

Source Readings

Life in Industrial Cities

The Industrial Revolution changed how people lived. In particular, it brought many people from rural areas into cities. As historian Penny Clarke describes in the following excerpt, life in these growing cities was difficult. In the first section the author describes homes in industrial cities and towns.

As you read, think about answers to the questions listed below. When you have completed the reading, answer these questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. How did families get water when the tap was not working?
2. Why were houses dark and stuffy?
3. How was meat on a spit turned?
4. Why did the poor have to buy most of their food?
5. Which statements in the excerpt are still true of the poor and working class today?

The industrial towns grew haphazardly as people drifted to them from the surrounding countryside, attracted by the chance of a job at one of the new factories. There was nowhere for them to live, and so many of the mill- and factory-owners, being rich men and needing workers, built houses for their employees. They knew that the people who would live in them were coming from poor homes, and so they wasted no money on good building materials, drains, or water-supplies. Gardens were quite out of the question. Instead, rows and rows of mean [low quality] little "back-to-back" houses were built. They got this name because the back walls of the houses in one street were the back walls of the houses in the street parallel with it. Most back-to-back houses had two rooms upstairs and two rooms down and the rooms at the back were very dark because, of course, they had no windows. . . .

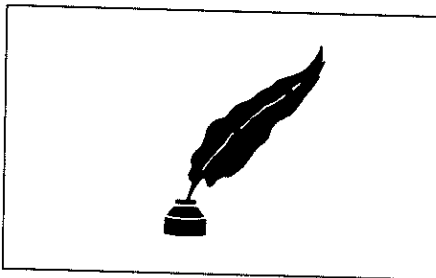
. . . The water-supply was a tap [faucet] . . . shared by all the families in the street. The

supply was erratic. Sometimes it was turned on for only an hour or two each day, and in dry weather it often failed completely. Then the family, tired after a day's work, had to fetch and pay for water from the local water-carrier. In such circumstances washing anything, even face and hands, was an immense luxury.

As the Industrial Revolution progressed and towns became ever bigger, so the pressure on housing increased. For example, Liverpool's population was 5,000 in 1700, but 77,000 by 1801. Every available space was occupied, from cellars to attics. According to a survey taken in Liverpool in 1848, there were 39,000 people living in 7,800 cellars. Even allowing for some exaggeration, this figure shows how shocking conditions were. . . .

Furniture

The furniture used by the different social classes showed the same contrast as their housing. The very rich had furniture made by the great master cabinet-makers and designers. . . .



Name _____

Date _____ Class _____

CHAPTER 22
Section 2

Source Readings,
continued

Most of the population never saw furniture of this standard or style. Bad roads and poor communications meant that small towns and villages had to be almost entirely self-sufficient for everyday needs. Therefore, every place had a carpenter or two, and it was furniture made by local carpenters which graced most homes of the period. Good, bad or indifferent, it reflected the skill of the craftsman and the price his customer could pay.

“[R]ows and rows of mean [low quality] little ‘back-to-back’ houses were built.”

Thomas Robinson’s invention of the kitchen range in 1780 was a great step forward. The fire was enclosed, and on one side was an oven, on the other a tank for heating water. Food could also be cooked on the top of the range.

Windows

Homes during the Industrial Revolution were dark. Lighting was by candle or oil-lamp, although gas was beginning to reach richer homes by the end of the period. . . . However, it was the lack of windows that really made homes dark. It also meant that houses were stuffy. . . .

Cooking

In the early part of the period food was still cooked on open hearths. The risk of accidental fire was therefore ever-present. This is one reason why in most larger houses the kitchens were far from the main living rooms. Another reason is that it lessened the cooking smells which reached the living rooms.

Meat was roasted on spits hung over the fires. To ensure that the meat was cooked evenly, the spits had to be turned. This was usually done by means of a treadwheel. A small child or a dog had to walk round and round inside the treadwheel.

Food

People living in the country had plenty of home-grown food, either from their cottage gardens or from the kitchen gardens of their estates. Many foreign visitors to England commented on how much most English agricultural workers ate. Meat for them was not such a luxury as it was for their European counterparts. Poultry, home-cured bacon and ham, and game poached [hunted illegally] from the surrounding woods varied the usual diet of bread, vegetables and cheese.

In towns, very rich families had supplies sent up from their estates. Prosperous merchants could afford to buy food from shops and markets. But the growing class of poor industrial workers were at a great disadvantage. They had no gardens in which to grow food or keep hens. Wages were so low that, to get enough money for the family to survive, the mother had to go out to work too. At the end of a ten- or twelve-hour day she had no energy left to shop or cook, even if she had the facilities for cooking, which was unlikely. As a result, the poor relied almost entirely on bought food, which was usually of poor quality. . . .

It is not surprising that children, living on such food, suffered from diseases like tuberculosis and rickets, nor that typhoid and dysentery were common.