

Industrial Revolution in Britain (Around 1860)

By **1860**, Britain had already gone through more than 100 years of industrial change. It was the **world's leading industrial nation**, and major changes in work, transport, technology, and society had taken place.

The Economy in Britain Before the Industrial Revolution

Before the Industrial Revolution began in the mid-1700s, **Britain had a traditional, farming-based economy**. Most people lived and worked in rural areas.

There were **no factories, no machines, and very little, large-scale production**.

Farming (Agriculture) – The Basis of the Economy

- **Most people were farmers** or worked on farms.
- Farming was done by **hand tools** such as hoes, sickles, and wooden ploughs.
- There were **no machines** to plant, harvest, or process crops.
- Farmers used the **open-field system**, where villagers shared land and worked it together.
- Crop yields were low, meaning farmers produced **just enough food** for their families.

Cottage Industries

Before factories, many goods were made at home in small family workshops. These were called **cottage industries**.

Common cottage industries:

- **Spinning and weaving** wool or cotton into cloth
- Making **candles**
- Making **shoes**
- Handcrafts like pottery or lace

Families used simple tools and worked slowly. Production was **limited** and goods were **expensive**.

Transport Was Slow and Difficult

Before industrialisation:

- Roads were mostly **dirt roads**, muddy in winter and dusty in summer.
- Transport was done by **horses, carts, or on foot**.
- Rivers and small sailing ships helped transport goods, but travel was still slow.

Small-Scale Trade

- Markets were local—people usually sold goods in nearby towns.
- There was some international trade (wool, tea, spices), but nothing close to what happened during the industrial era.

Britain exported:

- **Wool** (its biggest export before 1750)
- Some iron tools
- Agricultural products

Limited Technology

- Most work relied on **human and animal power**.
- Simple tools, no engines.
- Very slow production.

Because of this, life changed very little for hundreds of years.

Social Structure Before Industrialisation

Society was divided into:

- **Landowners** (rich)
- **Tenant farmers**
- **Peasants and labourers** (poor)

Most people were poor, with very few chances for education or social mobility.

Social Changes During the Industrial Revolution

The Industrial Revolution (late 1700s–1800s) did not only change machines and factories—it **completely transformed people's lives and society**. Below are the major social changes:

Urbanisation (Growth of Cities)

- People moved from rural areas to cities to work in factories.
- Small towns grew into large industrial cities like Manchester and Birmingham.
- Cities became overcrowded and lacked proper housing and sanitation.

New Social Classes Developed

The Industrial Middle Class

- Factory owners, merchants, bankers, and managers.
- Became wealthy and powerful.
- Lived in comfortable homes outside the polluted city centres.

The Working Class

- Factory workers, miners, and labourers.
- Lived in crowded slums with poor conditions.
- Worked long hours for low wages.

Changes in Family Life

- Families no longer worked together on farms.
- Men, women, and even children worked in separate sections of factories.
- Working hours were long (12–16 hours), leaving little family time.

Child Labour

- Many children worked in mines or factories.
- They were preferred because they were cheap and small enough to fit between machines.
- This led to injuries, illness, and exploitation.

Poor Living Conditions

- Workers lived in overcrowded slums with:
 - No clean water
 - Poor sanitation
 - Open sewage
 - Pollution from factories
 - This led to diseases like cholera and typhoid.

Changes in Women's Roles

- Many women worked in textiles, mines, and domestic service.
- They earned less than men.
- The idea of the "housewife" only applied to middle-class women.

Rise of Labour Unions

- Workers formed unions to demand:
 - Shorter working hours
 - Better wages

- Safer conditions
- Early unions were banned but later became legal and powerful.

Lives of the Working Class During the Industrial Revolution

During the Industrial Revolution (late 1700s–1800s), the **working class** experienced some of the **hardest and most difficult living and working conditions** in history. While factories and machines made some people rich, ordinary workers faced many struggles.

Long and Exhausting Working Hours

- Workers laboured **12–16 hours a day**, six days a week.
- There were **no breaks**, except very short meal times.
- If a worker was late, they could lose a day's pay or be punished.

Factories valued **production**, not the well-being of workers.

Dangerous Working Conditions

Working in factories was risky:

- Machines were fast and **had no safety guards**.
- Many workers lost **fingers, limbs**, or were pulled into machines.
- Coal mines were even more dangerous, with **explosions, cave-ins**, and toxic gases.

