PART II

Prerevolutionary
England
CHAPTER THREE

Going Dutch

English Society in 1683

Later seventeenth-century English men and women were fascinated by their country. Travel narratives, topographical descriptions, and urban histories flooded the book market. Time and again contemporaries noted that the great works of the previous age—William Camden’s Britannia (1586), John Stow’s Survey of London (1598), Sir Thomas Smith’s De Republica Anglorum (1576)—were hopelessly outdated. Though some complained that their Elizabethan forebears had relied on hearsay rather than “experience,” most felt that the country had changed so dramatically that new description was imperative. The future bishop of London, Edmund Gibson, undertook in the years immediately after James II’s fall from power the most ambitious and comprehensive project, the updating of Camden’s Britannia. The project was sufficiently promising that the London printer Awnsham Churchill was able to advance Gibson more than two thousand pounds to undertake it. Gibson lined up a variety of noted antiquaries, virtuosos, and local experts to “compare Camden’s account with the present condition and furnish us with some short description of it.” Gibson’s revised Britannia

was elegant, impressive, and popular. It gave the impression that England had changed rapidly and profoundly since Camden's day. In "the space of sixty or eighty years," Gibbon concluded, there had been "a strange alteration in the face of things." Gibbon noted that "the growth of trade, the increase of buildings, the number of inhabitants, do all make the appearance very different."

This perception that England was a rapidly changing society stands in uneasy tension with most scholarly accounts of the Glorious Revolution. Thomas Babington Macaulay nearly two centuries later offered a detailed and memorable account of later seventeenth-century English society, in the conviction that the absence of the social contract "would render the subsequent narrative unintelligible or uninteresting." Macaulay compared England in the later 1660s to England in his own day and found it severely wanting. Were one transported back to 1685, Macaulay thought, "we should see struggling huts built with wood and covered with thatch where we now see manufacturing towns and sea-ports renowned to the farthest ends of the world." A large part of the country beyond Trent, Macaulay insisted, was "in a state of barbarism." Communications by land and sea were horrid for both passengers and goods. London, though more sophisticated by far than the rest of the country, was "squalid." The country gentleman, to say nothing of his social inferiors, was marked by "his ignorance and uncomeliness" as well as by his insularity. "It was very seldom that the country gentleman caught glimpses of the great world," wrote Macaulay, "and what he saw of it tended rather to confuse than to enlighten his understanding." Later seventeenth-century England was more barbaric than civilized, more backward than modern. England could not, in Macaulay's view, have a modern revolution in 1688 because it was not a modern but a traditional society. More recent historians of the Glorious Revolution have done little to modify this impression of the society they are describing. Scholars have taken one of two tacks in dealing with English society. The first is to decide that English political history could be described without reference to the society in which it occurred. Despite the increased interest in popular politics evinced by many of these historians, the social and economic organization of the lives of the people have not figured in their accounts. A second tack is to affirm Macaulay's classic Whig view of English society. Jonathan Clark has suggested "that England from Restoration to Reform possessed an economy not driven by manufacturing industry and that its diverse social order was contained within a parochial hegemony." Jonathan Scott has insisted that "the events, structures, and issues in the reign of Charles II ... are almost exact copies of events, structures, and issues of the early Stuart period." Rapid and profound social change figures in neither account.

Historians of the Glorious Revolution should take the contemporary perceptions of rapid and significant social and economic change before the Revolution of 1688-89 more seriously. Economic development was a cause, not an unintended consequence, of the Revolution. England in the later 1660s was quickly becoming more urban, more economically diverse, and more committed to manufacturing. All of these developments were supported by an increasingly sophisticated economic infrastructure. This rapid economic growth was remarkable in that it diverged sharply from major trends on the Continent.

The source of England's dynamism was the indirect effects of its colonial trade with the East and West Indies and with North America. The English had met the standards that economic historians have set for a modern economy. England had developed a variety of markets for land, labor, and capital. England had become a net exporter of agricultural goods, making it capable of supporting "a far-reaching division of labor." The political nation had taken to heart the notion that economic productivity was essential to the kingdom's welfare. And unlike most other European countries, England had achieved "a level of technology and organization capable of sustained development." In short, English society by the later seventeenth century had come to look increasingly like that of its neighbors across the North Sea. If, as the most recent scholarship suggests, the Dutch United Provinces had become "the first modern economy" in the 1660s, the English were quickly learning from Dutch success.

Unlike current scholars of British social and economic history, commentators in later seventeenth-century England were obsessed with comparative economic development. They tried to account for Venetian economic decline, the surprising prominence of Genoa, and the trading success of imperial free cities. The Tory-leaning economic writer John Houghton promised that his economic periodical would provide "as good an account as may be had of the trade, strength and policy of other nations."

Late-seventeenth-century commentators disagreed, and disagreed sharply, about the causes and consequences of the economic developments they observed. But there was little debate about two salient developments in contemporary Europe. Spain, recently perhaps the greatest power in Europe, was in serious economic decline. Spain was now a country with little or no domestic manufactures, clinging desperately to its dispersed overseas empire. Its sole aim, thought one adviser to James II, was "how to stave off some approaching ruin." Spanish decline was invariably contrasted with the remarkable economic efflorescence of the Northern Netherlands. Although there was little agreement about the causes of the Dutch economic miracle, commentators were certain that it had nothing to do with agriculture. The United Provinces of the Netherlands "affords neither grain, wine, oil, timber, metal, stone, wool, hemp, pitch, nor, almost any other commodity of use; and yet we find, there is hardly a nation in the world which enjoys all these things in greater influence." The glee, English commentators agreed, was to make their economy more Dutch than Spanish.

In fact, the society James II inherited in 1685 was going Dutch. Travelers noted the sheer agrarian beauty of Kent, the exclusive focus on agriculture in Northamptonshire, and the pastoral character of Dorset, but above all they commented on the extent and variety of English manufactures. "In most parts of England," commented the well-traveled
Andrew Yarranton, "there are fixed manufactures already that do in great measure set the poor at work."  

Although England in the sixteenth century had been almost entirely an agricultural society, it had ceased to be so by the later 1600s. Pen drainage and enclosures were controversial topics in the seventeenth century as they are now, but their effect on the employment profile of England's rural population was clear. Whereas over 80 percent of the population was employed primarily in agriculture in the early sixteenth century, less than 40 percent was so employed in the later seventeenth century. The number of rural laborers dependent on the market doubled between the second quarter of the sixteenth century and the last quarter of the seventeenth century. By the later 1600s, then, the percentage of England's population primarily involved in agriculture had reached the levels achieved by the precocious Dutch Republic at midcentury, clearly differentiating itself from the rest of Europe. To place this in an even broader perspective, the percentage of English men and women primarily employed in agriculture in later seventeenth-century England was about the same as in the United States on the eve of the American Civil War.  

Compared to the rest of Europe, England had been economically backward in the early 1600s. This was true whether one measured the value of manufacturing output or the percentage of the population so employed. This was no longer the case by the later 1600s. By 1700 the manufacturing and commercial sectors were responsible for fully one-third of English national product. Again, this placed England on a par with the United Provinces and well ahead of every other kingdom and state in Europe. Although the economic statistics do not exist to describe the development with precision, the evidence suggests that England's transformation was not gradual. "The later decades of the seventeenth century," notes the economic historian D. C. Coleman, "were marked by brisk industrial advance" and by "an abnormally rapid progress of internal change."  

The growth of manufacturing and the decline in the relative importance of agrarian employment dramatically altered the economic geography of England. New towns emerged devoted to particular industries; old towns declined. Regions increasingly developed economic specializations while at the same time these regions diversified their manufactures within a particular sector. In the later 1600s observers were increasingly aware of the pronounced differences between agricultural and manufacturing regions.  

Cloth was England's leading manufacture in the late seventeenth century, as it had been in the sixteenth century. "English wool is famous all over the world, both for its fineness and goodness," noted the Lusitanian native Guy Miege, "the English being now the best cloth-makers in the world." This observation, however, conceals the rapid and significant transformation of English clothing manufactures. Even though English wool retained its high reputation both domestically and internationally, the English were no longer finishing their own raw wool exclusively. By 1700 fully one-quarter of English raw wool was imported from Ireland, Spain, and elsewhere. English textile manufacturing was now more significant than English raw wool production. English cloth manufactur
seventeenth century they were selling the lighter new draperies to southern Europe, the eastern Mediterranean, and beyond. The Mediterranean merchant John Jolliffe told the House of Commons in 1670 that "our woolen trade begins to thrive." So important had English cloth exports to Spain and Portugal become that some advised the English to increase their consumption of Iberian wine so as not to jeopardize the trade. In the grand duchy of Tuscany, despite laws prohibiting the sale of English cloth, "all the nobility and gentry, even in [Florence] wear little or nothing else but English cloth." Not only were the new cloths lighter but they were produced and sold for lower prices. Between the late sixteenth and the late seventeenth centuries the price of English fabrics dropped by over \( \sqrt[90]{2} \) percent. The English now produced textiles for mass consumption.

The advent of the new draperies and the relative decline of markets for English heavy woollens dramatically altered England's manufacturing landscape during the seventeenth century. After 1643 English exports of heavy cloths began an inexorable if uneven decline. Towns and regions that had depended on this old manufacture experienced noticeable downturns. Coventry's clothiers complained in the 1680s that "for some years past" they had "labored under the manifest decay of their trade: to their very great impoverishment and the utter ruin of some hundred families that depended thereon." Salisbury apparently suffered a similar fate. Needham, like so many cloth-making towns and villages in Suffolk, was trading "less than formerly." Reading experienced the same decline as the Weald of Kent, in which the old brocadel manufacture was "in a great measure laid aside."

By contrast, new areas emerged as centers of production of the new draperies. Serges and kerseys were made in the West Country, making Taunton into a "neat and populous town" and transforming Tiverton in Devon into a manufacturing center. The grand duchy of Tuscany observed over thirty thousand people making "different sorts of light cloth" in Devonshire in the 1660s. Exeter grew from a town of eight thousand in the late sixteenth century to about thirteen thousand in the late seventeenth century because it was "much inhabited and resorted unto by merchants and traders" buying and selling serges and kerseys at home and abroad. Norwich surged from a population of twenty thousand in the 1620s to thirty thousand by 1700 because of its commitment to Norwich stuffs, another form of new drapery. Bays and says, again lighter woolen hybrid fabrics typical of the new draperies, were manufactured in Exeter. There, despite the devastation of Colchester during the Civil War, fifty to sixty thousand families were employed in the "woolen manufacture." Ralph Thorowgood marveled at "the increase of the clothing trade" in the West Riding of Yorkshire, which was "inconsiderable" in the middle of the sixteenth century, "but now the very life of these parts."

Macaulay's barbaric north benefited significantly from the new draperies. Manchester, "justly noted for the manufactures there made called from the place Manchester wares," was "much" larger than it had been in Camden's day. Those Manchester wares or Manchester cottons were being manufactured in and around Manchester from the late seventeenth century. Bolton had become sometime in the early 1660s "a place for great trade for fustians"—a wool-linen-cotton blend—which "anciently were credible wearing in England for persons of poorest quality" but were now inexpensive enough for much broader consumption. Even the most barbarous counties of all, Cumberland and Westmoreland, experienced a manufacturing boom. Kendal and its surrounding district was one among many places that diversified its manufacturing portfolio in the late seventeenth century. Not only were Kendal's corns "famous all England over," but its inhabitants were now manufacturing "druggers, serges, hats, and worsted stockings." Kendal, whose "people seem to be shaped out for trade," earned Sir Daniel Fleming's praise as "a place for excellent manufactures, and for civility, ingenuity and industry." Even the garrison town of Carlisle had become "a place of good trade, chiefly for fustians."

