Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales

Preparing for the Global Citizenship Mini Challenge

big pit national coal museum amgueddfa lofaol cymru

SOURCE PACK

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Researching and Understanding Poverty and Child Labour

We can learn a lot about the issue of child labour by studying Welsh history and visiting museums such as Big Pit. We only need to visit the south Wales valleys to see the impact mining has had on the environment such as the terraced housing in mining towns and villages, the remains of coal or spoil tips and old mine workings.

Study these three sources about young people working in coalmines in Wales. They will help you to understand why young people were sent to work in coalmines. They will also give you information about what they did at work, the conditions underground and how they felt about it all. If you would like to know more why not study the Mines Report itself. You can find the Mines reports for South Wales, on the website of the Coalmining History Resource Centre.

ISSUE: **POVERTY** FOCUS: **CHILD LABOUR**

SOURCE 1: adapted from *From the Cradle to the Coalmine*, C. Thompson (University of Wales Press, 2014)

Attitudes to child labour in the 18th century

Children have been employed in agriculture and industry in Wales for centuries. Before the nineteenth century, child labour was not always seen as a bad thing. For example, when Daniel Defoe wrote about his visit to Lancashire in 1724, he saw four year olds working in the cotton industry and was pleased that they were gainfully employed. The writer John Locke went as far as stating that poor children should be put to work at three years old with a bellyful of daily bread! Childhood was generally seen as a time when skills were learned in preparation for adult employment.

Attitudes to child labour in the 19th century

By the 1840s around a third of the workforce of a cotton mill or coal mine could be composed of children. During the nineteenth century attitudes began to change and there was much debate over the conditions that children worked under and whether they should be in work at all.

Arguments for the use of child labour

Working class children were regarded as 'little adults' and expected to contribute to their family's income. Parents had worked as children and expected their children to do the same. There were few schools available so work kept children out of mischief. Many industrialists saw the employment of children as a cheap source of labour that kept them competitive. Children were regarded as ideal industrial workers; they did as they were told and were unlikely to form trade unions. They were small and nimble and so suitable for working amongst machinery in a textile mill or in narrow underground roadways.

Arguments against child labour

Some social reformers like Elizabeth Barrett and the poet Samuel Coleridge wanted child labour stopped, arguing children were little more than slaves. Slavery had been abolished they argued in 1833. They accused parents of sending their children to work either to get more money for themselves or because

they were so poor they did it to make ends meet. They accused rich mine owners who employed children of being greedy and living fine lives on the profits gained from child labour.

The debate caused the government to order an enquiry and seeing the results, to pass the Factory Act of 1833 which placed restrictions on the ages and hours which children were allowed to work. Unfortunately, the Act did not cover the coal industry, although one of the factory commissioners recorded that '*... labour, in the worst room, in the worst conducted factory is less hard, less cruel and less demoralising than the best of coal mines.*'

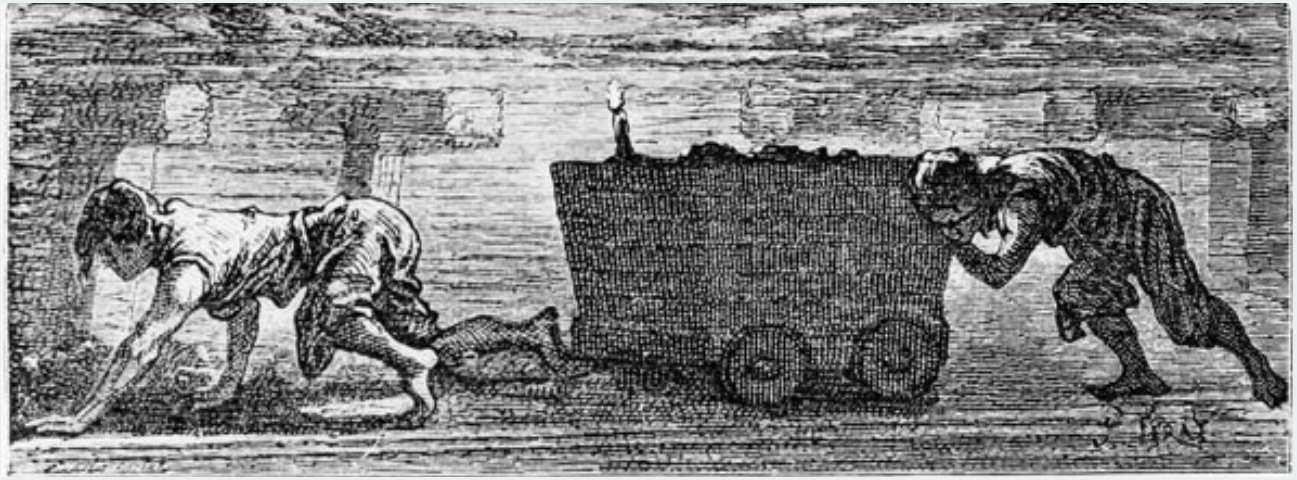
Royal Commission and *Mines Report* 1842

