CHILDREN OF THE REVOLUTION

~ Discover Blaenavon & its People in the Heart of the 19th Century

TEACHERS' NOTES

This resource aims to develop children's learning skills by investigating life in the South Wales industrial town of Blaenavon at a key point in the 19th century.

Through a range of multi-media experiences, children will interrogate a wide variety of sources of historical evidence, enhance their powers of deduction and critical reasoning and develop their confidence in their ICT and literacy skills. Moreover, they will open a window on the fascinating and shocking story of Blaenavon; once at the forefront of the Industrial Revolution in Britain and one of the world's leading producers of iron and coal, Blaenavon is now a World Heritage Site and vital to our understanding of how industrialisation affected the lives of ordinary working people.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE LEARNING RESOURCE

The Scenario

Children are given an initial scenario which provides the context for their investigation and final report. In this resource, they are asked to be inspectors for a Royal Commission sent by Queen Victoria to discover the truth about working and living conditions in her industrial towns, taking a special interest in the plight of children. This mirrors a genuine historical event, as in 1842 inspectors actually did compile a national report on *The Employment of Children and Young Persons in Mines*; this provided the basis of the Mines Act (1842) which limited the working of young boys, girls and women in coal mines throughout the kingdom.

Tasks and Activities

Children carry out a series of activities, grouped under four main task headings, and gradually accumulate knowledge about life for people in Blaenavon by examining evidence from a variety of sources. Throughout the activities, children are encouraged to make use of their thinking skills both to draw conclusions about what life must have been like for working people and to suggest reasons for the circumstances and processes they are observing.

The four task areas are: Work; Homes and Health; Education; Growth of the Community. Information is presented through a variety of media, such as: video; virtual reality; still pictures; modelling exercises; graphs; interactive maps and text. Each task area features a number of individual activities and outcomes which provide children both with a chance to demonstrate the knowledge and understanding they have gained of this topic, and a vehicle

through which to put their key skills into practice. Many activities are printable, so children can work on screen and/or on paper.

The Final Outcome

At the end of the investigation, children are asked to compile a summary report and suggestions for what they think could or should be done in response to the situation they have uncovered. This 'report' could take any form: a class display; a written document (with illustrations?); a Powerpoint presentation; a piece of drama; poetry; a piece/collection of artwork; a combination of these; etc. etc. etc. Whatever the medium used, the content should be informed by the evidence that children have discovered and by appropriate responses to it. For this activity, we have offered no guidance on structure, content, etc. as, really, the possibilities are endless.

Children's Self Evaluation

An important feature of *Children of the Revolution* is the optional facility for children to make critical assessments of their own performance. Before each activity, they are invited to choose their own target for how well they want to perform the task; do they want to be working at Trainee Inspector, Assistant Inspector or Senior Inspector level? What they will need to accomplish to attain each of these levels is clearly laid out. After the activity, they can assess how well they *actually* performed and what status they achieved.

Resource Bank

A selection of additional and relevant source materials has been included to enhance extension activities, personal research and to provide alternative media for accessing information. Suggestions for useful educational textbooks and Internet sites are also provided to assist further research.

Support for Teachers/Parents

In addition to these notes, sample 'answer sheets' have been provided for most of the activities, together with writing frames and/or models of good responses to the suggested task. These will be found in the Teachers' Notes section.

<u>Background Information – Iron Town: Blaenavon and its part in the Industrial Revolution video</u>

Before commencing the investigation, it would be a good idea for children to watch the *Iron Town* video, which discusses what the Industrial Revolution actually was and what part Blaenavon played in the building of the British Empire. It was filmed in and around Blaenavon and its surrounding mountains, and features most of the key historic elements of the World Heritage Site. It lasts for about 27 minutes.

MAKING USE OF CHILDREN OF THE REVOLUTION

This learning resource has been designed with flexibility in mind, in the hope that teachers will feel liberated rather than straitjacketed by it. The resource could be used, for example, as a means of challenging more able children to learn independently, as a framework for group work, or as a basis for whole class teaching and learning, perhaps using computer suites and/or interactive whiteboards. It could form the vehicle for a whole term's work, or a short, intensive investigation. Teachers can use it in its entirety or merely pick and choose specific topics, or activities resources. In many cases, children can work on screen or on paper.

