

Victorian Work

Gus Belt



A Gus belt would have been worn by a Hurrier, which was normally a young boy or girl who pulled the coal tubs to the pit bottom. They often had to crawl on their hands and feet through narrow tunnels. They wore belts attached to a heavy chain which passed between their legs and attached to the front of the coal tub. They were called Hurriers because the faster they moved, the easier it would be to pull the coal tub as this created momentum.

Victorian Work

Flat Cap



The flat cap normally made from wool, tweed, or similar soft materials with a small peak would have been worn by Victorian miners to try to protect their heads, as it created a thin barrier. With this being such a thin material, it didn't protect miners from rock falls and there were many head injuries suffered. Despite this, miners continued to wear flat caps to work until it became compulsory to wear hard helmets.

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Waist Coat



A waistcoat or vest, is a sleeveless upper-body garment worn by Victorian miners for warmth and protection. It is usually worn over a shirt. It is said that waistcoats might have got their name because people would have made them from the waist of their old coats by cutting the arms off.

Victorian Work

Shawl



Pit brow lasses were female workers that worked at the top of the conveyor belt that brought coal out of the mine. Their job was to pick stones and sort the coal after it was hauled to the surface. They would have worn a shawls and headscarf as it was very dusty work and wearing these garments would protect their hair from coal dust.

Victorian Work

Motty



In Victorian times, mining families were only paid for coal they were able to mine. Each family had a unique number which was embossed on an iron tag, this was called a Motty. This would have been attached with some rope to the side of the coal tub where there were two holes to thread through. When the coal reached the surface, it would be weighed, and the money would be given to the family who were registered to the number on the Motty.

Victorian Work

Tipple Tin



Traditionally miners' wages each week were put in a numbered tipple tin, which the miners picked up either at the Tommy shop (the local store run by the mine owner) or at the local pub. If a miner worked in several mines during the week, they would have to go to several stores or pubs to receive their wages. After numerous complaints, mine owners agreed to pay wages in the pit yard to make it easier.

Victorian Work

Horse Shoe



Ponies were used underground to pull coal tubs. They had to work on a hard surface all day doing heavy work; therefore, it was important that they were fitted with metal horseshoes to protect their feet from cracking or splitting. They would be hand-made (usually on-site) by a Blacksmith at his forge. He would create a very hot fire that could heat metal until it softened. This enabled him to bend the metal into the shape he needed, depending on the size of the hoof.

Victorian Work

Tallow Candle



Victorian miners used a candle so they could see their surroundings when working underground. It was so dark that you could not see your hand in front of your face. The candles were made of animal fat called tallow and once the candle was lit it would smell of meat and attract mice and rats who ate the candles if they were left unattended. Candles were expensive and families could only afford one at a time. This candle would be used by the Father, meaning the Mother and Children would have to work in complete darkness.

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Gauze



In the early days of coal mining, miners used candles with a naked flame which could react with a dangerous gas called methane underground which caused explosions. This resulted in many miners losing their lives. In 1815 Sir Humphry Davy discovered that surrounding the flame with a wire gauze with lots of tiny holes let air and some gas in, but did not let the heat of the flame out. When the flame pushed against the gauze it spread out and this caused the temperature of the flame to drop which prevented explosions from happening.

Victorian Work



Flame Safety Lamp

After a particularly bad explosion in 1812, two inventors George Stephenson and Sir Humphrey Davy both worked to produce a lamp safe to use in mines. The Davy lamp had a wire gauze/mesh surrounding the flame. This let air and some gas in, but it did not let the heat of the flame out. The gas outside the gauze never got hot enough to explode. It gave a safe light and also the small flame gave the miners warning when dangerous gas was around, as the flame would go out and the miners knew to evacuate. It is still used for this purpose today.