

The 18th Century

Social
Background

The Structure of Society

Read the following material and complete the outline on the right summarizing the ideas of the passage.

England in 1714 was a land of hamlets¹ and villages: its towns, such as it had, were on the coast. In Lancashire, the West Riding, and West Midlands² towns of some size and substance were beginning to grow, but the majority of the population was still in the south and still rural. Estimates of population vary because the evidence is unreliable. Until the last decades of the century, it is largely a matter of intelligent guesswork. The population was probably, in 1714, about five and a half millions, and from 1714 to 1742, after an initial spurt³, there was only a very small increase, but there were important changes in its distribution. [...]

These changes were due to the growth of towns and industrial villages. [...] London exceeded half a million; Bristol passed Norwich and may have reached its 50,000 in this period. Manchester, Liverpool, Sheffield, Leeds, Halifax, Birmingham, and Coventry all ceased to be the sprawling villages they had been half a century earlier, although, as towns, they were small by modern standards, none of them reaching 50,000. Small as they were, they ate up men, women, and children and their population was only maintained, let alone increased, by a steady immigration from the country and in the north-west from Ireland.

The first noticeable thing about these towns would have been the stench⁴. There was no sanitary system; an open cesspool in the court often served the richer inhabitants; the poor [...] made a public convenience of every nook and cranny⁵. The unpaved streets⁶ were narrow, often only six

England in 1714
Physical aspect:

The population:

Its distribution:

The towns:
No sanitary system:

The streets:

1. **hamlets** = small villages.
2. **West Riding** = now, eastern division of Yorkshire;
West Midlands = middle counties of England.
3. **spurt** = short period of growth.

4. **stench** = disagreeable odour.
5. **every nook and cranny** = every possible place.
6. **unpaved streets** = streets which were not covered with stones.

feet wide; at Bristol they were too narrow for carts, and sledges⁷ had to be used for moving goods. The houses of the poor were one or two room hovels⁸, frequently made only of weatherboard⁹ with a pitched roof¹⁰, placed back to back; or they were the houses of the rich, deserted because their owners were seeking more salubrious suburbs — ramshackle warrens¹¹ of filth, squalor, and disease. Most cellars were inhabited, not only by people but also by their pigs, fowls¹², sometimes even by their horses and cattle. All tradesmen and craftsmen used the street as their dustbin, including butchers who threw out the refuse of their shambles¹³ to decay and moulder in the streets. About London and one or two of the large towns, enterprising market gardeners bought the refuse and the night soil to manure¹⁴ their fields, and this helped the growth of cleanliness.

All houses and cellars were desperately overcrowded — ten to a room was common in Manchester. It was reported that often the rooms were without furniture and lacking even beds; the occupants slept close together on shavings¹⁵ for warmth. Disease was rampant and unchecked: smallpox, typhus, typhoid, and dysentery made death a commonplace. In the early part of the century, only about one child in four, born in London, survived; and probably the infant mortality was higher in the mushroom towns of the north. In the midst of death, the people sought palliatives and found them in drink, gambling, and violence. The consumption of gin — drunk mixed with fruit cordials — was prodigious, but largely confined to London, where it may have affected the death rate in the thirties, although virulent influenza epidemics also took their toll¹⁶. Gambling was an antidote favoured by all classes of society; the wealthy favoured stocks¹⁷, cards, and lottery tickets; the poor, crown and anchor, pitch and toss, or bull baiting and cock fighting¹⁸. Violence born of despair and greed, belonged to the poor alone. Most of the new towns were still, constitutionally speaking, villages; and they usually had no more than two parish constables to keep order. London, Bristol, Liverpool, and a few other large corporate towns were better off because they had resident justices who could read the Riot Act, but even their forces for keeping order were pitifully inadequate, and burning, looting¹⁹, and destruction by the mob were commonplaces of life. And yet these towns drew an endless stream of emigrants from the countryside.

The houses:

The refuse:

Spreading diseases:

Palliatives and entertainments:

the poor	other classes
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Social order:

7. **sledges** = vehicles with runners pulled by horses or dogs.
8. **hovels** = miserable dwellings.
9. **weatherboard** = horizontal boards erected to protect walls from the rain.
10. **pitched roof** = roof covered with black, waterproof tar.
11. **ramshackle warrens** = falling down, rickety dwellings.
12. **fowls** = poultry.
13. **shambles** = butchers' slaughter houses.

14. **manure** = fertilize.
15. **shavings** = small bits of wood.
16. **took their toll** = caused a lot of deaths.
17. **stocks** = a game of chance.
18. **crown and anchor** = game played with dice marked with crowns and anchors; **pitch and toss** = game played by throwing coins; **bull baiting** = sport of Spanish origin in which men on horseback fought bulls; **cock fighting** = organized fight between two trained cocks.
19. **looting** = widespread robbing during a riot or fire.

