

Evidence from the past comes in many forms, including written and printed material, illustrations, photographs and artefacts.

Written sources can be primary, first-hand accounts written at the time or secondary, written by historians after the period being studied.

To piece together a picture of the past, all evidence needs to be looked at very carefully. Some questions that you might want to ask when looking at a piece of evidence are:

- Where did it come from?
- Is it a personal or official source?
- Who recorded it and why?
- Is the information given correct or accurate? Can this be checked?
- Can we tell if information has been left out?
- What did the person who recorded this want us to know, feel or think?
- Are facts and opinions included?
- Is the evidence useful, reliable or biased?
- Is the evidence exaggerated in any way?

Suggested Activity

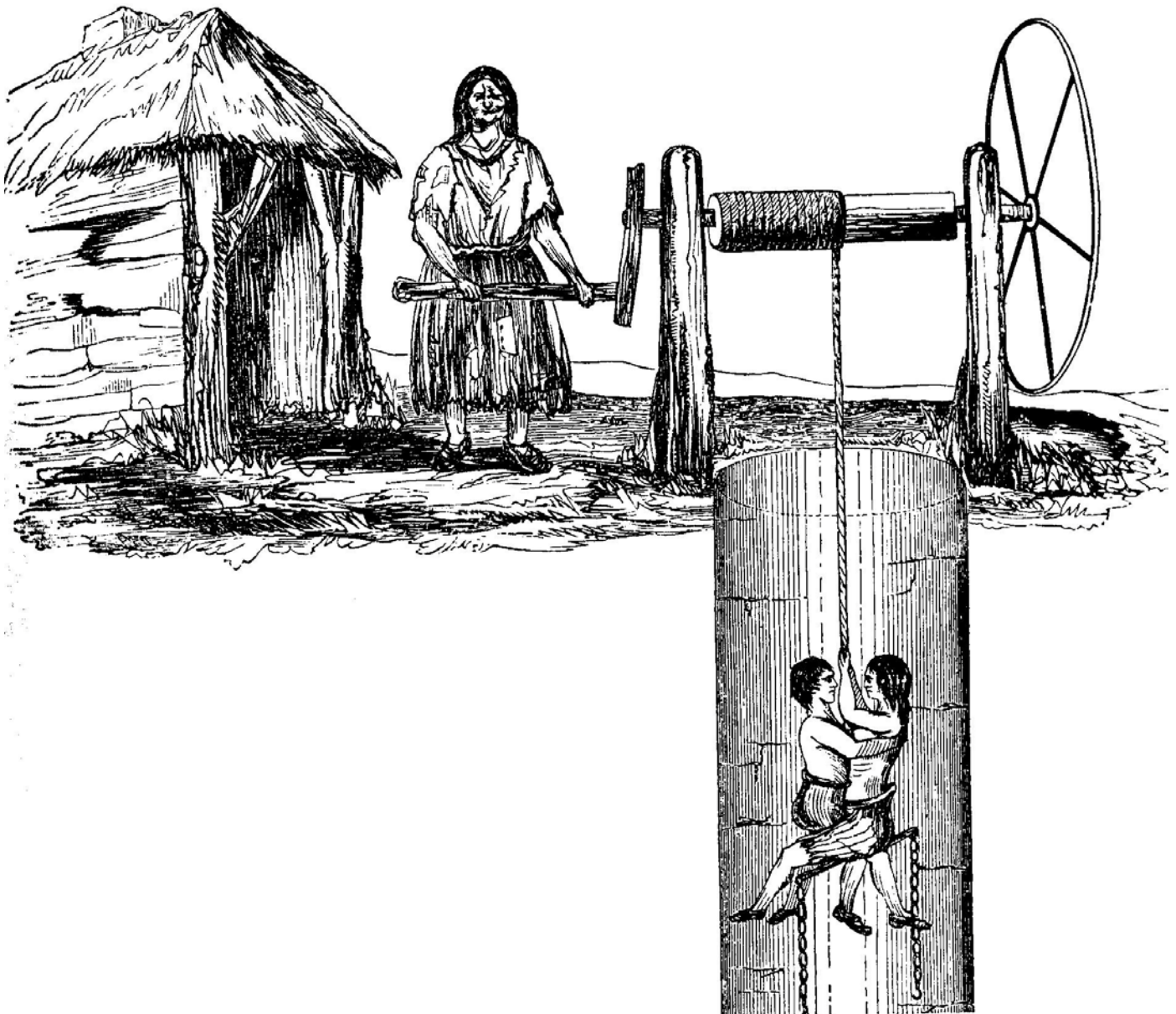
The report for the Royal Commission investigating children's employment in mines, which was written in 1842, provides us with important information about what it was like to work in a mine as a child in Victorian times.