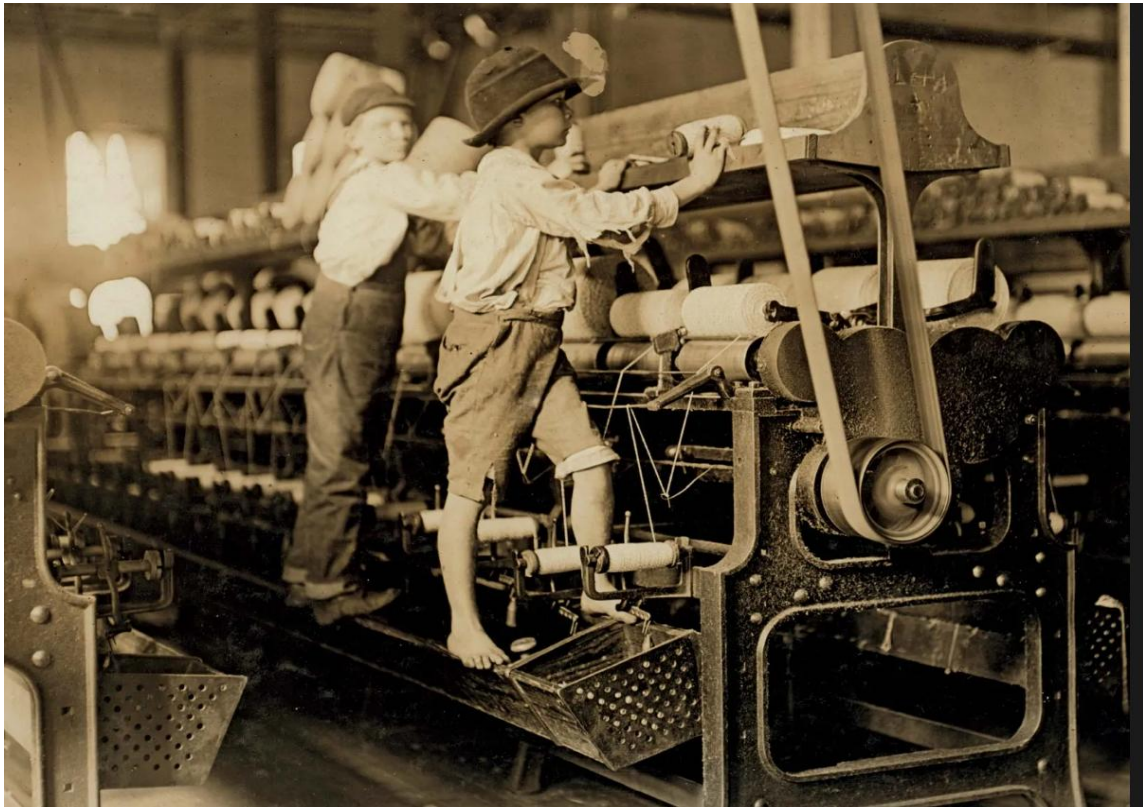
There were **no safety laws** to protect workers.

Low Wages

- Wages were very low—just enough for basic survival.
- Women earned **half** of what men earned.
- Children earned even less.

Families had no choice but to send everyone to work.

Child Labour



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Children as young as **5 or 6** worked in:

- Textile factories
- Coal mines
- Chimney sweeping
- Iron foundries

Children worked because:

- They were cheap labour.
- They could fit into small spaces between machines or tunnels.
- Families needed extra income.

Many children suffered from **injuries, sickness, and exhaustion.**

Poor Living Conditions



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- No running water
- No toilets inside homes
- Sewage ran through the streets
- Rubbish piled up everywhere

These conditions caused diseases such as:

- **Cholera**
- **Typhoid**
- **Tuberculosis**

People often lived **10–12 per room**.

Pollution

Industrial cities had:

- Smoke from factory chimneys
- Dirty rivers filled with chemical waste
- Constant noise from machines

Fresh air was rare; many workers developed **lung diseases**.

Little Education

- Working-class children usually did **not attend school**.
- They worked instead of learning.
- Only later (mid-1800s) did laws begin to reduce child labour and promote basic education.

Limited Rights

- Workers had **no rights**, no minimum wage, and no job security.
- They could be fired at any time.
- Early trade unions were illegal, so workers could not strike or protest safely.

Formation of Labour Unions (Late 1800s)

Eventually, the working class organised themselves:

- Unions demanded **shorter hours, better wages, and safer workplaces**.
- Many reforms and laws were introduced because of their struggles.

Swing Riots (1830–1831)



The **Swing Riots** were a series of **rural protests and uprisings** by farm workers in southern and eastern England between **1830 and 1831**. They happened **before** the full Industrial Revolution took over, but they were directly linked to the economic and social changes happening at the time.

Why Were They Called “Swing” Riots?

The protestors signed letters using the name **“Captain Swing.”**

- “Captain Swing” was **not a real person**.
- It was a **symbolic name** used to threaten landowners.
- The name suggested that landowners might “swing from a rope” if they ignored workers’ demands.