In London, which drew the most, conditions varied considerably. The eastern suburbs, Westminster, and parts of Southwark were as bad as the provincial towns. The area controlled by the City of London was better administered, although the social amenities were negligible. An attempt had been made to light the City in 1684. The lamps were shaped like frying pans and the fat used was derived from animals' intestines. The experiment was not a success. In 1734 a new system of street lighting was introduced which dispelled some of the nocturnal gloom. To contemporaries, especially provincials, it was a spectacular achievement. But it remained practically the only one of the period. [...]

At the head of urban society were the merchant princes, with whom a few lawyers and high civil servants could associate on terms of equality both in wealth and social standing. Towards the end of their careers, these merchants often bought up great estates to endow themselves with²⁰ the social prestige which went with land ownership and which would enable their sons and daughters to marry into the aristocracy or to acquire a title in their own right. These were the men who controlled the Bank of England and the great chartered companies²¹ and jealously protected their privileges. They had close financial ties with the government and it is not surprising that in politics they tended to support Walpole and call themselves Whigs; but of course to them Whiggery was not a radical creed. It meant, quite simply, the Hanoverian dynasty, with toleration to dissenters and the preservation of things as they were. In habits of life, the merchant princes differed little from the noblemen; they lived in equal state, built as grandly; and spent as prodigiously on furniture, food, and servants. But not all merchants were merchant princes. The great majority were middling people, mildly prosperous because of their industry and thrift²² which bred a distinctive ethos. Among these, the ordinary merchants and prosperous shopkeepers, the traditions of seventeenth-century life were stronger. They were still deeply attached to the puritan attitude; many were dissenters. They were also Whig, but it was an old-fashioned type of Whiggery which did not always see eye to eye²³ with Walpole, for they believed in plain, fair, and honest dealing, and the control of government by a Parliament — not the reverse, which was Walpole's way. They both envied and distrusted the great chartered companies and felt increasingly that they were a hindrance²⁴ to trade. What loyalty they had to Walpole was strained by the opposition's frequent exposure of corruption in high places. [...]

The craftsmen and artisans — the journeymen and apprentices of the great livery companies of London — were the bridge between the rich and the poor. They

In London:

Street lighting:

Urban Society

The social classes:

Merchant princes:

Power:

Political attitude:

Habits of life:

Ordinary merchants and prosperous shopkeepers:

Attitudes:

Craftsmen, artisans, journeymen and apprentices

20. **endow themselves with** = give themselves.

21. **chartered companies** = trading companies with special recognition.

22. **thrift** = economy.

23. **see eye to eye** = agree with, approve of.

24. **hindrance** = obstacle.

worked long hours — fourteen was common — for a modest wage which, with the additions made by their wives and children, raised them well above the subsistence level, so long as trade was good. But trade was fickle²⁵ and the chance of hunger and poverty threaded their lives with anxiety. Also, the changes in industrial organization — the decay of the guild²⁶, the spread of a free labour market, the introduction of labour-saving machinery — increased the feeling that they were being dispossessed. Until 1725 they still enjoyed a measure of political power in London, but this was diminished by Walpole, who disliked the spread of opposition views, both Tory and Radical, among them. [...]

Below the artisans and journeymen were the mass of London's population, the hordes of labourers whose livelihood depended almost entirely on casual employment and who were liable to be dismissed at will²⁷. Their lives were a chequered pattern²⁸ of modest affluence and abject poverty. Their hard, lean faces and shrunken bodies gave a sense of bitter despair to many of Hogarth's prints of London life. To the desperate poor, a riot was a clarion call to their instinct to survive, for in the burning and looting there was many a windfall²⁹. It mattered little to them what the riot was about and unscrupulous politicians never had difficulty in rousing the mob. Of course, the real poor had no political rights and as yet no one conceived that they should have them, though by the opposition they

Social position:
for executives: parties were unanimous in licence of the destitute just by 1740, for stealing a hand long could

Economic and political problems of the class:
The big provincial towns wealth and more poverty, less charity, more disas opportunity for men of vigour, and resource to necessary to enter the dem which the eight

Labourers
Social position:
With proper one's children, for in the relatively easy to pass from This was true of the great Here the p

Living standards:
by tradition and custom. C the thirties, the introduction rotation of crops by development of seed balling

Consequences:
Toll, but the farmers, whether as their former had farm open-field strip system, only slowly giving way before enclosure, still dominates The big p towards enclosure, a highly desirable form of investment and of

employer pleased.
28. **chequered pattern** = mixture.
29. **windfall** = unexpected good fortune.