Children of the Revolution can provide a wide range of stimuli for children and adults alike, but learning only truly takes place when students are challenged to *think* about the meaning or implications of the information they are absorbing. Teachers, therefore, still need to initiate debate and discussion amongst students, to develop ideas and skills, draw conclusions and promote understanding as well as knowledge.

TASK 1 - WORK

1) Census Exercise

The extracts included here are taken from the census returns for Blaenavon in 1841. A copy of an original record has been included for reference in the Resource Bank, but the information for use in the activity has been transferred onto a spreadsheet for the sake of clarity. We have also merely provided sample addresses from the census and not included entire streets or clusters of houses (which would have been repetitive and dull). The record for each individual household shown, however, is full and complete.

Background

In an effort to raise money for the wars with Revolutionary France, Income Tax was introduced in 1798. It quickly became apparent, however, that the government had no real idea of what the actual population of the country was, or how it was comprised geographically or socially. The official census was therefore introduced in 1801 and has been carried out every ten years ever since (with the exception of 1941).

What the Census Can Tell Us

The census is a vital resource for historians of the 19th century, as it sheds light on several important aspects of life and society: occupations (including child labour); household size and composition; language; migration. The records were compiled by an Enumerator; a literate member of the local community who travelled door to door and collected information about who was resident at each address *on that particular night*. Unfortunately, as you can see from our sample collection, the records were not always fully completed. Blanks were sometimes left, for instance, in relation to the

occupations of women and children, giving the sometimes false impression that they were not employed. In the entry for the McCarthy household in Stack Square for, example, (see Task 2, activity 1) the two young boys are not recorded as being at work. Their testimony to the Mines Commissioners in 1842, however, (see Resource Bank) shows clearly that both lads worked with their father in the ironworks.

The census, therefore, provides a certain amount of information about work and occupations in Blaenavon in 1841, but to paint a fuller picture we need to complement it with other sources.

The Activity

The activity sheet is provided as a means of helping children to familiarise themselves with the layout of the census record, navigate their way around it and to glean key factual information. Deeper discussion about what this information tells us about life in the past, needs to be prompted by the teacher.

2) Servants of the Empire video and Job Description Exercise

Evidence

The video was filmed underground at the National Mining Museum, Big Pit, Blaenavon. The script for the various characters portrayed in the film has been based on the 1842 Royal Commission report on *The Employment of Children and Young Persons in Mines*, which provided the basis for the Mines Act of the same year. In spite of its title, the report also recorded information about adult males and those working above ground but in related industries (e.g. iron making).

The words spoken by the actors have, in places, been slightly amended from the text given in the report, in order both to cut out unnecessary duplication and to make the extracts easier for children to speak. The original text extracts for each character have been included in the Resource Bank, together with some additional quotations. Teachers may notice from these that they are a mixture of reported and direct speech. For the purposes of the video, all the text has been treated as direct speech. Furthermore, it is clear that the testimony was given in response to questions from the Inspectors which were not included in the report. For the video script, we have written and added our own questions.

In addition to the children themselves, the two main characters in the video are Mr. Franks (voice only; the camera lens represents his eyes) and Mr. John Samuel, his underground guide. R. H. Franks was the real Royal Commission Inspector who collected evidence from South Wales and actually visited the Blaenavon district in 1842. 31 year-old John Samuel was the Mine Agent for Blaenavon and provided testimony for Franks' report, but there is no actual evidence that he did, in fact, serve as Franks' underground guide. Someone such as him, however, most probably did so.

The Mines Report was innovative in that it was one of the first to include illustrations. As intended, these had a profound effect upon the Members of Parliament whose opinion the report sought to influence, but their inclusion incensed some of the mine and colliery owners (*). Copies of some of these illustrations are included in the Resource Bank, together with an extract from the response of one deeply aggrieved South Wales industrialist.

(*) A colliery produces coal, a mine produces iron stone (or iron ore, as it is sometimes known). *Collier*, therefore, refers to a worker who digs for coal, *miner*, to one who digs for iron stone.