In 1840, Lord Ashley (later the Earl of Shaftesbury) managed to persuade Parliament to set up a Royal Commission to investigate conditions in the mines. Four commissioners were appointed to enquire into the age, sex, number and the working conditions of children employed in the mining industry. Evidence was taken from employers, doctors, teachers, clergymen, parents, adult miners and the children themselves. The commissioners found evidence of brutality, accidents, long hours, associated lung diseases, and horrific conditions of work. It was the first government report to use pictures, and it deeply shocked the public, who were particularly alarmed by the plight of the young 'trappers' (who opened and closed the ventilation doors underground), the nakedness of males and females working together, and what was seen as the lack of religion or morality among the young workers.

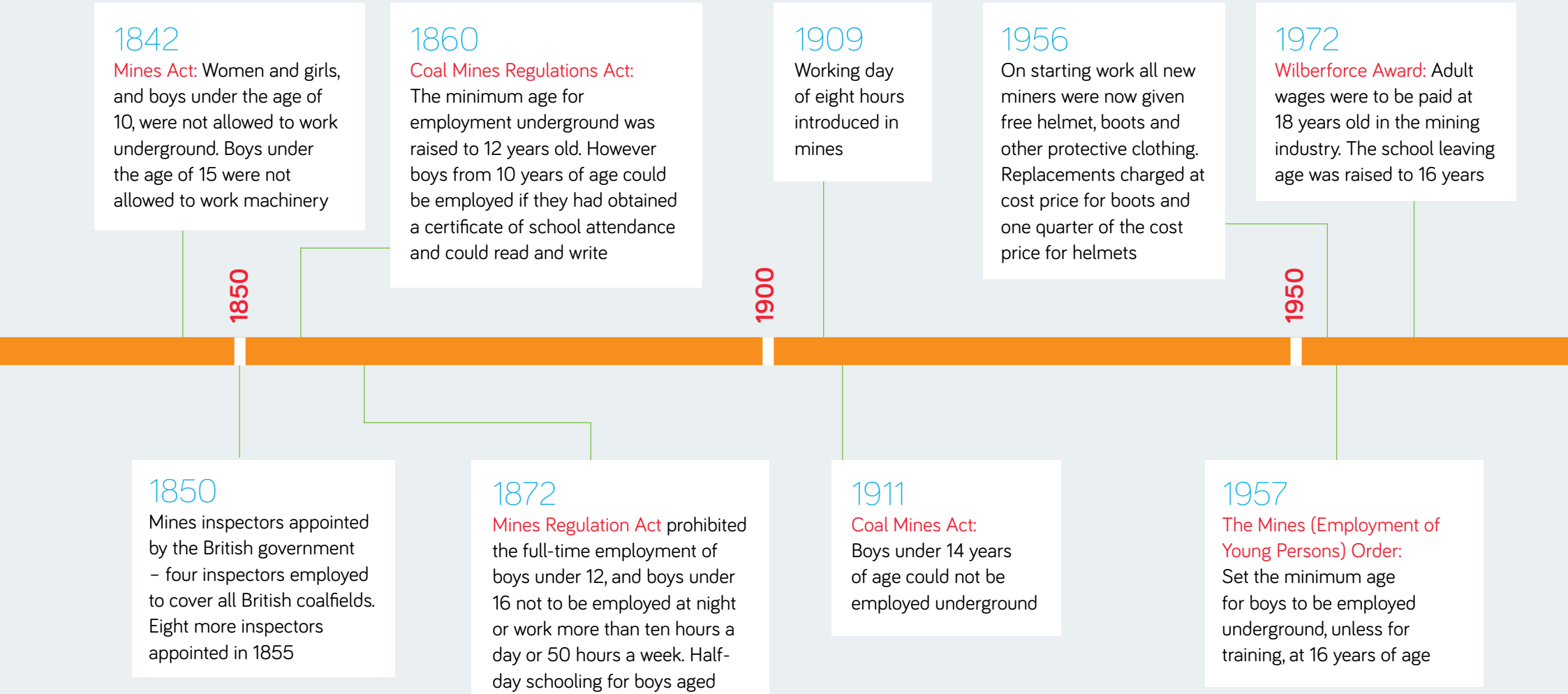
The final Report of the Commissioners, published in May 1842, shocked members of the public. In Parliament, MPs called for new laws to protect children in the mines. Some coal owners fought hard against this. In the House of Lords, the coal owner, Lord Londonderry, argued that some seams were so thin that they could only be worked by children. In addition he said, no one was forced to work underground and it was the parents themselves who wanted their women and children to work; the poor would suffer if the law was changed.