25. **fickle** = changeable.

26. **guild** = medieval trade corporation.

27. **dismissed at will** = laid off whenever the



Beer Street (left) and Gin Lane (right): imaginary streets by William Hogarth (1751). Gin Lane shows the disruptive effects of alcohol among the lower classes. Here the sign of the usurer stands upright showing prosperity.

were used as a threat, and by the government as an excuse for executive action that smacked of tyranny; but all parties were unanimous in feeling that the unbridled³⁰ licence of the destitute justified the savage intensification of the laws dealing with crimes against property, so that, by 1740, for stealing a handkerchief worth one shilling, so long as it was removed privily from the person, children could be hanged by the neck until dead.

The big provincial towns were like London but with less wealth and more poverty, more despair, less social order, less charity, more disease, but, like London, full of opportunity for men of tough temperament, endless vigour, and resource to acquire the modest affluence necessary to enter the demi-paradise of comfort and ease which the eighteenth century afforded for hard cash³¹. With property came standing in society and a future for one's children, for in the early part of the century it was relatively easy to pass from one social class to another. [...] This was truer of the great towns than of rural England. Here the pattern of life was more stable, controlled firmly by tradition and custom. Changes there were, such as, in the thirties, the introduction of the turnip³² and four-fold rotation of crops by Lord Townshend³³ and the development of seed drilling and horse hoeing by Jethro Tull³⁴, but they were completely unnoticed by the bulk of the farmers, whether gentlemen or peasants. They farmed as their forbears had farmed for century. The wasteful open-field strip system³⁵, only slowly giving way before enclosure³⁶, still dominated English agriculture. [...]

The big farming profits encouraged the movement towards enclosure. It also made the possession of great estates a highly desirable form of investment and of course this again encouraged experiments in agrarian technique.

From the end of the seventeenth century, possibly since the Civil War, there had been a tendency for estates to grow larger, and this was beginning, by the early eighteenth century, to affect the nature of rural society. By prudent marriages and careful purchases, some of the aristocratic families of the seventeenth century amassed estates which made them far richer than many of the sovereign powers of Germany. [...]

In every county there were a few families, usually aristocratic, who possessed similar riches. This made them a class apart from the small squire. The distinction was further underlined by the way of life which these agrarian millionaires designed for themselves. The point of pride was the rural palace. There was no modesty felt about the ostentation of wealth. [...]

The big provincial towns:

Rural England

Tradition and novelty:

The rural aristocracy:

Living standards:

30. **unbridled** = uncontrolled.

31. **hard cash** = immediately available money.

32. **turnip** = plant of the mustard family whose root and top are both edible.

33. **Lord Townshend** = (1674-1738) English statesman who retired from his post as Secretary of State to devote his time to farming.

34. **Jethro Tull** = (1674-1741) English agriculturist who introduced new farming techniques.

35. **open-field system** = medieval system of cultivation by which villagers owned strips of land and shared wastes to graze their cattle.

36. **enclosure** = fencing in of the open field strips into hedge fields owned and controlled by landlords.



Serenity and culture among the upper classes: a noble family portrayed by Johann Zoffany (1775).

To give them a fit setting nature was subdued with exquisite art and the English countryside enriched eternally by men so confident of themselves that they designed for their children's children. Europe first, and Asia next, were ransacked³⁷ for treasures, modern or antique, good, bad, or indifferent: so long as they emanated a sense of *luxe* they were welcome. Trees, plants, and fruits which have been thoroughly assimilated into the English garden or countryside were then new and strange. The Duke of Argyle introduced the weeping willow and acacia: fuchsia appeared in 1732.

The lesser gentry were in a dilemma. It was difficult for them to suppress either their envy or their desire to emulate their betters. Their envy was further quickened because the possession of vast estates carried greater significance than the ownership of land. For with this ownership went a host of social and political privileges which drew to their possessors the anxious and devoted attention of all aspiring men. As the social and political power of the magnates grew, that of the lesser gentry diminished. Those who had once been courted were now ignored. Naturally, they began to look back to a world of the past in which they believed they had possessed undisputed control of their countryside. [...]

What strenght and vigour the Tory party possessed in the early part of the century sprang from the social

The lesser gentry:

Social and political position:

37. ransacked = robbed.

animosity of the country gentlemen of modest means, but the general prosperity which they shared with all classes took away some of the bitterness which a class, losing power, must feel.