The reports contain various types of primary evidence including **quotations** from people who were interviewed, **illustrations** and **statistical** information.

Look at the three examples of evidence from the report using the questions to guide you.

Using Evidence: Illustrations

This illustration, by S.S Scriven, has been taken from the report to the Royal Commission on the Employment of Children: Mines 1842 Volume 6, p79 and Volume 8, p61.



Questions

1. What does the picture show?
2. What is the woman doing?
3. What materials are the winder and house made from?
4. What are the people wearing?
5. Why are the children in the shaft?
6. What do you think the loose chains are for?
7. Do you think this looks safe?
8. What do you think it would feel like to be lowered down into a mine like that?

If you have been to the Museum you will also be able to answer:

9. How is the pit-top in the picture different to the pit-top at the Museum?
10. How is the winder in the picture different from the winder at the Museum?

Extension questions

11. Who drew this picture and why?
12. Is this what the artist could actually see?
13. What do you think people were most concerned about when they first saw this drawing?
14. How would such a scene be recorded today?



museum links

Find out more about the 1842 Children's Employment Commission on site at the Museum, in the 1842 Gallery.

Using Evidence: Quotations

This extract has been taken from the report to the Royal Commission on the Employment of Children: Mines 1842 Volume 7, p289. William Pickard was interviewed by sub commissioner J.C. Symons.

No. 255. *William Pickard*, General Steward to Sir John Lister Lister Kaye's Collieries. Examined at Denby Grange, May 21, 1841:—

I have been a bottom-steward 44 years. We used trappers till lately, and they used to go and begin as early as 6 years old. Now the doors are allowed to fall to themselves. The men will let the children go as soon as ever they are big enough to adde any wages. They come at 8 or 9 to hurry; but we have had trappers that begun earlier to hurry. The thinnest bed we are working is only 10 inches. We cut the gates 26 inches; but they don't stand quite that at the banks. The youngest children go there. The corf and coal together will weigh 28 stone. They will have 250 yards to hurry, on an average; they hurry 16 a-day. They always fill or riddle. It is a rare thing for the children to go two together; they go singly. 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, if it can be avoided. They go down generally at 6, or a quarter after. We reckon to give over pulling at 5 out; they generally give over at 3. The hurriers will stop to eat their bread at 12; but the bigger ones of 12 or 14 years old will be kept to work in the hole shovelling muck, or picking it away. When I was a hurrier, they had good reason to be tired with a belt and chain, and without rails. I do not think now that children's work is hard work. They have generally play enough after their work is done. If a child does not begin to be a hurrier at 9, he never will do in thin coals; they must be brought up to it. We could do with them at 9; but it would be better to have them at 8. It would be possible to cut the gates higher; but it would be a great expense. It is not only the expense of cutting away, but there is that also of taking the stuff away. We are now paying 6d. a yard extra for straight work in the thin bed, where we cut 16 inches of muck, &c. It would be a capital thing to make the men more regular in their hours of work; but if we were to take a man and hang him every now and then, it would not make them regular. Nine hours for drawing coals would be plenty of time. I have known pits in the neighbourhood drawing coals at 9 at night. The education of the children is very much neglected. The parents don't value it, and think nothing about. The proprietors of coal-pits don't notice schooling much, except the Stansfelds'. They are the best I ever knew; they are always doing something for education to the children; and Mrs. Milnes has always done a great deal too; and Mr. Briggs also is a very good one for that. I don't know how we are to do without girls; we cannot do without. It would be a good thing to stop girls from going after they are 12 or 13 years old. I have known a married woman hurrying for a man who worked stark naked, and not any kin to her. I fear colliers could not do without the wages of girls; and they are far better hurriers, and more attentive to their job.