The development of the new draperies was not autochthonous. There was no gradual evolution of the domestic English manufacturing industry. Instead immigrants, especially immigrants from the Netherlands, played a crucial role in developing the new lighter clothing. "The Dutch chiefly manage" the Essex new drapery trade, discovered Nicasius Lutrell in the late 1670s. Thomas Baskerville declared that Maidstone's thread manufacturers learned their trade from Flemish-speaking immigrants. Norwich's booming trade, declared Guy Minge, "is beholding to the Dutch that came to inhabit here."

The new wave of late-seventeenth-century Huguenot immigrants taught the English more new manufacturing skills, as the French envoy Bontemps was only too painfully aware.

England's cloth manufacturing had been transformed and its exports had doubled by the late 1660s. And yet cloth suffered a relative decline in importance during the seventeenth century. This was because the English developed—in some cases rapidly—new manufactures. Regional specialities familiar to students of the nineteenth century had emerged by 1685.

Extracive industries—the mining of coal, lead, iron, and tin—were certainly not new in the later seventeenth century. However, collectively the development in these industries from the mid-1660s through the late 1690s deeply altered England's commercial profile.

In the middle of the seventeenth century William Grey of Newcastle estimated "that there was more coals vented in one year, than was in seven-years forty years by-past." Recent scholarship has confirmed and quantified the impression of this seventeenth-century topographer. The most comprehensive analysis of coal production finds that between the 1560s and 1700 coal production increased twofold. Production in the northeast alone more than doubled between the early 1600s and 1680. The figure is impressive, given that demand might have been met by producers outside the northeast, where coal pits were proliferating. Coal production grew dramatically in Derbyshire, Cumberland and Westmoreland, the Mendip Hills, South Wales, and Kingwood Chase. But the greatest center of coal production was undoubtedly the northeast, where "many thousand people" were said to be employed in mining, conveying, and shipping. The northeastern coal mines,
thought: Guy Mige, who may well have been involved in the coal trade, "supply with coals, not only this country (where that fuel is always bought at very easy rates) but a good part of England besides." Areas beyond Durham and Northumberland benefited from the boom in coal shipments. Ipswich, quickly losing its trade in old broadcloth, for example, maintained a high level of prosperity by shipping "Newcastle coals."  

Contemporaries were well aware that coal consumption set England apart from the Continent. John Evelyn complained that in London there was "such a cloud of sea-coal, as if there be a resemblance of Hell upon Earth." Continental commentators were just as conscious of the effects of coal pollution but were more appreciative of the economic benefits. One of the marquis de Segresley's industrial spies marveled at the colliers docked at Bristol, noting that "everyone used coal and it is extremely widely consumed." Henri Mison pointed out that new chimney technology had somewhat contained the "horribly thick" coal smoke, which was a good thing, since coal was now "the common fuel" in England. The "cheapness" of coal, maintained in part by government regulation, made a huge difference for the lower orders, thought Guy Mige. "Wherever the Parisians say to the praise of their wood-fires," Mige pointed out, "I dare say the common sort of people there would be glad, could they compare it, to change in Winter-time fuel with the Londoners."  

Although coal long had been used for household purposes, as early as the thirteenth century it also came to play a commercial role. The development of metal manufacturing in and around Birmingham "was bound to the development of the coal-field at every point." So significant was coal in later seventeenth-century manufacturing that the modern historian of the coal industry has emphasized the "sweeping changes [that] occurred in the pattern of industrial coal consumption."  

Lead mining was also a booming industry in seventeenth-century England. Since lead was heavily used in domestic building and for military and naval uses, one might expect some modest development, in fact, English lead output more than doubled in the 1650s, with "much of the growth" in the 1660s and 1670s. New demand sparked "rapid change" in the industry, leading to the "growing domination of large-scale capitalism." Contemporaries were well aware of the growing importance of lead and lead mining. The Mendip Hills were "famous for the lead-mines," many of whose miners were slain in the Duke of Monmouth's ill-fated 1685 rebellion. The north also had its share of mines. The best lead mines "not in England only but Europe for quality and quantity" were in Derbyshire's Peak District. There mining had "in a great measure" stripped the hills of their woods and made Wirksworth "rich ... and well inhabited."  

Cornish tin mining was a much older industry. But while the output from the mines was largely stagnant from 1600 to 1660, between the 1660s and 1680s it more than doubled. This is why Narcissus Lutrell could observe that Cornish tin was sold "to all parts of the world." Tin, like lead, was increasingly mined by wage laborers working for large owners like Sir William Strode, who escorted Cosimo de' Medici through his tin works. It was perhaps the increasingly capitalististic nature of the enterprise that allowed miners in some works to "dig up as much tin as would yield a thousand pounds in one day from some time together."  

Iron manufacturing also grew significantly in the 1600s. Both iron mining and iron smelting increased. Travelers commented on the impressive ironworks in Sherwood Forest, Herefordshire, and Powyspool and on iron mining in Cumberland. Sussex, an iron center in decline, still had ironworks in "several places." The most vibrant iron-producing region seems to have been the Forest of Dean in Gloucestershire. There "no less than sixty thousand persons" worked in the mines and furnaces. In the 1680s two experts concluded that England had at least eight hundred iron furnaces. Many commented on the deleterious effects of the booming iron trade on the English countryside. Guy Mige and Thomas Newsham blamed the deterioration of Gloucestershire and Warwickshire on the iron industry. "It were well if there were no iron works in England; and it was better when no iron was made in England," complained many in the later seventeenth century, because "the iron-works destroy all the woods."  

Despite the proliferation of English ironworks in the 1600s, England became, in this period, a net importer of iron. By the 1680s the English imported almost half of their bar iron. Domestic production could simply not satisfy the voracious appetite of the burgeoning English metalware trade. Sheffield, always a center of metal production, transformed itself in the later seventeenth century into a diverse and vibrant industrial center. The Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire claimed that "there are above one thousand cutlers, scissor-smiths, [and] shear-smiths" in and around Sheffield in 1680. Sheffield and the Hallamshire area also became the home of button makers, file makers, and a steel industry in the late seventeenth century. In 1679 there were about six hundred smithies in and around Sheffield. Sheffield was already responsible for England's reputation for producing "the best knives" in the world. A wide variety of metalworking trades also developed "in the years following the Civil War" in the West Midlands. At Stourbridge, Dudley, Wolverhampton, Sedgley, Walsall, Birmingham and therabouts, iron was "wrought and manufactured into all small commodities, and diffused all England over, and when manufactured sent into most parts of the world." By the later seventeenth century, the trades that were to make mid-Victorian Birmingham famous had already established themselves. Andrew Yarranton, himself a former ironmaster, thought that Midland iron manufacturers employed well over one hundred thousand people by 1675. Between 1660 and 1700 the Midlands metalware trades had been transformed. Whereas in 1660 Midland smiths had barely penetrated the London market, by the Restoration they had gained control of royal naval contracts, and their commercial products were sold worldwide.  

Over the seventeenth century the English also established a variety of new manufactures. Between 1600 and the 1670s England had gone from being a glass-importing to a glass-producing nation. England's remarkable development in this industry, much like the development of the new draperies, depended on skilled learned from foreign handicraftsmen, in this case Venetian and Huguenot refugees. By the later seventeenth century more than
sixty houses turned out glass in England—almost three times as many as there had been in the 1650s—with great concentrations in and around London, Stonorbridge, Newcastle, and Gloucester. In Herefordshire bottle makers developed a symbiotic relationship with cider makers in the later seventeenth century, producing enough red-streak cider "to furnish London and other parts of England." Although the glass industry had not reached the same scale as the Midland iron manufactures, it did employ "several thousand poor people" and had developed its own lobbying cartel by the 1690s. The results were startling. The Venetian envoy in London thought that the English would soon bring the famous Venetian glass trade to "utter ruin." **"There is so great an improvement of the art or mystery of making glass within this our kingdom,"** agreed the workmen glassmakers, that virtually all imports had ceased. John Houghon thought that English glass had become "the best in the world." No wonder, then, that in the later seventeenth century "hardly any people were without" English glasswares.28

English ceramics developed later than glasswares. John Dwight of Christ Church, Oxford, was one of many in the late 1600s who devised ways of imitating imported pottery from China, Germany, and the Netherlands. Staffordshire quickly became the center of this new industry, which like glass depended heavily on cheap coal for firing. Between the 1660s and 1700 there was an "especially rapid" explosion of commercial pottery making in Staffordshire: the number of potteries doubled, and the size of each individual outfit increased. By one report, "upwards of 5000 families depend[d] wholly upon the manufacturing of stone and earthenware" by the 1690s. The potteries thought that they could "with ease" soon supply the needs of "the whole nation."29

Sugar refining and processing exploded in England in the later seventeenth century as well, growing alongside the development of England's West Indian colonies. In the 1660s "there were but four or five refining houses in England," but that number had reached fifty by the 1690s. Sugar imports doubled between 1660 and 1700, suggesting that an increasing percentage of sugar coming from the West Indies was refined. The majority of sugar refiners were in London and Bristol, where much of the West Indian sugar entered England, but sugar bakers also set up shop in Newcastle, York, Chester, Liverpool, Worcester, Plymouth, and Exeter. By the late seventeenth century the refiners claimed, probably with exaggeration, that they employed "some thousands of subjects." It is important to note that England's "sugar revolution," like so much of England's commercial development, was not a native growth but relied on Dutch expertise brought from Brazil to the English islanders of the Caribbean.27

It was in the later 1660s that the English developed a great shipbuilding industry. While contemporaries remarked on the large amount of commercial shipbuilding in London and Bristol, English naval production underwent the most dramatic transformation. When he heard that Edmund Gibson was planning to revise Camden's Britannia, Samuel Pepys insisted that he undertake "an historical account" of England's naval development, which had "been very considerable" since Camden's day. The statistics Pepys ultimately provided were startling. Pepys calculated that the Royal Navy had five times as many ships, almost six times the tonnage, and six times the crew as it had in Camden's time. The median peacetime expenditure on the navy was more than twenty times what it had been in Camden's day. Not surprisingly, then, it was in the later seventeenth century that England's naval dockyards "underwent their most rapid expansion." Portsmouth, Pepys noted, "is very much altered since Mr. Camden's time, and even since the Restoration of Charles II." It had replaced its "much decayed" neighbor Southampton as one of the "principal chambers of the kingdom, for the laying up of its Royal Navy." Its dry and wet docks, storehouses, and rope yards made it ideal "for the building, repairing, rigging, arming, victualling, and complete fitting to sea [of] ships of the highest rates." Deptford was an older center of naval shipbuilding, but its yardyard was "more than double what it was" at Charles II's accession. Chatham and Sheerness also developed notably in the later seventeenth century. Robert Plot bragged that the "station of the Navy-Royal" was "far advanced by the Kings, Charles and James 2." The late Stuart kings had added new docks, storehouses, launches, mast houses, and boathouses "exceeding what had been before known in the navy of England." Woolwich and the rapidly developing dockyards at Plymouth also became large naval-building centers in the later 1600s. Harwich, a modest market town in Camden's day, had become in the later seventeenth century a major royal naval base, ideal for "ready cleaning and refitting of ships of war." Charles II built the King's Yard at Harwich, which became a center for shipbuilding as well. The prodigious growth of naval shipbuilding in England captured the attention of foreign visitors, one of whom pronounced, a fortnight after James II's coronation, that the English navy frigates "instill fail and terror all over Europe."30

England had become a nation of manufactures between the 1680s and 1690s. Early modern English social historians have been riveted by the years before 1640. Yet it is clear that English manufacturing grew fairly spectacularly after the outbreak of the Civil Wars. Wool remained the most important manufacture, but its relative importance declined. Coal mining, metalworking, and shipbuilding all came to play a significant economic role in the century separating Camden's Britannia from the accession of James II. Although much of the manufacturing took place in the countryside, it would be wrong to describe this development as exclusively rural. Metalworking was based in Sheffield, Birmingham, and other towns in the Midlands. Shipbuilding was centered in London, Portsmouth, and Harwich. Sugar was refined in Bristol, Newcastle, and London. In fact, late-seventeenth-century London "was the greatest manufacturing city in Europe and was at its all-time peak as an industrial centre relative to the rest of the country."31 England in 1689 was not an agrarian capitalist society; it was a capitalist society.