There were a few winners and a multitude of losers lower in the social scale of rural society, although both were fewer than later in the century. The agricultural labourer had eked out³⁸ a precarious living by using his small allotments and his common rights, but with enclosure, which always required a considerable capital expenditure, these disappeared, and the consequence was a growth in rural poverty which became the nightmare of local administration. The small proprietor — the peasant or yeoman — suffered in a similar way. More often than not he lacked the capital for enclosure: if he was a small tenant farmer, he became unprofitable to his landlord and out he went. The dispossessed swelled the ranks of the rural poor or were eaten up by the towns. Yet not all the yeomen suffered. The landlords wanted intelligent and industrious men to work the new large farms and these the yeomen class provided, but for one who prospered there were a score who lost.

Hungry men will snare and poach³⁹. For decades country gentlemen, great or small, had been paying increasing attention to their property rights over the birds of the air or the fish in the streams. As they controlled Parliament, it was easy to give the force of law to their desires; and the poor went hungrier than before. Nevertheless, they were not allowed to die of starvation. The Elizabethan poor law, later modified by the Stuarts, was still operative. The parish was responsible for relief. In the twenties and thirties of this century the problem of the rural poor, especially in South England, became too heavy for the single parish to bear. In 1723 Parliament enabled parishes to combine for the purpose of erecting a workhouse — hence the word 'Union' which is often still applied by the poor to workhouses. These 'unions' were then hired out to any manufacturer who, in return for keeping the inmates⁴⁰ alive, obtained cheap labour. To prevent the pauper children absconding⁴¹ they were at times ringed by the neck or manacled⁴². In lean years the despair of the poor became unendurable; food riots, with burning, looting, and mob violence were a commonplace. The militia suppressed them and hangings and transportations followed. Rural poverty and the fear of workhouses does much to explain the lure⁴³ of the diseased and dangerous life of the towns.

(abridged from D.H. Plumb,
England in the Eighteenth Century, Penguin Books)

38. **eked out** = earned with effort.

39. **snare and poach** = trap animals illegally, usually on private land.

40. **Inmates** = prisoners.

41. **absconding** = escaping.

42. **manacled** = handcuffed.

43. **lure** = attraction.

The agricultural labourer:

The peasant (yeoman):

The poor:

The poor law:

Workhouses:

The Reading Public and the Rise of the Novel

Read the following material and complete the outline on the right summarizing the ideas of the passage.

The introduction has already been done for you.

Many eighteenth-century observers thought that their age was one of remarkable and increasing popular interest in reading. On the other hand, it is probable that although the reading public was large by comparison with previous periods, it was still very far from the mass reading public of today. [...] one figure, that of 43,800 copies sold weekly in 1704, implies less than one newspaper buyer per hundred persons per week; and another later figure, of 23,673 copies sold daily in 1753, suggests that although the newspaper-buying public tripled in the first half of the century, it remained a very small percentage of the total population. [...]

It is likely, therefore, that when, in 1781, Johnson¹ spoke of a 'nation of readers', he had in mind a situation which had to a large extent arisen after 1750, and that, even so, his phrase must not be taken literally: the increase in the reading public may have been sufficiently marked to justify hyperbole, but it was still on a very limited scale. [...]

Opportunities for learning to read seem to have been fairly widely available, although the evidence strongly suggests that popular schooling was at best casual and intermittent. An educational system as such hardly existed; but a miscellaneous network of old endowed² grammar schools and English schools, charity schools, and non-endowed schools of various kinds, notably dame schools³, covered the country, with the exception of some outlying rural areas and some of the new industrial towns of the north. In 1788, the first year for which adequate figures are available, about a quarter of the parishes of England had no school at all, and nearly a half had no endowed schools. [...]

Attendance at these schools was usually too short and irregular to give the poor anything but the rudiments of reading. Children of the lower classes often left school at the age of six or seven, and if they continued, it was only for a few months in the year when there was no work in the fields or the factories. [...]

In the towns there was one factor at least which was even more hostile to popular education: the increasing employment of children from the age of five onwards to offset⁴ the shortage of industrial labour. Factory work was not as subject to seasonal factors, and the long hours left little or no time for schooling; and as a result it is likely that in some textile and other manufacturing areas the level

Although the age showed an increasing interest in reading ...

Johnson's phrase must not be taken literally because ...

Opportunities for learning were available but ...

Obstacles:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

1. **Johnson** = Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) outstanding British critic and lexicographer.
2. **endowed** = financed by privately donated funds.

3. **dame schools** = small private schools for children.
4. **offset** = balance.

of popular literacy tended to fall throughout the eighteenth century.

There were, then, as is shown by the lives of the uneducated poets and self-made men, [...] many serious obstacles in the way of those members of the labouring classes who wanted to be able to read and write. [...]

Being able to read was a necessary accomplishment only for those destined to the middle-class occupations — commerce, administration, and the professions; and since reading is inherently a difficult psychological process and one which requires continual practice, it is likely that only a small proportion of the labouring classes who were technically literate developed into active members of the reading public, and further, that the majority of these were concentrated in those employments where reading and writing was a vocational necessity. [...]

