



RESOURCE 7

STORIES OF VICTIMS OF CHILD LABOUR

TEAM 1

1. [John Allett](#) started working in a textile factory when he was 14 years old. Allett was 53 when he was interviewed by Michael Sadler and his House of Commons Committee on 21 May 1832.

Question: Will you state whether the hours of labour have been increased.

Answer: When I went at first to factories, I was at work about eleven hours a day, but over time this has increased to fifteen, sixteen, and sometimes to eighteen hours. I have seen my own children seem quietly lively; but towards the end of the week, they begin to get fatigued.

Question: Are they almost continually on their feet?

Answer: Always. There can be no rest at all.

Question: Were they excessively sleepy?

Answer: Very sleepy. In the evening my youngest boy has said, 'Father, what o'clock is it?' I have said perhaps, 'It is seven o'clock.' 'Oh! Is it two hours to nine o'clock?' I cannot bear it; I have thought I had rather almost have seen them starve to death, than to be used in that manner. I have heard him crying out, when getting within a few yards of the door, 'Mother, is my supper ready?' and I have seen him, when he was taken from my back, fall asleep before he could get it.

Question: When did that child first go to the mill?

Answer: Between six and seven years old.

Question: Do more accidents take place at the latter end of the day?

Answer: I have known more accidents at the beginning of the day than at the later part. I was an eye-witness of one. A child was working wool, that is, to prepare the wool for the machine; but the strap caught him, as he was hardly awake, and it carried him into the machinery; and we found one limb in one place, one in another, and he was cut to bits; his whole body went in, and was mangled.



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2. [Elizabeth Bentley](#) was born in Leeds 1809. She began working in a flax mill at the age of six. On 4 June 1832, Elizabeth was interviewed by Michael Sadler and his House of Commons Committee. She told of how working in the card-room had seriously damaged her health: 'It was so dusty, the dust got up my lungs, and the work was so hard. I got so bad in health, that when I pulled the baskets down, I pulled my bones out of their places'. She explained that she was now 'considerably deformed'. She went on to say: 'I was about thirteen years old when it began coming, and it has got worse since'.

Question: What were your hours of labour?

Answer: As a child I worked from five in the morning till nine at night.

Question: What time was allowed for meals?

Answer: We were allowed forty minutes at noon.

Question: Had you any time to get breakfast, or drinking?

Answer: No, we got it as we could.

Question: Did you have time to eat it?

Answer: No; we were obliged to leave it or to take it home, and when we did not take it, the overlooker took it, and gave it to the pigs.

Question: Suppose you flagged a little, or were late, what would they do?

Answer: Strap us.

Question: What work did you do?

Answer: A weigher in the card-room.

Question: How long did you work there?

Answer: From half-past five, till eight at night.

Question: What is the carding-room like?

Answer: Dusty. You cannot see each other for dust.

Question: Did working in the card-room affect your health?

Answer: Yes; it was so dusty, the dust got up my lungs, and the work was so hard. I got so bad in health, that when I pulled the baskets down, I pulled my bones out of their places.

Question: You are considerably deformed in your person in consequence of this labour?

Answer: Yes, I am.

Question: At what time did it come on?

Answer: I was about thirteen years old when it began coming, and it has got worse since. When my mother died I had to look after myself.

Question: Where are you now?

Answer: In the poor house.

Question: You are utterly incapable of working in the factories?

Answer: Yes.

Question: You were willing to have worked as long as you were able, from your earliest age?

Answer: Yes.

Question: And you supported your widowed mother as long as you could?

Answer: Yes.



TEAM 2

1. **John Birley** was born in Bethnal Green, London, in 1805. His father died when he was two years old. His mother was taken ill and in 1810 he and his sister were sent to Bethnal Green Workhouse. Birley later commented: 'We had good food, good beds and given liberty two or three times a week. We were taught to read and in every respect were treated kindly'.

