

Working Children

If you were a child from a poor family at the beginning of the Victorian times, you worked and worked and worked

Children were often forced to work almost as soon as they could walk. This was not something new to the Victorian period as children had always been expected to work for hundreds of years. Many were used as cheap labour.



What was wrong with the working conditions for children during the Victorian times?

- Children worked very long hours with little breaks and no fresh air.
- They often worked in very dangerous conditions resulting in injuries or even death.
- Very young children were expected to work
- There was no education for the poor, so it was very unlikely they could get better paid jobs when they were older.
- Children were paid very little because they were younger

Why didn't children refuse to work?

Most children had no choice - they needed to work to help their families earn enough money to live.

What kind of jobs did children do?

The lucky children got apprenticed in a trade, the less lucky ones worked on farms or helped with the spinning. When new types of work appeared with the development of **industries** and **factories**, it seemed perfectly natural to use children for work that adults couldn't do; Crawling underneath machinery or sitting in coal mines to open and close the ventilation doors.

Chimney Sweeps



Chimney sweeping was a job children could do better than adults. Small boys (starting at the age of 5 or 6 years) would be sent scrambling up inside the chimney to scrape and brush soot away. They came down covered in soot, and with bleeding elbows and knees.

"I have two boys working for me. after work their arms and legs are bleeding so I rub them with salt-water before sending them up another chimney" **Sweep Master**

The chimneys were usually very narrow (in some cases as small as 30cm) and twisted.

Children often got stuck or froze with terror in the cramped darkness - in these cases the Master Chimney Sweeper, would simply light the fire underneath to 'encourage' them to get on with their work. The work was dangerous and painful. Some boys got stuck and died of suffocation.

"I never got stuck myself but some of my friends have and were taken out dead." **boy aged 8**

In 1832 the use of boys for sweeping chimneys was forbidden by law, however, boys continued to be forced through the narrow winding passages of chimneys in large houses.

'The Water Babies' by Charles Kingsley, tells the tale of a young sweep, Tom, who drowns while trying to escape from his evil master and comes back to life underwater as a 'water baby'.



Factories



Children worked long hours and sometimes had to carry out some dangerous jobs working in **factories**.

"I start work promptly at 5:00 in the morning and work all day till 9:00 at night. That's 16 hours! We are not allowed to talk, sit or look out of the window whilst we work. The only day off from work I get is on Sundays, when we have to go to church." **Girl aged 9**

In textile mills children were made to clean machines while the machines were kept running, and there were many accidents. Many children lost fingers in the machinery and some were killed, crushed by the huge machines.

Young children working in a textile mill

In match factories children were employed to dip matches into a dangerous chemical called phosphorous. The phosphorous could cause their teeth to rot and some died from the effect of breathing it into their lungs.

Why were children employed to work in factories?

- Children were much cheaper than adults as a factory owner did not have to pay them as much.
- There were plenty of children in orphanages, so they could be replaced easily if accidents did occur.
- Children were small enough to crawl under machinery to tie up broken threads.



When did young children stop working in textile factories?

1833 the Factory Act was made law. It was now illegal for children under 9 to be employed in textile factories

Street Children

Thousands of poor children worked and lived on the streets. Many were orphans, others were simply neglected. They worked very long hours for very little money. To buy bread, they **sold** matches, firewood, buttons, flowers or bootlaces, **polished shoes, ran errands** and **swept** the crossing places where rich people crossed the busy roads.



Coal Mines



Coal was the main source of power in Victorian times. It was used for cooking and heating, and for driving machinery, trains and steam ships.

Until 1842, children under the age of 10 worked in coal mines. In order to produce more coal, the mines needed more workers and children as young as 5 years old were used to supply this need. They worked for up to 12 hours a day.

Trappers

Trappers were children who operated the air doors providing ventilation for the miners. By keeping the fresh air flowing they prevented the build up of dangerous gases. The children would sit in the draft of the doors, cold, damp and very frightened, with little or no light for 12 hours a day.

"I sit in the dark down in the pit for 12 hours a day. I only see daylight on Sundays when I don't work down the pit. Once I fell asleep and a wagon ran over my leg" **Boy aged 7**

"I hate the dark, it scares me. I never go to sleep. Sometimes I sing, there is nothing else to do other than open and close the door." **Girl aged 8**

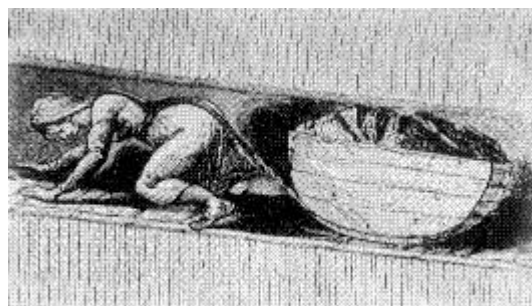


Drawers

Drawers pulled heavy carts of cut coal to the pits surface with heavy chains around their waists.

" I am a drawer, and work from six o'clock in the morning to six at night. stop about an hour at noon to eat my dinner: I have bread and butter for dinner; I get no drink.

I have a belt round my waist, and a chain passing between my legs, and I go on my hands and feet. The tunnels are narrow and very wet where I work. My clothes are wet through almost all day long." **Girl aged 10**



Dangers

The coal mines were dangerous places where roofs sometimes caved in, explosions happened and workers often injured themselves.

Below is a small sample of how children were killed working in coal mines (information from www.dmm.org.uk)

- A trapper, only 10 years old killed in an explosion.
- A horse driver aged 11. Crushed by horse.
- A driver, aged 14 fell off ladders and was crushed between the tubs and a door.
- A token keeper aged 14. Crushed by surface wagons on branches.
- A screenboy aged 12. Crushed by surface wagons.
- A trapper aged 12. Crushed by tubs.
- A driver aged 12. Horse fell on him.
- A bank boy aged 11. Caught by cage.
- A driver aged 12. Head crushed between tub top and a plank while riding on ladders.
- A trapper aged 13. Head crushed between cage and bunton while riding to bank.
- Tub Cleaner, aged 13. Fell down the shaft off a pumping engine.
- Boy aged 14, drowned.
- Boy, aged 7. Killed in an explosion.
- Trapper, aged 9. Killed in an explosion.
- Driver, aged 14. Crushed against wall by a horse.
- Screen Boy, aged 15. Head crushed between a tub and screen legs ; too little room.

When did children stop working in the mines?

The Mines Act was passed by the Government in 1847 forbidding the employment of women and girls and all boys under the age of ten down mines. Later it became illegal for a boy under 12 to work down a mine.