

Describing the Lives of Workers in the Early 1800s

What hardships did industrialization create for workers? Though it transformed the British economy with the addition of jobs, industrialization had a drastic social impact on the working people of England.

PRIMARY SOURCE

Miner Betty Harris, 37, gave testimony to an 1842 Royal Commission investigating conditions in British mines.

I was married at 23, and went into a **colliery**¹ when I was married. I . . . can neither read nor write. . . . I am a **drawer**², and work from 6 in the morning to 6 at night. Stop about an hour at noon to eat my dinner; 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 road is very steep, and we have to hold by a rope; and when there is no rope, by anything we can catch hold of. There are six women and about six boys and girls in the pit I work in; it is very hard work for a woman. The pit is very wet where I work, and the water comes over our clog-tops always, and I have seen it up to my thighs; it rains in at the roof terribly. My clothes are wet through almost all day long. . . .

My cousin looks after my children in the day time. I am very tired when I get home at night; I fall asleep sometimes before I get washed. . . . the belt and chain is worse when we are **in the family way**³. My feller (husband) has beaten me many a times for not being ready.

¹ **colliery**: coal mine and its connected buildings

² **drawer**: worker who pulled coal tubs in a mine; tubs were attached to the drawer's belt with a chain

How did industrialization affect living conditions in cities? The Industrial Revolution not only brought waves of new factories, it caused masses of workers to move to the cities to find jobs at these factories. Both developments had a profound impact on the lives of England's workers.

The Industrial Revolution altered both the working and living conditions of Britain's working class. Read the excerpts and study the illustration to learn more about how industrialization impacted the people of England during the first half of the nineteenth century.

PRIMARY SOURCE

German socialist Friedrich Engels, co-founder of Marxism, described industrial Manchester in his book, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844*.

The first court below Ducie Bridge . . . was in such a state at the time of the cholera that the sanitary police ordered it evacuated, swept, and disinfected with **chloride of lime**⁴. . . . At the bottom flows, or rather stagnates, the Irk, a narrow, coal-black, foul-smelling stream, full of debris and refuse, which it deposits on the shallower right bank. . . .

Above the bridge are **tanneries**⁵, **bone mills**⁶, and gasworks, from which all drains and refuse find their way into the Irk, which receives further the contents of all the neighboring sewers and **privies**⁷. . . . Below the bridge you look upon the piles of debris, the refuse, the filth, and offal from the courts on the steep left bank; here each house is packed close behind its neighbor and a piece of each is visible, all black, smoky, crumbling, ancient, with broken panes and window frames. . . .

Such is the Old Town of Manchester . . . [in] defiance of all considerations of cleanliness, ventilation, and health which characterize the construction of this single district, containing at least twenty to thirty thousand inhabitants.

³ **in the family way**: pregnant

⁴ **chloride of lime**: bleaching powder



▲ This illustration shows a female drawer—as portrayed by Betty Harris in *Parliamentary Papers* of 1842—in a coal pit in Little Bolton, England in 1842.

PRIMARY SOURCE

England's Industrial Revolution increased the need for coal. By 1841, more than 200,000 men, women and children were working in the mines. Women and young boys were used to remove the coal from the mines.

The above print of a woman drawer in a coal pit was created to accompany Betty Harris's testimony to the Royal Commission in 1842. The image shows the belt around her waist and the chain between her legs. In Betty's testimony, she claimed that she worked in these conditions with other women and small children.

The Mines Act passed in August 1842, prohibiting female labor and boys under the age of 10 from working in the mines.

- 5 **tanneries:** buildings where skins and hides are tanned
- 6 **bone mills:** mills that convert animal bones into fertilizer
- 7 **privies:** outhouses

DBQ Analyzing Historical Documents

- 1 **Calculating** How many hours did Betty Harris work each day?
- 2 **Recognizing Bias** How could Engels's background have affected his assessment of Manchester? How might a description of the city written by a factory owner contrast from that written by Engels?
- 3 **Integrating Visual Information** How does the above illustration support Harris's testimony about the work experience for women in mines?
- 4 **Contrasting** How have working conditions changed in the United States since Industrialization? What laws protect the rights of workers?
- 5 **Synthesizing** How could Engels have used Harris's testimony to support his main point about industrialization?
- 6 **Problem-Solving** Consider the lives of England's workers in the early 1800s. Suppose you are an adviser to the British government. Write a letter to government leaders recommending changes for work conditions.