Transcript (edited)

No. 255. *William Pickard*, General Steward to Sir John Lister Kaye's Collieries.
Examined at Denby Grange, May 21, 1841 :-

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The thinnest bed we are working is only 10 inches. We cut the gates 26 inches. The corf and coal together will weigh 28 stone. They will have 250 yards to hurry, on an average; they hurry 16 a-day. They always fill or riddle. It is a rare thing for the children to go two together; they go singly.

The biggest part of the gates are dry. There is some places where the water is over their shoes; but very few. I don't like to see the poor little children dabble in water, if it can be avoided.

They go down generally at 6, or a quarter after. The hurriers will stop to eat their bread at 12; but the bigger ones of 12 or 14 years old will be kept to work in the hole shovelling muck, or picking it away. When I was a hurrier, they had good reason to be tired with a belt and chain, and without rails. I do not think now that children's work is hard work. They have generally play enough after their work is done. Nine hours for drawing coals would be plenty of time. I have known pits in the neighbourhood drawing coals at 9 at night.

The education of the children is very much neglected. The parents don't value it, and think nothing about. The proprietors of coal-pits don't notice schooling much, except the Stanfelds'. They are the best I ever knew; they are always doing something for education to the children; and Mrs. Milnes has always done a great deal too; and Mr. Briggs is a very good one for that.

I don't know how we are to do without girls; we cannot do without. I fear colliers could not do without the wages of girls; and they are far better hurriers, and more attentive to their job.

Questions

1. What jobs did children do?
2. What did they have for lunch?
3. What were the conditions like in this pit?
4. What were William Pickard's views on:
 - The ages of children working
 - The hours they worked
 - Girls working
5. What education did the children have?

Extension questions

6. Why was William Pickard being interviewed? Why did the pit employ young children?
7. Do you think that the information recorded is correct and accurate?



museum links

Find out more about the 1842 Children's Employment Commission on site at the Museum, in the 1842 Gallery.

Using Evidence: Statistical Information

This table (see over for a larger print), with a further three families, appears on pages 218 and 219 of the Report of Children's Employment: Mines 1842 Volume 7. The information was collected by sub-commissioner J.C Symons.

APPENDIX H.
220.—AVERAGE OF WAGES AND CONSUMPTION OF FOOD for Eight Weeks in the Families of Six Colliers in Flockton, a parish in Yorkshire chiefly composed of Colliers.

