

## Artisan workshops of eighteenth-century Birmingham

"The industry of the people was considered extraordinary, their peculiarity of life remarkable. They lived like the inhabitants of Spain or after the custom of the Orientals. Three or four o'clock in the morning found them at work. At noon they rested; many enjoyed their siesta; others spent their time in the workshops eating and drinking, these places being often turned into taprooms and the apprentices into potboys; others again enjoyed themselves at marbles in the skittle alley, Three or four hours were thus devoted to "play" and then came work again till eight or nine and sometimes ten, the whole year through.

They worked hardest on Fridays, handed their work in on Saturday, but took off Monday as well as Sunday, and often Tuesday as well, and sometimes even Wednesday. This was partly to recover from their drinking, partly to amuse themselves with dog and cock fights and pugilism, but even more because the men are regulated by the expense of their families and their necessities; it is very well known that they will not go farther than necessity prompts them. In other words, they followed the same principles as have guided Indian peasants, who decide what standard of living suits them, and work just as much as they need to maintain it."

written by a visitor to the artisan workshops of eighteenth-century  
Birmingham, England

from AN INTIMATE HISTORY OF HUMANITY by Theodore Zeldin,  
1994.