The high cost of books in the eighteenth century emphasizes the severity of economic factors in restricting the reading public. [...]

Magnificent folios for the libraries of the gentry and the rich merchants would cost a guinea a volume or more, whereas a duodecimo, with perhaps the same amount of reading, ranged from one to three shillings.

[...] Novels were in the medium price range. They gradually came to be published in two or more small duodecimo volumes, usually at 3s. bound. [...]

The prices of novels, then, though moderate compared to larger works, were still far beyond the means of any except the comfortably off: *Tom Jones*, for example, cost more than a labourer's average weekly wage. It is certain, therefore, that the novel's audience was not drawn from such a wide cross-section of society as, for example, that of the Elizabethan drama. All but the destitute had been able to afford a penny occasionally to stand in the pit of the Globe⁵; it was no more than the price of a quart of ale. The price of a novel, on the other hand, would feed a family for a week or two. This is important. The novel in the eighteenth century was closer to the economic capacity of the middle-class additions to the reading public than were many of the established and respectable forms of literature and scholarship, but it was not, strictly speaking, a popular literary form.

For those on the lower economic fringes⁶ of the book-buying public there were, of course, many cheaper forms of printed entertainment; ballads at a halfpenny or a penny; chapbooks containing abbreviated chivalric romances, new stories of criminals, or accounts of extraordinary events, at prices ranging from a penny to sixpence; pamphlets at threepence to a shilling; and, above all, newspapers at the price of one penny until a tax was imposed in 1712, rising to three-halfpence or twopence until 1757, and eventually to threepence after 1776. Many of these newspapers contained short stories, or novels in

Reading was accomplished by ...

Price of books:

folios:

novels:

Readers that could afford them:

Cheaper reading material:

5. the *Globe* = theatre in London.

6. fringes = levels.

serialized form — *Robinson Crusoe*, for example, was thus reprinted in the *Original London Post*, a thrice-weekly journal as well as in cheap duodecimos and chapbooks. For our particular purposes however, this poorer public is not very important; the novelists with whom we are concerned did not have this form of publication in mind, and the printers and publishers who specialized in it normally used works that had already been published in more expensive form, often without payment.

The extent to which economic factors retarded the expansion of the reading public, and especially that for the novel, is suggested by the rapid success of the non-proprietary or circulating libraries, as they were called after 1742 when the term was invented. A few such libraries are recorded earlier, especially after 1725, but the rapid spread of the movement came after 1740, when the first circulating library was established in London, to be followed by at least seven others within a decade. Subscriptions were moderate: the usual charge was between half a guinea and a guinea a year, and there were often facilities for borrowing books at the rate of a penny a volume or threepence for the usual three-volume novel.

Most circulating libraries stocked all types of literature, but novels were widely regarded as their main attraction: and there can be little doubt that they led to the most notable increase in the reading public for fiction which occurred during the century.

The distribution of leisure in the period supports and amplifies the picture already given of the composition of the reading public; and it also supplies the best evidence available to explain the increasing part in it played by women readers. [...]

Women of the upper and middle classes could partake in few of the activities of their menfolk, whether of business or pleasure. It was not usual for them to engage in politics, business, or the administration of their estates, while the main masculine leisure pursuits such as hunting and drinking were also barred. Such women, therefore, had a great deal of leisure, and this leisure was often occupied by omnivorous reading. [...]

Many of the less well-to-do⁷ women also had much more leisure than previously. B.L. de Muralt had already found in 1694 that 'even among the common people the husbands seldom make their wives work'; and another foreign visitor to England, César de Saussure, observed in 1727 that tradesmen's wives were 'rather lazy, and few do any needlework'⁸. These reports reflect the great increase in feminine leisure which had been made possible by an important economic change. The old household duties of spinning and weaving, making bread, beer, candles, and soap, and many others, were no longer necessary, since most necessities were now manufactured and could be bought at shops and markets. [...]

Relevance of the poorer reading public:

Function and aims of circulating libraries:

Distribution of leisure:

Women readers

Upper middle class women:

Less well-to-do women:

7. less well-to-do = poorer.

8. needlework = design sewing, embroidery.

In rural areas further from London the economy changed much more slowly, and most women certainly continued to devote themselves almost entirely to the multivarious duties of a household that was still largely self-supporting. Nevertheless a great increase in feminine leisure certainly occurred in the early eighteenth century, although it was probably mainly restricted to London, its environs, and the larger provincial towns.

