

# Economy in mid 1700s britain history essay



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The Industrial Revolution, which began in the mid-1700s first in Britain and later in Western Europe, is the most significant collection of technological, social, and economic changes in human history.

There is a lot of speculation as to why the Industrial Revolution occurred first in Western Europe, especially in Britain. Historians point to a number of factors. Built upon the economic and cultural developments of the Renaissance, Europe was already relatively wealthier than other regions of the world, thus providing the needed capital for investment in new technologies. Europe was full of competition at the time, each country wanting to be the best.

The Industrial Revolution saw through the change from manual labour to mechanical devices due to a multitude of technological advancements. We can see this mostly where steam power took over man power. Applied first in coal mining and textiles, the new techniques, new machines, and new methods rapidly spread into other industrial areas. One of these advancements was the use of steam to power transportation devices. This increased the railroad system's efficiency and reliability, bringing the nation together into one whole market, introducing globalization and encouraging changes in steel, iron and communication facilities.

This revolution also had a great impact on other sectors in society such as politics and culture. The meaning of culture was changed drastically because of the new job openings and great increase in production of goods. The meaning of a job was evolving for many people, a lot of which benefitted from improvements in family income. On the other hand, the introduction of

factories meant the loss of craftsmanship. The repetitive motions of the machines removes all mastery and satisfaction from labour.

Everyone's life style and standard of living was now based on the technological advancements in society. Now there was a large variety of goods to satisfy everyone's tastes and needs. Most people could now afford to own their own equipment and tools which were previously only affordable by the wealthier of classes prior to this revolution. Rapid economic growth and spreading prosperity were among the effects of the Industrial Revolution.

The revolution in transportation meant that people could now travel further than ever before. Here a whole new commerce was introduced in the form of travelling. This helps in changing cultural norms and values too as people were mixing with different societies.

The most important virtues were staying out of debt and saving what you earned. This all changed, as after the Industrial Revolution, the main word was consumption. If people didn't buy goods off store shelves, then the shop owner wouldn't have to order stock from the factory and so people would be made redundant from the factory and this would close down. The only way to stop this from happening was to teach people how to become intensive customers by purchasing all that they saw, even if they did not need it.

To encourage such consumption, the advertising industry was created, developing sophisticated techniques suggesting new needs among ordinary people. Often using manipulation, sex appeal, and other emotional inducements, advertisers have been able to get people to purchase objects

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and services they never felt any need of. And they could be persuaded to throw away still functioning items, in order to buy the “latest, improved” models.

Rider, Christine (1995), ‘An Introduction to Economic History’ South Western

## **Britain before the Industrial Revolution**

Before this revolution, Britain was a quite different place to the one that exists today. Industrialisation brought with it new types of roads, trains and many other forms of communications which simply did not exist prior to industrialisation. So before the Industrial Revolution it was very hard to keep in touch with people in other parts of the country. News was spread by travellers or through messengers, and goods were distributed largely within the locality in which they were produced.

Because it was so hard to move around, people had to rely upon themselves and their communities to provide the vast majority of the things that they needed. Food was produced locally. Clothing was made locally, making use of animal hides and furs.

Life was, for the bulk of the population, the life of a farmer. By the 18th century the feudal system was long gone, but in its place was a system in which the people were as reliant upon each other and their master as before.

Some people were fortunate enough to benefit from imported goods which came into ports such as London and Bristol in increasing quantities from the Elizabethan age onwards. What was manufactured was done making use of natural elements.

Education was poor, only the rich being catered for by nannies and private tutors. There were of course schools and several universities. These were not for the ordinary man or woman though. Also, politics was based upon land ownership.

## **Britain after the Industrial Revolution**

As McCloskey said in 1981,

“ In the eighty years or so after 1780 the population of Britain nearly tripled, the towns of Liverpool and Manchester became gigantic cities, the average income of the population more than doubled, the share of farming fell from just under a half to just under a fifth of the nation’s output, and the making of textiles and iron moved into steam-driven factories.”

[http://www.ehs.org.uk/industrialrevolution/PH\\_index.htm](http://www.ehs.org.uk/industrialrevolution/PH_index.htm)

The industrial revolution certainly saw changes in the economy and society of Britain. There was a huge increase in the numbers of people employed in industrial sectors, manufacturing goods of all kinds, especially textiles, iron goods, and metal wares, for both overseas and domestic markets. More of the working population also came to live and work in towns and cities. A drastic smaller proportion of the working population, which is less than a third, lived in the countryside and got their living from the land.

In the early 18th Century, more than two thirds of the labour force had been in agriculture but now, towns and cities grew at an exceptional rate, due to the high rates of population growth that accompanied industrialisation.

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During and after the industrial revolution, population growth and economic growth were able to occur together over the long term, unlike what has happened before, where when there was an increase in population, there was always a decrease in economic growth. However, during and after the industrial revolution, both population and economy were able to grow together.

## **Diseases**

Poverty walked with disease and death in industrial Britain during the first half of the nineteenth century. Hard working conditions, long hours of working, poor diet, overcrowded poor housing and inadequate sanitary arrangements made poor health and early death inevitable mostly for the lower classes.

One specific city which has been through vast amounts of study was Manchester. A number of important people such as the literary man Robert Southey, medical luminaries like Dr James Phillips Kay and social scientists like Friedrich Engels studied these problems.

Housing conditions and the health of the public during the middle years of the Industrial Revolution cannot be separated. However, it was only when a deadly cholera epidemic spread in Manchester's poor areas that Kay and his associates were able to do something to change the housing and sanitary conditions in the inner city. They did not know how cholera spread and were only examining ways of combating this disease. They firmly believed that, only by relieving the conditions that prevailed in the worst city slums would make it possible to cure the instability that was threatening the rest of the

city. However, the opportunity to take decisive action was lost. Engels, exploring these same areas of Manchester by night 12 years later, found only little change in these circumstances.

## **The Industrial Revolution in Literature**

The rapid industrial growth that began in Great Britain during the middle of the eighteenth century which later on expanded to other countries provided a wide range of material for many nineteenth-century writers. The literature of the Industrial Revolution includes essays, fiction, and poetry that respond to the changes which occurred in technology as well as the labour and demographic changes. Having observed the adoption of such new technologies as the steam engine and other types of new technology, the Scottish intellectual Thomas Carlyle described this period as the “Mechanical Age”. The Industrial Revolution literature gives us a range of literary genres. Social critics such as John Ruskin, Henry Adams, and Carlyle examined the cultural changes that accompanied the machine. On the other hand, novelists ranging from Charles Dickens to Rebecca Harding Davis and Herman Melville provided a realistic treatment of modern working conditions. Moreover, poets such as William Wordsworth and Walt Whitman saw to the artist’s role in such a world.

By the close of the eighteenth century, the early romantics began to view the emerging technology in a different light. A case in point is that in Friedrich Schiller’s ‘Letters upon the Aesthetical Education of Man’ (1795), argued that the machine was a threat to individual freedom and a destructive force on contemporary culture.

The issues surrounding the relationship between technology and culture have continued to interest critics and writers well into the twentieth century. Contemporary writers also look to literary figures of the Industrial Revolution as they address similar concerns of the role of the machine in today's society.