Not only did England become a more commercial society in the 1660s, it became a more urban society. The percentage of English men and women living in urban
environments rose dramatically. Whereas between 10 and 12 percent of English people lived in towns in the early sixteenth century, the most recent estimates suggest that as many as 40 percent lived in urban areas by 1700. This was slightly below the 45 percent urbanization rate achieved in 1675 by the United Provinces, the most urban state in Europe outside Venice. The United States did not achieve England’s rate of 40 percent in 1700 until 1870. Significantly, it was in the late seventeenth century that England’s urban development surged ahead of its Continental neighbors. Whereas most European countries experienced urban stagnation or deurbanization from the later seventeenth century, England’s towns enjoyed sustained growth. England was urbanizing more rapidly than any place in Europe.

Much of this urbanization was the result of the remarkable growth of the capital. London was a modest city in 1550—its population of seventy-five thousand placed it alongside such cities as Lyon, Milan, and Palermo. It was much smaller than Lisbon, Antwerp, Paris, Venice, and Naples. By 1700 all that had changed. French visitors, not usually noted for their modesty when it came to assessing their native land, were “amazed with the vastness of this city,” noting that “one may safely venture to affirm that London, including Westminster, is the biggest city in Europe.” Contemporary scholarship has confirmed their assessment. London had a population of around 750,000 people, sixty-five thousand more than Paris. It was more than twice the size of Amsterdam, Lisbon, or Naples and about five times the size of Vienna and Madrid.

Not only was London a larger city than most of its Continental rivals, it was also a different kind of city. Only Amsterdam shared London’s remarkably bourgeois character. London, as both native and visitor noted, lacked the great noble palaces with their enclosed courtyards scattered throughout Paris. Instead London had merchants’ houses, shops, and taverns. Late-seventeenth-century London was a shopper’s paradise. “For convenience and delight, here all is at hand,” marveled the well-traveled Guy Migue, “and scarce anything wanting that money can purchase.” “I believe no body is ignorant that London has as rich and extensive a commerce as any city in the world,” gushed the Huguenot exile Henri Misson. “The river that runs by London bears a great floating city, and its streets are a perpetual fair.” Few would have disagreed with William Petty’s claim that “London is the best housed, best peopled and wealthiest city of the known world.”

Although London grew and grew tremendously, it was not alone responsible for England’s increasing urbanization. Outside London, two sorts of towns grew substantially: new manufacturing centers, and ports oriented toward overseas, and increasingly, Atlantic trade.

Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, Halifax, and Sheffield all developed into major urban centers by 1700. Birmingham, which one historian has described as being “no more than a group of villagers” in the sixteenth century, had a population of at least eight thousand in 1700. The statistics are not solid, but it is clear that most of Birmingham’s rapid growth occurred after 1660. “The ancient and modern state of Birmingham, must divide
at the restoration of Charles the Second," wrote the eighteenth-century local historian William Harrison, "at this period the curious arts began to take root, and were cultivated by the hand of genius." Manchester had a similar meteoric rise in the seventeenth century. It, too, had a population well under five thousand in 1650, but had an estimated population between eight and nine thousand in 1700. Manchester was already famous "for excelling all the towns lying round about it" and "for the vast quantity of wares and commodities made there." So significant was its "growth" that, "of an inland town[,] it has the best trade of any one in the north of England." Though Sheffield was not as large as Birmingham or Manchester, its growth was even more remarkable. Between 1651 and 1755 Sheffield experienced a thirty-five-fold increase in population, a growth that mirrored its growing prominence as a manufacturing center. The inhabitants of Halifax, "noted for their industry in making of cloth and other manufactures," increased substantially between the mid-sixteenth and the late seventeenth century. Population estimates vary, but no one doubted "the vast growth and increase of this town." Halifax's West Riding neighbor Leeds also rose to prominence in the eighteenth century. By 1760 it had grown from humble, though ancient, beginnings to have a population of between seven and eight thousand. Guy Miege remarked that in the recent past Leeds had grown to be "so considerable, that it is counted one of the best towns in Yorkshire." John Conyers similarly expressed surprise that Leeds, hitherto a relatively unimportant place, was both "a town of good trade" and "a thriving town." 29

Two older manufacturing towns developed rapidly in the 1660s. Coal was responsible for turning Newcastle from "a poor hamlet" into a town "considerable for its numerous, trading, wealthy inhabitants." Newcastle's population grew by over 50 percent from 1660 to 1700, from about ten thousand to about sixteen thousand people. Newcastle had become "the wealthiest" and "the most trading place in the whole Northern tract." Newcastle's "wealth and commerce are wonderfully increased since Camden's time," concurred the northern antiquary and future bishop of Carlisle William Nicoleon. While praising its growing importance as the great emporium of the north, Nicolson knew that Newcastle achieved prominence because its "coal trade is incredible." The rise of the new draineries was responsible for Norwich's growth in the seventeenth century. And grow it did. The Dutch visitor and painter William Schellinks was right to observe of Norwich in 1662 that it was "a famous, old town." It was already England's second city in the early sixteenth century. But the population of Norwich "multiplied in the course of the seventeenth century some two-and-a-half times," growing to thirty thousand by 1700. Much of this growth happened after 1690. When Thomas Baskerville visited Norwich after the Restoration, he praised it as "a great city and full of people." 30 New manufactories were the keys to prosperity for new and ancient towns alike.

Ports had always been important for England. Yet between 1600 and 1700 ports grew in importance and shifted in focus. London and the southeast remained important, but new ports emerged, shifting England's orientation toward the Atlantic and colonial

trades. Liverpool in 1660 "was an insignificant seaport," but by 1700 it had "emerged as one of England's leading ports." By 1700 Liverpool's population ranged somewhere between five and seven thousand. Already it was a town whose fortunes were intimately tied to "the trade to the West Indies." So significant was this trade, and the trade with Ireland, that Liverpool's customs income had increased between eightfold and tenfold "within these 38 years past." Contemporary celebrations celebrated Liverpool's new and "fair buildings," including the new townhouse with a mercantile exchange down below. The growth of Whitehaven in the later seventeenth century was even more spectacular. Between 1667 and 1690 Whitehaven tripled in size under the guidance of Sir John Lowther of Whitehaven, reaching a population of three thousand by 1700. The virtual creation of a new and thriving town did not escape contemporary notice. All remarked that Whitehaven was "absolutely the most thriving town in these parts" and praised its "much improved" buildings. Whitehaven's growth depended on the exploitation of local coal deposits and overseas trade. Coal was shipped from Whitehaven in large quantities to Dublin, Pitch, tar, and cordage were imported from Denmark and Norway, and increasingly "tobacco and sugar [came] from the West Indies." So important had the West Indian trade become by the late eighteenth century that Sir John Lowther himself kept a record of "goods vendible at Jamaica from Whitehaven." 31

The southwest as well as the northwest benefited from the new orientation toward the Atlantic. Plymouth had grown from "a poor village, inhabited by fishermen," into a major port in the late sixteenth century. The town grew only modestly after 1650, reaching a population of nine thousand by 1700. The relatively stagnant population, however, masks a reorientation of Plymouth's trade. Despite Charles III's anxiety to "overawe the town," which had been so "prone to sedition" during his father's reign, Plymouth remained "a very populous, rich and thriving place." This was because Plymouth had diversified its mercantile portfolios. It continued to trade with France and Spain but added a vibrant commerce with the Canary Islands, Barbados, and North America. Falmouth in Cornwall was incorporated only in 1660. The town was still relatively small in 1700, but it became a major trading center in a few years. When he visited Falmouth in 1677, Narcissus Lattrell met people "that remember the time when there was not above two or three houses in the whole town; but now it is very large, having several fair houses and inns for entertainment." Falmouth became "the most frequented place in these parts for mariners" because it exported Cornish tin to Spain and Portugal and served as a haven for returning New-foundland fishermen. The older port of Exeter also prospered in the seventeenth century. It had already been a big place in the early sixteenth century, and although it had remained relatively stagnant with a population of around eight thousand throughout the seventeenth century, it almost doubled again in size over the eighteenth century. The Earl of Bath was probably right to claim that Exeter "is a city so considerable in wealth and trade, that it is deservedly accounted one of the greatest after London." Exeter's sustained growth in the 1660s owed in part to the development of the new draineries in the West Country and in
part to its growing involvement in the Atlantic trade with New England, Newfoundland, and the West Indies.  

Bristol's growth pattern was very similar to Exeter's. Bristol's population almost doubled between 1600 and 1700, to twenty-one thousand. Its prosperity in the later seventeenth century led one visitor to declare it a "second London." Bristol, thought Narcissus Luttrell, was "a place of great trade and merchandise and a man may have anything here." Bristol was more heavily dependent than Exeter on Atlantic imports for its economic surge in the late seventeenth century. Bristol's shipping devoted to the West Indian trade, largely sugar, almost tripled between 1670 and 1700 at the same time that it doubled its ships committed to the Chesapeake tobacco trade. In 1670 Sir John Knight claimed that trade with North America and the West Indies "employs half the ships of Bristol." The French commercial spy M. Robert thought that in 1689 the "greatest commerce" of Bristol's merchants was with the West Indies and North America, from whence they imported "tobacco, indigo, cotton, and sugar which they refine in this same town." When Roger North visited Bristol in 1680, he found it "remarkable" that "all men that are dealers, even in shop trades, launch into adventures by sea, chiefly to the West India plantations and Spain."  

East coast ports grew as well, but not as consistently. Sunderland, like Newcastle dependent on the coal trade, developed into a significant town of five to seven thousand inhabitants in the seventeenth century. Among the East Coast ports Great Yarmouth expanded most rapidly, doubling in size from five to ten thousand between 1600 and 1700. Yarmouth certainly benefited from exporting Norwich worsted cloth, but contemporaries tended to believe that its "chief trade" was smoked herring.  

Three North American ports had also grown into substantial towns by the later seventeenth century. Philadelphia, on the Delaware River, was founded only in the 1680s. But within "ten year's time there was above one thousand houses built and inhabited." By 1700 it had a population of five thousand. The development of Boston and New York was less dramatic. But they, too, had populations of at least five thousand by century's end.  

Growing prosperity necessarily meant more disposable income. The result was the proliferation in later seventeenth-century England of "leisure towns." This period saw the transformation of medicinal watering places into tourist towns. Bath, a medicinal center from Roman times, shed its cloth-making pretensions in the late seventeenth century and diversified its entertainment portfolio. When William Schellinks visited Bath in 1661, the town was a place where "people are sent by their doctors to bathe." By the 1670s and 1680s it had already become much more of a resort. From May through August, "not only . . . the nobility and gentry, but . . . the commonalty also, from all parts of the nation" flocked to Somerset. "Thousands go thither," observed Henri Milson, not so much for the medicinal virtues of the hot baths "but only to divert themselves with good company." The opportunities for such diversion were proliferating. When Narcissus Luttrell visited in the late 1670s he found tourists going to plays, dancing at balls, competing on the bowling green, and "walking in the meads." Bath, like today's fashionable resorts, was not inexpensive.  

