

BRITISH PARLIAMENTARY PAPERS
Children's Employment (MINES), 1842

No. 16. Hannah Richardson, thirty-nine years of age. Examined at Intake, February 17—

I've one child that works in the pit; he's going on ten. He is down from 6 to 8; he is a trapper; he's not much tired with the work, it's only the confinement that tries him. He likes it pretty well, for he'd rather be in the pit than go to school. There is not much difference in his health since he went into the pit. He was at school before, and can read pretty well, but can't write. . . . I've another son in the pit, 17 years old; he's a hurrier and filler. He went into the pit at eight years old. It's not hurt his health nor his appetite, for he's a good size. It would hurt us if children were prevented from working till 11 or 12 years old, because we have no jobs to live now as it is.

No. 101. Benjamin Mellor, 46 years old. Examined March 18, 1841

I am under-ground steward to four of Mr. Clarke's pits and I have the superintendence of above 90 colliers. I have known children go as early as six, but the usual age would be nine or ten. They could trap first. They generally begin to hurry at 11 or 12. There are not quite so many girls go as boys. . . . I do not think that children suffer from the work. It is usual practice for girls to work in pits here. . . . If a man was to offer an insult to a girl in a pit she would first take her fist and give him a blow in his face.

No. 109. Mathew Lindley

I am nearly 52 years old. I am a collier in Messrs. Day and Twibell's pit. Children are sometimes brought to pits at the age of six years and are taken out of their beds at four o'clock and between that and five throughout the year. They leave the pits between four and five in the afternoon, making an average 12 hours' work. They have a little milk or a little coffee and a bit of bread in the morning before they go to the pit, and they will take nothing with them but a little bread and perhaps a little tea. . . .

It would be better for the health of the children, better for their morals, better for their education, better for the Government and for the country that children should be prevented from working till they were 11 years old; but I think it would be hard on many parents unless wages rose. . . .

No. 114. S.S. Scriven, Sub-Commissioner

The estimation of the sex has ever been held a test of the civilization of a people. Shall it then be said that in the very heart of our own country—from which missions are daily sent to teach God's law and millions upon millions have been generously poured forth for the manumission of hosts in a distant land—that there shall exist a state of society in which hundreds of young girls are sacrificed to such shameless indecencies, filthy abominations, and cruel slavery as is found to exist in our coal pits? Chained, belted, harnessed, like dogs in a go-cart—black saturated with wet, and more than half naked—crawling upon their hands and feet and dragging heavy loads behind them, they present an appearance indescribably disgusting and unnatural.

No. 171. Henry Briggs . Esq. One of the proprietors of the Messers. Stansfield and Briggs' coal mines, Flocton. Examined at Overton near Wakefield, May 3, 1841.

Think the morals of the colliers full as good, if not better, than in the neighboring districts. Gambling is one of their chief vices. . . . There is a great number of illegitimate children. . . . It is not more common among the females who work in pits than among those who work in the fields. The system has prevailed long of having girls in pits; more so formally than now; it is one decidedly better avoided if possible; it must injure the morality in some degree, and then it prevents their learning anything else. . . . I am decidedly of the opinion that they are more cleanly and less immoral than girls who work in factories.

No. 194. Mrs. Nancy Watson

I don't think it does the girls any good going in the pits, but some are well behaved that go. Girls go because they can get better wages than they can in the fields. The children get schooling here far better than most places. There are few places where people take such pains with the poor as Mrs. Stansfield does and all of them at the Manorhouse. They don't get such pains taken elsewhere.

No. 208. Mary Margerson, aged 16.

I work in a pit above the one where Fanny Drake works. We work from 6 in the morning till 5 at night. I don't stop for dinner. I get muck up generally all the time and I rest odd times. I hurry alone, to dip. I am quite sure I have nobody to help me. I work for Joseph Lister, who pays me. The pit is very wet. The water comes up nearly to my calves generally, till they let it off. It is often so for a week together. I find it very heavy work. I am very tired when I come home. I hurry both muck and coals. . . . I wear a petticoat and shift and stays. There is a cold wind in the pit. The man I work for wears nought, he is stark naked. I don't like being in the pit. . . .

Speech by Lord Ashley, 1842

But now mark the effect of the system on women: it causes a total ignorance of all domestic duties; they know nothing that they ought to know; they are rendered unfit for the duties of women by overwork, and become utterly demoralized. In the male the moral effects of the system are very sad, but in the female they are infinitely worse, not alone upon themselves, but upon their families, upon society, and I may add upon the country itself. It is bad enough if you corrupt the man but if you corrupt the woman, you poison the waters of life at the very fountain. Sir, it appears that they are wholly disqualified from even learning how to discharge the duties of wife and mother.

William Corbett, 1824

In the cotton spinning work, these creatures are kept in a heat of from 80-84 degrees. The door of the place wherein they work is locked. Except for half an hour at tea time, the people are not allowed to send for water to drink. In addition, there is the dust and what is called cotton-flyings or fuz, which the unfortunate creatures have to inhale. Men are rendered old and past labor at forty years of age, and the children made decrepit and deformed.

Source: National Coal Mining Museum for England, *Victorian Workers* (1997). [Teaching Materials]