'The same year my mother died, I being between six and seven years of age, there came a man looking for a number of parish apprentices. We were all ordered to come into the board room, about forty of us. There were, I dare say, about twenty gentlemen seated at a table, with pens and paper before them. Our names were called out one by one. We were all standing before them in a row. My name was called and I stepped out in the middle of the room.' The man said, 'Well John, you are a fine lad, would you like to go into the country?' He replied: 'Yes sir'.

Birley was taken to Buxton in Derbyshire. 'We got to Buxton at four o'clock on Saturday afternoon. A covered cart was waiting for us there. We all got in, and drove off to the apprentice house at Litton Mill, about six miles from Buxton. The cart stopped, and we marched up to the house, where we saw the master, who came to examine us and gave orders where we were put. They brought us some supper. We were very hungry, but could not eat it. It was Derbyshire oatcake, which we had never seen before. It tasted as sour as vinegar.'

John Birley discovered that he was now an apprentice at Cressbrook Mill. 'Our regular time was from five in the morning till nine or ten at night; and on Saturday, till eleven, and often twelve o'clock at night, and then we were sent to clean the machinery on the Sunday. No time was allowed for breakfast and no sitting for dinner and no time for tea. We went to the mill at five o'clock and worked till about eight or nine when they brought us our breakfast, which consisted of water-porridge, with oatcake in it and onions to flavour it. Dinner consisted of Derbyshire oatcakes cut into four pieces, and ranged into two stacks. One was buttered and the other treacled. By the side of the oatcake were cans of milk. We drank the milk and with the oatcake in our hand, we went back to work without sitting down. We then worked till nine or ten at night when the water-wheel stopped. We stopped working, and went to the apprentice house, about three hundred yards from the mill. It was a large stone house, surrounded by a wall, two to three yards high, with one door, which was kept locked. It was capable of lodging about one hundred and fifty apprentices.'

Like most apprentices, Birley was treated very harshly: 'Mr Needham, the master, had five sons: Frank, Charles, Samuel, Robert and John. The sons and a man named Swann, the overlooker, used to go up and down the mill with hazzle sticks. Frank once beat me till he frightened himself. He thought he had killed me. He had struck me on the temples and knocked me dateless. He once knocked me down and threatened me with a stick. To save my head I raised my arm, which he then hit with all his might. My elbow was broken. I bear the marks, and suffer pain from it to this day, and always shall as long as I live.'

Birley decided to inform Bethnal Green Workhouse about his predicament: 'I was determined to let the gentleman of the Bethnal Green parish know the treatment we had, and I wrote a letter with John Oats and put it into the Tydeswell Post Office. It was broken open and given to old Needham. He beat us with a knob-stick till we could scarcely crawl. Sometime after this three gentlemen came down from London. But before we were examined we were washed and cleaned up and ordered to



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tell them we liked working at the mill and were well treated. Needham and his sons were in the room at the time. They asked us questions about our treatment, which we answered as we had been told, not daring to do any other, knowing what would happen if we told them the truth.'

In the summer of 1849 John Birley was interviewed by Rayner Stephens. John's account of his life as a child worker at Cressbrook Mill appeared in The Ashton Chronicle on 19 May 1849.

2. [Testimony](#) of an 11-year-old girl: in 'les débuts de l'industrie', p. 43, Mines Commission Inquiry (1842):

'I've been working underground at the mine for my father for three years. I have to go down the shaft at two in the morning and I come back up at one or two in the afternoon. I go to bed at six in the evening so that I can start again the following day. In the part of the pit where I work, the seam is on a steep slope. With my load I have four slopes or ladders to climb before I get to the mine's main gallery. My job is to fill four or five wagons, putting 200 kilos in each. I need to do 20 trips to fill five wagons. If I don't manage to do it I get a beating. I'm very happy when the work is finished because it's exhausting'.