Bath was "very well served with provisions," warned Luttrell, "but it is extraordinary dear living here, the people being mighty exacting."  

After 1660 Tunbridge Wells began to rival Bath. Robert Plot, predictably, highlighted the medicinal aspects of the "famous Chalybit springs." But most came to Tunbridge for its variety of entertainment. So popular had the resort become that James Fraser complained in the summer of 1687 that London "is become so empty by reason of the resort to Tunbridge." By the 1680s Tunbridge Wells had developed a series of walks, along which visitors passed houses and boozes to fully enjoy the views. More important, it had become "an emporium of all diversions," transforming itself in John Evelyn's opinion from a place of "natural philosophical solitude" into a "meat of vanity." The villages round about had developed a range of accommodation for the nobility, gentry, and citizens who came to partake of the waters. Good victuaries, high-quality butchers, fresh fruit, and good poultry were readily available. Tourists were well fed, and they were entertained. The "pipe office," a sort of smoking club, was by 1680 well established. The most fashionable preachers of the day could be heard at Tunbridge parish church in the summer. For those drawn more to marmom than to God, the Royal Oak Lottery opened at ten each morning for gambling. Each evening in season, the various villages hosted music and dancing. Auctions offered opportunities for those interested in different kinds of risks. Perhaps the most popular diversion at Tunbridge Wells was conversation. James II's mistress Catharine Sedley warned Justice George Jeffreys that any restriction on free speech, any refusal to "suffer persons to vent their own fancies, and to use freedom in conversation and discourse," would "destroy Tunbridge Wells."  

Less fashionable but still very popular spas developed throughout the country. Epsom Wells, which John Aubrey recalled was discovered in the late 1660s, developed a variety of facilities. By the 1680s one was exclaimed that "every Mother's son" could be found at Epsom in the summer. Buxton in Derbyshire, Harrogate in Yorkshire, Aysgath Wells in Northamptonshire, Bourne in Lincolnshire, Laxecost in Cornwall, and Barnt in Hertfordshire all emerged as regional or national resorts in the later seventeenth century. Even Islington developed as a spa. By the 1860s it was known as "the New Tunbridge Wells" with more than a thousand visitors every day in the season partaking of the waters as well as the gaming, walking, and dancing.  

Spas did not capture the entire tourist market. Charles II's love of horse races stimulated the development of Newmarket as a tourist destination. After the Restoration, Newmarket's buildings were "beginning to improve in appearance, and to increase in numbers." There was no local manufacture, and "the townsmen live chiefly upon passengers." Burford in Oxfordshire and Lichfield in Staffordshire had also become centers for regular horse races by the later seventeenth century. The years after 1660 have been described as a "boom" period for the development of regular horse racing meetings. Although seaside resorts were largely a later development, Saltsfield in Lincolnshire was already "much frequented by the gentry in the summer season" during the Restoration.
Not only did England become more urban, not only did tourist destinations emerge, but the quality of everyday life in England’s towns and cities significantly improved in the later seventeenth century. Houses, both urban and rural, became much more comfortable. John Houghton thought that houses were “built like palaces over what they were in the last age.” Improved building materials were partly responsible. “Glass windows were very rare, only used in churches and the best rooms of gentlemen’s houses,” averred John Aubrey, “even in my remembrance, before the Civil Wars, copyholders and ordinary people had none.” “Now,” Aubrey concluded, even “the poorest people that are upon alms have it.” After 1670 brick became the most fashionable building material, stimulating a variety of local brick-making industries. The result was more substantial and permanent domiciles for all but the poorest of people. Whereas it was once thought that England was substantially rebuilt in the decades preceding the Civil War, recent scholarship has taught us that “the period from 1660–1719 was far more important, with every decade producing more dated houses than even the peak decade of the pre–Civil War period.” The transformation was evident by the last decades of the century. “When I compare the modern English way of building with the old way,” testified Guy Mieg, “I cannot but wonder at the genius of old times.” Older houses were so cramped and dark “that one would think the men of former ages were afraid of light and good air.” By contrast, “the genius of our time” was for “lighter staircases, fine sash-windows, and lofty ceilings.”

Anecdotal evidence confirms the impression that Macaulay’s thatched villages were disappearing rapidly long before the mid-nineteenth century. Before the Great Fire of 1666 John Evelyn thought London “deformed” and thoroughly lacking in “modern architecture.” After the fire London rose from its ashes, but differently. The French visitor M. de Sainte-Marie who came to view James III’s coronation was astounded by the transformation since his previous visit. “I am astonished,” he exclaimed, “I find a different city, newly built of brick in place of the old of wood, and badly built, that I left in 1660.” Glass was used liberally now, and rooms were larger and better ventilated. Londoners constructed about ten thousand new buildings between 1665 and 1677, convincing one Italian visitor that they had constructed a “more modern” city.

The capital may have taken the lead, but it was not alone in replacing timber-framed houses with more spacious stone and brick dwellings. Northampton, which also was devastated by fire in the late seventeenth century, rebuilt all its houses “either of brick or stone.” In the 1670s Ralph Thoresby rebuilt his house in Leeds with brick, “which were scarce known in the beginning of my grandfather’s time.” Sheffield soon followed suit. Derby and Newcastle each had a number of new brick buildings in the later seventeenth century. Yarmouth had “many very handsome new brick houses” in 1679. Preston in Lancashire, too, was largely a town of brick in the 1680s. Nearby, Manchester’s tradesmen were also building in brick. Launceston in Cornwall was newly built in stone, while Norwich banned thatched roofs in the later seventeenth century. More and more towns and cities paved their streets in the later seventeenth century.

There was a remarkable transformation of the urban landscape in late-seventeenth-century England when streets were paved, cleaned, and lit and public and private buildings were reconstructed, often in a grandiloquence style, in brick and stone.

John Evelyn and Sir John Denham were involved in the post-1660 paving of London’s streets. Within thirty years “the principal streets” were all “paved a good convenient breadth on each side with smooth hewn stone, for the benefit of foot-passengers.” Dorking in Surrey had paved streets in 1649. By the 1670s Preston was “evenly paved,” as was Barnstaple. Shrewsbury began paving its streets in the 1670s. Morpeth and Wakefield in Northumbria benefited were “paved high in the middle with the kerbs on each side, after the manner of the new paving of streets in London.” The streets of Bridlington in Yorkshire, “which before [were] troublesome to pass for dirt,” were paved in the later seventeenth century. Plymouth, too, had paved streets, though Lutrell thought them “very slippery.”

Streetlighting, in all likelihood like the new draperies a Dutch import, came to English towns in the 1680s. Edmund Heming began in the early 1680s, deploying convex gas lamps on the streets of London. The new lamps, a rarity outside Amsterdam, were so effective that they “seem to be but one great solar light.” London soon required that the new lights be placed outside all public buildings. Canterbury and York deployed the new streetlamps during the reign of James II, while Exeter and Norwich developed them soon thereafter. The effect, no doubt, was to make towns safer and to encourage a variety of evening cultural activities.

Late-seventeenth-century towns had a variety of cultural amenities. Libraries are usually thought to have emerged in the eighteenth century. But there were already libraries...
available for public use in the seventeenth century. Lords had a new library in the later seventeenth century, as did Stainborough in Yorkshire. Ipswich, Manchester, Colchester, Norwich, Bristol, Gloucester, Leicester, and Durham all had publicly accessible collections. Peterborough's cathedral library was expanded in the 1670s. Before the erection of Tension's London library, inhabitants of the capital could consult books at Lambeth palace or public records in the Tower of London. Public walks and pleasure gardens began to be features of English towns in the late seventeenth century. The new Spring Gardens at Vauxhall gave people venues to smoke, stroll, and watch occasional performances. Promenades, walls, or pleasure gardens were also constructed at Bath, Tunbridge Wells, Preston, and Shrewsbury.49

The growth of new manufacturing towns, port towns, leisure towns, and above all London had a dramatic effect on the nature of English society. The new urban amenities, combined with the old attraction of the alehouses and taverns, created a large cultural pull. In the previous age "the gentry and nobility of England lived altogether in the country," but now they spent more time in towns and cities, and "their way of living is quite differing from that used heretofore."50 Although the transformation was no doubt exaggerated by the defenders of rural culture, there was no doubting the overall trend. In the later seventeenth century, the English increasingly took their cultural cues from urban and commercial society.

The rapid development and improvement of England's infrastructure in the later seventeenth century did a great deal to support the growth of urban society and urban culture. English communications by both land and sea, which Macaulay claimed were virtually non-existent, improved dramatically in this period. These developments supported an ever-expanding network of towns and accommodation. Perhaps more important, the emergence of a national and accessible postal system in the later 1660s made it easier for merchants to conduct business, for communication networks to fan out across wider areas, and for political gossip to spread the news ever more rapidly. Merchants and consumers alike benefited greatly from the development of two typically modern conveniences, insurance and deposit banking. All of these developments facilitated the gradual transformation of the English from a nation of consumers dependent exclusively on the rhythms of market fairs into a nation of shoppers.

Although many English rivers were navigable in the early seventeenth century, many more were by 1700. English engineers, financiers, and projectors almost doubled the number of navigable river miles between 1660 and 1700. The Thames and the Avon in Warwickshire were improved in the 1650s, the Wey in Surrey in the 1670s, the Avon in Wiltshire and the Stour in Worcestershire after 1660, and the River Wye in the West Midlands in the 1690s. The Severn, long navigable, experienced a massive increase in river traffic in the latter half of the century. The number of commercial voyages passing through Gloucester annually, for example, more than doubled between 1657 and 1700. Barges on the Severn delivered ever-increasing quantities of coal to Shrewsbury, Gloucester, and Bristol and brought "merchantable goods up stream again." Maldenbridge in Berks was one of those towns that in the later seventeenth century could send two passenger barges per week up the Thames to London. Regular barges carried lead from Derbyshire, tin from Cornwall, and coal from Newcastle to London.51

Foreign visitors were invariably impressed by the variety, efficiency, and speed of the various forms of water transport available in and around London in the later seventeen century. The Thames was "all covered" with "small boats," remarked one French visitor in 1686. There was a "perpetual motion of wretches and small boats" agreed Gay Mige, perhaps as many as two thousand in number, supported by more than three thousand watermen. Unlike in France, Henri Misson implied, there were no financial "disputes" because the carriage rates were "fixed by authority."52

English coastal shipping, taking advantage of England's long coastline, also grew remarkably after the Restoration. Between 1660 and the early eighteenth century there was a growth of over 27 percent in the number of ships plying the English coasts. Between 1665 and 1681 the number of ships traveling from London to other English ports increased threefold. By the time of James's accession, for example, it was possible to take regularly scheduled wherries from Ipswich to Harwich, from Norwich to Yarmouth, and from London to Gravesend. William Schellinks found it easy to hire "a post boat" to carry his injured friend Thlerry from London to Dover.53

Ground transportation improved just as dramatically. Even though the cost of transport by land was still substantially higher than that by sea, Sir John Lowther ranked "commodious carriage by land" as the highest priority in his "rules for increase of trade." His fellow members of the House of Commons acted on his desires. In 1665 Parliament passed the first turnpike act that effectively shifted the burden of road improvements from local parishes to those who used the roads. This first act created just one turnpike on the New Great North Road in Hertfordshire, Huntingdonshire, and Cambridgeshire, and there would not be another turnpike act until a flurry in the 1690s and first decade of the eighteenth century. In passing that first act, however, English politicians recognized the rapidly expanding demand for road transport.54

