

Factories and Workers

James Cocker The name is James Cocker and I live in the Lancastrian mill town of Royton.

Lancashire could be called the county of plenty. Plenty of water on the land and in the air and the humid air stops the cotton from breaking. Plenty of mills, plenty of noise and smoke, plenty of coal to work the engines and plenty of people to work the mills.

Yes, we use children in our mills. Useful they are for clearing under the machines but you have to be very strict with them as the overseers will testify. My overseers see that everyone, man, woman or child, works hard for their pay. I give a good wage here, even a six year old can earn 3 shillings a week but that is for 7 full days. I myself, would never work on the Lord's Day, of course.

There are some people out there who are concerned about the children. Tender-hearted they are, but you don't make money being kind. If one child is injured or dies the overseers will quickly put another one in their place as it is very tiresome when the work has to stop because of an accident.

Proud I am of my business and of my country.

Abraham Wild

Abraham Wild, overseer at Mr. Cocker's mill. You have to watch these boys you know. As soon as you turn your back they are up to tricks and avoiding work. They don't think I know how rude they are about me when I'm not in earshot. Not that their mums and dads are a lot better. A good wage they get and are they grateful? No! Just moan about not seeing daylight from one Sunday to the next. A whole day of rest they get then and many of the children even get some education, if they go to the Sunday school, and they learn to read a little and sing hymns. I had better get down to see just what is going on. You know the old phrase, 'When the cat's away the mice will play.'

**Mary Ann
Bailey**

I have been apprenticed to Mr. Wood for two years. I cannot read or write. I never went to day-school since I was a little girl, then I went to learn to spell. I do not go to Sunday school, 'cause mother is ill, but I shall go when she gets better.

My father is a sagger maker. I have two brothers who work with father, they have two days work a week. I come to work at seven and leave at five. I do not go to evening school; there is evening school in town but I do not go. In our room there are 16 girls working with me; six of them cannot read their names: Anna Boules, Ann Lovett, Eliza Broad, Hannah Garner, Ann Holland, and myself. We are all under 13. 9 out of the whole 16 can write.

I get bread and cheese and coffee for breakfast, and pork-pie for dinner; sometimes meat and taters. I always get enough and I have got clothes enough: three frocks.

I like my work very much, my mistress is very good to me. We get holidays three or four times a year; we are never punished except by getting another piece or two to do if we do not behave. When we are good girls and we give over sooner than usual.

**Edward
Holdsworth**

I am Edward Holdsworth, owner of the Rochdale Coal Mine. Now coal is the commodity that drives all of industry in this country and my mine is producing so much coal each day that I need many, many workers to keep the production going at top speed. I employ men as miners, women to sort the coal at the surface and children to get into the small places the adults cannot reach. One of the main jobs for 4-year-olds to 7-year olds is that of the trapper and John, here, is going to teach his brother Albert, who is new, all that what he must do. Get on with it, John, and mind Albert doesn't slack for the next 12 hours.

John Gill

Albert, the job of the trapper is to open and close a door. Normally the door must be kept closed to stop the air in the mine taking a shortcut to the outside.

Albert Gill

Why mustn't the air take a shortcut?

John

If that happened, some mine passages would get gasses trapped in them and that could kill the miners.

Albert

So when must the door be opened?

John When a corve comes through you must open the door to let it pass.

Albert What is a corve?

John That's a basket full of coal – or an empty one going back to the coal face.

Albert So how do I open and close the door?

John You must sit in a small hole beside the door holding two ropes – one to open the door and one to close it. When you hear the corve coming through, you pull the open rope and when it has passed you pull the close one.

Albert So where is my door?

John It's the next one down from mine, about 1,000 feet underground. Oh and Albert, you mustn't fall asleep!