

The Economic & Social History of Continental Europe & Britain, c. 1000-1914: An Introductory, Annotated Reading-List for Economists

1. I separate continental Europe from Britain for the simple reason that the world today, at the beginning of the 21st century, speaks English, not any Continental language. And a substantial part of the 'developed' world, not to speak of the 'under-developed' world, is Anglophone. So obviously there's something in the history of this small fogbound island off the north-west coast of Europe. (Put that in your pipe, Paris & Brussels, & smoke it.)

2. There's an awful lot of reading here. Factual overload is not only possible, it is probable. So take it slowly; allow material to assimilate, before moving on. The various references cover specific time-periods (for a very good reason, as will be evident when they are read.) If a particular period catches your interest, well & good: follow up with further reading from the references & bibliographies.

Take your economist's hat off, & clear all grand theories from your mind before reading. You're learning a very interesting story -- it's the facts of the various stories that count. They are not -- repeat, not -- 'empirical' or other 'data' to be churned through some theory or the other. They are the reality: this is the real world, independent of any need economists may have for 'empirical work'. It is the contemplation & study of facts such as these, that led the older Austrians to develop -- ex post facto -- the further analytical tools needed to see deeper. Such insights are complementary to, 'standard' historical research. So this is an exercise in learning something about the real world.

You may find it easier to start with the nearer period -- the 19th century -- & then work your way backwards. The 19th century is a little more familiar than earlier periods & you may want to ease yourself into them rather than plunging at once into something quite strange & unfamiliar. The object of the exercise is to gradually realise -- & appreciate -- the distinctiveness of each period/region; & especially to see the tremendous significance of the Golden Century between 1815 & 1914.

3. The references include or cover 'social' & 'cultural' history as well as 'economic' history:- a. The nature & content of the ends aimed at, determine the nature & content of the means produced. b. 'Economic' life is not -- cannot be -- a separate self-contained compartment on its own: it is bound up with life generally.

4. This cannot be the definitive reading list, of course. There are at least half-a-dozen & more, alternatives, for each title. So these references are merely to help you get going. By all means consult some other title if it speaks to you more clearly than the one listed here.

You should realise as you finish each book that you have barely begun to scratch the surface. There are dozens of articles & specialised monographs on every topic treated (see, for example, the annual list of articles & monographs on British history in the *Economic History Review*.) In other words: historians are already hard at work (& have been, for quite some time now) researching into what people do & think & say -- i.e., studying the real -- social -- world.

5. Have an atlas on hand -- geography is a very important influence in history. Also consult an historical atlas.

A. Continental Europe

Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe...950-1350* (Penguin 1994) -- brilliant.

Euan Cameron, ed, *Early Modern Europe, An Oxford History* (OUP 1999). Covers the 16th -18th centuries. Chs 1,4,7 deal with economic affairs; other chapters cover religious, intellectual, political developments.

T C W Blanning, ed, *The Nineteenth Century: Europe 1789-1914* (OUP 2000). Covers political, social, cultural & economic change; international relations -- political & economic.

Peter Rietbergen, *Europe A Cultural History* (Routledge 1998). Comprehensive -- begins in the 3rd millennium BC & includes Babylon & Rome, before settling into 6th century Europe (A.D.) & proceeding therefrom. Includes the influence of Islam; discusses 'consumer culture' & general socio-economic changes (inter alia.)

Sidney Pollard, *Peaceful Conquest, The Industrialization of Europe 1760-1970* (OUP 1981). Shows how production processes cross & re-cross merely political boundaries. The last chapter shows how the European economic order was destroyed -- almost.

B. Britain

R H Britnell, *The Commercialisation of English Society 1000-1500* (2nd ed, Manchester UP 1996). The development of specialisation & exchange -- the division of labour -- in the context of a 'manorial' system. Traces the gradual, concomitant change in legal rules & customs -- towards a more open system.

Christopher Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages...c.1200-1520* (CUP 1989). Dyer is an excellent historian. An excellent survey of changes in consumer goods at all levels of society.

Keith Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities, Economic Lives in Early Modern Britain, 1470-1750* (Penguin 2002). Outstanding survey; covers Scotland & Wales, & also the social & intellectual changes that intertwined with 'economic' change. This & Thirsk (below) neatly complement one another.

Joan Thirsk, *Economic Policy and Projects, The Development of a Consumer Society in Early Modern England* (pb ed, Clarendon Press 1988). Concentrate on the huge variety of outputs & economic activities; ignore the political shenanigans.

J A Sharpe, *Early Modern England, A Social History 1550-1750* (Hodder Arnold 1997). Comprehensive: covers politics & society, the economy, the different social ranks, education, literacy, culture -- both popular & 'high', religious change.

Maxine Berg, *The Age of Manufactures 1700-1820* (2nd ed, Routledge 1994). Concentrate on craft, industrial, & regional change; read chs. 3 & 8 after the others.

Neil McKendrick et al, *The Birth of a Consumer Society, The Commercialization of Eighteenth Century England* (Hutchinson 1983). 'Few experiences more vividly convey the sense of a consumer society than a sustained diet of late eighteenth-century advertisements' (p. 182.)

Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (rev ed, Penguin 1990). Porter is magnificent, as always. Brilliant survey of social, intellectual, literary, & economic changes. Many tables at the back.

Peter Mathias, *The First Industrial Nation...1700-1914* (reiss. Routledge 2001) Part II (but Part I's OK too: compare it with Berg, above.) Comprehensive, slightly old-fashioned (but still useful), lots of tables.

Sidney Pollard, *Britain's Prime and Britain's Decline...1870-1914* (Edward Arnold 1989). Britain supposedly fell behind the Continental economies (esp. Germany) in the later 19th century, because of her laissez-faire policies. But did she?

S B Saul, *The Myth of the Great Depression 1873-1896* (2nd ed, Macmillan 1985). All available price indices generally declined through most of this period, but everything else expanded: employment, industrial growth & change, foreign trade, consumption, housing, etc., etc.

C H Wilson, 'Economy and society in late Victorian Britain', *Econ. Hist. Rev.* 18 (1965). 20th century consumption patterns were set in the late 19th century.

F M L Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain 1830-1900* (Fontana 1988). Brilliant. Neatly places economic activities in changing social context.

A G Kenwood & A L Loughheed, *The Growth of the International Economy 1820-2000* (4th ed, Routledge 1999) chs 1-10. Good introduction. Ignore the theorising, concentrate on getting the overall picture: trade (growth & esp. change, also multilateral patterns); capital & population movements.