

Social Change in the Mid-19th Century

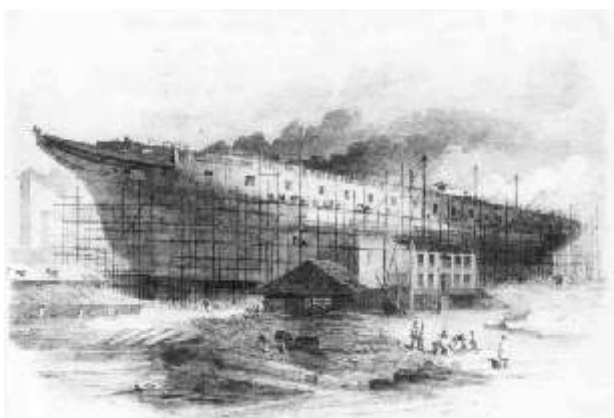
The age of great engineering breakthroughs associated with men like Brunel and ships like the *Warrior* was about more than just the machinery.

This kind of change also had a huge impact on peoples' lives. Railways alone transformed ways of thinking and living in many different ways. London newspapers could be delivered to the provinces within the day and news spread much faster than ever before. The need for railway timetables meant that timekeeping had to be standardised throughout the country.

The existence of railways led to the development of commuter suburbs for the middle classes. They also meant that towns had easy access to supplies of fresh foods. By the end of the century the railways would also spur the growth of seaside holiday resorts and lead to a revolution in leisure.

Music hall stars were now able to easily travel around the country. Stars like Marie Lloyd and Harry Lauder became household names. Railways were also responsible for the development of professional football. In the 1880s the teams of the industrial towns began to travel to play Saturday afternoon matches to entertain workers on their afternoon off.

Above all, the growth of industry and new technologies altered the way that society was made up. More and more people came to live and work in towns. By 1871 the majority of Britain's population lived in an urban environment. The progress of engineering pioneers like Brunel meant that there was a huge expansion in the range of jobs available. For the middle classes there were jobs as engineers, works managers and many more within the range of services needed to keep this new industrial economy ticking over. There were armies of book keepers, clerks and supervisors. Industrial enterprises provided an increasing volume of work for lawyers and accountants. The growing towns required doctors, teachers, police officers and so on.



HMS Warrior under construction, Blackwall in 1859



J.M.W. Turner's painting, *Rain, Steam and Speed* shows a broad gauge locomotive crossing Maidenhead Railway Bridge. This painting is on display at the National Gallery, London

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For the workers, industry and technology brought mixed blessings. Some workers saw their old craft skills being lost as machines took over. The advent of iron shipbuilding, for example, saw a decline in demand for the woodworking skills of shipwrights and wood caulkers.

Others were more fortunate and had job opportunities created for them. Brunel and other railway builders provided work for thousands of unskilled labourers as they dug tunnels and cuttings or carted away the debris from blasting tunnels in places such as Box Hill. Legions of bricklayers and their labourers were employed as Brunel sank supports into the Tamar for the Saltash Bridge or constructed the elliptical arches for his Maidenhead Bridge across the Thames.



Maidenhead Railway Bridge
Courtesy of Dorothy & Ian Hart



HMS Warrior 1860
Portsmouth Historic Dockyard
Image courtesy of HMS Warrior 1860

The engineers of the age of Brunel were also responsible for creating entirely new skills to occupy people throughout their working lives. Railway engines required a new range of metal working trades. Brunel effectively created a new town at Swindon to build the rolling stock designed by his locomotive engineer Daniel Gooch. While the old shipbuilding trades may have suffered with the arrival of iron shipbuilding, new trades took their place. The key workers in the making of iron ships were boilermakers, workers skilled in the cutting and shaping of metal.

Some of the trades created by Brunel and his contemporaries still exist. Some have disappeared or are much less important than they once were, in the same way that the skills needed to build wooden ships were replaced by those needed to build iron ships.

In fact, the idea of a flexible work force, with new skills constantly needing to be learned could be said to have begun with Brunel.



All Change!

If the Industrial Revolution taught us anything it taught us that changes in technology can have a massive impact on the way we live our lives.

Read through the information sheet again and see how many ways the spread of the railways changed people's lives in Britain during the 19th century. It affected everything from the kind of jobs people could have to what they could do in their free time.

Your Task

Try to think of an invention or technological breakthrough that happened in the 20th century. Once you have something in mind think about how different life would be if it had never happened. An example could be the invention of computers.

Write down your thoughts in five different bubbles as below. These ones are just to show you how to draw them, when you do it use a whole sheet of A4 paper so you've got plenty of room. Feel free to add different bubbles if you want.