By the end of the century improved roads, coupled with increased demand, had created a boom in ground transport. One modern expert claims that "the later seventeenth century appears as a crucial phase in the development of the road carrying industry." There was, for example, 137 percent more land carriage out of London by 1710 than there had been in 1670. Although contemporaries noted that there were some bad roads in Somerset and Cornwall, and that, unlike in France, not all roads were paved, the general quality of English roads in the later seventeenth century was remarkably high. Gay Mige continued to say that "the English nation is the best provided of any for land travel," claiming that "no city in Europe" had better communications than London. Regular carriers took goods from
Kendal and Whitehaven in less than two weeks when they took the direct road. In fact, the north of England, which had no regular carrying service to London before the English Civil War, had six weekly services by the early eighteenth century. Wagoners and carriers regularly plied the roads from Ipswich, Norwich, and Yarmouth to London. Roads in and out of Newcastle were “as much frequented” as “almost any other in the kingdom.” Even the “totally decayed” town of Bodmin in Cornwall had roads that supported regular carriers to Truro and Exeter.56

The English began to use stagecoaches in the 1650s. By the latter seventeenth century, the English could take stagecoaches throughout the width and breadth of the country. York, Chester, and Exeter had regular stagecoaches to London, as did Gloucester, Hereford, Reading, Harwich, Portsmouth, Southampton, Winchester, Basingstoke, Bath, Salisbury, Reading, Canterbury, and many places besides. Several stagecoaches, “especially in Summer time,” served Tunbridge Wells. “Flying coaches” made the trip between London and Cambridge or Oxford in less than a day. By the 1680s there were stagecoaches “to almost every town within twenty or twenty-five miles of London.” Local stage connections were made to larger ones, like the service that connected Bridport in Dorset to Exeter. Stagecoaches were so popular that John Aubrey complained that the gentry were forgetting how to drive hunting horses. Others marveled that stagecoaches had decreased the demand for saddle horses in general by three quarters. “England excels all other nations” in having stagecoaches, thought Gave Miegel. This new form of transport, he marveled, was cheap, comfortable, and fast, and it could take the interested traveler “to most noted places in England.”57

Within London itself hackney coaches had become widely available to transport passengers from one end of the city to the other. One finds hackney coaches “in all quarters of this city,” wrote one French visitor to London at the time of James II’s coronation, “in all parts of the street, always ready to depart, and always with the same great speed.” These urban coaches were already established in London by 1660, long before they appeared in Paris. By the 1660s, all agree that there were at least eight hundred hackney coaches plying their trade on London’s streets, catering to all social classes. Sir Richard Temple was only one of the easiest to complain that the proliferation of hackney coach drivers made it impossible to cross the street in London and Westminster “without great obstruction and hazard.”58

The English state in the later seventeenth century used the newly improved and expanded road system to develop a national post office. Successive postmasters general in the later seventeenth century, beginning with John Thurlow in 1659, transformed the postal service from one that carried royal messages and the letters of a select elite into a national service that circulated the correspondence of thousands of English men and women. Charles I had established a letter office in 1659, but by 1659 that office employed just forty-eight people and took in £1,136 in revenue. By contrast, in 1686 the post office employed well over four hundred people—including clerks of the road, sorters, window men, letter receivers, letter bringers, porters, and letter carriers—and took in close to £100,000. By 1698 the post office employed almost seven hundred workers. “The number of letters missive in England were not at all considerable in our ancestors’ days,” noted one observer in the 1680s, but the volume of correspondence had become “so prodigiously great” in part because even “the nearest people have generally learnt to write.”59

After the Restoration the English postmasters general, Roger Whitley in particular, aggressively sought to expand the English mail service. Whitley wrote constantly to local postmasters or would-be postmasters seeking to open new offices and new routes. New postmasters were promised that they would be “free from all public offices, and [that] quartering soldiers” and would receive copies of the London Gazette “free of charge” in order to help “in their common trade of selling drink.” By the 1680s the postmasters had established six postal roads, running as far as Plymouth in the west and Edinburgh in the north, and 182 deputy postmasters. There was, wrote Gave Miegel, “no considerable market town but has an easy and certain conveyance for letters.” Philip Frowde, Whitley’s successor as postmaster general, developed a strategy to ensure that all towns and villages within sixty miles of London had daily mail service “to accommodate merchants.” Whitley also worked to provide a speedy and reliable standard of delivery. He told his postmasters that the “late carrying of mail is not to be longer endured.” The mail, he advised, needed to travel at least five miles per hour and 120 miles per day. Because of Whitley’s vigilance, letters traveled from London to Edinburgh in five days and from London to Plymouth in three. By 1690 Sir William Aston remarked that only a heavy snowfall could prevent the timely delivery of the post to him in Warrington, Cheshire. By the 1670s Whitley was surely right to assert that “the commerce of the nation is maintained by the ministration of this office.” Since that commerce was increasingly foreign as well as domestic, it was hardly surprising that the post office delivered huge quantities of overseas mail. Whitley claimed that on a single day in 1671 his office handled more than four thousand letters that arrived in Plymouth from overseas. In 1686 the post office delivered more than sixty thousand letters “brought from New England, Jamaica, Barbados, Lisbon, Cadiz and other foreign ports.”59

Not surprisingly, as the post office became increasingly important not only for the nation’s commerce but also for the circulation of political news and the dissemination of political propaganda, the postmasters became political appointees. One Mr. Castleton, for example, lost his job as postmaster in 1689 in part because he was “a great frequenter of clubs.” William and Mary chose as their first governor of the post office the long-time radical operative and former employee of Thurlow in the Protectorate postal service John Wildman, who lost his position when the Marquess of Carmarthen, a Tory, consolidated his hold on power.60 The transformation of England’s economy and the creation of new infrastructure vastly expanded the range and social depth of politics.7
The new London Penny Post soon became even faster, more efficient, cheaper, and briefly more heavily politicized than the national post office. In 1660 two Whigs, William Dockwra and Robert Murray, set up an office in London that promised "cheap and frequent" conveyance of letters in and around London. The office was an immediate success. Letters were collected every two hours at more than four hundred offices in the city and once a day in over 148 towns and villages within ten miles of London. Dockwra himself bragged that the Penny Post soon "set on foot thousands of things that never would have been done" without it. The Duke of York, the future James II, was convinced that some of these things were Whig political projects. So in 1661 James secured a King's Bench decision stripping Dockwra of the Penny Post. Nevertheless, the Penny Post survived under the control of the central post office. By 1688 the Penny Post was delivering more than seven hundred thousand letters a year. The Frenchman Henri Misson was so impressed that he thought it "a wonder" that no other city in Europe had set up such a system, John Evelyn later lobbied for a medal commemorating Dockwra, "who has brought to perfection the now so useful, cheap, certain and expeditious intercourse of letters by the Penny Post."

Londoners launched another innovative project in the 1680s: fire insurance. Although a system of fire insurance had been established in Hamburg in the 1670s, London was certainly a European leader in this field. Perhaps energized by the economic disaster resulting from the Great Fire of 1666, a number of Londoners began floating proposals for a fire insurance office in the 1670s. Fire Insurance, like the Penny Post, generated a good deal of controversy that may have been partly political. The Tory Nicholas Barbon opened his Fire Office in 1680. The following year the Whig-dominated London Common Council inaugurated its own scheme. Although that insurance company failed, William Hale and Henry Spelman established the Friendly Society in 1683 to compete with Barbon. All told, the competing companies insured more than seven thousand houses and helped create fire departments to protect their investments.

Londoners provided deposit-banking facilities for the first time in the second half of the seventeenth century. Before the middle of the century there were no English banks, but by the 1650s there were well over forty in London alone. The old Cavalier William Blandell offered a plea for improved credit facilities in 1659, but by 1681 he thought things were extremely "convenient to borrowers and lenders." The Tory Sir Edward Seymour complained in 1670 that the proliferation of bankers had encouraged the English to "carry all their money to London." London was in fact quickly becoming a "a new kind of hub for international finance." Not only did London bankers like Edward Backwell operate at the center of a web of financiers across Europe, but other London bankers provided financial services to clients throughout England. From the 1680s Francis Child, based in Fleet Street, provided services to more than eight hundred customers. Beginning in the 1670s Richard Hoare, in Cheapside, began building a national network of customers that by 1700 included clients in Shropshire, Lancashire, Leicestershire, Pembroke, Somerset, Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, and Northumberland as well as all across the Home Counties.

Better roads, easier water transport, an extensive post office, insurance, and improved financial services not only made trade easier for wholesalers but transformed the nature of retail in later seventeenth-century England. England was quickly becoming a nation of shoppers and shopkeepers. Whereas retailing had been castigated as a moral hazard in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, shops and shopkeepers were accepted as a necessary part of the domestic economy by the late 1660s. Not surprisingly, this shift in perspective was accompanied by a proliferation of shops and shopkeepers across the country. John Houghton's contemporary estimate that "we have six times the traders, and twice of their shops and workhouses better furnished than in the last age," has been confirmed by more recent research. Many more market towns and villages had shops than before the English Civil War, and those shops were better stocked with a wider variety of goods. In contrast to what was "wont to be formerly," reported one pamphleteer, "now in every country village, where is (it may be) not above ten houses, there is a shop-keeper... and many of those are not such as deal only in pigs or such small wares, but such that deal in as many substantial commodities as any that do live in cities and market towns." At the turn of the century one economic writer guessed that there were eight thousand shops in London and more than 1.2 million across England. These numbers were staggering by European standards. One observer thought that "there are ten thousand retailing shop-keepers more in London than are in Amsterdam," the most commercial city in Europe. "The number of shops both in the City and suburbs" is "so great, and indeed so far beyond that of any foreign city," wrote another, "that it is to strangers a just matter of amazement."
All across England, though perhaps faster in some regions than in others, the open market was losing the retail trade to filial shops. Naturally, London led the way. Visitors to London invariably lavished praise on the New Exchange, with over two hundred shops in which "well-dressed women" sold "the richest sort of commodities." But perhaps more impressive for those who got to know the city was the fact that "every lane, turning, street and corner" was "full of shops of all kinds of ware." By the later seventeenth century much smaller towns offered the same range of emporia to eager shoppers. Nottingham was a "town full of shops." The streets of Ipswich in Suffolk, long a trading center, were also "full of shops." Nearby Bury St. Edmunds was "full of rich shops and tradesmen" when Thomas Baskerville visited it in the later seventeenth century. Tamworth, the West Country clothing center, had "long, wide streets full of shops." Gloucester was "a fairly large town with "some fine streets and shops." Chester's major streets had "galleries (or rows as they called them) with shops on one side through which galleries one may walk free from wet in the greatest storms." The cathedral towns of Canterbury and Winchester were "full of handsome shops." The market village of Billericay in Essex, which sent five men to New England on the Mayflower, had "a wide street with fine houses and shops." Narcissus Luttrell discovered that in the tin-mining town of Truro in Cornwall, "a man may have almost anything" in the 1670s.56

The English developed a remarkable array of new, and recognizably modern, institutions in the later seventeenth century. Stagewear, turnpike trusts, the Penny Post, fire insurance, deposit banking, an increasingly robust retail sector all helped support England's increasingly commercial society. These new institutions and this vastly expanded infrastructure helped soften the shock of England's transition from agrarian to urban culture. It was much easier to leave the countryside to work in the city, or to migrate between country house and town house, if goods, people, and ideas could travel more easily between the two. As these social and cultural connections deepened, it became increasingly possible for the English to have truly national political discussions. Interests, anxieties, and aspirations were communicated far more quickly in the later seventeenth century than they had been in earlier periods. And, just as important, these ideas could now be communicated to an English people who shared an increasingly large number of social and cultural reference points.