The Activity

In the job description exercise, the idea is for children to use factual information and their imagination to compile notes on the main features of up to 3 jobs of their choice, plus suggestions for the physical and mental attributes that the workers might need to survive the rigours of the job. This should test both the knowledge they have gleaned from the video and/or the Resource Bank extracts and their understanding of what this tells us about the lives of people in the past (particularly children), whilst also helping to develop their communication skills. As mentioned above, it is really up to the class teacher to then initiate a deeper discussion about the harshness of working conditions and how these might have affected children's health, personal development and life opportunities.

Children can watch the full *Servants of the Empire* video and/or refer to individual clips relating to particular jobs.

TASK 2 - HOMES AND HEALTH

1) Virtual Tour of Ironworker's Cottage

Background

A number of early industrial houses immediately adjacent to Blaenavon ironworks have been preserved by Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments. Known as Stack Square, they were first erected when the ironworks were established in the late 18th century to provide accommodation for some of the essential and most highly skilled workers. Although small and cramped by modern standards, they probably represent some of the best quality workers' housing built in the town during the period of industrial boom.

For this exercise, one room of one cottage was refurnished for a day and photographed in panorama, to provide a 'virtual tour' of an ironworker's home in about the middle of the 19th century. Time constraints prevented us from filming more of the house, but just about all the essential elements of home life are represented in this simple tour. The 1841 census record for this particular house has been included in the Homes and Health section of the Resource Bank.

The Virtual Tour Itself

As children travel around the room using their mouse, they will come across a number of 'hotspots', represented by an arrow; each of these, when clicked, will take the child into a closer exploration of that particular part of the room. This may take the form of a short video clip, a zoom-in on a part of the room (e.g. the kitchen range) and/or a close-up of an individual object which can then be revolved for closer inspection. NB Children with keen eyes and sharp brains may spot the 'deliberate' mistake in one of the video clips: the lady doing the ironing holds the flat iron without wrapping a cloth around the handle to protect her hand from the heat. Within each hotspot, children can also access a text file which will provide them with some key information about aspects of life in a house such as this.

Key Points

The main teaching points are:

- * no gas, electricity, running water, drainage or sewerage in this house. Water would have been collected from outside the house, from a stream, well, pump or perhaps a rain-filled water butt (see bucket hotspot).
- * One room was used for virtually all domestic functions, such as: working; cooking; eating; relaxing, washing (bodies and clothes) and even sleeping.
- * Lighting was provided by natural light through the small window and/or the door (not in bad weather). This was supplemented by burning rushes (cheap but fairly ineffective) or candles (more light, but expensive). See candle holder hotspot. The window does not open. Poor ventilation in houses was a universal problem, leading to constant problems with dampness. As a result, illness and diseases connected with the respiratory system were commonplace and often fatal.
- * Heating was provided by the fire in the kitchen range (fuelled by logs or coal) which was also the means by which all food was cooked (see kitchen range hotspot). In the left hand corner of the fireplace was a small oven for baking wheat bread, although in Wales in the 19th century oatbread was probably more common. This was baked over the fire on a bakestone (just like Welsh cakes) and an example can be seen in the main picture, just behind the bed. Vegetable soup or stew was eaten virtually every day in most Welsh households, and could be found simmering away in a hanging pot or cauldron over the range. The oven on the right hand side could be used to roast meat, although this would have been an infrequent luxury for many families in industrial Blaenavon. Notice also, the kettle on the centre of the grate; the range was the only source of hot water for the family, for cooking, drinking or washing.

- * Many industrial workers' houses suffered from severe overcrowding, as parents usually raised as many children as they could. This was partly to increase the family's earning power (see Resource Bank) and partly because the child mortality rate was extremely high (see Activity 2 below). Households were often further enlarged by the taking in of lodgers, again to add income to the family budget. Sleeping arrangements were generally pretty basic, with several (unwashed) people often sharing the same bed (see bed hotspot).
- * Some of the most important foods of an industrial worker's household can be seen on the table. In addition to the food mentioned above (i.e. wheat bread, oat bread and stew) staple foods included: butter; lard; cheese; potatoes; vegetables; porridge; with tea and beer as the principal drinks. Food storage was primitive: meat could be salted or smoked, some foods could be pickled or made into preserves (see storage jar hotspot).
- * The sparcity of furniture, decoration and 'creature comforts'. Rest and relaxation after an indescribably hard day's labour must have been extremely difficult to obtain.
- * The labour intensity of the housework (see broom hotspot). With no electricity, all household chores, such as cleaning, washing and cooking, relied upon human muscle power and effort. N.B. Several female children mentioned in their testimony to the Royal Commission Inspectors that they had to help their mothers with the housework after returning from their day's paid labour (see *Servants of the Empire* video and Resource Bank).

