

1. The Middle Ages

During the Middle Ages most people lived in villages and farmed the land. Both the land and villeins (peasant villagers) were owned by a lord of the manor. In return for living on the land, villeins had to obey their lord. For example, they were not allowed to leave the land without the lord's permission and had to work for three days every week without any payment. Although villeins could buy or be granted their freedom from their lord, this was very unlikely and uncommon.

4. Parliament

In 1265 a baron, Simon de Montfort, established the first Parliament. As well as bishops and barons, two knights from each county and large town entered Parliament. This was the first time ordinary people – the commoners – were given some say in how the country was run. For example, Parliament could ask the monarch for permission to introduce new laws. The monarchy was also reliant on Parliament to help raise taxes.

6. Towns

During the Middle Ages the number and size of towns increased. London was the largest town with a population of over c.40,000. By 1400, about 300 towns had received a charter of freedom. The charter of freedom was granted by the monarch or local lord and allowed ordinary people a new sense of freedom. For example, town officials were granted the right to rent land for personal use as well as to hold markets. Ordinary people could therefore make and keep their own goods and profits.

KS3 Spine Freedom and Rights



2. Women in the Middle Ages

Throughout the Middle Ages, women were viewed as mentally and physically inferior to men. As a result, they were seen as the possessions of men. For example, women were not allowed to train as a doctor, lawyer, priest or judge, to own property, to travel on their own, to wear tight or revealing clothing, or to marry without parental permission. The Christian Church also stated that wives were servants to their husbands.

7. Cromwell's Commonwealth

During Cromwell's Commonwealth (1649–1660), corruption and bribery was reduced. This meant that people could no longer escape the law just because they were rich. There was also an increase in publishing. For example, women's work was published for the first time. In addition, Cromwell embodied the shift in power from the monarchy and wealthy elite to a republic led by an ordinary man who had risen from the ranks of a farmer.

3. The Magna Carta

Although the Magna Carta (1215) did not apply to ordinary people, it marked an instrumental change in freedom and rights in Great Britain. The Magna Carta protected barons and other nobles because it checked the power of the monarchy. For example, King John agreed to allow fair trials before imprisonment, to stop unfair taxes, and to permit merchants to travel the country without paying large taxes.

5. The Peasants' Revolt

As a result of the Peasants' Revolt (1381), which saw 60,000 angry peasants rise up against King Richard II, poll tax was scrapped. Although many changes occurred slowly over the next 50 years, the peasants did receive many of their demands. For example, the monarchy stopped trying to control the wages of peasants and peasants won their freedom from their lords.

8. Race

Although British merchants transported almost 3 million Africans across the Atlantic into slavery between 1700 and 1810, slavery was outlawed in Britain in 1772. By the end of the 18th century, c.15,000 black people lived in England. Whilst black people could enjoy rights, such as the ability to testify in court and own goods, they were still subject to terrible racist stereotyping.

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9. Reformers

During the 1800s, reformers like Lord Shaftesbury, Richard Oastler, John Fielden and Michael Sadler campaigned for laws to protect factory and mine workers. In particular, they sought to protect women and children who were seen as more vulnerable than men. For example, the 1833 Factory Act ruled that children under the age of nine could not work in factories, whilst the 1844 Factory Act ruled that women could only work a maximum of 12 hours a day.

10. The Vote

Although still limited, three Reform Acts (1832, 1867 and 1884) gave more people the vote than ever before. By 1884, c.5 million people could vote – two out of every three men could vote. The right to vote was also protected by the 1872 Ballot Act, which meant that all voting became private. By 1918, all men over the age of 18, regardless of whether they owned property or not, could vote.

11. The Liberal Reforms

Many of the Liberal reforms of the early 20th century sought to improve and protect the rights of children. For example, in 1906 local authorities sought to provide free school meals. Equally, in 1908, the Children’s Charter set out severe punishments for any adult who neglected or abused children. Juvenile courts were also established, which sent children convicted of a crime to borstals instead of prisons. The death penalty for children under the age of 16 was also abolished.

12. Rights for women

Legislation throughout the 20th century increased and protected the rights of women. For example, in 1918 all women over the age of 30 were allowed to vote. By 1928, all women over the age of 21 were granted the right to vote on the same terms as men. Likewise, the Equal Pay Act of 1970 ruled that women must receive the same pay and conditions as men, whilst in 1991 the law recognised rape in marriage.

14. Racial Equality

The Race Relations Act (1965) was the first legislation to address racial discrimination. The act outlawed discrimination on the grounds of colour, race, or ethnic or national origins, in public places. In 1968 a further act made it illegal to refuse jobs, housing or public services to anyone on the basis of their race, ethnic background or country of origin. In 2006, the law was extended to define spreading racial or religious hatred as a crime.

13. The 1960s

The 1960s saw a rise in more liberal attitudes in Britain. For example, it became acceptable for women to pursue independence and seek roles beyond marriage and motherhood. Equally, the 1967 Sexual Offences Act decriminalised homosexuality. Although it was not until 2014 that same-sex marriages were legalised, increasingly people had the rights and freedom to choose how to live and love.

Activities

1. Define the key term – freedom.
2. Define the key term – right(s).
3. The economic, political and social freedom and rights of people in Great Britain have changed over time. Identify at least one example of a change in:
 - a. the economic freedom and rights of people in Great Britain
 - b. the political freedom and rights of people in Great Britain
 - c. the social freedom and rights of people in Great Britain.
4. Create a ‘living graph’ to show how the freedom and rights of people in Great Britain have changed over time. Use the Y axis to plot the increasing level of freedom and rights and the X axis to plot time.
5. When you think about ‘change’ you should consider the size, type and significance of the change. Using the word bank below to help, which three words best describe the changes to the freedom and rights of people in Great Britain over time? Which pieces of evidence best support your descriptive words?
6. To what extent did the freedom and rights of people in Great Britain change over time?

Size of Change	Type of Change	Significance of Change
considerable	critical	comprehensive
great	contributing	empowered
large	drastic	enduring
major	expected	insignificant
marginal	key	facilitated
minimal	landmark	far-reaching
minor	main	long-lasting
negligible	radical	served as a catalyst to
slight	revolutionary	short-lived
small	pivotal	significant

