

Winter 2020 – John Styles

H 161. Selected Topics in History

Topic: The First Industrial Revolution, 1750 to 1850, in Global Perspective.

For many historians, economists and social scientists, the British Industrial Revolution of the years from 1750 to 1850 holds a unique, world-historical significance – it marks the beginning of modern history. The mechanical innovations of the Industrial Revolution were, they insist, unprecedented. They yanked Britain, and subsequently much of the rest of the Western world which imitated British innovations, out of the penury and stagnation of traditional society into the sunny uplands of sustained economic growth and high mass consumption. But is this true? Was the British Industrial Revolution the trailblazing pioneer of modernity? Was it genuinely revolutionary, or was it a small part of a bigger story, or even a blind ally with limited benefits? This course will explore the history of the British Industrial Revolution – what it was, why it happened, what it changed, and how it was taken up in other parts of the world.