The emergence of the coffeehouse in later seventeenth-century England, perhaps more than any other institution, both transformed and marked the transformation of English national culture. Coffee and coffeehouses took England by storm in the late 1660s. Although coffee was available as an exotic novelty good in the early seventeenth century, the first coffeehouses opened in England in the 1670s. By the 1670s coffee was so widespread that one contemporary could remark with only slight exaggeration that "coffee has so generally prevailed that bread itself though commonly with us voted the staff of life is scarce of so universal a use." Coffee, John Evelyn noted in the late 1650s, had "universally besotted the nation."66

London became the epicenter of English coffeehouse culture. Already in November 1659 the Londoner Thomas Rugg noted that there was "at this time a Turkish drink to be sold almost in every street, called coffee." Londoners such as the natural philosopher Robert Hooke and the civil servant par excellence Samuel Pepys worked, debated, and relaxed in dozens of different coffeehouses in the 1660s, 1670s, 1680s, and 1690s. In the early eighteenth century Dudley Ryder of Hackney regularly visited a dozen coffeehouses in and around London, where he discussed politics, gossiped about the law, and refined his conversation. When the Swiss traveler Antoine Muralt visited London in the early eighteenth century he reported on the "prodigious number of coffee-houses in London." One surveyor of the London scene estimated that in the first decade of the eighteenth century there were "near 5000" coffeehouses in London and Westminster.67

Coffeehouses were not merely metropolitan phenomena in England. One pamphleteer noted correctly that there were coffeehouses "in both universities and most cities and eminent towns throughout the nation." England's first coffeehouse opened in Oxford in the 1660s, and several others soon followed in that university town. Roger North complained that there was already a coffeehouse in Cambridge in the 1660s. By the early eighteenth century things had gotten worse, for there were "diverse" coffee establishments "where hours are spent in talking; and less profitable reading of newspapers." Soon most of the manufacturing towns of England had their own coffeehouses. Thomas Baskerville found a coffeehouse in the cloth-making town of Gloucester in the 1670s. Exeter, Coventry, and Kendal in Westmorland—all cloth manufacturing towns in the seventeenth century—had coffeehouses by the 1680s and 1690s. Sheffield, already famous for its ironworks, and Newcastle, renowned for coal, had their coffeehouses in the later seventeenth century. English ports also boasted coffeehouses. Bristol, the center of trade with the West Indies, had "three or four coffee houses in the 1670s." Plymouth and Dorchester had their own establishments in the later seventeenth century as well. The fishing town of Great Yarmouth had a coffeehouse by the late 1660s. Not to be outdone, old country towns such as Penrith in Westmorland, Preston in Lancashire, Chester, Stamford, Buckingham, Nottingham, and York soon had their own coffeehouses. By the time of the Glorious Revolution even Boston in New England had a coffeehouse.68 English coffeehouses were neither the preserve of Londoners in the later seventeenth century nor limited geographically to the centers of elite, gentlemanly, or scientific culture.

Coffeehouses spread more slowly on the Continent. The observation of the cosmopolitan Guy Migele that coffeehouses were "more common [in England] than anywhere else" is borne out by recent research. In the Holy Roman Empire coffee "was a relatively expensive and exotic drink up to the 1720s." Vienna, normally thought of as the center of coffeehouse culture, did not have its own coffeehouse until 1683. The trading town of Hamburg, unsurprisingly, had one earlier, in 1671. Amsterdam had a vibrant coffeehouse
English coffeehouses were sparsely decorated, aspiring to little of the aristocratic elegance of the French cafés. English coffeehouse owners created a climate for free and open conversation rather than intimate exchange. Their clientele was overwhelmingly drawn not from the gentry and aristocracy but from the urban middle classes.

scene by the late seventeenth century. But even then its thirty-two coffeehouses were an order of magnitude smaller than the hundreds or even thousands in London. The first café opened in Paris in the 1670s, but the real boom period of the French coffee-drinking establishments was in the eighteenth century.

Not only were there more, many more, coffeehouses in England than in Continental cities, English coffeehouses were physically quite different. The archetypal French café, the Café Procope, was opened by the Sicilian Francesco Procopio Colelli in the rue des Fossés-Saint-Germain in 1686. The Café Procope was from the first an elegant establishment, with little marble tables, crystal chandeliers, and mirrors throughout. It was, in the words of one historian, a “luxurious place.” Colelli’s success soon encouraged competitors. By 1690 “the entire heart of elegant Paris—from the Bussy crossroads to the Saint Germain Fair and on to the Seine River” had taken to the coffeehouse. The Parisian café had taken on the elegance and luxury of the aristocratic town home. In London, by contrast, the center of coffeehouse life was the “heart of London’s mercantile sector.” They were anything but genteel. One Frangiphané visitor complained that English coffeehouses “are loosehouse, full of smoke like a guard-room, and as much crowded.” Ned Ward, an admiringly hostile witness, compared the clientele of the coffeehouse as “a parcel of moddling trick-worms [who] were as busy as so many rats in an old cheese-loft; some going, some coming, some scribbing, some talking, some drinking, others jangling and the whole room stinking of tobacco like a Dutch barge.” The small, elegant marble tables in Paris were replaced with long, communal wooden ones in London. The typical coffeehouse, recalled one commentator, had “three or four tables set forth, on which are placed small wass-lights, pipes, and diurnal.” The French visitor M. de Sainte Marie, no doubt familiar with the urban elegance of the French cafés, compared the long wooden tables in English coffeehouses to those in monastic refectories. Where the Parisian cafés were organized to invite intimate and private dialogues, the London coffeehouses were ideal for group discussions.

The physical environment of the English coffeehouse catered perfectly to its clientele. Coffeehouses from the first told their wares cheaply. A cup of coffee could be had anywhere in England for a penny. An evening at the coffeehouse was relatively cheap, whereas “a tavern reckoning soon breed a purse—consumption.” Opponents and proponents of the new social venues agreed that coffeehouses were thus able to host socially diverse clientele. In a coffeehouse, noted Samuel Butler, “people of all qualities and conditions meet.” The coffee man, Butler averred, “admits of no distinction of persons, but gentleman, mechanic, Lord, and scoundrel, mix, and are all of a piece, as if they were resolved into their first principles.” In a coffeehouse there was no regard “to degrees or order,” asserted one pamphleteer, there “you may see a silly fop, and a worshipful justice, a griting fool, and a grave citizen, and an errant pick-pocket, a Reverend Nonconformist, and a canting mountebank.” The “ugly Turkish enchanter,” complained one scribbler, “attracts both rich and poor.” Another more neutrally observed that “persons of all qualities from all parts resorted to” coffeehouses. Foreign observers agreed. In English coffeehouses “a boatman and a Lord smoke at the same table,” remarked one French visitor. In general the early-eighteenth-century Swiss visitor Antoine Muralt thought the English were devoid of the pronounced social distinctions so prevalent on the Continent. Coffeehouses in particular “are the constant rendezvous for men of business as well as the idle people, so that one is sooner asked about his coffee-house than his lodging.”

The earliest English coffeehouses were associated with trade. Not only did coffee beans have to be imported from the Middle East, but the coffeehouse itself had Levantine origins. Coffeehouses had existed in Damascus, Cairo, Aleppo, and Baghdad since at least the sixteenth century. In the 1650s there were thought to be over six hundred coffeehouses in Istanbul. It was, of course, merchants trading with the Ottoman Empire who first came into contact with this novel institution. Unsurprisingly, then, John Houghton recorded that the first coffeehouse in London—in St. Michael Cornhill—was introduced by two English merchants, Rastall and Edwards, who had come to learn the Ottoman custom of drinking coffee in Smyrna and Livorno. A Jewish man named Jacob, almost certainly of Levantine descent, had opened the first English coffeehouse in Oxford two years earlier. In the early 1660s George Davenport reported to the future archbishop of Canterbury William Sancroft that two baptized Jews were about to open new coffeehouses in London. One can only assume that the first French coffee store, opened in 1671 in the Mediterranean port town of Marseille rather than in Paris, had a similar origin.

The English coffeehouse quickly emerged as a place to conduct business. London’s Jamaica Coffee House provided a comfortable venue for West Indian merchants to catch
up on the latest news and to make deals for sugar, indigo, and slaves. The governing court of the Moscow Company met at Jonathan’s Coffeehouse. Londoners could “every noon and night on working-days, go to Garrway’s Coffee-House, and see what prices the actions bear on most companies trading in joint-stocks.” In the 1690s John Houghton’s *Collection for the Improvement of Husbandry and Trade*, which included a range of commodity prices as well as political and commercial news, could be found in all the coffee houses and read for free. In the 1670s Andrew Yarranton lectured in “public coffee-houses” about the need for a public bank and the shortcomings of goldsmith-bankers. In the early 1680s London’s short-lived Bank of Credit invited potential clients to visit any of eight coffeehouses to enter their subscriptions. By the later seventeenth century projectors were typically depicted peddling their schemes in one coffeehouse or another. One government memorandum of the 1680s warned that it was the country’s newfound addiction to “trade” that “causes that eternal noise and wild manner of talk in City coffee houses.” “No bargain can be drowe, or business concluded between man and man,” observed one pamphleteer, “but it must be transacted at some public house and more often than not in a coffee-house.” In that sense the Huguenots exile Henri Miouso was absolutely correct to suggest that coffeehouses were “extremely convenienc” locales to “meet your friends for the transaction of business, and all for a penny.”

Merchants, shopkeepers, and businessmen in the seventeenth century needed to have the most up-to-date information not only on commodity prices but also on world events that might affect those prices. Predictably, then, coffeehouses quickly emerged as centers of news and information. As soon as one entered a coffeehouse one heard “that threadbare question, ‘What news have you Master?’” or “Gentlemen, here’s fresh news from all parts.” The Florentine Lorenzo Magalotti discovered that in coffeehouses “there are diverse bodies or groups of journalists where one hears what is or is believed to be new, be it true or false.” Two decades later Henri Miouso, reflecting on England’s vibrant coffeehouse culture, reported that “England is a country abounding in printed papers, which they call pamphlets, wherein every author makes bold to talk freely upon affairs of state, and to publish all manner of news.” In coffeehouses, agreed Antonio Murat in the early eighteenth century, the English “insole, game, and read the Gazettes, and sometimes make them too. Here they treat of matters of state, the interests of princes, and the honour of husbands, &c.” The English did not disagree with this assessment of their new cultural attachment. “There’s nothing done in all the world, / From monarch to the mouse,” rhymed one minor poet of the 1670s, “But every day or night ‘tis hurrd, / Into the Coffee-House.” “Every coffee-house now seems, as it were, a Cabal of State,” observed another pamphleteer.

Although coffeehouses no doubt purveyed a good deal of local gossip, they were also the locales par excellence where city dwellers could go and learn about recent developments overseas. Thomas Sheridan found that in coffeehouses one could “hear the state-affairs of all nations adjusted.” The Frenchman M. de Sainte-Marie marvelled that in
publications from the early 1880s, there was no continuous French-language commodity price list to be had anywhere in France until the third quarter of the eighteenth century. Whereas foreign visitors to England marveled at "the license assumed by this nation to scrutinize events," in Paris "there is very little noise . . . of public cries of things to be sold, or any disturbance from pamphlets and hawkers." There was comparatively little interest in news. Dr. Martin Lister was amazed that in Paris "the Gazette comes out but once a week, and but few people buy them." When the marquis de Seignelay expressed concern about political gossip in Parisian coffeehouses in the 1880s, he attributed the dangerous speech to "foreigners." The difference was not one of taste. The French, Martin Lister thought, now drank coffee, tea, and chocolate "daily," but unlike the English, most did so "in private houses." This impression was confirmed by the journalists Joseph Addison and Richard Steele in the early eighteenth century. "As for politicians," they told the readers of the Tatler, the French "do not abound with that species of men as much as we." The French, they thought, specialized in the literary memoir, while the English were famous "for extempory dissertations in coffeehouses." The Tatler writers made their point chillingly clear in a later comparison. While passing Will's Coffeehouse, now a notorious Tory and Jacobite stronghold, they overheard "a very loud voice swearing, with some expressions towards treason, that the subject in France was as free as in England. His dissembling would not let him reflect, that his own discourse was an argument of the contrary." Only in England did a political and economically vibrant coffeehouse culture emerge.