3. [Inspection report](#) (Loire departmental archives 88 M 21)

'At the Sieur Irénée Laurent glass factory in Vauche, at 5 p.m. on 27 July, 8-year-old Jean-Marie Januel was working in the team whose shift starts at 4 p.m. and ends at midnight... with the aggravating circumstance that the child was not attending any school, did not have papers and was not enrolled on the workforce register, meaning that the intention to deprive this child of our protective role was premeditated.' 'On 9 May 1891, at two in the morning, convinced that they were hiding children from us who were working at night, we went up to the attic bedroom where we found Joseph Granger hiding in a bed, into which he had just jumped fully clothed, hat on his head, shoes still on his feet, and still holding in his hand the hook he used to extract threads from the loom. When we asked him what he was doing he first told us that he wasn't working, just sleeping like that, fully clothed, then later, in front of Mr Perrichon himself, he admitted that he was part of the night shift working from midnight to midday. Not daring to enter the girls' dormitory, we stopped our investigations there, quite sure, nevertheless, that under-age girls sleeping fully clothed were also being hidden from us.'



TEAM 3

William Dodd, **A Narrative of the Experience and Sufferings of William Dodd, a Factory Cripple (1841)**

At the age of six I became a piecer. The duties of the piecer will not be clearly understood by the reader, unless he is acquainted with the machine for spinning woollen yarn, called a billy. A billy is a machine somewhat similar in form to the letter H, one side being stationary, and the other moveable, and capable of being pushed close in under the stationary part, almost like the drawer of a side table; the moveable part, or carriage, runs backwards and forwards, by means of six iron wheels, upon three iron rails, as a carriage on a railroad. In this carriage are the spindles, from 70 to 100 in number, all turned by one wheel, which is in the care of the spinner. When the spinner brings the carriage close up under the fixed part of the machine, he is able, to obtain a certain length of carding for each spindle, say 10 or 12 inches, which he draws back, and spins into yarn; this done, he winds the yarn round the spindles, brings the carriage close up as before, and again obtains a fresh supply of cardings.

These cardings are taken up by the piecer in the left hand, about twenty at a time. He holds them about four inches from one end, the other end hanging down; these he takes, with the right hand, one at a time, for the purpose of piecing, and laying the ends of the cardings about 2 inches over each other, he rubs them together on the canvas cloth with his flat hand. He is obliged to be very expert, in order to keep the spinner well supplied. A good piecer will supply from 30 to 40 spindles with cardings.

The number of cardings a piecer has through his fingers in a day is very great; each piecing requires three or four rubs, over a space of three or four inches; and the continual friction of the hand in rubbing the piecing upon the coarse wrapper wears off the skin, and causes the finger to bleed. The position in which the piecer stands to his work is with the right foot forward, and his right side facing the frame: the motion he makes in going along in front of the frame, for the purpose of piecing, is neither forwards or backwards, but in a sliding direction, constantly keeping his right side towards the frame. In this position he continues during the day, with his hands, feet, and eyes constantly in motion. It will be easily seen, that the chief weight of his body rests upon his right knee, which is almost always the first joint to give way.

I have frequently worked at the frame till I could scarcely get home, and in this state have been stopped by people in the streets who noticed me shuffling along, and advised me to work no more in the factories; but I was not my own master. During the day, I frequently counted the clock, and calculated how many hours I had still to remain at work; my evenings were spent in preparing for the following day – in rubbing my knees, ankles, elbows, and wrists with oil, etc. I went to bed, to cry myself to sleep, and pray that the Lord would take me to himself before morning. [...]

My legs became distorted. Standing in the easiest position, when the feet are about 14 inches apart, the knees and thighs are then pressing close together, so that the legs form a sort of arch for the support of the body. One evil arising from the bending and curving of the legs is the blood-vessels must go wrong. One serious evil resulting from the imperfect circulation of the blood, is the drying up of the marrow in the bones. The bones then decay.



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In the spring of 1840, I began to feel some painful symptoms in my right wrist, arising from the general weakness of my joints, brought on in the factories. The swelling and pain increased; and although I had the advice of medical practitioners, it was all to no purpose; and, having been off work for a length of time, and my resources failing, I was under the necessity of entering St Thomas's Hospital where every care and attention was paid to me. It soon became evident to all who saw me, that I must, very soon, lose either my hand or my life. A consultation was held by the surgeons of the hospital, who came to the conclusion, that amputation was absolutely necessary. On the 18th of July, I underwent the operation. The hand being taken off a little below the elbow. This, another plan to raise myself above want, and keep myself out of the workhouse, was frustrated and dashed.

