

## **Primary Source Readings, Perspectives on British Mines (1841-1842)**

**Read the following first-hand accounts of conditions in British mines:**

1. Mr. Joseph Staley, Managing Partner of the Yate Common Coal-works
2. William Jagger, Holmes & Stocks Quarry-House Pit
3. Patience Kershaw, Booth Town Pit

**Define the following mining terms:**

Carters-

Googs-

Girdle/lugger-

Cwt.

Collier-

Hurrier-

Corve-

Getter-

**What was it like to work in a British Mine?**

Make a chart that compares the working environment in each of the three mines you read about. Consider the following:

1. Compare the work being performed by William and Patience. How high is the tunnel they work in? How far do they have to move their carts? How heavy are their carts? What particular problems did each face?
2. Compare the days and hours worked per week including the starting time, quitting time, and any times for breaks.
3. Compare the lives of William and Patience, their parents, brothers and sisters, and where and what their family members do for a living.
4. Describe some of the other jobs in each mine, the ages of the people performing the jobs, and why children were used for those jobs.
5. How were the children affected by their jobs?

either of his own free will, or on being dismissed as punishment, or because of illness, the partly completed work shall be valued by the general manager with the help of two overseers, and he will be paid accordingly. There is no appeal against the decision of these experts.

(19) A free copy of these rules is handed to every workman, but whoever loses it and requires a new one, or cannot produce it on leaving, shall be fined 2½ silver groschen, payable to the sick fund.

Moabit, August, 1844.

### 11. Report on the Employment of Children in British Mines, 1841-1842

May 14, 1841.

No. 49. Mr. Joseph Staley, Managing Partner in Coal-works at Yate Common, in the parish of Yate (Two Pits), carried on under the firm of *Staley and Parkers*:

Employ from 30 to 35 hands; not more than five or six boys under 13; the two youngest are from eight to nine years old, who work with their father; perhaps three boys not more than 10 years of age; they assist in cutting and carting out the coal from a one-foot seam; no doorboys employed, because there is sufficient ventilation without being particular about closing them; the carters generally manage the doors as they pass; the boys earn from 6s. to 9s. per week when they get handy at cutting; have not more than three or four under 18; all over 15 are earning nearly men's wages—say 15s. per week; the men earn from 18s. to 20s.; considers two tons a fair day's work; wages paid in money every Saturday; the older boys receive their own; the boys, in carting out the coals from the *googs* [narrow inclined planes up which the coal is pulled by a chain and windlass], when short distances, draw by the *girdle* or *lugger*, i.e. a rope round the waist, with an iron hook depending in front, to which a chain, passing between the legs, is attached; if for longer distances, they use wheeled-carriages on a railway; no horses are employed under ground at present; the smaller boys do not tug more than 1 cwt.<sup>39</sup> at a time; the carts generally hold about 2 cwt. each; the thickest vein is two feet six inches, and is worked by the young men; the boys cart through a two feet six inches passageway; the young men have four feet, there being a bed of soft stuff above the coal, to cut away before they come to the roof; the shaft is 45 fathoms,<sup>40</sup> worked by a steam-engine, and strong-plaited rope; thinks rope decidedly safer than chain, as it gives more timely notice of any defect, by a strand or two giving way, whereas a link of iron is sometimes near breaking, a good while before it is discovered, and then separates on a sudden. Has had many years' experience in Staffordshire and Derbyshire, having been brought up a collier; say for 40 years; has been

39. cwt: hundredweight, i.e., 100 pounds.

40. fathom: a fathom equals 6 feet; the shaft of 45 fathoms thus extended 270 feet below the earth's surface.

engaged 23 years in this coal-field; the workings are quite dry; a pumping-engine of 60-horse power, is constantly at work when there is water; three or four days a-week is sufficient in summer; hours of work average eight to nine hours a-day; no night-work at present; always employ two sets when it occurs.

Some of the boys and young persons attend the Church Sunday-school, and others the Dissenting Sunday-school; most of them can read a little; look clean and tidy on Sundays; thinks there are no healthier boys in the country.

MESSRS. WILSON, HOLMES, AND STOCKS, QUARRY-HOUSE PIT.

