

Working & living conditions during the Industrial Revolution

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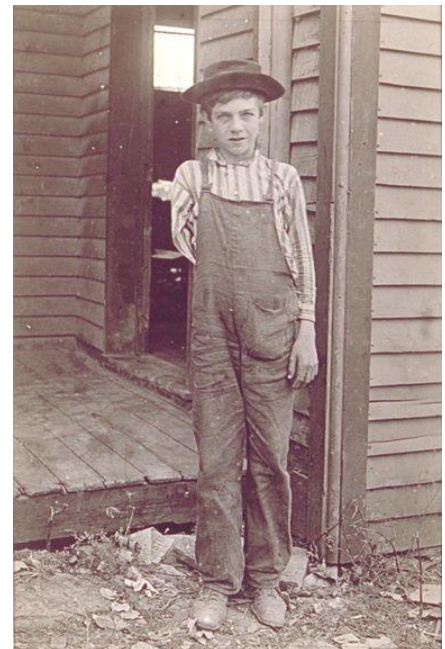
Long working hours: normal shifts were usually 12-14 hours a day, with extra time required during busy periods. Workers were often required to clean their machines during their mealtimes.

Low wages: a typical wage for male workers was about 15 shillings (75p) a week, but women and children were paid much less, with women earning seven shillings (35p) and children three shillings (15p). For this reason, employers preferred to employ women and children. Many men were sacked when they reached adulthood; then they had to be supported by their wives and children.

Cruel discipline: there was frequent "strapping" (hitting with a leather strap). Other punishments included hanging iron weights around children's necks, hanging them from the roof in baskets, nailing children's ears to the table, and dowsing them in water butts to keep them awake.

Fierce systems of fines: these were imposed for talking or whistling, leaving the room without permission, or having a little dirt on a machine. It was claimed that employers altered the time on the clocks to make their workers late so that they could fine them. Some employers demanded that their overseers raise a minimum amount each week from fines.

Accidents: forcing children to crawl into dangerous, unguarded machinery led to many accidents. Up to 40 per cent of accident cases at Manchester Infirmary in 1833 were factory accidents.



¹ Bbc.co.uk. (2018). BBC - GCSE Bitesize: Working conditions in factories. [online] Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/history/shp/britishsociety/livingworkingconditionsrev1.shtml> [Accessed 19 Apr. 2018].

Health: cotton thread had to be spun in damp, warm conditions. Going straight out into the cold night air led to many cases of pneumonia. The air was full of dust, which led to chest and lung diseases and loud noise made by machines damaged workers' hearing.

Parish apprentices: orphans from workhouses in southern England were "apprenticed" to factory owners, supposedly to learn the textiles trade. They worked 12-hour shifts, and slept in barracks attached to the factory in beds just vacated by children about to start the next shift.



Working in Mines

Trappers as young as four years old sat all day in the dark, opening the doors for the coal trucks to pass through.

Young **putters** pushed tubs and children as young as six carried coal for the hewers. Women hurriers pulled tubs with a chain that went around their middles and between their legs.

Hewers cut the coal with pickaxes in seams only 18 inches high.

Wages were so low that there were stories of pregnant women giving birth down the pit one day and being back at work the next.

There were stories of **brutal discipline** measures. Miners were paid by the tub and if their tub was underweight, they were not paid. There were fierce fines, and some miners ended a week's work owing the money to the mine owner.

Accidents such as roof falls, explosions, shaft accidents and drowning were frequent.

If a man joined a **trade union**, he was not only sacked but also blacklisted by all the mine owners in the area so he became unemployable. Many employees were required to sign "the Document" promising they would not join a union.

In some mines, especially in Scotland, a miner had to sign "**the Bond**" before he was given a job, in which he promised not to leave for another job.

Living conditions in cities

Pollution: coal was used to heat houses, cook food and heat water to produce steam to power machines in factories. The burning of coal created smoke, which led to terrible pollution in the cities.

Overcrowding: due to large numbers of people moving to the cities, there were not enough houses for all these people to live in. Low wages and high rents caused families to live in as small a space as possible. Sometimes whole families lived in one room.

Disease: typhus, typhoid, tuberculosis and cholera all existed in the cities of England. Cholera reached England for the first time in 1830, and there were further major epidemics in 1832 and 1848. Overcrowding, housing of a low standard and poor quality water supplies all helped spread disease.

Waste disposal: gutters were filled with litter and the streets were covered in horse manure, collected by boys to sell to farmers. Human waste was discharged directly into the sewers, which flowed straight into rivers. In London, Parliament had to stop work because the smell from the Thames became too much.

Poor quality housing: houses were built very close together so there was little light or fresh air inside them. They did not have running water and people found it difficult to keep clean. Houses often suffered from damp due to their thin walls and roofs made out of cheap materials. Many households had to share a single outside toilet that was little more than a hole in the ground.

Lack of fresh water: people could get water from a variety of places, such as streams, wells and stand pipes, but this water was often polluted by human waste.