William Dodd interviewed John Reed, a former employee of Richard Arkwright, in his book *The Factory System: Illustrated* (1842)

John Reed is a sadly deformed young man living in Cromford. He tells his pitiful tale as follows: 'I went to work at the cotton factory of Messrs Arkwright at the age of nine. I was then a fine strong, healthy lad, and straight in every limb. I had at first instance 2s. per week, for seventy-two hours' work. I continued to work in this factory for ten years, getting gradually advanced in wages, till I had 6s. 3d. per week; which is the highest wages I ever had. I gradually became a cripple, till at the age of nineteen I was unable to stand at the machine, and I was obliged to give it up. The total amount of my earnings was about 130 shillings, and for this sum I have been made a miserable cripple, as you see, and cast off by those who reaped the benefit of my labour, without a single penny.'

Here is a young man, who was evidently intended by nature for a stout-made man, crippled in the prime of life, and all his earthly prospects blasted for ever! Such a cripple I have seldom met with. He cannot stand without a stick in one hand, and leaning on a chair with the other; his legs are twisted in all manner of forms. His body, from the forehead to the knees, forms a curve, similar to the letter C. He dares not go from home, if he could; people stare at him so. He is now learning to make children's first shoes, and hopes ultimately to be able to get a living in this manner.

I have taken several walks in the neighbourhood of this beautiful and romantic place, and seen the splendid castle, and other buildings belonging to the Arkwrights, and could not avoid contrasting in my mind the present condition of this wealthy family, with the humble condition of its founder in 1768. One might expect that those who have thus risen to such wealth and eminence, would have some compassion upon their poor cripples. If it is only that they need to have them pointed out, and that their attention has hitherto not been drawn to them, I would hope and trust this case of John Reed will yet come under their notice.



TEAM 4

1. [David Bywater](#) was born in Leeds in 1815. Bywater was interviewed by Michael Sadler and his House of Commons Committee on 13th April, 1832. He explained how long he had to work: 'We started at one o'clock on Monday morning, and then we went on again till eight o'clock, at breakfast time; then we had half an hour; and then we went on till twelve o'clock, and had half an hour for drinking; and then we stopped at half past eleven for refreshment for an hour and a half at midnight; and then we went on again till breakfast time, when we had half an hour; and then we went on again till twelve o'clock, at dinner time, and then we had an hour: and then we stopped at five o'clock again on Tuesday afternoon for half an hour for drinking; then we went on till past eleven, and then we gave over till five o'clock on Wednesday morning.' Bywater claimed that this led to physical deformities: 'It made me very crooked in my knees'.

Question: At what age were you when you entered upon night work in the steaming department?

Answer: I was nearly fourteen.

Question: Will you state to this committee the labour which you endured when you were put upon long hours.

Answer: We started at one o'clock on Monday morning, and then we went on again till eight o'clock, at breakfast time; then we had half an hour; and then we went on till twelve o'clock, and had half an hour for drinking; and then we stopped at half past eleven for refreshment for an hour and a half at midnight; and then we went on again till breakfast time, when we had half an hour; and then we went on again till twelve o'clock, at dinner time, and then we had an hour: and then we stopped at five o'clock again on Tuesday afternoon for half an hour for drinking; then we went on till past eleven, and then we gave over till five o'clock on Wednesday morning.

Question: Did you go home then?

Answer: No, we slept in the mill.

Question: How did you sleep in the mill?

Answer: We took all our clothes off, except our shirts, and got into the warmest part of the mill, and amongst the driest cloth we could.

Question: Did you take your meals standing?

Answer: Yes, we put our baskets on the boxes.

Question: Were you perfect in your limbs when you undertook that long and excessive labour?

Answer: Yes.

Question: What effect did it have on your limbs?

Answer: It made me very crooked in my knees.

Question: If you refused to work long hours, and wished to have worked a moderate length of time only, should you have been retained in your situation?

Answer: I should have had to go home. I should have been turned off directly.