The Activity

The activity sheet should, again, help children to extract and record key factual information from the tour. Most of the 'answers' or relevant ideas are contained within the hotspot and text files, and extracting this information will test children's observation and note-taking skills.

2) Making Ends Meet Shopping Activity

Aims

The aims of this activity are two-fold:

- to see how successfully children can manage a limited family budget and achieve the desired objective of ensuring that their family is well fed, warm and clean. Can they make sensible choices of how to spend their money in order to provide a balanced diet and a comfortable home environment (within the constraints of their budget)?
- To help children to realise that, depending upon their skill, status and earning power, achieving this objective would have been considerably easier for some families and virtually impossible for others.

Children should be encouraged to consider the likely health implications for the poorer families of the fact that their weekly budget simply does not allow for a properly balanced diet and sufficient nutrition to compensate for the family's daily exertions in the workplace. The *Babies, Boils and Burials* activity in the Homes and Health task should help them to explore this idea further.

An activity sheet has been provided to help to draw some ideas and conclusions together.

Evidence

i) Occupations and Wages

For this exercise, we have assumed a fixed family size of six people (the sample census records provided in Activity 1 actually suggest a figure of seven). The three families are entirely hypothetical, but the occupations and wages quoted are taken directly from the 1842 Royal Commission report referred to earlier, and are therefore authentic for each family member.

NB Both wages and prices are expressed in old pennies (d.) rather than pounds, shillings and pence $(\pounds, s. d.)$ simply because, in a modelling exercise such as this, everything must be expressed in a single unit of currency, to make calculations and comparisons feasible.

ii) Prices and Quantities

The actual prices and units of quantity for each commodity are something of a mixed bag, as we have been forced to draw evidence from a wide variety of sources and dates. Some prices/quantities are almost absolutely exact for Blaenavon in 1842. Records show, for example, that in 1840 the Blaenavon Truck Shop (*) was charging 24d. for 4lbs of mutton, 22d. for 4lbs of beef and 18d. for a 2lb bag of sugar. Others are accurate for the date, but not necessarily the location; the Illustrated London News, for example, quotes 10d. as the price of a 4lb loaf of wheat bread on October 1st 1843.

In some cases, however, we have discovered the price for a given quantity of a particular commodity, but at a slightly different date; in other cases, we know the proportion of weekly income that would have been spent on average on a particular commodity (e.g. potatoes), but not the actual units of quantity. Some guesswork has therefore been required.

(*) A Truck Shop was owned and run by the company which employed and paid the workers. Prices were always significantly higher than in private shops, but workers were often paid not in money, but in company tokens which could only be used in the Truck Shop. They were thus tied to the company's prices. The Truck System provoked bitter resentment and was eventually outlawed later in the century.

The Activity

Notwithstanding these complications, however, the validity of the exercise stands. Included in the price list are all the main commodities upon which a working class family would have relied, together with a number of less essential or luxury items which could have been available (and attractive) to it. Children need to make choices as to which of these are most important and how much of their income they will spend on each. By far the most important staple was bread. To make the exercise more realistic, and more difficult, we have therefore taken a fixed amount out of each family budget and set it aside for bread and for rent (the other aspect of the budget over which the family had little or no control). The actual amount consumed by bread has been calculated on the basis of one loaf per man per day and half a loaf a day each for women and children.

It is likely that children will find that, despite the fact that four of them are working, the labourer's family simply cannot buy everything it needs on a weekly basis, let alone put anything away for savings, clothing or furniture. Money for leisure time or recreation barely comes into the equation. The collier's family fares a little better, but can hardly be said to be comfortable. The puddler's family appears to be actually doing quite well at this time. Certainly, puddlers were among the industrial elite, but their wages were subject to huge annual fluctuations and could have plummeted or increased (perhaps considerably) by the same time the next year. Saving was therefore a wise precaution.