Mines Act 1842

In 1842 a new law, the Mines Act, was passed banning all females and boys under ten from working in the mines. The Act also ordered a system of inspection of the mines to make sure that the Act was obeyed. However, the Act did not restrict working hours and did not apply to children or women working on the surface of collieries. The Act might not have completely eradicated child labour but was a major leap forward in social improvement.



SOURCE 2: Key laws relating to the employment of children and young adults in the mining industry



SOURCE 3: Extracts and images from the Mines Report published in 1842

Getting to work

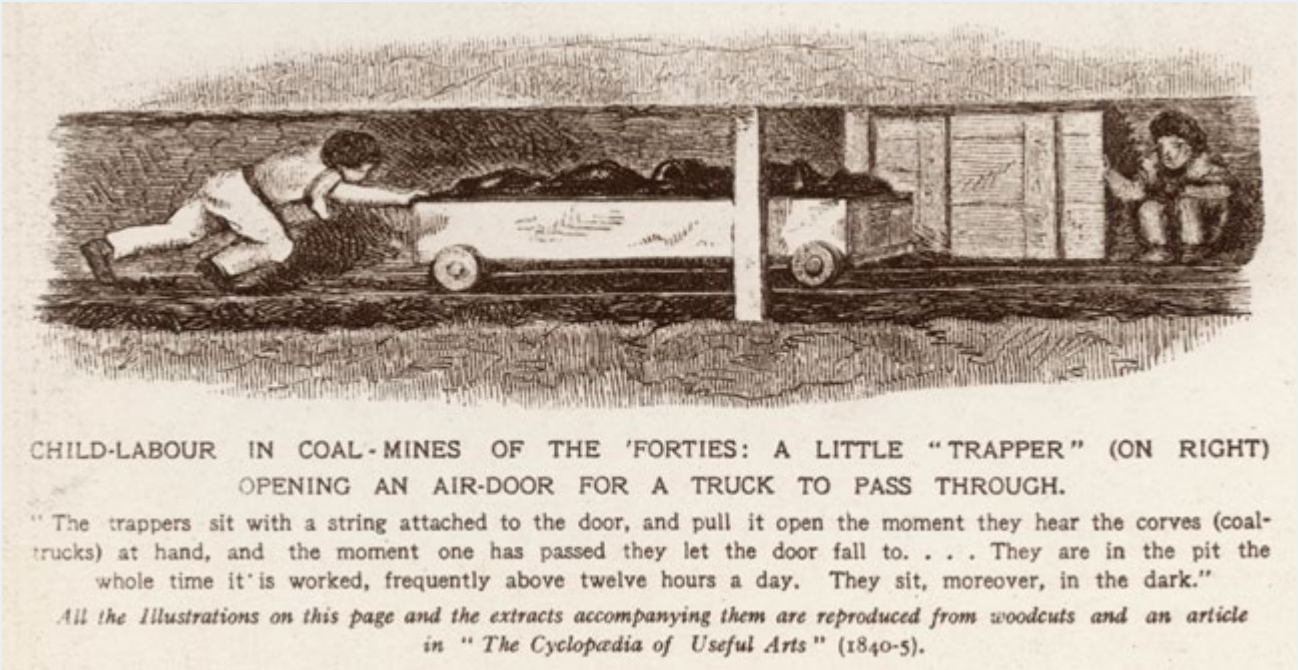
Even the simple matter of getting to work in the mine was sometimes highly dangerous. Many mines were 'drifts' driven into the mountainside and children could walk into them with few concerns about safety. Others were shafts, which were served by winches or steam engines. The mines in the Llanelli area were up to 155 metres deep and had to be descended into by baskets or ladders.

At work

Some children pushed trucks of coal along mine tunnels. They were called 'putters'. 'Trappers' opened and shut wooden doors to let air through the tunnels. A trapper boy sat in the dark, with just a small candle, and no-one to talk to.

This 1842 drawing (left) shows two children being lowered into a mine on the end of a long rope.