How much of this increased leisure was devoted to reading is difficult to determine. In the towns, and especially in London, innumerable competing entertainments offered themselves: during the season there were plays, operas, masquerades, *ridottos*, assemblies, drums, while the new watering-places and resort towns catered for the summer months of the idle fair. However, even the most ardent devotees of the pleasures of the town must have had some time left for reading; and the many women who did not wish to partake of them, or could not afford to, must have had much more. For those with puritan backgrounds, especially, reading would be a much more unobjectionable resource. Isaac Watts⁹, a very influential early eighteenth-century Dissenter, dwelt luridly on 'all the painful and dismal consequences of lost and wasted time', but he encouraged his charges, very largely feminine, to pass their leisure hours in reading and literary discussions.

There is in the early eighteenth century a good deal of outraged comment about how the labouring classes were bringing ruin upon themselves and the country by aspiring to the leisure pursuits of their betters. [...]

The traditional view was that class distinctions were the basis of social order, and that consequently leisure pursuits were only proper for the leisure classes; and this outlook was strongly reinforced by the economic theory of the day which opposed anything which might keep the labouring classes away from their tasks. [...]

The opportunities of the poor for any extensive impropriety¹⁰ in this direction were in any case very small. Hours of work for labourers in the country included all the hours of daylight, and even in London they were from six in the morning to eight or nine at night. [...]

Francis Place thought that drink was almost the only working-class recreation during the eighteenth century; and it must be remembered that cheap gin made drunkenness available for less than the cost of a newspaper.

For those few who might have liked to read there were other difficulties besides lack of leisure and the cost of books. There was little privacy, as, in London especially, housing was appallingly overcrowded; and there was often not enough light to read by, even by day. The window tax imposed at the end of the seventeenth century had reduced

Women in the country

Entertainments other than reading:

Attitude towards leisure activities for the working classes:

Obstacles for the poor who wanted to read:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

9. **Isaac Watts** = (1674-1748) British hymnwriter.

10. **extensive impropriety** = socially undesirable act on a large scale.

windows to a minimum, and those that remained were usually deepset¹¹, and covered with horn¹², paper, or green glass. At night lighting was a serious problem, since candles, even farthing dips¹³, were considered a luxury. Richardson was proud of the fact that as an apprentice he bought them for himself, but others could not, or were not allowed to. [...]

There were, however, two large and important groups of relatively poor people who probably did have time and opportunity to read — apprentices and household servants, especially the latter. They would normally have leisure and light to read by; there would often be books in the house; if there were not, since they did not have to pay for their food and lodging, their wages and vails could be devoted to buying them if they chose; and they were, as ever, peculiarly liable to be contaminated by the example of their betters. [...]

In assessing the literary importance of this latter group it must be remembered that they constituted a very large and conspicuous class, which in the eighteenth century probably constituted the largest single occupational group in the country, as was the case, indeed, until within living memory. Pamela¹⁴ then, may be regarded as the culture-heroine of a very powerful sisterhood of literate and leisured waiting-maids. [...]

By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the booksellers, especially those in London, had achieved a financial standing, a social prominence, and a literary importance considerably greater than that of either their forebears or of their counterparts abroad. [...]

Together with some of the printers they owned or controlled all the main channels of opinion, newspapers, magazines, and critical reviews, reviewing for their wares¹⁵. This virtual monopoly of the channels of opinion also brought with it a monopoly of writers. [...]

The power of the booksellers to influence authors and audience was undoubtedly very great. [...]

Once the writer's primary aim was no longer to satisfy the standards of patrons and the literary *élite*, other considerations took on a new importance. Two of them, at least, were likely to encourage the author to prolixity¹⁶: first, to write very explicitly and even tautologically¹⁷ might help his less educated readers to understand him easily; and secondly, since it was the bookseller, not the patron, who rewarded him, speed and copiousness tended to become the supreme economic virtues.

(abridged from I. Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, Penguin Books)

4. not enough light due to ...

The people who enjoyed opportunities to read were ...

Reasons:

Relevance of these readers:

Role of booksellers and printers:

Influence on writers and their works:

11. **deepset** = placed deep in the wall.
12. **horn** = material from animals horns.
13. **farthing dips** = very cheap wax covered wicks burnt to provide lighting.

14. **Pamela** = main character in Samuel Richardson's novel *Pamela or Virtue Rewarded* (1741).
15. **wares** = merchandise.
16. **prolixity** = long and boring style.
17. **tautologically** = in a repetitive but unclear way.

The Industrial Revolution

Read the following passage and summarize each paragraph in outline form. Some of the main points have already been done for you. Your task is to add more details in the space provided.