Question: Have you received any information as to what will be the consequences of your having given evidence.

Answer: My overlooker told my brother that if I came to London I should never have any employment any more, nor my brother neither. My brother said he could not help it; but I expect that the first time he does a job which does not please that he will turn him away; because, if you work in a family, and one does wrong, the whole family must go.



2. [Sarah Carpenter](#) was the daughter of a glass blower. When she was eight years old her father died and the family had to go to the Bristol Workhouse. Sarah later recalled: 'My brother was sent from Bristol workhouse in the same way as many other children were – cart-loads at a time. My mother did not know where he was for two years. He was taken off in the dead of night without her knowledge, and the parish officers would never tell her where he was.'

A couple of years later she followed her brother to work in Cressbrook Mill: 'Our common food was oatcake. It was thick and coarse. This oatcake was put into cans. Boiled milk and water was poured into it. This was our breakfast and supper. Our dinner was potato pie with boiled bacon it, a bit here and a bit there, so thick with fat we could scarce eat it, though we were hungry enough to eat anything. Tea we never saw, nor butter. We had cheese and brown bread once a year. We were only allowed three meals a day though we got up at five in the morning and worked till nine at night.'

Punishment at the mill was extremely harsh: 'The master carder's name was Thomas Birks; but he never went by any other name than Tom the Devil. He was a very bad man – he was encouraged by the master in ill-treating all the hands, but particularly the children. I have often seen him pull up the clothes of big girls, seventeen or eighteen years of age, and throw them across his knee, and then flog them with his hand in the sight of both men and boys. Everybody was frightened of him. He would not even let us speak. He once fell poorly, and very glad we were. We wished he might die.'

Some of the children tried to run away: 'We were always locked up out of mill hours, for fear any of us should run away. One day the door was left open. Charlotte Smith said she would be ringleader if the rest would follow. She went out but no one followed her. The master found out about this and sent for her. There was a carving knife which he took and grasping her hair he cut it off close to the head. They were in the habit of cutting off the hair of all who were caught speaking to any of the lads. This head shaving was a dreadful punishment. We were more afraid of it than of any other, for girls are proud of their hair.'

Sarah Carpenter was interviewed by Rayner Stephens in the summer of 1849. Sarah's account of her life as a child worker at Cressbrook Mill appeared in *The Ashton Chronicle* on 23rd June, 1849.



TEAM 5

EXTRACTS FROM THE BOOK - A Memoir of Robert Blincoe (1828)

In the summer of 1799 a rumour circulated that there was going to be an agreement between the church wardens and the overseers of St. Pancras Workhouse and the owner of a great cotton mill, near Nottingham. The children were told that when they arrived at the cotton mill, they would be transformed into ladies and gentlemen: that they would be fed on roast beef and plum pudding, be allowed to ride their masters' horses, and have silver watches, and plenty of cash in their pockets. In August 1799, eighty boys and girls, who were seven years old, or were considered to be that age, became parish apprentices till they had acquired the age of twenty-one. [...]

The young strangers were conducted into a spacious room with long, narrow tables, and wooden benches. They were ordered to sit down at these tables - the boys and girls apart. The supper set before them consisted of milk-porridge, of a very blue complexion! The bread was partly made of rye, very black, and so soft, they could scarcely swallow it, as it stuck to their teeth. Where is our roast beef and plum-pudding, he said to himself.

The apprentices from the mill arrived. The boys had nothing on but a shirt and trousers. Their coarse shirts were entirely open at the neck, and their hair looked as if a comb had seldom, if ever, been applied! The girls, like the boys, destitute of shoes and stockings. On their first entrance, some of the old apprentices took a view of the strangers; but the great bulk first looked for their supper, which consisted of new potatoes, distributed at a hatch door, that opened into the common room from the kitchen.