HMSO



CHILD-LABOUR IN COAL-MINES OF THE 'FORTIES: A LITTLE "TRAPPER" (ON RIGHT) OPENING AN AIR-DOOR FOR A TRUCK TO PASS THROUGH.

"The trappers sit with a string attached to the door, and pull it open the moment they hear the corves (coal-trucks) at hand, and the moment one has passed they let the door fall to. . . . They are in the pit the whole time it is worked, frequently above twelve hours a day. They sit, moreover, in the dark."

All the Illustrations on this page and the extracts accompanying them are reproduced from woodcuts and an article in "The Cyclopædia of Useful Arts" (1840-5).

HMSO

SOURCE 3 *continued*

Commissioners interviewed children about their employment in the mines. They found that some children started work at 2am and stayed below ground for 18 hours.

My employment is to cart coals from the head to the main road; the distance is 60 yards; there are no wheels to the carts; I push them before me; sometimes I drag them, as the cart sometimes is pulled on us, and we get crushed often.

Edward Edwards, aged 9, Yskyn Colliery, Briton Ferry

A Putter and Trapper

HMSO

We are doorkeepers in the four-foot level. We leave the house before six each morning and are in the level until seven o'clock and sometimes later. We get 2p a day and our light costs us 2½p a week. Rachel was in a day school and she can read a little. She was run over by a dram a while ago and was home ill a long time, but she has got over it.

Elizabeth Williams, aged 10 and Mary and Rachel Enoch, 11 and 12 respectively, Dowlais Pits, Merthyr

In this image from the Mines Report a girl pulls a tub of coal. She is wearing a harness around her waist, to pull the heavy tub. The tunnel roof is supported by wooden 'pit-props'.

HMSO

SOURCE 3 *continued*

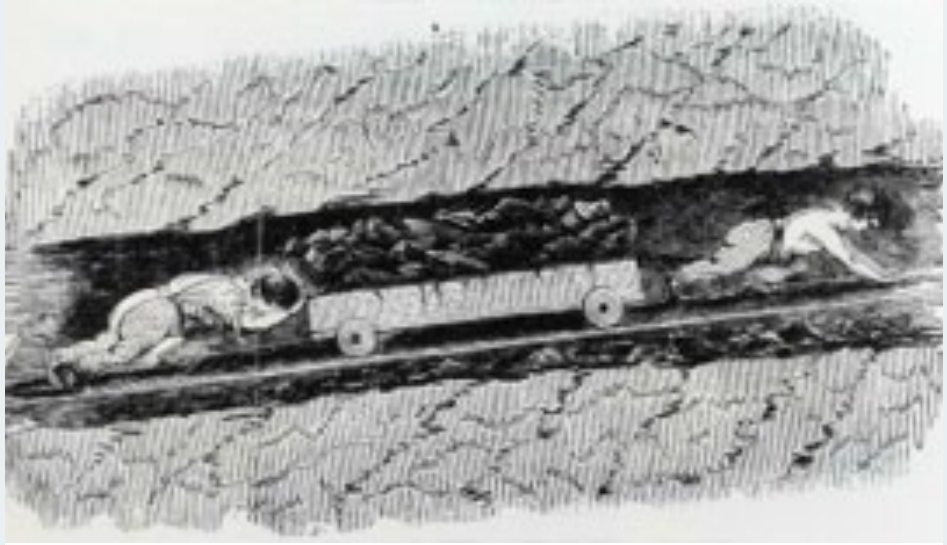
Children and women were employed as hurriers, pulling and pushing tubs full of coal along roadways from the coal face to the pit-bottom. The younger children worked in pairs, one as a hurrier, the other as a thruster, but older children and women worked alone. The tubs and the coal could weigh over 600kg, and would have to be moved through roadways which were often only 60-120cm high.

I have been driving horses since I was seven but for one year before that I looked after an air door. I would like to go to school but I am too tired as I work for twelve hours.

Philip Davies, aged 10 from Dinas Colliery, Rhondda had a horse for company. He was pale and undernourished in appearance. His clothing was worn and ragged. He could not read.

Dangers and accidents

Coal mines were dark, dirty and dangerous. The only light came from candles and oil lamps. Gas in the mine could choke miners, or explode. Tunnels could flood or collapse. Accidents seriously injured and even killed many young miners.



HMSO

HMSO

Henrietta Franklin, aged 11, crushed by horse and tram. Not killed. PLYMOUTH. Philip Phillips, burnt by firedamp. Laid idle for five months. Face sadly disfigured. GRAIG. Mary Price, air-door girl, fell asleep and fell on the rail. Tram ran over her and broke her leg. Ann Jenkin aged 12 fell down pit. Killed.