When George III came to the throne in 1760, Britain was mainly self-supporting¹ — her only imports were 'luxury goods', such as wines and silks. Nine-tenths of the nation's food was provided by her own soil, much of it being produced by small owner-farmers. Its clothes were nearly all spun² and woven in cottage-homes, and its ironware was smelted³ on a small scale by means of charcoal in the wooded areas of south and west. But by the end of the reign (1820) the country had become dependent on foreign trade; big farms were in the hands of tenant-farmers who employed hired labourers; spinning and weaving were being carried on in factories by paid 'hands'; iron was being smelted by coal in great foundries in the north and midlands. These changes constitute what we call *The Industrial Revolution*.

They began with the growth of the slave trade. One of the most profitable lines which commerce took in the eighteenth century was the export of cotton cloth to West Africa, where it was exchanged for negro slaves captured by Arab dealers⁴. The slaves were sold in America — many of them to the plantations which provided the raw material for the growing cotton industry of Lancashire. So long as English village life had been self-sufficing there was no inducement⁵ for anybody to devise improved methods; but this expansion of foreign markets meant that the more people could produce, the more money they could make, and this set men's wits⁶ to work to accelerate production.

These developments came first in the cotton industry, for which, as we have seen, there were elastic markets and sources of raw material. Output had long been restricted by the fact that it took five spinners to keep one weaver supplied with yarn⁷. So, about 1764, James Hargreaves invented a *Spinning Jenny*, which enabled one person to attend to a number of mechanically propelled spindles⁸. The next step forward was a method of strengthening the spun thread. Hitherto linen had to be used for the warp⁹ of cotton cloth, as cotton could not be spun strong enough for the purpose; but Richard Arkwright's *Water Frame* got over the difficulty by twisting the yarn as it spun it. Ten years later Samuel Crompton combined these two inventions in *The Mule*, which produced yarn strong

Economic situation in Britain in 1760:

Change in economic situation by 1820:

These changes are generally called ...

The slave trade:

The cotton industry:

The inventions:

1. by
2. by
3. by

1. **self-supporting** = economically independent.
2. **spun** = formed into thread from wool.
3. **smelted** = produced by separating metal from ore.
4. **dealers** = merchants.
5. **inducement** = incentive.
6. **men's wits** = men's imagination and intelligence.

7. **yarn** = wool fibres which have been spun for knitting.
8. **spindles** = thin rods used for twisting yarn by hand.
9. **warp** = the thread under which other threads are passed when cloth is woven.

enough to be used as warp, yet fine enough to be woven into the finest fabrics, which had hitherto been produced only in India. A little later similar inventions were applied to the manufacture of woollen cloth as well. [...]

The changes led to others. The ever-growing demand for machinery caused great engineering works to be set up, and greatly increased quantities of iron were required. The supply of wood for smelting soon failed, and methods were devised of using coal for the purpose.

At first most of the power used to drive the machinery was water-power — hence the word 'mill' for a building in which manufacture is carried on; and the earliest of these mills were built by the side of streams. But the growth of the industry made some more concentrated form of energy necessary, and stimulated the development of *steam-power*. The greatest pioneer in this matter was James Watt, who made an engine that was far more powerful and less wasteful of fuel than any that had hitherto been devised. At first the engines turned out from the works of Boulton & Watt at Birmingham were used only for pumping the water out of mines; but by degrees they were adapted for driving all sorts of machinery, and were imitated by other firms. [...]

Coal-mining was further stimulated by the need for fuel¹⁰ to make the steam in the engines; and an indirect consequence of this was a shifting of population. Hitherto the south had been the most populous part of the country, inasmuch as it was richest in agricultural land and had the great port of London as its centre; but after the development of the steam-engine the new manufactures developed near the coalfields which provided them with their fuel, and crowded industrial towns grew up in the north and midlands.

Other notable developments of the age were in the matter of locomotion. Practically nothing had been done in the way of road-making since the departure of the Romans. So long as the badness of the roads was merely a source of inconvenience, men had only grumbled at¹¹ it; but when it became a hindrance to making money they began to use their brains to improve matters. The first step — about the beginning of George III's reign — was to create 'turnpike trusts'¹², which were authorized by Act of Parliament to levy tolls from the users of the roads they maintained. A generation later came the pioneers of scientific road-making, Telford and Macadam; and by the turn of the century fast mail-coaches on hard roads had halved the time required for journeys. Equally important was the development of canals. In 1759 James Brindley designed a canal between Manchester and the Duke of Bridgewater's collieries¹³ at Worsley; and this was later continued to connect with the Mersey. The cost of transporting cotton between Liverpool and Manchester was

Changes brought other improvements in industry:

Need for more energy brought development of ...

James Watt:

Need for fuel stimulated ...

Consequence:

Improvements in communications:

Condition of roads:

Turnpike trusts:

New roads:

New canals:

10. **fuel** = material for producing heat or other forms of energy.

