

# The Industrial Revolution

and its impact  
on  
Australia

## LIVING THE REVOLUTION

### MANCHESTER

Manchester, the great city of the north of England, is considered to be the cradle of the Industrial Revolution.

It was dubbed 'Cottonopolis' in the early 19th century because of the vast number of mills in the city and to its north. As well, it became the world headquarters for the supply of cotton goods.

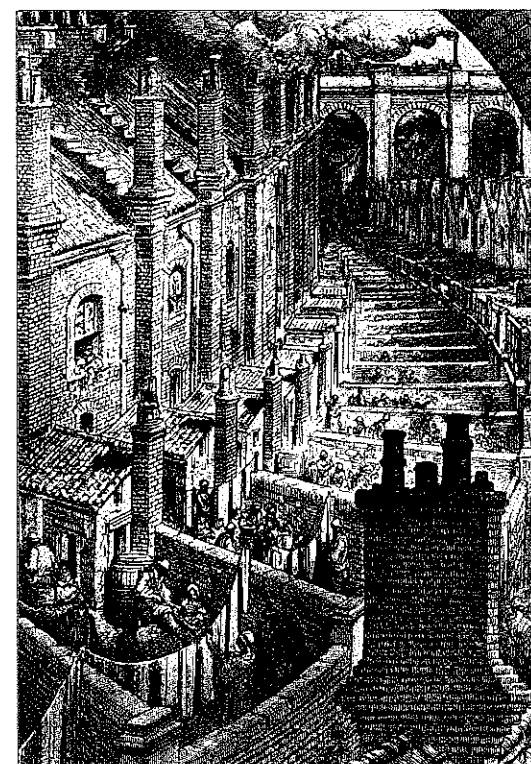
In former British colonies including Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, 'manchester' is the generic term for cotton goods such as bed sheets, tablecloths, towels and related merchandise.

A classic Industrial Revolution scene with blast furnaces working day and night in a factory next to workers' houses

### IMPROVING THE LIFESTYLE

**While** there were many negative aspects to life for the average person during the Industrial Revolution, there were a few pluses. By the mid 18th century the quality of food for the average British person was slowly improving. This came about because of new farming techniques and better use of land.

As usually happens, when the standard of nutrition improves the population increases, partly through more births and partly because of longer lifespans. Even so, at the beginning of the Revolution in the 18th century the average life expectancy in Britain and other European countries was less than 40 years. In the USA, with better access to food and less pollution, the average person could expect to live close to 50 years.



Closely packed slum housing of the 19th century, with railway bridges passing directly overhead

### POPULATION CRUNCH

The second half of the 18th century was marked by rapid population increases in Britain and the rest of Europe. This came about through a drop in the number of epidemics that had suppressed population growth for centuries. Better nutrition was also a factor as improved agricultural methods led to more abundant crops and cheaper vegetables.

The population increase meant larger families and more mouths to feed.

Peasant families grew ever larger, to the point where some of the children could no longer be used as labour on farms. They were forced to seek employment elsewhere, usually in factories in growing industrial centres.

Similarly, entrepreneurs and businessmen found it necessary to expand their enterprises in order to feed their families. When those children grew up, they went out into the world and began new businesses.

### MOVING FOOD

**Between** 1750 and 1850 Britain's transport system changed dramatically, as canals and later railways spread across the land. Improved transportation meant food could be moved relatively easily from growing areas to the major centres of population. It also allowed some regions to specialise in particular types of foods, improving efficiency and lowering prices.

As shipping services improved, merchants were able to begin importing more exotic foods and beverages from other parts of the world. In the early 19th century the British middle classes developed a taste for a new drink imported from China: tea.

An entire industry grew up around tea, with special fast clipper sailing ships built to take it around the world. It also created a new industry in British India — the growing of opium, which was used to pay Chinese merchants for the tea.

### GROWTH CENTRES

**As** the population of Britain began moving around seeking work, cities experienced explosive growth. Governments and councils were not prepared for this development, and had few people with the expertise to cope with it.

As mechanisation on farms reduced the number of labourers needed, people were forced to move where the work was. This meant the ever-expanding towns and cities, where new factories were being

built to cope with the world's demand.

In the regions of Yorkshire and the Midlands, former villages were transformed into major population centres. Wherever a new mill or factory opened, people migrated there looking for work. What very few authorities or employers considered was where these labourers were going to live.

Developers entered the picture, hurriedly putting up rows of small, substandard housing. Huge numbers of people were crammed in, up to ten per room. Often they were little more than dirt-floor shanties with inadequate light and poor sanitation.

These new areas quickly became slums. Thousands died from the many diseases — including tuberculosis, cholera and typhoid — that erupted from time to time.