Mines Report on collieries in the Merthyr area

SOURCE 4: An Interview with William Thomas, a young miner of the 1930s

William Thomas was born and brought up in a small terraced house in Abercynon, south Wales, in 1923. His was a typical family of the Welsh coal-mining community. In 1986 he recalled his life as a young miner in the 1930s.

Nearly a year ago there was an accident and most of us were burned. I was carried home by a man. It hurt very much because the skin was burnt off my face. I couldn't work for six months.
Phillip Phillips, aged 9, Plymouth Mines, Merthyr

Growing up at a time of economic depression

I was still a teenager during the depression years. I cannot honestly say I remember much about the poverty, unemployment, strikes and political unrest of the time. I knew very little of what went on outside Abercynon. My father and brothers worked in a relatively prosperous pit, which meant that although we were not well off, we were never short of food or clothing. Those thought to be well off were the pit manager, the local doctor and the manager of the local co-op shop, one of the few in Abercynon who owned a car.

1. Why do you think William did not really appreciate the problems of the depression?

My first job

When I was twelve years old I was able to help out with the family budget when my father arranged for me to work at the local barber's shop as a lather boy. I worked every evening and all day Saturday for half a crown (about 12p) per week, half of which I gave to my mother.

In those days it was common for men to have their beards shaved at the barber shop, where all the local gossip was discussed at length. One Sunday, Baden Adams, the barber, offered me some overtime, which I eagerly accepted. He took me to a house in Abercynon, presented me with a shaving brush and a mug of hot water and told me to attend to the

customer waiting in another room. When I opened the door I found my customer waiting - an old and quite dead man. I did somehow manage to lather the corpse, but it was the last time I accepted overtime.

2. Do you think helping out with the family budget was the only reason William's father arranged for his 12 year old son to work at the barber's shop? What other possible reasons were there?

Starting work in the pit

I started work at the pit in Abercynon, alongside my father and four brothers, in May 1937, soon after my 14th birthday. It didn't come as a shock. Most young boys in the South Wales mining community followed their fathers and brothers into mine work. I didn't really appreciate how hard and dangerous mine work was until I started in the pit. I remember the drop down the shaft to the pit bottom seemed endless.

We had to walk a long way to the coal face, carrying a large electric lamp which weighed about ten pounds. I also had to take a 'jack' or flask of water and the sandwiches my mother had given me in a 'tommy box'. If you did not use a 'tommy box' the mice would get into your pockets and eat your food. We started work at 6.45 am, and got back up to the surface at about 4 p.m.

The system of mining was called 'stall and heading' which at that time meant that there were no conveyors, pneumatic drills or coal cutters, such as you would see in a modern mine. The work was done with a pick, a shovel and a hatchet. Each man was expected to fill seven or eight drains (coal trucks) every shift. I used to spend about six hours a day dragging a 'curling box' full of coal, which my elder brother would lift and tip into drains. When drains were full they were taken away by a man called the haulier and his pit pony.

3. How do you think William felt about starting work at the pit?

Dangers and accidents

Accidents were and still are a part of life as a miner. I remember seeing serious accidents down the pit but you should not forget that less serious incidents were far more common. Cuts were for instance often dealt with inadequately, partly

because of the time it took to get out of the pit. As a result of the lack of sterilisation or prompt treatment, miner's cuts, more often than not, left blue scars caused by coal dust. I still have many of these, even after fifty years. The local doctor dealt with these less serious incidents and even set broken bones, at the home of the miner concerned.

Sounds played a very important part in the life of a working miner. One of the first things I had to learn was never to ignore a slight creak or rumble. This could be an important warning of a roof collapse or a pit prop breaking under pressure. When I was fifteen I was present when a man was killed when the roof caved in. There was little anyone could do when this happened.

Serious accidents could easily occur if any miner was foolish enough to take a cigarette underground. Gas explosions were dreaded by miners. I remember being about 1,000 metres from an explosion which killed three men and blew me off my feet. Survivors crawled along the dram rails in order to find their way out, as all lights failed. You know what it is like to be in real darkness when you're a miner.

One very hazardous task was the extending of rails on which the drains ran. These were very heavy and I once saw a friend from Caerphilly lose five toes when one of these rails fell on his foot. In those days there were no steel capped boots or steel helmets. All miners, even today, have to be very careful underground.

