



# Child Workers in Industry Role-play

## Teachers' Guidance Notes

### Learning Objectives

- To discover the jobs that children carried out in the mines and ironworks near the canal
- To learn about the conditions, daily work life and education of the children who worked in the mines and ironworks
- To develop investigation, research and role-play skills

### Resources

- Role-play cards
- Sub-commissioner's summary report (for teacher use)
- Role-play question sheet
- [1842 Report](#)

### Activity Instructions

Learners take it in turns to take on the role of the sub-commissioner who is investigating Plas Kynaston Coal and Ironworks and Acrefair Ironworks, looking at the working conditions, education and health of the children that worked there. Learners will use real information from the 1842 report, using the Role-play cards to take on the role of the characters and interviewing each other in role.

After the role-play the teacher will share the overall findings of the investigation with the Committee (the whole class) using the sub-commissioner summary report. The Committee will then debate and vote on whether children should continue to work in the mines and ironworks.



### 1842 Children's Employment Commission

In 1841, commissioners were instructed by the Government to carry out enquiries into the working conditions of children and young people in mines and factories across England and Wales. They were given powers to talk to anyone they chose to ascertain the health, working conditions, morals and education of the children and young people who worked there. Evidence to the Commission was not given under oath, but a written record was made of every interview. Some workers, afraid that they might lose their jobs, may have made light of their working conditions. Some children had experienced no other working life except mining and could not compare it to other sorts of work. Others may have taken the opportunity to speak honestly about their lives.

The results were used to produce a number of reports that were submitted to a Government Committee for discussion. The 1842 North Wales report was completed by sub-commissioner, H. Herbert Jones. Extracts from his report form the basis for this activity.

There were many collieries and ironworks near the canal, especially in the Cefn Mawr area. We have used interviews with employees from Acrefair Ironworks, Plas Kynaston Coal and Iron Works, Bont y Consulty Iron Works, Ruabon and British Coal and Iron Company's Forges, &C., Ruabon as the basis of the role-play.

# Child Workers in Industry Role-play

## Teachers' Guidance Notes **Continued**

### Starter Activity Ideas:

**Research** about ironworks, forges and mines then consider what jobs there might have been for children. What do you think would they be like?



**Discuss** as a class what is the role of the sub-commissioner? What were they trying to find out?

Look over the information provided in the Role-play cards. Are there any words or phrases you need to find out more about?

### Further Activity Ideas:

**Discuss:** After interviewing the employees what recommendations would you make? How would you improve their conditions?



Use the 1842 report to research the conditions in other North East Wales mines and ironworks.

Compare the lives of these children and young people with your own. How have things changed? Consider things like education, school leaving age, diet and leisure time.

### Brief for Learners:

Choose one of the role-play characters, read their story and imagine what they might have looked like. Draw a picture of your character.



Take on the role of this character and have conversations with other characters, in preparation for answering the sub-commissioner's questions.

In groups, take it in turns to become the sub-commissioner interviewing the employees, using the Role-play question sheet and any of your own questions to learn more about the lives of the employees in the ironworks and mines.

Afterwards, take the role of a member of the 1842 Committee to listen to the sub-commissioner's findings presented by your teacher. Then discuss as a class whether you think children should continue to work in the mines and ironworks.

Points to consider:

- **Do you think the interviewees were answering honestly? Can you think of any reasons why they may not have complained? Does this affect your decision?**
- **What are the reasons for children to carry on working?**
- **Why would it be better if children stopped working?**
- **What are the advantages/disadvantages to both answers?**

Vote on your decision.



# Summary of Sub-Commissioner's Report

## H. Herbert Jones, Esq

### Who was H. Herbert Jones?

**Age:** 45 in 1841

**Job:** Sub - Commissioner on the Employment of Children and Young Persons in Mines and Mineral Works in North Wales and on the State, Condition, and Treatment of such Children and Young Persons.

