

# A Trading Nation

**1717** Birth of John Metcalfe (d.1810) who improved road building and constructed over 300 kilometres of road, mainly in the Pennines.

**1736** Smugglers Act imposed harsh penalties on smugglers.

**1751–60** Over 180 Turnpike Acts passed through parliament.

**1756** Birth of John McAdam (d.1836) who invented mixture of tar and small stones known as 'tarmac' used to surface roads.

**1757** Birth of Thomas Telford (d.1834), the engineer who oversaw building of London to Holyhead road and the Menai Bridge.

**1761–72** Over 200 Turnpike Acts passed through parliament.

**1773** Stock Exchange founded.

**1807** Slave trade abolished in Britain.

**1833** Slavery abolished in British Empire.

*The wealth that the 'Triangular Trade' brought to ports such as Liverpool and Bristol had a terrible human cost. As part of the trade, native Africans were taken from their homeland to work on plantations in the West Indies. Their treatment at the hands of the European traders was often both cruel and inhumane.*



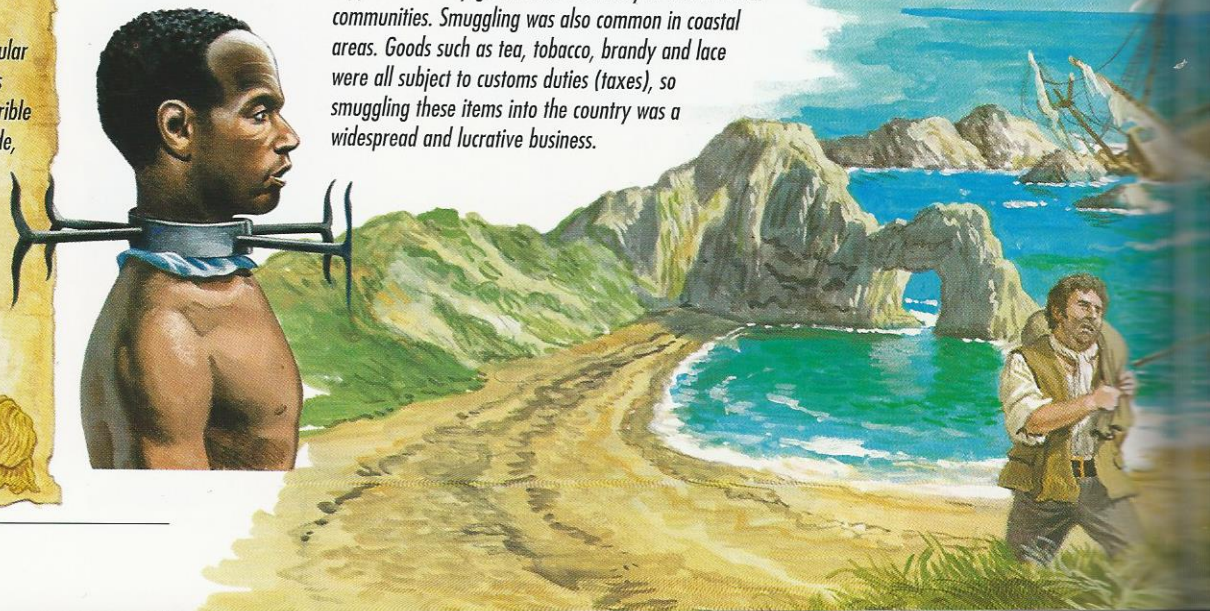
*Household goods were made by machine for the first time during the 18th century.*

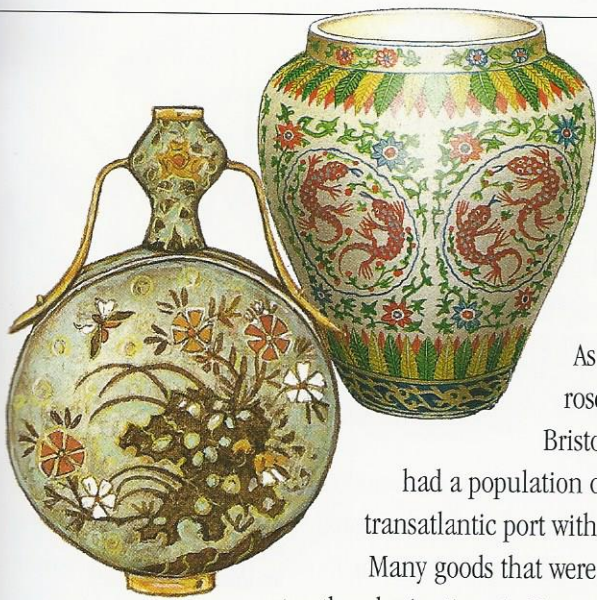
Daniel Defoe, writing in the 1720s, described Britain as the 'most flourishing and opulent country in the world'. And so it must have seemed as communications within Britain improved, and trade into and out of Britain continued to expand throughout the 18th century.

Trade within Britain at the opening of the 18th century still depended largely on markets and fairs. In London, there were large specialized markets at Billingsgate (fish), Smithfield (meat) and Covent Garden (vegetables). Supplies for these markets came from all over the country. There were smaller markets in regional centres where people came to buy and sell goods. Transporting goods from one place to another was both difficult and expensive. Each parish was responsible for looking after the roads in its area. In the early 18th century, local businessmen began to set up turnpike trusts to improve stretches of road and links to the main cities and travelling around the country became easier. However, most heavy goods were sent by river and on the canals that were constructed during the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

By the beginning of the 18th century the 'Triangular Trade', which involved transporting slaves from Africa to the Caribbean and taking goods back to Britain, was thriving.

*Ships were frequently wrecked along the rocky shores of southwest Britain and often provided welcome supplies of luxury goods such as brandy or tea for local communities. Smuggling was also common in coastal areas. Goods such as tea, tobacco, brandy and lace were all subject to customs duties (taxes), so smuggling these items into the country was a widespread and lucrative business.*

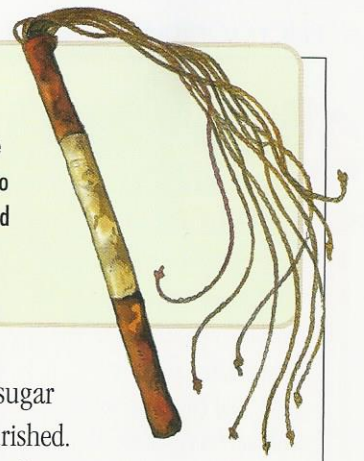




*These decorated vases come from China. Trade with Asia brought many exotic goods to Britain including Chinese porcelain and tea, spices such as pepper and cinnamon, and cheap cotton from India.*

### LIFE ON THE HIGH SEAS

Many young men became sailors, seeking adventure abroad. However, life aboard ship was hard. New sailors had to learn the ropes quickly and anyone found breaking the ship's strict rules could be flogged with a cat o' nine tails.



As demand for imports such as tobacco and sugar rose, ports along the west coast of Britain flourished. Bristol, Liverpool and Glasgow all expanded rapidly. In 1700 Liverpool had a population of about 5,000 people. One hundred years later, it was a major transatlantic port with a population of over 80,000.

Many goods that were imported, such as tobacco, tea, coffee and sugar, were re-exported to other destinations in Europe. In addition, exports of manufactured goods to Britain's colonies, for example in North America, became an increasingly valuable market. However, throughout the 18th century Britain's most important export was textiles. The manufacture of woollen textiles was centred in the West Country, East Anglia and Yorkshire. But, after the 1780s, cotton manufacture began to replace wool in importance. Cotton was to play a major role in the Industrial Revolution in Britain.