4. What effect do you think accidents like these had on the attitude of miners like William to working in the pit?

Family life

Now, as I think back, I realise what a hard life my mother had. She died in her fifties, worked to death really. She was up every morning before five o'clock and did not get to bed before midnight. She had to cook for five miners and do all their washing, without any of the modern aids, such as vacuum cleaners or automatic washing machines. As I remember her main tools were a scrubbing board, brushes and a flat iron. My father spent his whole life as a miner and died of a lung disease caused by the inhalation of coal dust for so many years.

SOURCE 4 *continued*

5. How do you think William's mother felt about her life and that of her husband and sons working at the colliery?

Life on the surface

Growing up in a mining community meant accepting life as it was and I wouldn't say I was in any way unhappy. Going to work in the pit was hard and dangerous of course, for which incidentally I was only paid the equivalent of about 50p per week. But we knew little of what went on beyond Abercynon, except for what was in the newspapers, radio and cinema newsreels. Few people even had a telephone. Besides, life wasn't all work. We were lucky enough to be able to afford a holiday in a tent at Porthcawl once a year. As a special treat there was a visit to Pontypridd market on a Saturday afternoon. If we were lucky, we occasionally went to the local cinema, the 'Palace'.

6. What do you think William meant when he said if you were brought up in a mining community you just accepted life as it was?

SOURCE 5: Big Pit National Coal Museum and website

You will be able to learn a lot more from a visit to Big Pit National Coal Museum.

The Big Pit Mining Galleries simulate underground workings and a multi-media presentation tells the story of how the Welsh mining industry evolved.

Visiting Big Pit will not only help you to research the issue of child poverty and child labour but also to see how the Museum presents the story. This will help you with ideas for your raising awareness activity later on.

The Underground Tour lowers you 90 metres down the Big Pit mineshaft for a journey around a section of original underground workings.

Visitors wear the same equipment – helmet, cap lamp, belt, battery and 'self rescuer' – used by miners. Once underground, you will be guided around the coal faces, engine houses and stables in the company of a former coal miner.

Your guide will explain the different ways in which coal was mined and transported, and share some of his own experiences.

SOURCE 5 *continued*

The Big Pit National Coal Museum website (web address below) is also a great place to find historical sources and information about children working in the mines. You can find more evidence from the 1842 Mines Report in the 'Children of the Revolution' section along with a range of other useful audio-visual resources and activities.

Big Pit website address:
www.museumwales.ac.uk/bigpit/

The Coalmining History Resource Centre

Finally if you would like a great deal more information about young miners in the 19th century, why not study the Mines Report itself. You can find the sources printed here, along with all the reports for South Wales on the Coalmining History Resource Centre website.

The Royal Commission website address:
www.cmhrc.co.uk/site/literature/royalcommissionreports/

Children working in coal mining in India today

We have studied the evidence of children working in coal mining in the south Wales valleys in the 19th century. Study the sources below about children working in the coal mining industry in the state of Meghalaya, India today.

Coalmining in India

GREENPEACE UK

SOURCE 6: Extracts from a report in the *New York Times*, February 2013

KHLIEHRIAT, India — After descending 70 feet on a wobbly bamboo staircase into a dank pit, the teenage miners ducked into a black hole about two feet high and crawled 100 yards through mud before starting their day digging coal.

They wore T-shirts, pajama-like pants and short rubber boots — not a hard hat or steel-toed boot in sight. They tied rags on their heads to hold small flashlights and stuffed their ears with cloth. And they spent the whole day staring death in the face.

Just two months before full implementation of a landmark 2010 law mandating that all Indian children between the ages of 6 and 14 be in school, some 28 million are working instead, according to Unicef (United Nations Children's Emergency Fund). Child workers can be found everywhere — in shops, in kitchens, on farms, in factories and on construction sites. In the coming days Parliament may consider yet another law to ban child labor, but even activists say more laws, while welcome, may do little to solve one of India's most intractable problems.

"We have very good laws in this country," said Vandhana Kandhari, a child protection specialist at Unicef. "It's our implementation that's the problem."

Meghalaya State is in the isolated eastern part of India. Its people are largely tribal and Christian, and they have languages, food and facial features that seem as much Chinese as Indian.

Poverty, corruption, decrepit schools and absentee teachers are among the causes, and there is no better illustration of the problem than the Dickensian "rathole" mines in the state of Meghalaya. Most of the under-age workers have been illegally trafficked into the region from Nepal and Bangladesh by agents working for mine owners.

Suresh Thapa, 17, said that he has worked in the mines near his family's shack "since he was a kid," and that he expects his four younger brothers to follow suit. He and his family live in a tiny tarp-and-stick shack near the mines. They have no running water, toilet or indoor heating. His mother, Mina Thapa said "If they don't do this work, what other jobs are they going to get?"

