

Hi everyone, in this session I'll be presenting my research about the social history of Britain during the Industrial Revolution. I particularly looked at how ordinary lives were affected by changes that happened at that time. This was a time that saw the beginning of a new phenomenon⁽¹⁾ – where buying and selling goods became a major part of ordinary people's lives.

In fact, it was in the 19th century that the quantity and quality of people's⁽²⁾ was used as an indication of the wealth of the country. Before this, the vast majority of people had very few possessions, but all that was changed by the Industrial Revolution. This was the era from the mid-18th to the late 19th century, when improvements in⁽³⁾ as well as in technology triggered massive social changes that transformed life for just about everybody in several key areas.

First let's look at manufacturing. When it comes to manufacturing, we tend to think of the Industrial Revolution in images of⁽⁴⁾ and coal. And it's true that the Industrial Revolution couldn't have taken place at all if it weren't for these new sources of power. They marked an important⁽⁵⁾ the traditional watermills and windmills that had dominated before this. The most⁽⁶⁾ industry for much of the 19th century was textiles. This meant that fashionable fabrics, and lace and ribbons were⁽⁷⁾ to everyone.

⁽⁸⁾ the Industrial Revolution, most people made goods to sell in small workshops, often in their own homes. But enormous new machines were now being created that could produce the goods faster and on a larger scale, and these⁽⁹⁾ a lot more space. So large factories were built, replacing the workshops, and⁽¹⁰⁾ workers to travel to work. In fact, large numbers of people migrated from villages into towns as a result.

As well as manufacturing, there were new technologies in⁽¹¹⁾, contributing to the growth of consumerism. The horse-drawn stagecoaches and carts of the 18th century, which carried very few people and goods, and travelled slowly along poorly surfaced roads, were gradually⁽¹²⁾ by the numerous canals that were constructed. These were particularly important for the transportation of goods. The canals gradually fell out of use, though, as⁽¹³⁾ were developed, becoming the main way of moving goods and people from one end of the country to the other. And the goods they moved weren't just coal, iron, clothes, and so on – significantly, they included newspapers, which meant that thousands of people were not only more⁽¹⁴⁾ about what was going on in the country, but could also read about what was available in the shops. And that encouraged them to buy more. So faster forms of transport resulted in⁽¹⁵⁾ becoming far more efficient – goods could now be sold all over the country, instead of just in the local market.

The third main area that saw changes that contributed to consumerism was ⁽¹⁷⁾ . The number and quality of shops grew rapidly, and in particular, small shops suffered as customers flocked to the growing number of department stores – a form of retailing that was new in the 19th century. The entrepreneurs who opened these found new ways to ⁽¹⁸⁾ them with goods, and to attract customers: for instance, improved lighting inside greatly increased the ⁽¹⁹⁾ of the goods for sale. Another development that made goods more visible from outside resulted from the use of plate glass, which made it possible for windows to be much larger than previously. New ways of ⁽²⁰⁾ goods were introduced, too. Previously, the focus had been on *informing* potential customers about the availability of goods; now there was an explosion in advertising trying to ⁽²¹⁾ people to go shopping.

Flanders claims that one of the great effects of the Industrial Revolution was that it created ⁽²²⁾ . All sorts of things that had previously been luxuries – from sugar to cutlery – became conveniences, and before long they'd turned into ⁽²³⁾ : life without sugar or cutlery was unimaginable. Rather like mobile phones these days!