

**DANIEL DEFOE AS A PROMOTER OF ENGLAND'S INDUSTRIAL  
PROSPERITY IN THE EARLY EIGHTEENTH CENTURY (BASED ON TRAVELS IN  
THE EASTERN COUNTIES OF ENGLAND)**

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**Abstract:** This article explores Daniel Defoe's Travels in the Eastern Counties of England as both a descriptive and persuasive text. It argues that Defoe not only documented economic life but also actively promoted the idea of England as a rapidly developing industrial nation. Writing in the context of the English Enlightenment, he presented economic progress as a key marker of national strength.

Focusing on East Anglia and the counties south of London, the study shows how Defoe highlighted the growth of manufacturing, especially in the textile sector, while also noting shipbuilding, metalwork, and other industries. His descriptions often emphasize productivity, diversity of output, and access to trade routes, particularly seaports. At the same time, he acknowledges regional differences and economic challenges.

The article concludes that Defoe's travel writing functioned not only as observation but also as a form of economic advocacy aimed at shaping public perception of England's prosperity.

**Keywords:** Daniel Defoe, Enlightenment, East Anglia, industry, manufacture, economic discourse

### **Introduction**

By the early eighteenth century, England had become one of the most economically advanced countries in Europe. This transformation was not only visible in trade and production but also reflected in intellectual life. Writers and thinkers increasingly turned their attention to questions of economic growth, social development, and national identity. Daniel Defoe stands out in this context. Known today primarily as a novelist, he was also a keen observer of economic life. In his travel writings, he sought to explain — and, importantly, to present — England's development in a positive light. His Travels in the Eastern Counties of England is one of the clearest examples of this approach.

While Defoe has often been studied as a literary figure, his role in shaping economic discourse has received less attention. This article therefore focuses on how he represents industrial development and how his text works to promote the image of a prosperous and dynamic England.

### **Defoe's Perspective and Method**

Defoe's travel account is based on journeys he made between 1709 and 1714. These travels allowed him to gather firsthand impressions of different regions. However, his work is not simply a neutral record. It reflects his broader goals as a writer addressing a wide readership. He was interested in practical matters — production, trade, labor — but he also selected and framed information in a way that emphasized success and progress. In this sense, his writing can be seen as an early form of economic journalism, combining observation with persuasion.



### **Industrial Development in East Anglia**

East Anglia occupies a central place in Defoe's narrative. He presents the region — especially counties such as Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex — as one of the most economically active parts of England. Norwich, in particular, is described as a major industrial and commercial center. The textile industry receives the greatest attention. Defoe repeatedly stresses its scale and importance, noting that large portions of the population were involved in cloth production. Although some of his figures appear exaggerated, they nonetheless reflect the prominence of the industry.

At the same time, he highlights key features that, in his view, made English textiles competitive: relatively low prices; a wide variety of products; flexibility in responding to market demand. He also observes changes within the industry, including a shift toward lighter and more fashionable fabrics. Even when acknowledging that English goods were sometimes inferior to continental products, he emphasizes their accessibility and market appeal. Beyond textiles, Defoe notes the presence of other economic activities, such as leatherworking, brewing, and small-scale manufacturing. This diversity suggests that East Anglia was not narrowly specialized but supported a complex and interconnected economy.

### **Regional Differences and Market Dynamics**

One of Defoe's more perceptive observations concerns regional variation. He repeatedly points out that industrial development was uneven. Some towns were highly productive, while others lagged behind. A key factor, in his view, was access to trade routes. Towns connected to ports or navigable rivers tended to prosper, while more isolated places struggled. This emphasis on geography reveals his awareness of the importance of infrastructure and commerce in shaping economic outcomes. He also discusses the impact of external events, such as wars, on trade patterns. For example, disruptions in international markets forced manufacturers to shift between export and domestic sales. These shifts often led to increased competition within England.

### **Counties South of London**

In the counties south of London — including Kent, Sussex, and Surrey — Defoe identifies similar patterns, though often on a smaller scale. Textile production remains important, but he also notes shipbuilding, metalworking, and emerging industries such as paper and sugar production. Here again, he emphasizes specialization: different towns focused on particular products. He also draws attention to labor issues, including shortages of skilled workers and the use of migrant labor, such as French Protestant refugees in silk production. Particularly interesting is his discussion of planned economic development. In some cases, industrial growth resulted from cooperation between government and private entrepreneurs. The example of New Forest illustrates how deliberate policies — including the relocation of skilled workers — could stimulate economic expansion.

### **Defoe's Rhetoric of Prosperity**

Although Defoe's account contains valuable empirical observations, it is not purely descriptive. His language often amplifies success and downplays difficulties. Phrases emphasizing scale, productivity, and abundance appear frequently. In this respect, his work functions as a form of economic promotion. By presenting England as industrious, adaptable, and commercially successful, he contributes to a broader narrative of national progress. At the same time, his occasional references to кризисам, бедности и проблемам труда придают тексту определённую достоверность.



### Conclusion

Defoe's *Travels in the Eastern Counties of England* offers more than a snapshot of early eighteenth-century economic life. It provides insight into how industrial development was perceived, interpreted, and presented to a wider audience. His account highlights the central role of textile manufacturing, the importance of trade connections, and the diversity of local economies. It also reveals the uneven nature of development and the influence of both domestic and international factors.

Most importantly, Defoe's work can be seen as an attempt to shape how readers understood England's economic position. By emphasizing success and opportunity, he contributed to the construction of an image of England as a leading industrial power.

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