

# POVERTY IN VICTORIAN BRITAIN

## *Poverty and the Poor Laws*



Among the most unjust laws passed in Victorian Britain were the notorious **Poor Laws of 1834**.

Because the price of corn was kept artificially high by the **Corn Laws**, the poor risked **starvation** and could not feed their families.



# ***The Corn Laws***



***Laws designed to keep the price of the corn high to favour domestic producers.***

In order to solve this problem, children were forced to separate from their families and were sent to work in the parish workhouses, in return for which they received barely enough to survive.

# ***WORKHOUSES***



***Institutions where poor people had to work in return for (= in exchange for) food and accomodation.***



Millbank workhouse

This reflected the general Victorian view that **poverty was something like crime**, to be *managed* through repressive measures, rather than solved through the redistribution of resources.



**Charles Dickens** was a constant opponent of the Poor Laws: he documented the appalling (= *very bad*) conditions of the parish workhouses in his novel *Oliver Twist* .



It was only towards the end of the 19th century that poverty was to be widely recognized as a social problem, thanks in part to a systematic series of studies of the living conditions of the urban poor.

Typically, in industrial towns the minority **property-owning class** (**5% or less of the population**) **occupied up to 50% of the available land.**

Therefore the poor were forced into overcrowded **slums**, whose appalling **sanitary conditions** led to **epidemics** of cholera and other diseases.

