

## Extracts from the 1842

### Royal Commission



Here is a selection of evidence taken from the 1842 Children's Employment Commission; you can find a full copy of the report in the Museum's library. Some of these extracts are used in the Museum's '1842- A Faithful Picture?' Gallery

#### Evidence collected by J.C. Symons Esq. – Employers

**James Milnes Stansfield Esq. of Manor House, Flockton one of the proprietors of Messrs. Stansfield and Briggs Coal Mines, Flockton**

I have lived in Flockton about 25 years. It's population about 1000. The people are contented, peaceful and hard working; but many are fond of going to public houses, and the colliers are addicted to gambling. The number of persons employed in the concern is about 500. Flagrant instances of neglect of family are rare in the village. I beg to state most reservedly that the bad habits that exist in this village may be usually traced to drunkenness; and until public houses and beer shops are abolished or very much reduced in number there is little hope for improvement. Though I have chess boards etc. in the reading room, some of the young men say they would rather give 2d for a pint of ale. I do not think that girls who work in the collieries are more immoral than those employed in agricultural labour.

**Henry Briggs Esq. one of the proprietors of Messrs. Stansfield and Briggs Coal Mines, Flockton**

The system of employing girls would be better avoided if possible, it must injure their morality to some degree and it prevents their learning anything else. They are not less clean afterwards when they become wives and mothers; indeed they are more clean than the girls who don't go to the pits because they have learned to wash every evening with being so dirty. Bad language is not very common.

We could not have horse roads or even higher roads when the coal seams are so thin, because it would be so expensive. If children were to be stopped from working in pits the best Flockton seams must cease to be mined because it would cost too much to increase the height of the gates.

**Joseph Parker, of Windy Bank Pit, says -**

I have three apprentices (two hurriers and the other a 'getter'). They are bound to me until they are 21. I draw when they earn every fortnight and for that I keep them in meat, drink and clothing. They got to work at six in the morning but I do not know what time they leave. It is according to their work during the day. As a working man I think that nine days is sufficient for them but if they were prevented from working more than that, I could not get my living at their present wages. They hurry about 17 corves a day. As an honest man I think that too much.

### **William Pickard, General Steward at Denby Mine**

We used trappers till lately, and they used to go and begin as early as 6 years old. They come at 8 or 9 years old to hurry. The thinnest coal bed we are working is only 10 inches. We cut the gates 26 inches high. The youngest children go there.

The corf and coal together weigh 28 stone (174 kilograms). They will have 250 yards to hurry, on average. They hurry 16 a day.

The biggest part of the gates are dry. There is some places where the water is over their shoes; but very few. It is mostly very dry considering. I don't like to see the poor little children dabble in water.

I do not think now that children's work is hard work. They have generally play enough after their work is done.

It would be possible to cut the gates higher; but it would be a great expense.

I don't know how we are to do without the girls; we cannot do without them....they are far better hurriers and more attentive to their job.

### **Evidence collected by J.C. Symons Esq. – Children**

#### **David Pyrah: Examined at Flockton, May 3<sup>rd</sup>.**

I am going on 11, I worked at one of Mr. Stansfield's pits. I was lamed at Christmas by a sleeper falling on me, and have been off work since. I went to work usually at 6, but at 4 on odd days. We came out at 6 or 7, sometimes at 3 – whenever our work was done. We found it very hard work. The roads were nearly a yard but at the face it was half a yard. I did not like it because it was very low and I had to work till night. We got washed and got our dinner and then we got to bed or sometimes played. I can read or write a little. I go to Sunday school. John Sorby teaches; he is a preacher. I don't know anything about Jesus Christ... They teach us nothing but reading... We come out of the pit at the same time as the men – when they have finished. I'd rather be at school than at the pit.

