



History 7042
Specimen Question Paper 1F (A-level)
Question 03 Student 1
Specimen Answer and Commentary

V1.0

Specimen answer plus commentary

The following student response is intended to illustrate approaches to assessment. This response has not been completed under timed examination conditions. It is not intended to be viewed as a 'model' answer and the marking has not been subject to the usual standardisation process.

Paper 1F (A-level): Specimen question paper

03 'It was the development of the railways that enabled Britain to experience an economic boom in the middle years of the nineteenth century.'

Assess the validity of this view.

[25marks]

Student response

The railways were a key contributor to the economic boom in the middle years of the nineteenth century. They accelerated Britain's development as an advanced industrial country and it has even been suggested that they were responsible for a 'second industrial revolution' (the first being the conversion of the cotton industry to factory production, beginning in the 1780s). However, railways could not effect change entirely on their own. Other factors were also responsible, such as free trade, natural resources, population growth, commercial organisation, shipping, Empire and money supplies. Also, the fact that Britain was the first country to industrialise gave it a considerable advantage.

The economic effects of the building of the railways were huge. Firstly their building provided employment for huge armies of men, known as navvies. Workers moved around the country to undertake construction jobs, some of which were on a scale never before known -tunnelling and building huge bridges for example. This was in addition to the more mundane work of clearing the countryside and laying miles of track. This work was welcomed in the 1830s and 1840s, at a time known as the 'hungry forties' when there had been widespread unemployment. By providing jobs, workers became better-off and this in turn stimulated 'the market' and other industries. It also reduced protest and so gave the stability needed for economic growth.

The development of the railways produced a massive growth in the iron and steel industries as well as placing huge demands on the coal mines. These 'basic' industries supported both the building and running of the railways and around £150 million was invested in these between 1846 and 1850. The Bessemer process for the making of steel was the result of the demand for rails, which were generally produced this way in the 1860s. However, steel could also be used for other machinery and so a whole new industry grew as steel products became cheaper and easier to manufacture. In coalfield and iron-producing areas employment boomed and wages were good, again increasing domestic consumer demand.

The railways stimulated the building of new towns (a good example would be Crewe-built on a railway junction) and businesses and by reducing the costs of transport and travel, lowered the production costs of the industrialists. This was particularly the case for the transport of heavy goods which had previously relied on the canals and perishable goods, which in turn helped farmers increase their wealth. Whilst the spread of the railways put canal owners out of business, a number of former canal companies turned to the railways instead and the overall

benefits for industry certainly outweighed the losses. By lowering transport costs, British manufacturers were able to sell more competitively, both at home and abroad. In fact, the huge increase in export trade in the middle of the nineteenth century included railways themselves. The British railway business, Thomas Brassey, built railways across the globe.

However, the spread of the railways was not the only reason for the mid-nineteenth century boom. The development of free trade, whereby the government gradually removed restrictions on goods coming into and going out of the country also stimulated commerce. This had begun with the measures introduced by Huskisson in the 1820s and was continued by Sir Robert Peel in the 1840s and Gladstone in the 1850s. The anti-Corn Law League also campaigned for free trade in Corn, which was granted in 1846 by Peel. All of these measures stimulated imports and exports by removing taxes and allowing the market to dictate prices. Free trade increased competition and in a competitive atmosphere manufacturers competed to sell more cheaply and to sell more goods to keep up profits. Thus free trade was a very important component of the boom.

Not only free trade but also Britain's natural resources laid behind its mid-nineteenth century economic prosperity. Britain had an abundance of coal as well as plentiful iron and manpower. Furthermore, Britain could build on the lead the country had already established at the end of the eighteenth century, starting with the mechanisation of the cotton industry. This had, in turn led to considerable technical advances using steam power (as developed by James Watt) and new technologies had spread through many industries by the 1850s. The British middle class had solid capitalist instincts and saw industrial progress as the path to riches and to a better future. British banking and company organisation had developed and anyone with money or ambition saw the advantages of industrial investment. Britain's naval strength ensured its merchant shipping was protected as it travelled the globe and that shipping itself grew and improved, with the coming of the steamship. The possession of an Empire also helped here, providing markets and goods and that Empire expanded along with Britain's economy. Population growth (which increased by 25% between 1851 and 1871) provided a steady supply of labour as well as a growing domestic market. Moreover, gold discoveries, in California in 1849 and Australia in 1851 also stimulated world money supplies and came at a good time for the British industrialists and traders.

It was therefore the case that Britain was in a unique position to take advantage of the favourable conditions of the mid-nineteenth century to ensure industrial supremacy as 'the workshop of the world'. Cotton and wool led the way but coal, machinery (whose export had been prohibited before 1843 but was then 'freed'), iron, steel, pottery, copper and brass followed. Increased exports meant increased imports to pay for them and Britain was thus able to import food to feed the growing workforce and raw materials -such as raw cotton, in abundance. The balance of trade was made up for by 'invisible exports' -providing shipping for other nations and overseas investment (including the construction of railways abroad).

It was therefore a host of factors and not just the railways which enabled the British economic boom of the mid-nineteenth century. However, it would be fair to say that without the coming of the railways there could never have been the same degree of 'boom' because it was the stimulation they provided and their contribution to reducing costs that were key to Britain's success at that particular time.

Commentary – Level 4

This is an effective answer with range and generally appropriate supporting detail. It is consistently focused and has a clear argument. There is some lack of development at times; were, for example, the 1840s as stable as the answer suggests and there is little assessment of the problems associated with the development of the railways and the associated short-term adverse economic impact which resulted (such as 'railway mania'). It is, therefore, a good Level 4 answer.