SOURCE 6 *continued*

India's Mines Act of 1952 prohibits anyone under the age of 18 from working in coal mines, but Ms. Thapa said enforcing that law would hurt her family. "It's necessary for us that they work. No one is going to give us money. We have to work and feed ourselves."

The presence of children in Meghalaya's mines is no secret. Suresh's boss, Kumar Subba, said children work in mines throughout the region. "Mostly the ones who come are orphans," said Mr. Subba, who supervises five mines and employs 130 people who collectively produce 30 tons of coal each day.

He conceded that working conditions inside his and other mines in the region were dangerous. His mines are owned by a state lawmaker, he said.

"People die all the time," he said. "You have breakfast in the morning, go to work and never come back. Many have died this way."

While the Indian government has laws banning child labor and unsafe working conditions, states are mostly charged with enforcing those laws. The country's police are highly politicized, so crackdowns on industries sanctioned by the politically powerful are rare. Police officers routinely extract bribes from coal truckers, making the industry a source of income for officers.

"Child labor is allowed to continue in Meghalaya by those in positions of power and authority, as it is across India," said Shantha Sinha, chairwoman of the 'National Commission for Protection of Child Rights.'

In 2010, 'Impulse', a nongovernmental organization based in Shillong, Meghalaya's capital, reported that it had found 200 children — some as young as 5 — working in 10 local mines. The group estimated that as many as 70,000 children worked in about 5,000 mines.

Several mines visited in Meghalaya had no ventilation and only one entrance; they followed no mining plan, did not use limestone to reduce explosion risks and had minimal roof supports, among other illegal and dangerous conditions. Their bamboo staircases were structurally unsound and required miners to walk sideways to avoid falling. Miners said those conditions were endemic.

SOURCE 7: Images and extracts from a report *Life in India's Coalmines* by Robb Kendrick, *National Geographic* online, March 2014

Endurance. That one word best describes the people I met in India. Whether an illegal miner working a rat hole 400 feet down, a child laborer loading 50-pound coal baskets into trucks, coal sorters in a coal depot, or women in the villages within a coal mine acting as the glue that keeps family and community together, they all showed tremendous endurance, graciousness, and kindness. No one was bitter, no one complained, no one asked anything of me.

Life is cut to such a basic level that properly cremating their dead was a burden, though this ceremony is a vital part of proceeding to the afterlife. One group of miners, living in a coal mine that has experienced underground fires for nearly a century, simply wrap the deceased in cloth and stuff the body down one of the many crevasses where the body will burn.

SOURCE 8: Report on mining in Meghalaya, India, *TwoCircles.net* (2010)

Zakir Hussain, a boy from Karimganj district of Assam who has been working in the coal mines of Jaintia for the past two years.

"Life is very hard here. In fact life has no value at all. Extracting coal is a tough job and in addition I face harassment from local boys and also 'sardar' (leader of group of labourers). Food is very expensive. Simple rice sometimes cost more than 30 rupees per kilo. Vegetables are also very expensive. On an average, a labourer earns about Rs 400 a day. Those who extract coal from the 'rat hole' get about Rs 1500 a day but they risk life. Inside the mine, life is very tough. It's humid and very hot. One cannot work for more than four hours at a stretch inside the mine and it causes suffocation. Children can work 2 and half hours. After that they have to come out for fresh oxygen. Children are usually trained informally by seniors or relatives for 10-15 days before they start extracting coal by themselves. There is no emergency health facility available nearby.... Many get killed inside the mines. Sardar sends back the dead body home. Sometimes their dead bodies are not even traced!"

On November 20, 2009 the Hong Kong-based Asian Human Rights Commission investigation revealed that deaths are common in the mines and the dead bodies buried in undisclosed graves near the mines, often under piles of earth. The children are instructed under threat not to disclose their foreign identity to anyone they meet. They have no freedom to move out of the premises of the mine where they work.

Working hours are long, often from day break to nightfall without rest. They have no means to communicate to the outside world, much less to their families. The only tools the children have to extract coal or limestone are shovels or pick-axes."

In a visit to a coal mine, this reporter could see that children worked for 8-10 hours a day in an unsafe and unhygienic work environment. Some children below the age of 16 years disclosed that they worked to extract coal through a narrow opening of the coal mine and life was very insecure inside. Death may come due to falling of rock inside the quarries or water logging. The children also informed that there was only one small hospital in the whole coal mine area spread over

SOURCE 8 *continued*

15 kms at Sutnga in the Jaintia hills. The only health centre they have was in Jowai which was quite far away. Even first aid facilities were not available. It was noticed that one or two medicine shops were available though not easily accessible by the children.