| Names. | Employment. | Wages per Week. | Rent of House. | Number of Rooms. | Size of House. | Beds. | Ventilation of Rooms. | Furniture. | Books. | Garden. | Remarks. | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| George Wood and Jane Wood | Collier In Land in Harvest | £. s. d. 0 14 8 0 6 1 | s. 1 | Kitchen Back ditto 2 Chambers | ft. ft. 4 by 5 3 by 3½ 4 by 5 | 3 very good; hung in winter | Excellent; through draught | 5 Tables Clock Arm-chair Chairs | Delf-case, with abundance of Cooking utensils. | 4 Bibles 2 Testaments 2 Hymn-Books Common Prayer Herbal Book Barbauld's Hymns | Dr. Channing's Catechism Questions on the New Testament Common Prayer | Beautiful order, 18 yds. by 7 yds. | This person is a steady man; delicate from asth- ma; has worked with one master 30 years. |
| Children of above— Sarah 17 years William 15 ,, Joseph 12 ,, | Hurrier Hurrier At School | 0 7 0 0 5 6 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total earnings | | 1 13 3 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | Per Week. | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | Butter 1 0 Coffee 0 3 Tea 0 7½ Sugar 1 0 | | s. d. Coals 0 4 Meat 2 6 Wheatmeal 6 2 Potatoes 0 8 | | | | | | This house uniformly clean. The owner and his children can read and write, and regularly attend public worship. Their food consists of milk and water, with bread to breakfast; meat and potatoes to dinner. Break- fast at 6; dinner from 2 to 5; a little bread between. Killed a pig in the winter weighing 10 stones. Window curtains both to upper and lower rooms. This family dress very well. | |
| Simson Metcalf and Nancy Metcalf | Collier In Land in Harvest | £. s. d. 0 14 3½ 0 6 0 | s. 1 | Kitchen Back ditto and Pantry 1 Bed-room | ft. ft. 5 by 7 | 3 Beds; 1 divided by a cur- tain for the Girls | This house has not a thorough draught, and is rather dark. | 4 Tables Clock Large Book- Case and Drawers | Chairs and Delf-case | 4 Bibles 2 Testaments Common Prayer 2 Hymn-Books Barbauld's Hymns | Dr. Channing's Catechism Questions of the Testament | | A good worker; with one master 47 years. He can read. |
| Children of the above— Joseph 25 years James 24 ,, Richards 21 ,, Marianne 17 ,, Elizabeth 14 ,, Simson 10 ,, George 8 ,, | Collier Collier Hurrier In Land In Land Hurrier At School | 0 13 0 0 12 0 0 7 0 0 4 6 average for 1 yr. 0 2 1 0 5 0 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total earnings | | 3 3 10½ | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | Per Week. | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | Meat 13 1½ Meal 8 6 Oatmeal 0 6 Malt 4 2 Potatoes 1 8 | | s. d. Sugar 1 4 Butter 1 0 Tea 0 10 Coffee 0 3 Coals 0 4 | | | | | | This house not uniformly neat, but much excuse to be made in the number of the family, so many men all colliers. The man and his wife attend public services, and the younger children, who can also read and write. The elder sons drink much, and spend their Sabbath in lounging about. The diet much the same as that of other colliers. This family killed a pig weighing 12 stone at Christmas. This family decently dressed. They have not any garden, but a good potato-piece. The mother takes tea to dinner. | |
| William Child and Margaret Child. | Collier | £. s. d. 1 1 11½ | s. d. 1 2 | Kitchen Bedroom Pantry | ft. ft. 5 by 3¼ 5 by 3½ | 2 very good; neatly hung | Thorough draught | Clock Easy Chair Delf-case Chairs | Table Tables Drawers | 1 Bible 1 Testament Common Prayer Hymn Book | | This man is steady, and very respectable in his conduct; re- gular in his religious duties. His health rather delicate. | |
| Children of above— Festus 9 years Eliza 7 ,, Erasmus 4 ,, Jamar 2 ,, Alfred 0½ ,, | Hurrier At School | 0 3 6 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total earnings | | 1 5 5½ | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | Per Week. | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | Coals 0 4 Meat 3 6 Wheatmeal 8 4 Oatmeal 0 6 | | s. d. Malt 1 1½ Potatoes 0 8 Sugar 1 4 | | | | | | This house is kept as neat and clean as is possible with so many young children. The dietary consists of tea to breakfast for the women; oatmeal porridge and milk for children and man. Meat and potatoes, with Yorkshire pudding, for dinner. This family does not keep a pig. The man has worked for one master 13 years. | |

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Questions

1. Compare the three families by looking closely at:
 - The number of children and their ages
 - Wages
 - The house, rooms, furniture, rent paid
 - How much food was bought and prices
2. Why do you think the sub-commissioner would be interested in what books the families own?
3. How do you think these families were chosen?
4. Why was the information recorded?
5. Is the information accurate (look at the room sizes)?

Extension questions

1. Can you decide what factors the sub-commissioner thought were important to the families' well-being?
2. What information is missing? What other questions could have been asked?
3. Look at the remarks and longer comments. Who wrote these? Would those who wrote the remarks have been living in similar circumstances to these families?
4. Compare these families with families today.



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Find out more about the 1842 Children's Employment Commission on site at the Museum, in the 1842 Gallery.

APPENDIX H.

