

The Romantic Age

The Hanoverian kings:

The Romantic Age runs from the second half of George III's (1760-1820), through George IV's (1820-1830), to the end of William IV's reign (1830-1837).

King George III decided to rule as well as to reign. To do this he gathered round him a party of politicians known as "The King's Friends" and through them he used his authority to pursue a disastrous course in America, where he was regarded as a tyrant.

Because of his insanity, his reign, after sixty years, passed to his son, the Prince of Wales, known as the Prince Regent. George IV was most closely associated with the social entertainments.

After him there was William IV, he had a more liberal spirit than the preceding monarchs. During his reign the need for parliamentary reform was recognized.

The American War of Independence (1775-1782):

The American War of Independence was fought and won over a democratic issue: the contested right of Britain to impose taxes on people who had no representation in Britain's Parliament. After the Seven Years War, France withdrew its armies from America, now that the colonists didn't need British protection any longer, they began to discover reasons for dissatisfaction with their mother country: one of them was the British government request of payment of part of protection costs they gave to the colonies in North America from American Indian attacks. When the British government imposed taxation in 1773 the colonies refused them, their refusal was symbolized by the "Boston tea party", in the same year, in which British tea, subject to an import tax, was thrown into Boston Harbour.

Britain regarded America as its property, a market for British goods and a population to tax. The colonists joined together to the battle cry "*no representation, no taxation*". Britain responded with Penal Acts (1774) and closed the port of Boston. In 1775 hostilities broke out when Massachusetts militiamen attacked British troops. American's *Declaration of Independence* (4th July 1776) drawn up by Thomas Jefferson followed in 1776.

The colonists proved formidable opponents and overcame George III's army. In 1781 the British forces under Lord Cornwallis surrendered to George Washington's troops. The following year, the British Parliament, voted to stop the war, which formally ended in 1783.

The Industrial Revolution:

During these years another revolution was taking place throughout Europe: the Industrial Revolution. It marked the shift from manual labour to new manufacturing methods, which were made possible by the invention of machines. It was in England that the Industrial Revolution had its earliest and most substantial foundation, it was also the immediate consequence of a technological revolution.

A Scottish engineer and inventor, James Watt, perfected the steam engine in 1765. The new steam engines were used in the textile industry.

In 1807, the American Robert Fulton invented the steamship and in 1811 steam trains were patented by George Stephenson. These trains in particular radically changed the economic structure and the physical geography of the country, as raw material, goods and people were transported on an ever-expanding railway network.

Soon many industries started to use machines and workers came to serve the machine.

Thanks to these machines a lot of cities became dirty, polluted and insanitary because of the smoke of the factories, bad housing, poor sanitation and long hours for little pay made life intolerable.

As a result, there were increasing demand for better wages and for the bread price to be reduced. To prevent disorder, public meetings of workers were made illegal by the Combination Acts (1799). This, however, didn't stop some workers. Between 1811 and 1812 a lot of textile machines were destroyed.

There was also a strong demand for a reform of the electoral system because areas that had very few inhabitants who were easily corruptible were represented in Parliament, while areas densely populated were not. With the accession to the throne of William IV a Reform Bill was passed in 1832.

So other reforms passed: meeting of worker were no longer illegal, with the Factory Acts (1833) conditions in the factories were improved and there was the abolition of slavery in British colonies.