SOURCE 9: *Los Angeles Times* report on children in coalmining in Ladrymbai, Meghalaya state, India (2011)

In northeast India coal towns, many miners are children. Perhaps thousands of underage workers as young as 8, lured by the wages, leave school to work in coal mines under perilous conditions. The country officially upholds mining safety standards and forbids child labor, but loopholes in state laws allow widespread abuses.

The young miners descend on rickety ladders made of branches into the makeshift coal mines dotting the Jaintia Hills in northeast India, scrambling sideways into "rat hole" shafts so small that even kneeling becomes impossible. Lying horizontally, they hack away with picks and their bare hands: Human labor here is far cheaper than machines. Many wear flip-flops and shorts, their faces and lungs blackened by coal. None have helmets. Two hours of grinding work fills a cart half the size of a coffin that they drag back, crouching, to the mouth where a clerk credits their work. Most earn a dollar or two an hour.

"A big stone fell on a friend at a nearby mine last year, and he died," said Sharan Rai, 16, taking a break near the entrance with his friend Late Boro, 14. Both started mining when they were 12.

"The owners didn't pay the family anything. I try and check if the walls look strong before I go in."

Sharan may be leaving this hazardous work behind. He quit fourth grade years back, and an area civic group has persuaded him to return. Late, from Assam state, who's never attended school and is illiterate, is more typical.

"Let Sharan go off, play the big man," he said, fighting back tears. "I'll cut coal. That's my life."

Thousands of children, some as young as 8, are believed to toil alongside adults in the northeast mines; their small bodies are well suited to the narrow coal seams. Many migrated legally from from Nepal or illegally from neighboring Bangladesh, lured by the wages.

Deaths are undocumented but far from rare; medical care is almost non existent. Many of the older children spend their pay on alcohol, gambling and prostitutes. Some drift away; others keep working for decades.

SOURCE 9 *continued*

India has a national mining law, plus a right-to-education bill, and it has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, minus a few key clauses on the speed of implementation. But tribal land rights in Meghalaya state trump some national laws, and other laws are largely ignored, creating loopholes big enough to drive a coal truck through, activists say....

Officially, India had 81 accidental coal-mine deaths in 2009. But deaths in Meghalaya aren't recorded or investigated, with most hushed up to avoid mines being shuttered.

The number of children working in the state's 5,000 coal mines is a matter of dispute, with Impulse estimating tens of thousands and local politicians putting it in the hundreds. Few dispute, however, that the vast majority of India's underage coal miners work in Meghalaya. Almost everyone knows someone who's died in the "death pits." Three died recently after a shaft collapsed, four when a hopper fell.

"Responsible" mine owners pay $200-$500 for funerals, others nothing."If you die, it's your fate," said Shyam Rai, 22, who is not related to Sharan and who's worked since he was 17. "I heard coal mines had diamonds, but I sure haven't found any."

The nearest medical dispensary, selling little more than aspirin, acne soap and herbal remedies, is a few miles away in Latyrke. "We don't have much medicine," said Pintu Roy, a clerk at the dispensary. "If it's serious, drive to Shillong," three hours away. The miners are as careful as their limited resources and skills allow. Sharan checks the mine shaft for the risk of collapse by tapping the walls.

"If it goes 'dung-dung,' it's bad; 'tak-tak,' it's OK," he said. "Sure, you breathe in coal dust, but it doesn't hurt you."

Jaintia Hills is India's Wild West. Merchants in shacks sell boots, potato chips, booze and little else. Coal trucks, hand painted with images of various gods, belch black smoke up the steep roads. "Life is Not Forever," reads a sign on one. Adult miners can earn $150 a week, a good wage. But many squander the money.

SOURCE 10: Responses of the Meghalaya State Mining Minister Bindo Lanong to the reports of child labour, reported in the *New York Times* article above

Mr Lanong said 'reports of child labor are exaggerated, that most children are just helping their parents, and that a planned state law should curb excesses. Mine owner Phillip Pala, whose brother serves in India's parliament, said accidents happen only occasionally. "There's a risk in everything," he said

Bindo M. Lanong, Meghalaya's deputy chief minister for mining and geology, flatly denied the investigations' findings. "There is no child labor in Meghalaya," he said in a telephone interview this month. "These allegations are totally absurd. They are not based on facts." Mr. Lanong also said that mines in Meghalaya follow national safety regulations.

Mr. Lanong responded: "What should we do, stop mining? I ask those people if rathole mining is banned, you will be interfering with the liberty of the landowners."