It was like a signature used to frighten wealthy farmers.

The Swing Riots (1830–1831) were violent rural protests in Britain caused by low wages, unemployment, and the introduction of threshing machines. Workers, calling themselves “Captain Swing,” destroyed machines and demanded better pay. The government reacted severely by arresting, transporting, or executing many protestors. The riots showed the struggles faced by rural workers during early industrialisation.

The Luddites

The Luddites (1811–1816) were skilled textile workers who protested against machines that threatened their jobs during the Industrial Revolution. They broke machines, attacked factories, and used the symbol “General Ludd.” The government punished them harshly. The Luddites were not anti-technology—they were fighting for fair wages and protection of their livelihoods.

GRADE 8 HISTORY – ASSESSMENT ACTIVITY

Topic: The Industrial Revolution in Britain in 1860

Total: 40 marks

SECTION A: SOURCE-BASED QUESTIONS (25 marks)

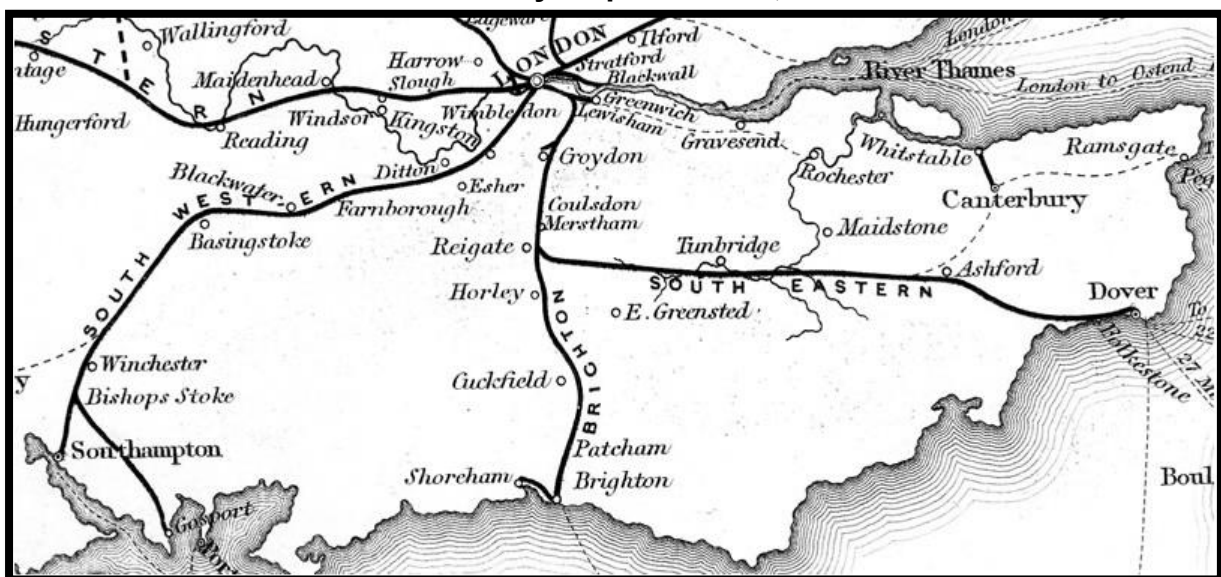
SOURCE A: Written Source – Factory Work (1860)

An extract from a report by a factory inspector in Manchester.

“In many cotton factories, workers begin their labour at 6 a.m. and continue until 7 p.m. The air is thick with dust and fibres from the machines. Children as young as nine are employed to crawl beneath the looms to collect fallen threads. Injuries are common, and medical care is rarely provided.”

- 1.1.1 Give two working conditions described in the source. (2)
- 1.1.2 Why were children employed in factories according to the source? (2)
- 1.1.3 Do you think this source shows the factory system in a positive or negative way? Give a reason. (2)

SOURCE B: Visual Source – Railway Map of Britain, 1860



commons.wikimedia.org

- 2.1 What does the expansion of railways tell us about British transport by 1860? (2)
- 2.2 Explain **one way** in which railways helped Britain's industries grow. (2)

SOURCE C: Visual Source – Urban Life, 1860



historycollection.com

3.1 Identify **two features** of living conditions shown in the illustration. (2)

3.2 Why were cities like Manchester overcrowded during the Industrial Revolution? (2)

Using ALL the sources

4.1 Explain whether the Industrial Revolution improved the lives of ordinary people by 1860. Give **two pieces of evidence** from the sources. (5)

PARAGRAPH WRITING

Write a paragraph (8–10 lines) explaining the lives of the working class during the Industrial Revolution in 1860.

Use the following points as a guide:

- Working hours
- Wages
- Child labour
- Safety in workplaces
- Living conditions
- **[15 marks]**