English coffeehouses were novel institutions in the later seventeenth century. Within a few decades every English village or market town with any pretensions had its own coffeehouse. Although each coffeehouse must have had its own particular charm, by and large English coffeehouses all shared the same cultural characteristics. They were venues where locals could come to exchange news, read the most recent newspapers and pamphlets, and conduct business. The coffeehouse was an institution ideally suited to a society experiencing rapid urbanization and commercialization. It fostered a modern politics in which the increasingly ambitious activities of the state were subject to the scrutiny of an expanding political nation.

Why did England change so quickly in the seventeenth century? What sparked the development of English manufactures? Why did manufacturing and port towns develop so rapidly? Why did England's road improve, its shops proliferate? Why did England develop a poor office, insurance agencies, new economic instruments? Why did the intellectual and cultural bastions of English men and women of even relatively modest means expand during this period?

These questions can best be answered by placing England in a comparative European context. The social change and economic growth that England experienced in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries mirrored developments in the rest of Europe.
Economic historians agree that in the long sixteenth century "the volume of trade expanded everywhere," that in Western Europe "the trend in absolute and relative prices and in population growth was everywhere the same." It was only in the middle of the seventeenth century that the Dutch first and then the English diverged from the general European pattern. For most of Europe the seventeenth century was an age of crisis. In the Netherlands it was a golden age. In England, especially in the later seventeenth century, the economy expanded greatly even though population stagnated. The Venetian resident Alberti reported in the 1670s that the City of London has never had so much trade as now. "We have increased more in trade" since 1660, noted John Houghton in his new economically oriented periodical. "than it is possible any nation has done in like space." This impression of substantial late-seventeenth-century English economic growth was confirmed by more statistically minded contemporaries as well as later scholars. The relevant question, then, is not why did the English economy expand, but why did the English economy expand while the rest of Europe (besides the Netherlands) was in relative or absolute decline?

Much recent work in social and economic history of the British Isles has failed to grapple with this question because it has become insular in two senses. First, as Jacob Price has suggested, "economic historians of Britain have shown a diminishing interest in placing the evolution of the nation's economy in a world context." Second, the role of England's foreign trade has been downplayed. "The bulk of incomes from employment," asserts John Chartres, "were dependent upon home trade and services." "The greater part of GNP," he concludes, was "generated internally, and the great bulk of domestic products was destined for the home market." In particular, "the impact of the colonial re-export trade before 1760 has been overstated." More ships carried goods destined for the internal market, so, naturally, that market must have been more important to England's economy.

The driving force in England's economic history as in its political history, contend most scholars, was national and exceptional rather than external and international. Recent work in comparative economic development has demonstrated conclusively the implausibility of this internalist story. Using indices of production and demographic change, scholars have now shown that "almost all the differential growth of Western Europe during the sixteenth, seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries is largely accounted for by the growth of nations with access to the Atlantic ocean," those people most "directly involved in trade and colonialism in the New World and Asia." In other words, the key factor in explaining differences in economic development, the key factor in accounting for English and Dutch prosperity in the face of crisis elsewhere in Europe, is the growth of long-distance trade and the development of overseas colonies. In fact, these scholars have shown that before the opening up of Atlantic trade routes, the regions that would later benefit performed much like neighboring non-Atlantic regions. Internalist stories of social change and economic development in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries are not wrong. England did develop in the period that has been the focus of so much attention from social and economic historians. Its development in this period was, however, much like the development experienced in most areas of Europe. In fact, the dynamism that the comparative approach assigns to long-distance trade explains the oddity that French Atlantic areas were uniquely economically vibrant in the French "age of difficulties."

Foreign trade, and especially long-distance foreign trade, did provide England with an economic jolt. English merchant shipping more than doubled its tonnage between 1660 and 1680. Much of this growth was in foreign trade. Imports grew sixfold and exports sixfold between 1660 and 1700. By 1700 trade with the North American and West Indian plantations on one hand and India and China on the other represented 50 percent of English imports and 15 percent of English exports. These figures had been negligible at the beginning of the century. Indeed, the export figures would be much higher if one included the massive reexport trade of colonial and East Indian products to Europe. This change in scale of English foreign trade was accompanied by a qualitative shift. Whereas 80–90 percent of English exports were woven cloths in 1620, by 1700 textiles accounted for less than 50 percent of exports. Foreign trade, and especially overseas trade, created what one economic historian has called a "new context," another "revolution in trade." Contemporaries were well aware of the transformative impact of overseas trade on England. One widely circulated merchant's handbook reminded its readers that England's customs revenues had increased more than tenfold since the reign of Henry VIII. Gregory King attributed England's economic boom in the later seventeenth century "chiefly to an increase in foreign trade." In particular, contemporaries pointed to the importance of the
new extra-European trades. "Whatever mistaken notions unthinking men have to the contrary," affirmed one late-seventeenth-century pamphleteer, "it may be truly affirmed that it is the planters and settlers of our American plantations, to whom England owes its greatest riches and prosperity." When William Bradford surveyed England's overseas endeavors in 1665, he concluded that "those plantations which heretofore were looked upon as desperate adventures are now become necessary and important members of the main body." Two years later Richard Blome affirmed that James II's dominions in the New World were just as important for national prosperity as the king of Spain's possessions there. Sir Robert Southwell reminded the Earl of Nottingham that North America and the West Indies furnished "a full third part of the whole trade and navigation of England." Almost all who cared to comment were convinced that England's prosperity depended on commerce with the East and West Indies. "It is foreign trade that is the main sheet-anchor of us islanders," commented one commercial expert. "No man ever doubted but that foreign trade and commerce is the great concern and interest of every nation," averred another. This was particularly true of England. "The wealth, strength and glory of the King and Kingdom of England depends much (under God) upon the Navigation and foreign trade,"

Imported colonial goods had a noticeable effect on English consumption in the later seventeenth century. Tobacco imports grew dramatically from 1610 to 1700. Between 1655 and 1700 English imports rose from sixty thousand pounds per year to thirteen million pounds per year, a twenty-fold increase. In addition England in 1700 imported another twenty-five million pounds per year to the Continent. By the later seventeenth century consumption of tobacco in England was "universal." "The common people love tobacco," agreed Sir George Downing. "Most part of the corporations of England do subsist by this trade of tobacco, what in tap-houses, and strong-water shops," one MP told the House of Commons in 1670. When William Schellinks visited Peru in 1661 he found that "everyone, men and women, young and old," were "putting tobacco, which is here so common that the young children get it in the morning instead of breakfast, and almost prefer it to bread." By 1670, it has recently been shown, English men and women consumed one pound of tobacco per person yearly.

Coffee and tea consumption also increased substantially in the seventeenth century. Both hot beverages were extremely exotic in the early seventeenth century, but with the proliferation of coffeehouses after 1650, they became extremely popular drinks. "The use of coffee and tea" had become "so prevalent," thought one observer with some exaggeration, that they "take off people considerably from drinking of strong liquors." English coffee imports from the Middle East and the East Indies more than doubled between 1664 and 1666. Although it is difficult to calculate precisely, it appears that about 1 percent of the English population was consuming one cup of coffee per day by the end of the century. No good price series exists for coffee or tea, but anecdotal evidence from a range of sources suggest that the price of coffee was plummeting in the later seventeenth century, making the drink more accessible to those of modest means. Coffee lacked the mass market

that tobacco did in the late seventeenth century, but it was nevertheless very popular for a relatively new nonessential food.

Sugar, too, changed in the late seventeenth century from an occasional luxury gift to an indispensable part of the English diet. Sugar was soon added to a variety of foods to create "many brave and exhilarating drinks," to "the noble root called the cocoa," which without sugar "would be but of little use," to say nothing of the transformations wrought by the variety of England's confectioners. By 1700 sugar was said to have "spread its generous and sweet influences through the whole nation." Thomas Tryon's impressions, though colorful, were not without foundation. Sugar imports more than doubled between the 1660s and 1690s while prices simultaneously plummeted. Isaac Salmasker's detailed painting captured the new economic vibrancy of one of England's sugar islands in the later seventeenth century. Barbados alone, the island depicted by Salmasker, more than tripled the quantity of sugar it sent to England between 1650 and 1700. Enough sugar was imported by the end of the century for the entire English population to consume about 4 pounds each per year.

Overseas trade was not a one-way affair. The West Indies and North America, much more than the East Indies, developed an appetite for English manufactures. Sir George Downing proclamed as early as 1670 that the "plantations do not only bring home and send abroad too, but vend your manufactures." Coal, cloth, stockings, gloves, glass, coaches, shoes, and hats were all sent regularly to the West Indies and North America. The prominent Quaker metalware manufacturer Thomas Fell was selling his products in Jamaica in the late seventeenth century. Suffolk cheese, "dinesteemed in England," was
deemed appropriate for the long voyages to the New World. "Most certain it is," one polemicist confidently and correctly asserted, "that our American plantations take off more of the manufactures of England than any other trade abroad whatsoever." In fact, exports of English manufactures beyond Europe more than tripled between the 1660s and the 1690s. The colonies in the New World had by the later seventeenth century created "the true new market for English manufacturers." 97

Although trade beyond Europe still accounted for only about 20 percent of English trade by 1700, its effects were much broader than that figure suggests. Contemporary merchants were well aware, as have been economic historians, that overseas trade's largest impact was not direct but was felt in its "innumerable multiplier, feedback, and spin-off effects." Sir John Lowther of Whitchurch chose to emphasize that "foreign trade has collateral advantages." It was these indirect effects which allowed Thomas Tomkins to claim that "there is scarce any man so mean, but that he doth in one degree or other receive some benefit by our commerce with other nations." 98

It is possible to identify some but not all of these indirect multiplier effects of foreign trade. The new popularity of coffee, tea, sugar, and tobacco—all perishable goods—created a need for local shops able to dispense these products in small quantities relatively frequently. Contemporary merchants often noted that after 1640 the English began eating lighter evening meals. English men and women tended in the later seventeenth century to supplement a light meal with a sweet, a hot caffeine beverage, or a smoke. Together the change in taste and consumptive practices, both owing to "the creative effects of overseas trade," helped to explain the proliferation of shops in towns and small villages in the later seventeenth century. Shops such as that of Benjamin Paramore in Sheffield, which stocked cinnamon from the East Indies, tobacco, sugar and molasses from the West Indies, and North American sarsaparilla, became ever more common in the late seventeenth century. Of course, the new hot beverages could not be consumed at home or in coffeehouses in the pewter tankards used for beer and ale. The demand for earthenware teapots for these new hot drinks may well have stimulated the rapid development of the pottery.

Overseas trade was also "the hot-house of the British economy" in other ways. The risk associated with overseas trade probably encouraged the creation of large firms to share the financial risk. More sophisticated financial instruments allowed for multilateral systems of payments based on signatures rather than face-to-face communications. 99 The arrival of cargoes on large ships encouraged the expansion of warehouses in which to store the goods. Denizens of England's growing port towns were thus stimulated to build new wharves, warehouses, docks, and distribution facilities. And of course, overseas trade necessitated the building of larger ships than were normal to the coastal or even European trades.