#### **James Leather: Examined at Flockton, May 3<sup>rd</sup>. Aged 13 years.**

I have been working four years in the pit, I have been hurrying all the time. I have hurried all the time myself. I go down to the pit at 6 usually but sometimes at 4, and often at half past 4. It is a roller that lets us down. We come out at 4 sometimes later and sometimes sooner. We stop in generally 9 or 10 hours. Sometimes we don't stop at all for dinner. Sometimes we find it hard work, and sometimes easy. We are generally tired at night... I can read and write. I go to Sunday school. We come to evening school on Mondays. They teach us to read and write at Sunday school, they teach us religion a little... I know there is a place called heaven which is a good place.

### **Hannah Vaux, aged 12. Examined at Flockton**

I have been working two or three years at a pit. I have been to Sunday School all the time. I read in the Bible.... It is the |Sunday school at Mrs. Stanfield's house...(spells poorly, knows very little arithmetic but has a fair knowledge of geography). My father and mother never teach me anything; and all I learn is at the evening school once a week and on Sundays.

### **Sarah Gooder, aged 8 years**

I'm a trapper in the Gawber pit. It does not tire me but I have to trap without a light and I'm scared. I go at 4 and sometimes at half past 3 in the morning, and come out at 5 and half past. I never go to sleep. Sometimes I sing when I've light, but not in the dark; I dare not sing then, I don't like being in the pit.

### **John Saville, aged 7 years**

I stand and open and shut the door; I'm generally in the dark, and sit me down against the door... I never see daylight now, except on Sundays.

### **Fanny Drake aged 15. Examined at Overton, near Wakefield, May 9<sup>th</sup>**

I have been 6 years last September in a pit. I work at Charlesworth's Wood Pit. I hurry by myself; I find it middling hard... I go down at 6 and sometimes 7, and I come out at 5 and sometimes 6; at least the banksman has told me it was 6, but there's no believing him. We stop at 12 but we often have to work at the dinner hour. There is no-one else but me and the getter. I don't like it so well. It's cold and there is no fire in the pit. I'd rather be out of the pits altogether. I'd rather help my grandmother. I push with my head sometimes and it makes my head so sore that I cannot bear it touched; it is soft too. I often have headaches and colds and coughs and sore throats. I cannot read, I can say my letters. I wear a vest and shift and petticoat in the pit. I have had a pair of trousers. The getter I work with wears a flannel vest when he is poorly, but when he is well he wears nothing at all... (This girl is 4 feet 5 inches in height and she looked very healthy).

### **William Firth, between 6 and 7 years old**

I hurry with my sister. I don't like to be in the pit. I was crying to go out this morning. It tires me a great deal. They pay me sometimes. I always stop for dinner.

### **William Ramsden. Examined May 12<sup>th</sup>, Flockton**

I am going 11. I've been 5 years in the pit. I come down every morning at 6 and I get up at 5. I go away at half past 4. I go at 4 on Mondays. I stop from 12 till 1. I never do anything then. My work doesn't tire me at all. I go to Sunday school and I read ABC. I have had good health.

### **Jane Margerson. Examined May 12<sup>th</sup>, Flockton**

I'm going 15. I hurry. I have been 4 years at the pit. The work doesn't tire me. I've never been badly. I go down at 6 and go out at 3 or 4. I don't mind being in the pit so much. I was in service till I came to the pit, and I like the service best. My father took me away from service to send me to the pit. I did go to Sunday school, but I don't now, because I have to help my mother. The men wear trousers in the pit. It's a bit wet but it does not come over my shoes.

### **Noah Talbot, Examined May 12<sup>th</sup>, Flockton**

I'll be fifteen at next Flockton feast, that's August. I come at 6, sometimes 10 minutes past 6. I go out at 4 and sometimes 2 and 3. I hurry 14 corves a day. I work dinner hour sometimes, but not the little ones. I think the work is nothing... I go to Sunday school, but I like to play on Sunday and not go to school. Nearly all the getters work naked down here, and we dress first with a flannel shirt.

## **Evidence collected by J.C. Symons Esq. – The Parents**

### **Mrs Mary Ann Watson of Flockton, Examined May 6<sup>th</sup>, at her cottage**

I went to the pit myself when I was 5 years old, and two of my daughters go. It does them no harm. It never did me none. My girls learn to sew as much as I can teach them, but that's not much. One sews well.