220.—AVERAGE OF WAGES AND CONSUMPTION OF FOOD FOR EIGHT WEEKS IN THE FAMILIES OF SIX COLLIERIES IN FLOCKTON, A PARISH IN YORKSHIRE CHIEFLY COMPOSED OF COLLIERIES.

| Names. | Employment. | Wages per Week. | Rent of House. | Number of Rooms. | Size of House. | Beds. | Ventilation of Rooms. | Furniture. | Books. | Garden. | Remarks. |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|----------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| George Wood | Collier | £. s. d. 0 14 8 | 1 | Kitchen | ft. ft. 4 by 5 | 3 very good; hung in winter | Excellent; thorough draught | 5 Tables Clock Arm-chair Chairs | 4 Bibles 2 Testaments 2 Hymn-Books Common Prayer Herbal Book Barbauld's Hymns | Beautiful order, 18 yds. by 7 yds. | This person is a steady man; delicate from asthma; has worked with one master 30 years. |
| and Jane Wood | In Land in Harvest | 0 6 1 | | 2 Chambers | 3½ by 5 | | | | | | |
| Children of above— | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Sarah | Harrier | 0 7 0 | | | | | | | | | |
| William | Harrier | 0 5 6 | | | | | | | | | |
| Joseph | At School | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total earnings | | 1 13 3 | | | | | | | | | |
| <p>Per Week. s. d.</p> <p>Coals 0 4 Oatmeal 1 0</p> <p>Meat 2 6 Malt 2 1</p> <p>Wheatmeal 6 2 Potatoes 0 8</p> <p>Tea 1 0 Sugar</p> | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Simon Metcalf | Collier | £. s. d. 0 14 3½ | 1 | Kitchen | ft. ft. 5 by 7 | | | | | | |
| and Nancy Metcalf | In Land in Harvest | 0 5 0 | | Back ditto and Pantry 1 Bed-room | 5 by 7 | | | | | | |
| Children of the above— | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Joseph | Collier | 0 13 0 | | | | | | | | | |
| James | Collier | 0 12 0 | | | | | | | | | |
| Richard | Harrier | 0 7 0 | | | | | | | | | |
| Marianne | In Land | 0 4 6 | | | | | | | | | |
| Elizabeth | In Land | 0 2 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| Simon | Harrier | 0 5 0 | | | | | | | | | |
| George | At School | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total earnings | | 3 3 10½ | | | | | | | | | |
| <p>Per Week. s. d.</p> <p>Meat 13 1½ Sugar 1 4</p> <p>Milk 8 6 Butter 1 0</p> <p>Oatmeal 0 6 Tea 0 10</p> <p>Malt 4 2 Coffee 0 3</p> <p>Potatoes 1 8 Coals 0 4</p> | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <p>This house not uniformly neat, but much excuse to be made in the number of the family, so many men all colliers. The man and his wife attend public service, and the younger children, who can also read and write. The elder sons drink much, and spend their Sabbath in lounging about. The diet much the same as that of other colliers. This family killed a pig weighing 12 stone at Christmas. This family decently dressed. They have not any garden, but a good potatoe-piece. The mother takes tea to dinner.</p> | | | | | | | | | | | |
| William Child | Collier | £. s. d. 1 1 11½ | 1 2 | Kitchen | ft. ft. 5 by 3½ | 2 very good; neatly hung | Thorough draught | Clock Easy Chair Delf-case Chairs | 1 Bible 1 Testament Common Prayer Hymn Book | | This man is steady, and very respectable in his conduct; regular in his religious duties. His health rather delicate. |
| and Margaret Child. | | | | Bedroom Pantry | 5 by 3½ | | | | | | |
| Children of above— | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Festus | Harrier | 0 3 6 | | | | | | | | | |
| Eliza | At School | | | | | | | | | | |
| Erasmus | | | | | | | | | | | |
| James | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Alfred | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total earnings | | 1 5 5½ | | | | | | | | | |
| <p>Per Week. s. d.</p> <p>Coals 0 4 Malt 1 1½</p> <p>Meat 3 6 Potatoes 0 8</p> <p>Wheatmeal 8 4 Sugar 1 4</p> <p>Oatmeal 0 6 Tea and Coffee of hawkers.</p> | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <p>This house is kept as neat and clean as is possible with so many young children. The dietary consists of tea to breakfast for the women; oatmeal porridge and milk for children and man. Meat and potatoes, with Yorkshire puddings for dinner. This family does not keep a pig. The man has worked for one master 13 years.</p> | | | | | | | | | | | |