

Jewellery and the Industrial Revolution

HI3T5 Value in the Age of Reason

2024-5, term 2, week 2

Dr. Michael Bycroft

Evaluation in an age of production

- First British Industrial Revolution, c. 1770-1830
- Usually associated with mass *production*
- Example of cotton textiles – see week 1.9, on the somewhat earlier consumer revolution
- eg. British cotton production increases ten-fold, 1785-1827
- Context for much of ‘classical’ economic thought, from Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations* (1776) to Karl Marx, *Das Kapital* (1867-1894)
- A ‘laboratory’ for economic historians: labour, class, race, gender, empire...
- Was this a revolution in evaluation as well as in production?

The early industrial revolution in Birmingham

- 1712 – ‘Newcomen’ steam engine invented by Thomas Newcomen, Devonshire ironmonger
- 1762 – Mathew Boulton begins building Soho Manufactory to make ‘toys’
- 1765 – ‘separate condenser’ invented by James Watt, then an instrument-maker at Glasgow University
- **1773 – Birmingham Assay Office created by Act of Parliament**
- 1775 – Boulton and Watt enter business partnership based on ownership of patent of Watt’s engine
- 1779 – Smethwick engine built, oldest working steam engine in world
- 1781 – Watt acquires patent for ‘sun and planet gear’ that turns reciprocating engine into rotational one
- 1788 – Soho Mint established to strike copper coins using steam engines
- 1796 – Soho Foundry established by Boulton and Watt to manufacture steam engines
- 1797 – Boulton granted license to strike British coins

The Birmingham Assay Office in context

- 1238 – earliest attempt in England to regulate the quality of gold and silver wares
- 1300 – ‘Guardians of the craft’ assigned to assay wares at workshops
- 1478 – Goldsmith’s Hall in London becomes permanent site of assays
- 1757 – counterfeiting hallmarks becomes a felony punishable by death
- 1773 – Birmingham and Sheffield assay offices created by parliament
- 1784 – duty on silver re-imposed; duty on gold imposed
- 1824 – Birmingham Assay Office now assays gold as well as silver