

Read the information and answer the questions that follow in the spaces provided.



Unlike political revolutions, the Industrial Revolution did not begin with great civil unrest or the clash of armies. As a result, it is difficult to arrive at a date for its beginning. The Industrial Revolution did not occur overnight, but rather began gradually and grew over several decades. Most Historians place its beginnings in England in the 1700s.

Most people lived in the country before the Industrial Revolution. In England, 75% of the population lived in rural areas or small villages in 1700 CE. The percentage was even higher in continental Europe. Those cities that existed were few in number and of modest population. Due to the limited development of farming methods, it was necessary for the majority of the people to live in the country in order to produce enough food for the population. Most families farmed

and lived on small plots of land that were controlled by large land owners who were often members of the nobility.

The total population of Europe was quite small before the Industrial Revolution (and Agricultural Revolution). For example, in 1700 England's total population was about five million, compared to fifty-five million today. The people of preindustrial Europe lived very isolated lives. Roads were poor and dangerous, so people rarely travelled beyond their home villages. News of events in the outside world arrived slowly and sporadically. As a result, the small villages that dotted the countryside were the centers of life for the majority of Europeans. Few people ever left the area of their birth.

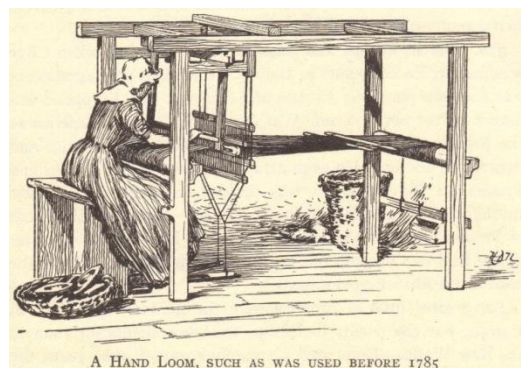
While the vast majority of the population worked in the fields, farming did not provide year-round employment. The peasant farmers were quite busy during the times of planting and harvesting, but at other times they were free to do other work. During this "free" time, thousands of families worked in their homes for clothing merchants. The merchants provided the families with wool or cotton, and for a fixed price, the families' spun yarn on their spinning wheels and produced cloth on their hand-operated looms. This practice between the merchants and rural families is known as "cottage industry" because all of the work was done in a family's cottage home.

Weaving cloth was difficult and tedious, but provided a valuable income for many families. It was convenient work, since it was performed from within the home and at the pace desired by the worker. Children worked along with their parents, often becoming skilled at spinning yarn at a young age.

The system also had advantages for the merchants. The merchants paid very little for the cloth produced by the rural families and could then sell it at a handsome profit. However, the merchants were troubled by the inconsistent levels of production by the families and had no way to supervise their work. Often the cloth would not be delivered on time, especially when there was field work to divert the families from their spinning and weaving. Thus, the merchants desired another system that would allow greater supervision, more consistent delivery, and increased production. When the opportunity to produce their goods through new methods came, the merchants were quick to seize it.



1. Why did most of the people of Europe live in the country before the Industrial Revolution?
2. Why were European villages isolated before the Industrial Revolution?
3. How did the term “cottage industry” get its name
4. Why did rural families participate in cottage industries?
5. What *advantages* did cottage industry production offer to merchants?
6. What *disadvantages* did the merchants face with cottage industrial production?
7. What goods were commonly produced by cottage industries?
8. What was the primary occupation of most people involved in with cottage industry?



A HAND LOOM, SUCH AS WAS USED BEFORE 1785