N.B. What we simply cannot calculate is the extent to which the family diet would have been supplemented by home grown produce, such as vegetables and perhaps the keeping of a pig. Children could perhaps be asked to think of ways in which the family could acquire food other than with money?

3) Babies, Boils and Burials Activity

Aims

Through the first activity in this task area, children will have identified the main characteristics of housing conditions and discussed their potential implications for health and family life; in the second, they will have seen how rates of pay curtailed the ability of many families to provide a balanced, nutritional diet and a healthy home environment. In this activity, children will examine and analyse evidence for the cumulative effects of these circumstances on life expectancy and identify some of the most common and serious types of sickness that afflicted working people in this period.

Evidence

'Burial evidence is taken from the register of deaths for Llanover(*) parish for the year 1841. Evidence for common illnesses are taken from the log books for St. Peter's School, Blaenavon. These records are from the latter part of the 19th century, however, as the records for our chosen period have been lost. This unfortunate, but an important part of the process of learning how to

think like a historian is recognising that sometimes key pieces of the jigsaw are missing. In some cases, we can more or less fill the gaps by using evidence which is of a very similar nature; on this occasion, from the same place, the same source, but slightly later in date. It's not perfect, but it gets us pretty close to where we want to be.

The Activity

Babies, Boils and Burials divides into three parts. In the first, children record data relating to the ages at which local people died in 1841. As they log the information on the tally chart, a bar graph automatically forms which illustrates graphically the high incidence of child mortality. In the questions window, the characteristics of this pattern are reinforced and children are asked to use the knowledge they have already acquired to explain some reasons for them. Having learned that large numbers of children were dying at this time, children then discover, through the school log book section, some of the illnesses that were responsible for this appalling death rate.

(*) The ecclesiastical parish of Blaenavon was not created until 1860. It was formed out of parts of a number of other parishes, Llanover being one of them.

TASK 3 - EDUCATION

Background

St. Peter's School, Blaenavon, was opened in 1816 and was the first school in Wales to be established by an industrialist for the benefit of his workers. The original building still stands and is currently (2003) under renovation, with a view to it becoming an Interpretation Centre for Blaenavon.

Until the latter part of the 19th century, however, attendance at school was very patchy. Few industrial working families could afford the luxury of allowing their children to go to school on a regular basis, as these children were essential in helping to bring in a decent income to the household (see *Servants of the Empire* video).

The Activity

In the first video, *School Rules, Ok*?, children from Clytha Primary School take turns to recite the original 1816 St. Peter's School rules. After each of the twelve rules is spoken, a modern version is offered, to make it a little easier for learners to get the gist of what the rule is about.

The second video, *School Days, Victorian Ways*, features extracts from St. Peter's School log books from the latter part of the 19th century, which help to shed light on aspects of curriculum, teaching methods and discipline in school. Unfortunately, the log books for the earlier part of the 19th century have been lost, but it is likely that teaching style and content altered little throughout the Victorian period.

As with *Servants of the Empire*, these videos can be watched in their entirety and/or in individual sections.

The activity which follows the watching of the two videos is to prepare log book entries for a 'typical' school day in 1841 and the present. Children are then asked to identify differences between the two and provide explanations for why they are so different.

There are numerous references in the booklists to where children can further research school in Victorian times. In the context of this investigation, the main teaching points are that many children received little or no education at all, and those that did faced a dull, strictly regimented curriculum and severe discipline. Tough as school was, however, it had to be better than labouring underground or at the furnaces.

TASK 4 – GROWTH OF THE COMMUNITY

There are three elements to this section.

Interactive Mapping exercise

This is a 'drag and drop' exercise to create a map of Blaenavon to show its main buildings and features by the year 1842. Features can be added to the map in three time zones: before 1800; by 1825; by 1842. If features are dragged onto the map in the wrong time zone, they will be rejected and bounced back. A list of key dates in Blaenavon's development is included to enable children to build the map in the right order. The features themselves have characteristic shapes and will only fit into one place on the map. This is because the object of the exercise is to establish a sense of the *chronological* development of the town, and we did not want children to flounder because they did not know where, for example, each chapel was located.