Overseas trade became increasingly important in the seventeenth century in political as well as economic terms. European markets, especially those markets influenced directly or indirectly by French policies, were increasingly closed to the English. The late-seventeenth-century protectionism became increasingly sophisticated and widespread. Jean-Baptiste Colbert, Louis XIV's minister of finance in the later seventeenth century, may not have succeeded completely in stimulating French industry or in eliminating internal French tolls and trade barriers, but he did erect steep barriers to English and Dutch imports. From the late 1660s the English were increasingly aware that French tolls were eliminating markets for English manufactures. Even after Colbert's death the French were using "all the art that can be found out . . . to obstruct and ruin the wooden manufactures of England." Merchants in London and Exeter, as well as elsewhere, were well aware that French policies had "ruined" their profitable Continental trade in the new drapery. 100 Increasing French power and increasing French diplomatic pressure would undoubtedly have gradually shut the English out of Continental markets.

English overseas trade with the colonies, itself protected by economic legislation, gave manufacturers a guaranteed market for their products. Colonial consumption of English manufactures was small but growing rapidly in the late seventeenth century. The growing demand from the colonies meant that England did not have to orient away from manufacturing. Inability to adjust to a protectionist world ultimately cut short the Dutch economic miracle. Despite Dutch initial success in combating French protectionist measures, the Dutch economy "was bound to decay as soon as protectionist policies were adopted more widely." Dutch colonies, like those of Spain and Portugal and unlike their English counterparts, were comparatively self-sufficient economically. There was no safe outlet for Dutch manufactures. So the English uniquely benefited from the late-seventeenth-century rage of tariffs and counterraffts. Because of its linking of England with growing demand from the colonies, the Atlantic trade provided a competitive advantage over trade with the East—a trade that provided rich spices and valuable cloths but very limited demand for English and European products. The development of the West Indian and North American colonies, one scholar has correctly noted, provided "an exclusive market for English industrial output precisely when intra-European trade was depressed and competition intensified." 101 Foreign trade, and in particular colonial trade, provided the job that allowed the English economy to grow during a European economic crisis. Atlantic trade provides the only plausible explanation for England's divergence from the European pattern.

Rapid economic development in later seventeenth-century England necessarily changed the political environment. England was a very different place than it had been a century earlier. It housed new industries, boasted new towns, engaged with new trading partners, developed a new infrastructure, and created new social institutions. All of this created new political opportunities, new resources for the state, and new political bureaucracies to manage new resources. Social and economic changes informed a new kind of politics. Macaulay and the historians who have almost all followed in his wake wrongly assumed that because English economic transformation was a consequence of the Revolution
of 1688-90 there was no need to investigate the relationship between socioeconomic and political history. These two realms of scholarly inquiry could be safely segregated. This assumption can no longer be sustained. The separation of social and economic from political history appears, at first glance, to be warranted by the historical record. The percentage of MPs involved in trade remained steady at about 10 percent from the age of Elizabeth through the end of the seventeenth century. James II's Parliament of 1685 was indisputably "a landed Parliament," one in which most MPs seemed to be bent on policies that "favour their lands." Samuel Pepys and John Houghton both complained that the govrrnry, when it came to trade, "are more ruled by vulgar error, and false maxims, than the dictates of their own reason."

This apparent continuity, the apparent continued lack of interest of the political nation in trade, was in fact exaggerated. In the early 1680s John Houghton published an entire periodical devoted to issues of commerce and industry because "trade is a subject that hath not only taken up the thoughts and time of private men, but also of late years especially hath been one of the main concerns of the greatest princes." An increasing number of those holding landed estates were taking an interest in commerce. The Duke of Buckingham, for example, was deeply involved in London glass manufacturing. The Earl of Tanket set up a textile manufacture in Appley. Sir John Lowther was personally responsible for creating the thriving port of Whitehaven and was a great supporter of state support for new manufactures. Sir Daniel Fleming developed lead and copper mines on his properties in Lancashire and Westmorland. The Earl of Rochester, normally seen exclusively as a committed defender of the Church of England, was "very well informed about the details of commerce and trade that his principal study." Of course, the greatest landed gentlemen of all, Charles II and James II, set a new example of commercial commitment. Charles II famously took "peculiar pleasure in experiments relating to navigation" and set up a school for boys designed to promote "the security and advancement of our trade." "The great and almost only pleasure of mind he seemed addicted to was shipping and sea affairs," commented one inquisitive of Charles II soon after the monarch's death. James II, thought the French special envoy Bonnecaus, was particularly interested in financial and commercial affairs. The Marquis of Ailesbury, who perhaps knew James II better still, thought he had trade "much at heart." In the 1660s and early 1670s James had been responsible for reviving the Royal African Company, investing huge amounts of time and money in the venture. On his accession James created a commerce committee within the Privy Council and initiated discussions on a number of commercial projects.

Trade was increasingly a topic of interest for the political nation. Charles II created a series of parliamentary and extraparliamentary committees and boards to gather "matters of fact" and develop proposals regarding trade. The Royal Society created a Geograph Committee to discuss agrarian issues and their relationship to trade. Contemporaries were convinced that trade was penetrating the culture in all sorts of ways. Ralph Thoresby thought that the new importance of trade required the penning of biographies "that are applicable to the trading part of the nation of persons involved in business." "Though here-tofore it was esteemed a disparagement to be a merchant or to marry with the daughter of such," wrote Sir Daniel Fleming of Lancashire, "yet now the inhabitants here have grown wiser and several gentlemen of very great quality are become merchant-adventurers." Sir Francis Brewster commented how much better his contemporaries understood issues of commerce than "our forefathers." Recently, agreed John Cary, many MPs "began to be much in love with trade, and have often lamented the dark notion that house had it." The Venetian envoy, no stranger to commercial culture, described the House of Commons in the 1670s as filled with "persons skilled in economics and acquainted with the readiest ways of obtaining ready money from the public."

Contemporaries were keenly aware that English political culture was diverging significantly from those of its Continental counterparts. The Newcastle-born merchant Ambrose Barnes, who had himself spent significant time on the Continent, observed that in both Denmark and Sweden "trade is below a gentleman." Most, however, contrasted the English with the French. The French visitor M. de Sainte-Marie marveled at the extent to which merchandizing had penetrated English culture. England, unlike France, was a place in which "King, Lords, gentlemen, and the bourgeoisie live all together." "In France indeed," commented Guy Miege, who hailed from Luxe, "where if a gentleman-born betakes himself to trade forfeits his gentility, the gentiy stand so much upon their honor, that it is very rare to see a French gentleman turn to merchandizing." Later seventeenth-century English men and women were restless commentators on recent changes in the sociology of power. This perception crossed party lines. The Tory John Houghton knew that "many of our poor cottagers' children have turned merchants and substantial traders." "As England is one of the most trading countries in Europe," agreed the Whig Guy Miege, "to the greatest body of its commonalty, is that of traders, or men that live by buying and selling." Most thought that as England became a nation of traders and shopkeepers, the locus of political power had shifted. John Aubrey was convinced that "the balance of the government [is] quite altered, and put into the hands of the common people." Dr. Charles Aldworth, a fellow of the ill-fated Magdalen College, confided to his commonplace book that recently "the commons" had "got the riches of the nation in their hands by trade" and had thus become "a match both for Kings and Lords." James II's friend and loyal supporter Sir Edward Hales knew that as a result of "the great increase in trade since Henry VIII's time," the English people had achieved "an equality of riches" and therefore power. Sir Henry Capel argued in Parliament that political trust was placed where "there is most property," and to him it was clear that "the property of England was in the Commons." Significantly, this was the conclusion of a memorandum circulated widely in James II's court in 1689. "Trade and negotiation have infected the whole kingdom, and no man dares to marry or mix with it," the author of the memorandum contended, "by this means the very genius of the people is altered, and it will in the end be the interest of the crown to proportion its maxims of power suitable to this new nature.
come among us." A variety of arithmetical calculations proved unequivocally that "trade is much the over-balance of the wealth of the nation, and consequently must influence the power for good or ill." 97

Again and again, the English described themselves as a trading nation in the later seventeenth century. "Trade is the true and intrinsic interest of Britain without which it cannot subsist," wrote one popular pamphleteer. "England is properly a nation of trade, and extremely well situated for commerce," agreed another. "The whole project of the nation," opined the economic writer Carew Reynell, was "trade." It is a mistake," warned Sir John Cotton, "to think that trade doth not concern our being but our well being." "Trade is the true and intrinsic interest of England," averred Slangby Bethel in an unusually uncontroversial statement. This was because "from trade there doth not only arise riches to the subjects, rendering a nation considerable, but also increase of revenue, and therein power and strength to the sovereign." On this point, if on few others, Bethel agreed with the Tory civil lawyer Charles Molloy. In England, Molloy contended, "navigation and commerce were never . . . in greater esteem than now." 98

In 1688 England was a radically different place than it had been in 1600. It was more urban, more mercantile, more industrial, and more prosperous. Communications were dramatically better by both sea and land. England had developed much more of a national market, with regional specialization. Insurance made trade less risky. The post office made it easier to carry out. The coffeehouse provided a new venue in which to conduct business. More important, perhaps, England had diverged from the general European economic pattern. Although its population was not growing in the later seventeenth century, its economy was dynamic while the rest of Europe largely lay stagnant. "For merchandising and navigation," observed one commentator correctly, "no people can compare with the English" but the Hollanders. 99 England had indeed followed the Dutch economic path to modernity. And like the Dutch, foreign trade had provided the stimulus to English economic modernization.

The English were well aware that the transformation of their society and economy required a new politics. Both James II and his critics were fascinated with trade. They were convinced that England’s political future lay as a commercial society. Thomas Babington Macaulay knew that it was impossible to describe England’s politics without first coming to grips with its social situation. Because Macaulay thought that seventeenth-century English society shared few characteristics with the England of his own day, he concluded that English politics at the accession of James II was anything but modern. In this assessment Macaulay was fundamentally mistaken. By most measures the England that James II came to rule in February 1688 was a modernizing commercial society. The English in the later seventeenth century were a people concerned with issues of commercial policy and foreign affairs as much as they were with religious and legal or constitutional controversies. Only by first understanding that fact, only by broadening our conception of the political, can we hope to understand the revolution that occurred in 1688.

CHAPTER FOUR

English Politics at the Accession of James II

Despite premature reports of his recovery from a severe stroke, on the morning of 6 February 1688 King Charles II "gave up the ghost." All England was soon consumed by uncontrollable grief. The Duke of Newcastle was "so very ill with grief" that he "could scarce stir out of [his] chamber." The news "drew tears" from Colley Cibber, who would in 1688 take up arms against James II. "What is all this world? What is all the glory of it," exclaimed the virtuous John Evelyn on hearing of the king’s death, "I cannot speak without disorder." "Now the whole nation is in a general sadness for the death of our beloved King Charles," the London merchant Henry Hunter told one of his trading partners. The Londoner’s perception of national sentiment was not far off the mark. John Curtols, a Lincolnshire cleric, recalled that as the news of Charles II’s death spread across the country, "we looked as half dead our selves and stood staring upon one another as men at our wits’ end: every eye was ready to drop a tear and every heart to breathe a sigh, I think I may truly say, never was King of England so generally and so heartily lamented." 100

Undoubtedly the lamentation for the death of Charles II stemmed from a variety of causes. Charles II’s convivial and informal manner appealed to many. His recent determined support of the Church of England and the rights of his brother the Duke of York gained the sympathy of others. But perhaps more than anything else, Charles’s twenty-

(above) James, Duke of Monmouth, and Archibald, Earl of Argyll, Beheaded by R. Arondeaux, 1685. The king’s forces put down the Duke of Monmouth’s Rebellion in July 1685. The leaders of the rebellion were executed later that month. This medal, cast in commemoration of the executions, warns that "ill-advised ambition falls."