There was no cloth laid on the tables, to which the newcomers had been accustomed in the workhouse - no plates, nor knives, nor forks. At a signal given, the apprentices rushed to this door, and each, as he made way, received his portion, and withdrew to his place at the table. Blincoe was startled, seeing the boys pull out the fore-part of their shirts, and holding it up with both hands, received the hot boiled potatoes allotted for their supper. The girls, less indecently, held up their dirty, greasy aprons, that were saturated with grease and dirt, and having received their allowance, scampered off as hard as they could, to their respective places, where, with a keen appetite, each apprentice devoured her allowance, and seemed anxiously to look about for more. Next, the hungry crew ran to the tables of the newcomers, and voraciously devoured every crust of bread and every drop of porridge they had left. [...]

The room in which Blincoe and several of the boys were deposited was up two pair of stairs. The bed places were a sort of cribs, built in a double tier all round the chamber. The apprentices slept two in a bed. The governor called the strangers to him and allocated to each his bed-place and bed-fellow, not allowing any two of the newly arrived inmates to sleep together. The boy whom Blincoe was to chum, sprang nimbly into his berth, and without saying a prayer, or anything else, fell asleep before Blincoe could undress himself. When he crept into bed, the stench of the oily clothes and greasy hide of his sleepy comrade, almost turned his stomach. [...]

Blincoe was assigned to a room, over which a man name Smith presided. The task first allotted to him was to pick up the loose cotton, that fell upon the floor. Apparently, nothing could be easier, and he set to with diligence, although much terrified by the whirling motion and noise of the machinery, and not a little affected by the dust and flue which he was half suffocated. Unused to the



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stench, he soon felt sick, and by constantly stooping, his back ached. Blincoe, therefore, took the liberty to sit down; but this attitude, he soon found, was strictly forbidden in cotton mills. Smith, his task-master, told him he must keep on his legs. He did so, till twelve o'clock, being six hours and a half, without the least intermission.

After Blincoe had been employed in the way described, he was promoted to the more important employment of a roving winder. Being too short of stature, to reach to his work, standing on the floor, he was placed on a block. He was not able by any possible exertion, to keep pace with the machinery. In vain, the poor child declared he was not in his power to move quicker. He was beaten by the overlooker, with great severity. In common, with his fellow apprentices, Blincoe was wholly dependent upon the mercy of the overlookers, whom he found, generally speaking, a set of brutal, ferocious, illiterate ruffians. Blincoe complained to Mr Baker, the manager, and all he said to him was: 'do your work well, and you'll not be beaten'. The overlooker, who was in charge of him, had a certain quantity of work to perform in a given time. If every child did not perform his allotted task, the overlooker, and was discharged.

A blacksmith named William Palfrey, who resided in Litton, worked in a room under that where Blincoe was employed. He used to be much disturbed by the shrieks and cries of the boys. According to Blincoe, human blood has often run from an upper to a lower floor. Unable to bear the shrieks of the children, Palfrey used to knock against the floor, so violently, as to force the boards up, and call out 'for shame! for shame! are you murdering the children?' By this sort of conduct, the humane blacksmith was a check on the cruelty of the brutal overlookers, as long as he continued in his shop; but he went home at seven o'clock and as soon as Woodward, Merrick and Charnock knew that Palfrey was gone, they beat and knock the apprentices about without moderation. [...]

A girl named Mary Richards, who was thought remarkably handsome when she left the workhouse and who was not quite ten years of age, attended a drawing frame, below which, and about a foot from the floor, was a horizontal shaft, by which the frames above were turned. It happened one evening, when her apron was caught by the shaft. In an instant the poor girl was drawn by an irresistible force and dashed on the floor. She uttered the most heart-rending shrieks! Blincoe ran towards her, an agonised and helpless beholder of a scene of horror. He saw her whirled round and round with the shaft – he heard the bones of her arms, legs, thighs, etc. successively snap asunder, crushed, seemingly, to atoms, as the machinery whirled her round, and drew tighter and tighter her body within the works, her blood was scattered over the frame and streamed upon the floor, her head appeared dashed to pieces - at last, her mangled body was jammed in so fast, between the shafts and the floor, that the water being low and the wheels off the gear, it stopped the main shaft. When she was extricated, every bone was found broken – her head dreadfully crushed. She was carried off quite lifeless.