Demographic statistics for early-to-mid eighteenth-century Britain are available only for the City of London, yet the picture which they generate is typical of the industrial-era cities.

Three-quarters of all children died before age five. While irreversible disease accounted for a large percentage of the fatalities, the most callous neglect, not to say wilful cruelty, accounted for the rest. Among the poorest people, and amidst the human impoverishment which accompanies material deprivation, the child mortality rate was almost one hundred percent. Mr. Hanway, a governor of the Foundling Hospital (established in 1739, one year after Wesley's conversion) commented on this aspect of English social life. "The pagan Chinese may legally drown female children; but an English Churchwarden, or 'Father of the Poor' . . . may suffer children to be starved to death or poisoned with noxious air." Scores of thousands of children were entrusted to nurses who pocketed the paltry sum given them for "caring", permitting starvation to overtake the child who was too expensive to feed. And since remains were too expensive to inter, infant corpses were routinely thrown onto manure piles. At birth the very poorest children were commonly abandoned in the street to perish. Frequently destitute parents blinded, maimed or deformed their child in hope of teasing out a few more pennies when the child was sent forth to beg. "Saddling the spit" was the highlight of parish entertainment; parish officers commandeered the monies paid to the parish to care for resourceless children and treated themselves to a large-scale drunk. The children, as many as five hundred at a time, were simply forsaken.

In 1684 Britain distilled 527,000 gallons of spirits. By 1750 the flow reached eleven million. (For a total population of only five million people!) Of the two thousand houses in St. Giles, London, 506 were gin shops. The record of proceedings from the Old Bailey, England's principal criminal court, informs us of the tragedy of Judith Dufour. She had removed her young child from the workhouse, strangled her, thrown the body into a ditch, sold the child's clothing for one shilling and four pence, and finally spent the money on gin, which she then shared with another woman who had collaborated in the murder.

The sign in gin shop windows read:

- Drunk: one shilling
- Dead Drunk: two shillings
- Free straw

Some shops advertised "clean straw," a concession to a better class of patron who preferred not to sleep in someone else's vomit. Parliament often foreshortened its debates "because the honourable members were too drunk to continue the affairs of state." Couples aimed at solemnizing their marriages in the morning; by evening solemnity had given way to sottishness.

Gambling was equally addictive. The well-to-do forfeited huge sums at the roll of dice, up to twenty-thousand pounds. The poor lost their money piecemeal yet lost it as surely to the government lotteries whose seduction they found irresistible. (Westminster Bridge and the British Museum were built largely by funds naively offered up by the poorest classes.) The degeneration which accompanied all of this need not be detailed. Its depth and scope are sufficiently attested in one advertisement for entertainment, "Champagne, Dice, Music, or your Neighbour's Spouse.”

An excerpt from “John Wesley and Sanctification” by Victor Shepherd

the Wesleyan Holiness website