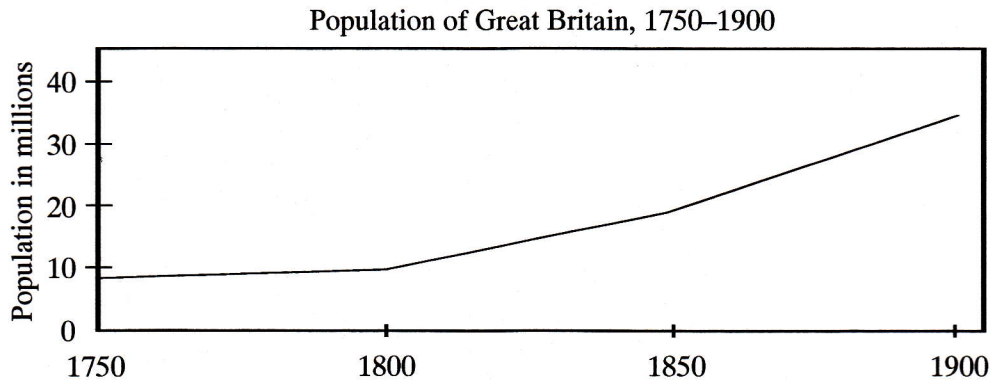


Changing Class Structure

An enormous population boom accompanied the Industrial Revolution, as the following graph demonstrates:



This in turn created a great demand for employment, and many people moved to cities to find work. Before the Industrial Revolution, class structure in England was formed primarily around occupational groups—artisans, merchants, and farmers. In farming villages, people were divided into the landowning elite and the peasantry, and the middle class included only a small number of people.

The age of industry brought with it changes in class structure. Ownership of land ceased to be the chief distinction between social classes. A new social class developed: the industrial capitalists (owners of wealth used in business) who organized, oversaw, and ran the factories. These people came from a variety of backgrounds—some were born into wealthy families, others were inventors, farmers, or merchants. All managed to become rich and powerful through their adaptability to fast changes, leadership, and energy.



Related to the industrial capitalists was a growing urban middle class. This included people in long-established professions, such as doctors and lawyers, as well as the new merchants, shopkeepers, factory clerks, and managers who arose as a result of large-scale industrialization.



A less fortunate effect of the Industrial Revolution was the growth of the urban poor, a much larger group. These were poverty-stricken workers who congregated in the slums around factories and lived in appalling conditions. It was extremely difficult for children of working-class parents to move to a higher class. Upward mobility required education, which was often a luxury not available to children working in factories.



Changing Class Structure



A poor family watches as rich people emerge from a restaurant in London around 1880.