



Children's Charter, 1889



La Reine le veult.

[52 & 53 VICT.] *Prevention of Cruelty to, and Protection of, Children Act, 1889.* [CH. 44.]



CHAPTER 44.

An Act for the Prevention of Cruelty to, and better Protection of, Children. A.D. 1889. *[26th August 1889]*

BE it enacted by the Queen's most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows :

1. Any person over sixteen years of age who, having the custody, control, or charge of a child, being a boy under the age of fourteen years, or being a girl under the age of sixteen years, wilfully ill-treats, neglects, abandons, or exposes such child, or causes or procures such child to be ill-treated, neglected, abandoned, or exposed, in a manner likely to cause such child unnecessary suffering, or injury to its health, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor, and, on conviction thereof on indictment, shall be liable, at the discretion of the court, to a fine not exceeding one hundred pounds, or alternatively, or in default of payment of such fine, or in addition to payment thereof, to imprisonment, with or without hard labour, for any term not exceeding two years, and on conviction thereof by a court of summary jurisdiction, in manner provided by the Summary Jurisdiction Acts, shall be liable, at the discretion of the court, to a fine not exceeding twenty-five pounds, or alternatively, or in default of payment of such fine, or in addition thereto, to imprisonment, with or without hard labour, for any term not exceeding three months.

Punishment for ill-treatment and neglect of children.

2. If it be proved that a person convicted on indictment as aforesaid was interested in any sum of money accruable or payable in the event of the death of the child, and had knowledge that such sum of money was accruing or becoming payable, the court may, in its discretion, increase the amount of the said fine so that the fine shall not exceed two hundred pounds. Such interest as aforesaid in any sum of money accruable or payable in the event of

Power to increase fine where offender interested in death of child.

Children's Charter, 1889

WHAT'S IT ABOUT?

This is an Original Act of Parliament from 1889. This was the first prevention of cruelty to children Act, and is sometimes called 'The Children's Charter'. It made it a criminal offence to ill-treat or neglect a child, allowing police to arrest anyone suspected of ill-treating a child and to obtain a warrant to search a house if children were thought to be in danger. It also placed restrictions on children employed in begging, singing, and performing public entertainments in the street. The Act was the result of lobbying by children's organisations, and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children was founded the same year (1889) with Queen Victoria as its patron.

The Act is printed on vellum (a type of parchment, or animal skin) and is bound with a red ribbon. The front cover gives the name of the Act, the date it was passed (26th August 1889), its original act number and the regnal year '52 & 53 Victoria', meaning the 52nd & 53rd year that Queen Victoria was on the throne. On the top of the first page you can read the handwritten words 'La Reyne le veult'. This is French for 'The Queen wishes it', and shows that Queen Victoria gave her Royal Assent to the Act. The use of French for this purpose is a practice dating back to the Norman Conquest of 1066, when French was the language of the ruling class.

Source: House of Lords Record Office, Ref: HL/PO/PU/1/1889/52&53V1n221