

Why did the Industrial Revolution Start in England?

Why did the Industrial Revolution occur first in England and not somewhere else in the world? Historians describe a confluence a coming together of many factors and they do not agree on which are most important. Some of these factors we discussed earlier because they had their seeds in pre-industrial society. All of these factors came together in the late 18th century to create the unique conditions in England that culminated in the first-ever Industrial Revolution:

The Agricultural Revolution resulted in increased food production and increased population in England first.

Population Growth resulted in more people from the countryside being freed up to work for wages in the new cities, and eventually increased demand for products such as clothing.

Financial Innovations such as central banks, stock markets, and joint stock companies encouraged people, especially in Northern Europe, to take risks with investments, trade, and new technologies.

The Enlightenment and the Scientific Revolution encouraged scholars and craftspeople to apply new scientific thinking to mechanical and technological challenges. In the centuries before the Industrial Revolution, Europeans gradually incorporated science and reason into their worldview. Some historians argue that these intellectual shifts made English culture, in particular, highly receptive to new mechanical and financial ideas.

Navigable Rivers and Canals in Great Britain quickened the pace and cheapened the cost of transportation of raw materials and finished products. Adam Smith, the first modern economist, believed this was a key reason for England's early success. In 1776, in his famous book *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, he wrote that "*Good roads, canals, and navigable rivers, by diminishing the expense of carriage, put the remote parts of the country more nearly upon a level with those in the neighborhood of the town. They are upon that account the greatest of all improvements*".

Coal and Iron deposits were plentiful in Great Britain and proved essential to the development of all new machines made of iron or steel and powered by coal such as the steam-powered machinery in textile factories, and the locomotive.

Government Policies in England toward property and commerce encouraged innovation and the spread of global trade. The government created patent laws that allowed inventors to benefit financially from the "intellectual property" of their inventions. The British government also encouraged global trade by expanding the Navy to protect trade and granting monopolies or other financial incentives to companies so they would explore the world to find resources.

World Trade gradually increased in the centuries before the Industrial Revolution and provided European countries access to raw materials and a market for goods. It also increased wealth that could then be loaned by banks to finance more industrial expansion in an upward spiral of economic growth. By 1500, Europe had a technological supremacy over the rest of the world in shipbuilding, navigation, and metallurgy (metal working). In successive years, European countries would use these advantages to dominate world trade with Asia, Africa, and the Americas.

The Cottage Industry, discussed earlier, served as a transition from a rural to an industrial economy. Like the later industrial factories, the cottage industry relied on wage labor, cloth production, tools and rudimentary machines, and a market to buy and sell raw materials (cotton) and finished products (clothes).