

The Industrial Revolution: Why Britain?

Why was England, a fairly small country, the first place in the world to industrialize? There are several factors that helped England move from being an mostly **agricultural** (farming) to being mostly **industrial** (products made with the help of machines). This change happened fairly quickly in historical terms, over about 100 years (around **1750-1850**), and drastically altered the way people lived and worked. This is why this period is called a **revolution**.

Technology was improving very fast and new machines were being built to make work more efficient. The first machines invented were ones to help make farming faster and easier. Soon technology spread to the textile industry (cloth making).

Britain had large amounts of **raw materials**, especially coal, which was used to power the machines. This meant that running these machines was fairly cheap. Britain's colonies provided materials for little cost as well.

Britain's population had been growing since the 1600's so there were already **lots of labourers** available to work. Many farmers who lost their land moved to the city to look for jobs. Because there were so many people looking for work labour was cheap and easy to find. Factory owners were able to pay their workers

All the money that the manufacturers and business men were making allowed them to invest in new businesses. This money, called **capital**, meant that the process of industrialization kept growing.

It was important to be able to get the goods being made to market. By the mid-1800's, the **transportation** system had improved greatly, partly because of the invention of steam powered locomotives. Britain is an island with a great naval history which made transporting goods by sea very convenient.

Since the Glorious Revolution, the wealthy middle class (landowners, merchants, business men) had become very important to the **government**. Parliament passed laws in favour of businesses as well as laws that stopped workers from forming guilds to protect their rights.

Discuss in your groups:

- 1) Which of these factors do you think was the most important and why? (There are no wrong answers for this.)
- 2) Imagine you lived during the Industrial Revolution. What things do you think you'd miss about life before the revolution? What changes would you be happy about? List 3 for each.