11. **grumbled at** = complained about.

12. **turnpike trusts** = groups organized to better the roads.

13. **collieries** = coal mines.

reduced from forty shillings to five shillings a ton. No wonder that all the chief industrial centres of the country were soon connected by similar waterways.* [...]

A great part of the country was still cultivated under the medieval 'open-field' system, by which each villager owned strips in each of three or four great unenclosed fields. These strips were divided from each other by mere grass 'balks', and the whole of each field was under the same crop at the same time. This system made up-to-date methods impossible, and local squires who wanted to profit by the mounting price of corn sought to end it. They got Parliament to pass 'Enclosure Acts' authorizing them to fence in the village lands, including the commons and waste land, and re-divide it into compact blocks. This hit the village 'small-holder' in three ways. Firstly, he generally got the worst of the deal when the lands were re-divided; secondly, he could rarely find the money for his share¹⁴ of the cost of passing the Act and fencing the fields; thirdly, he had lost the use of the 'common' on which he had hitherto turned out his cow and pigs and geese. Moreover, the large-scale scientific farmer was able to undersell the humble yeoman. The consequence was that the latter generally had to sell his share of the village lands and either work for wages on them as a hired labourer, or emigrate to one of the colonies, or drift into the nearest town to work in one of the new factories.

But the most vital of the changes wrought by the 'Industrial Revolution' was in the relationship between man and man. The new processes of manufacture required machinery which was enormously costly to buy, to house, and to feed with raw material. All this was quite beyond the resources of the cottage-worker. Furthermore, mass-production turned out huge quantities of goods at a price with which the hand-worker could not compete. These humble folk were starved into abandoning their home-industry and working for wages. Thus the nation came to be divided into two hostile classes — those who live by owning and those who live by earning — wage-payers and wage-earners — *capitalists* and *labourers*.

The fact that Britain was the first country in which this Industrial Revolution took place gave her an enormous advantage in the accumulation of wealth. It was this which enabled Britain to hold out in the long struggle with France; and it has been well said that the rocks upon which the Napoleonic Empire foundered were the factory chimneys of Yorkshire and Lancashire.

Unfortunately a price had to be paid for this, and that price was the health and happiness of several generations of our ancestors. Life in the country may be dull, but at any rate it is spent healthily in the open air; whereas in the mushroom towns¹⁵ which sprang up in the new industrial

The old agricultural system:
open fields:

The new agricultural system:
enclosures:

Consequences for the small-holder:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Consequences for the cottage-worker:

Two main classes:

The fact that Britain got wealthier enabled ...

Factory workers' living and working conditions:

* They were called 'Inland Navigation Canals', and so many men were employed digging them that the word 'navvy' has remained in use for this type of labourer.

14. **share** = part.

15. **mushroom towns** = small towns that were constructed to house workers of a mill, factory or mine.

areas the workers lived from morning to night in the foul atmosphere of a crowded mill, and from night to morning in the equally foul atmosphere of a crowded home. Even in agricultural district the labourer had now no rights, no freedom; and his wages fell so low, owing to economical methods of farming, that he could scarcely keep body and soul together. Moreover, many of the tasks in the factories could be performed by children, and those who survived the long hours of monotonous toil¹⁶ grew up a stunted and discontented race.

Farm labourers' living and working conditions:

Role of Parliament and employers:

Adam Smith:

Parliament did nothing to improve these conditions, chiefly because it was convinced by such writers as Adam Smith¹⁷ that wages and conditions of labour were as completely outside human control as the law of gravitation. They argued that, by the 'Law of Supply and Demand', wages fall if there are more workers than jobs for them, and *vice versa*. This doctrine of letting such matters alone — '*Laissez-faire*' — dominated the minds of the ruling classes for half a century and more. It was a comfortable doctrine for them, for it seemed to free them from all responsibility. Moreover, low wages enabled employers to accumulate capital to expand their businesses, and it appeared to be a patriotic duty to do everything possible to encourage this.

Only means to react to unbearable working conditions was ...

but ...

The only step that they could take in self-defence was to come to agreements among themselves not to work for lower wages or longer hours than seemed reasonable. Here we see the origin of Trade Unionism; but in this, its earliest form, it was doomed to a very short life. In 1799 Pitt¹⁸ passed a *Combination Act*, which forbade any workman to combine with other workmen to impose conditions on employers, under a penalty of three months' hard labour.

(abridged from R.M. Rayner,
A Concise History of Britain, Longman)

strongly supported free trade with a minimum interference from the government.

18. Pitt = William Pitt (1759-1806), English statesman.

16. **toil** = effort, hard work.

17. **Adam Smith** = (1723-1790) Scottish economist who argued against mercantile monopolies and