The basic layout of the town used as a framework for the exercise is taken from the tithe map of 1843.

Having completed the exercise, learners can use the sliding tab on the timeline to review the composition of the town at any time between 1800 and 1842. This now provides them with a tool with which to learn more about the geographical layout of the town.

In its early years, Blaenavon must have been extremely basic and harsh, perhaps being something akin to a frontier town or mining settlement in the 19th century American West, such as we have all seen in films or on TV. It is likely that the town did not take on any truly recognisable urban form until after 1850. Even as late as 1876 a traveller described Blaenavon in this way:

...About six miles from Pontypool in the opposite direction to Cwmbran stands, or rather straggles, the unfinished town of Blaenavon. Blaenavon is completely a colony of colliers and ironworkers. No one could dream of residing there unless in some way connected with the miners or the works...

With cramped housing, no paving to the streets and a lack of proper drainage and sewerage, the living conditions for the townspeople would have been brutish, if not completely lethal.

Population Growth Activity Sheet

This is a simple activity which compares population figures for Blaenavon and the county town of Monmouth and asks for reasons to explain the differential growth of these two towns. Monmouth was the traditional capital of the county; an original Medieval settlement, a market centre for the surrounding countryside and the seat of the county Assize Courts. It played no real part in the process of industrialisation, however, so its size and population were not fundamentally altered throughout the Victorian period. Blaenavon, however, existed purely and simply because of the Industrial Revolution and as demand for iron, and then coal, increased, so the town grew at an amazing rate.

Return to Blaenavon Imaginative Writing Exercise

This is a creative writing exercise in which children have to imagine that they are an elderly native of the valley who moved away before the onset of industrialisation and who has returned for the first time in 1842. The task is to write a letter to a friend or relative describing the changes that have occurred at the place of your birth and your feelings in response to them.

In the sample letter provided in this section, we have taken a pretty negative view of the town, emphasising the noise, commotion, pollution and the roughness of its people. Children may, of course, take a different view. Archdeacon William Coxe, for example, who visited and described Monmouthshire in 1800, recorded the following sentiments in relation to the neighbouring Nant y Glo ironworks, which had been established in 1795 in a similarly rural valley (but was temporarily closed down at the time of his visit):

The discontinuance of the works impressed me with much regret, as they had already given a new life and spirit to these dreary regions, and would soon have fertilised the surrounding districts.

Of course, Coxe visited the works for no more than a few hours and did not have to live in Nant y Glo. He was also much taken with Blaenavon:

Although these works were only finished in 1789, three hundred and fifty men are employed and the population of the district exceeds a thousand souls. The hollow of the rocks and the sides of the hills are strewed with numerous habitations, and the heathy grounds converted into corn and pasture. Such are the wonderworking powers of industry when directed by judgement!

There is no right or wrong attitude to take towards Blaenavon's growth (and teachers can of course choose to disregard the sample letter altogether, if they wish). Children may be moved by the plight of the working people; their long hours, dangerous conditions, dismal housing and poor wages. Alternatively, like William Coxe, they may be impressed by the vibrancy and vitality of the industrial and urban developments and the part they played in the build up of British wealth and prosperity. Industry undoubtedly brought employment, facilities and new communication links to regions which were previously sparsely populated, undeveloped and remote. It created massive wealth for some and gave Britain an unparalleled status in the world. The pace of urban growth, however, was achieved at the expense of the quality of building, streets and hygiene, and the town of Blaenavon in 1842 most probably had little aesthetic merit.

Was the development of Blaenavon a towering monument to British endeavour, initiative and power or the 'rape of a fair country'? This could form the basis of a wonderful class discussion prior to the writing exercise.

Ultimately, children will react according to their own perspectives and feelings. In assessing their work, teachers should take note of the extent to which their answers are informed by the evidence they have gathered. Children's interpretations may be different to the teacher's own, but if they demonstrate an understanding of issues, are informed by factual knowledge and are well expressed, they should be given full credit.

Overall, in this section, we are seeking to develop an understanding that the establishment of industry led to the rapid growth of towns and a huge influx of people into previously empty areas. Drawing on knowledge gained in earlier sections, children will hopefully realise that this population explosion had consequences for the quality of housing provided, public health and town facilities

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