### **Mrs. Nancy Watson, mother of the above witness**

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 other places. There are few places where people take such pains with the poor as Mrs. Stansfield does, and all of them at Manor House. They don't get such care taken elsewhere.

### **Mrs. Day, Examined May 6<sup>th</sup>**

I have two girls in the pit: the youngest is 8 and the oldest will be 19 in May. If the girls don't go into the pits they will have to take a bowl and go begging. I have tried to get a place in service for the oldest, but not for the others. It is very difficult to get a place in service. I don't think it makes much difference to their behaviour whether they go into the pits or not, if they have a good example shown them.

### **Benjamin Pyrah, Examined May 6<sup>th</sup> at Flockton**

I have two boys who work in the pit, though one now is out from an accident and I have one girl who works: one boy had 8s and the other 5s and the girl has 6s. I think that some girls will learn to be better managers of families when they go into the pits than those who work elsewhere, because they have time to learn sewing in the evening. It is not true that there is nothing else for them to do, but they prefer the pits because they have more freedom there than in service. The language is a lot better in Mr. Stansfield's pits than many round about. The children are not overworked around here – not as a general thing.

### **George Hirst, Collier aged 32, working at Messrs. Stansfield and Brigg's Pit**

The children hurry with a belt and chain, the chain passing between their legs; girls and all. It does not tire them too much. They begin at half past 7 and leave usually at half past 3. We work about 4 and a half days a week. It helps some poorer people to bring their girls to the pits, and I have seen many that make respectable women. It is true the girls are impudent but not more than other girls brought up in other ways. I have a boy myself who was 9 recently and he has been in the pits a fortnight. I think he has come soon enough to learn to be a collier. If families' circumstances would allow it would be as well to keep girls out of the pits, but there are not enough mills about that want girls.

### **Mr Samuel Scriven's Report – Women and girls**

Girls from five to eighteen perform all the works of boys. There is no distinction whatever in their coming up the shaft or going down, in the mode of hurrying or thrusting, in the weights of the corves or in the distance they are hurried, in wages or in dress. Indeed it is impossible to distinguish, either in the darkness of the gates in which they labour, or in the cabins before the broad light of the day, an atom of difference between one sex and the other.

They are to be found alike vulgar in manner and obscene in language but who can feel surprise at their debased condition when they are constantly associated and associated only, with men and boys living and labouring in a state of disgusting nakedness and brutality while they have themselves no other garment than a ragged shift or in the absence of that a pair of broken trousers to cover their persons?

**Susan Pitchforth, (No 10) says –**

I would rather set cards or do anything than work in a pit. I have one sister of 14 and she works with me.

**John Hepworth, a collier (No 16) says –**

I do not think it a proper occupation for them. They are not so strong as boys. It mashes them up. It is also very indecent that they should work in the pits but parents cannot support them without.

**Samuel Well, a collier (No 27) says –**

We have no girls in our pit. I should be sorry to see them because it is unnatural, indecent and uncalled for. I would under no circumstances have a daughter of my own there.

**Mr. John Sharp, the steward of Bowling states –**

We have no girls on the establishment. We would not allow of it by any means. It would be wrong to do so because they would frequently have to mix with the men naked. It is, in fact, not their labour and ought to be entirely prohibited.

**Mr. John Ambler, (NO 60), an individual who has taken an active interest in the welfare of factory children in Halifax states -**

I have been resident of Halifax and Ovenden 30 years and have always taken an interest in Sunday School education. I am therefore capable of forming an opinion as to the comparative difference of the several classes of young labourers and am fully convinced that the young miners are the most ignorant and profane of all the others. The consequence of girls working in the pits is that they turn out deplorably bad in after life. I have known some whose characters have been worse than the worst. They make bad wives, inasmuch as they appear degraded and dejected creatures and bring up their children in a state of ignorance and depravity in which they lived before them.