No. 6. *William Jagger*, aged 11.

May 6:

I am a hurrier<sup>41</sup> for my father, Benjamin Jagger; have been in here four years and upwards; I come to work at seven o'clock, and go home at four, five, and six; I get breakfast afore I come down; I get my dinner down here, I get it about one o'clock; I don't know how long I am taking it; I get it as I can; I go to work directly after; I get currant-cake and buttered cake sometimes, never any meat; I get a bit of meat for supper when I go up. I went to day-school often; I comed to work about half a year; I go to Sunday-school now at church; I cannot read or write. I have got to hurry a corve 400 yards; I don't know what weight it is [ $2\frac{1}{2}$  cwt.]; it runs upon rails; I push the corves; some of the boys push when there is no rail. I do not oft hurt my feet; I never met with an accident. The men serve me out sometimes—they wallop me; I don't know what for, except 'tis when I don't hurry fast enough; I like my work very well; I would rather hurry than set cards.

The mainway of this pit is 3 feet 6 inches high and 400 yards in length; seams 17 inches thick; gear in good order; shaft not walled up. At the moment of stepping out of the corve at the pit's bottom, a stone weighing from five to seven pounds fell in the water close by my feet from the unlined shaft near the top, or from the bank, a circumstance at once illustrative of the importance of protecting persons in their descent, by walling up the sides of the shaft, and thereby preventing loose measures from falling.

41. Mining vocabulary:

hurrier: person who drew a wagon loaded with coal through mine tunnels to the shaft up which the load would be raised to the earth's surface.

corve: small wagon for carrying coal or ore in a mine.

getter: person who cut the coal from the seam. Young male hurriers, who often suffered stunted growth because of their excessive labor in moving coal as children, often graduated to the occupation of getter. Short stature was an asset in the restricted spaces of mine tunnels. The mining commission report from which this testimony is drawn notes that getters described themselves as "mashed up."

MR. JOSEPH STOCKS, BOOTH TOWN PIT, HALIFAX.

No. 26. *Patience Kershaw*, aged 17.

May 15:

My father has been dead about a year; my mother is living and has ten children, five lads and five lasses; the oldest is about thirty, the youngest is four; three lasses go to mill; all the lads are colliers, two getters and three hurriers; one lives at home and does nothing; mother does nought but look after home.

All my sisters have been hurriers, but three went to the mill, Alice went because her legs swelled from hurrying in cold water when she was hot. I never went to day-school; I go to Sunday-school, but I cannot read or write; I go to pit at five o'clock in the morning and come out at five in the evening; I get my breakfast of porridge and milk first; I take my dinner with me, a cake, and eat it as I go; I do not stop or rest any time for the purpose; I get nothing else until I get home, and then have potatoes and meat, not every day meat. I hurry in the clothes I have now got on, trousers and ragged jacket; the bald place upon my head is made by thrusting the corves; my legs have never swelled, but sisters' did when they went to mill; I hurry the corves a mile and more under ground and back; they weigh 3 cwt.; I hurry 11 a-day; I wear a belt and chain at the workings to get the corves out; the getters that I work for are *naked* except their caps; they pull off all their clothes; I see them at work when I go up; sometimes they beat me, if I am not quick enough, with their hands; they strike me upon my back; the boys take liberties with me sometimes, they pull me about; I am the only girl in the pit; there are about 20 boys and 15 men; all the men are naked; I would rather work in mill than in coal-pit.

This girl is an ignorant, filthy, ragged, and deplorable-looking object, and such a one as the uncivilized natives of the prairies would be shocked to look upon.<sup>42</sup>

#### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Let us bring together your findings on the old and new labor of European working men and women. Your goal is to understand the changes affecting them in the late eighteenth

and nineteenth centuries and how these changes came about. You may want to review the questions in Sources and Method before continuing your study of the evidence.

First, consider the length of time workers devoted to labor. Was the preindustrial workday much differ-

42. This comment by the mine commissioners is amplified elsewhere in their report, where they note that Kershaw worked in a mine whose tunnels contained 3 or 4 inches of water at all times and that she moved her corve 1,800 to 2,000 yards on each trip.