**Where:** Denbighshire and Flintshire mines and ironworks

**Pay:** £100 for the report and a guinea (£1 and one shilling) per day travel expenses

### Summary of Findings

**Views on children in work:** Children work in the coal pits but the age they start work differs around North Wales. Normal age is around 9 or ten but in some places the children start at 7.

**Views on girls and women in the coal pits:** Girls under 18 are employed but none go down the mines they work at the pit mouths. They bank the coal and help draw the coal and ironstone to the surface. They are mostly over 18 as they need to be strong. The women appear to be respectable although they lack sewing, washing and baking skills. Few have been to school and few can read but most have been to Sunday School and go to church.

**Views on children's jobs:** They rarely work but on the surface breaking, picking and washing the ore to prepare for the smelters. They keep the air doors open, fill the wagons, riddling the coals, pumping, drawing, hooking on, driving the horses and asses underground, cutting the coal and bringing it to the surface.



“Drawing or pushing the coal wagons, which in North Wales are called pyches, forms the principal employment of children and young persons in the pits. Drawing is performed by means of a chain passing from the pyche between the boy's legs, and fastened to a girdle around his waist. Being thus attached to the load he draws it by stooping down, proceeding along ‘all-fours.’ Some push the pyches from behind, which is done by the hands and forehead. The children describe it as immaterial to them which method they pursue. In low works, where the seams of coal are very thin, they draw, as they can stoop lower than in the attitude of pushing. At first the chain in drawing is apt to excoriate the skin, and sometimes causes so much soreness as to oblige the boys to leave off work for a day or two, but no other evil arises from this unnatural and in appearance brutal mode of work the boys, and custom soon reconciles and inures them to their wretched fate. The pyches being loaded, they are drawn or pushed, in the manner described, from the working to the main or horse ways, there to be met by the empty or return pyches.”



**Views on times and hours:** The boys in the mines work both day and night shifts. They can work overtime. Usually day shifts are 6am to 6pm and night times 6pm until 5am. If the men work overtime the children have to stay. There is less work in the summer in the coal mines when coal is needed less.



# Summary of Sub-Commissioner's Report Continued

## Findings Continued...

### Views on work conditions:

“The work of these children is a grievous subject for reflection and a sad spectacle to behold. They pass the day in working many fathoms under ground, where daylight never enters, and in excavations that will not in many instances admit them to stand in an erect position. The air they breathe is full of dust and noxious gases, and dangers surround them on all sides. Pitiably indeed is their mad condition. But amidst so many dangers and hardships I was gratified to find that when at work they are seldom if ever beaten or otherwise maltreated by their taskmasters.”



The children usually have breakfast at home, eat dinner at work and they have an hour. Friends or family send food. In the summer they eat it where they work but can eat in the engine room in the winter. In winter they have a shorter lunch as they have to finish earlier. They usually eat bread, butter, potatoes and sometimes a little bacon with milk and broth. They have bread and butter between breakfast and dinner and dinner and supper.

**Views on starting work:** When a child first goes into the pits they are taken by their father or a friend. When they first go into the pits they feel fear and distress but soon become used to the work. Some children want to start work as they want to earn their own wages and parents encourage this work which can be detrimental to their education.

**Views on clothing:** Colliers and mine boys wear thick coarse woollen jackets and any have two suits and three shirts. Many do not change to go home.

**View on education:** A lot of children have little education as are taken out of school early to work. Many are unable to read and write. This is worse in the ironworks as they start earlier than the children who work in the mines. Sunday School is the main place where children and adults can learn to read and write and can attend on Sundays and in the evenings. This depends on the children's shifts and if the parents send them.

**View on church:** More families now attend church.

**Pay:** Children are paid between 2s 6d and 10s a week depending on the job all of which goes to the parents.

**View on the health of children:** They are on the whole healthy but do not get ill from swallowing small bits of lead and dust as many do not wash before eating. If someone has a fever these can spread more easily in confined space with no ventilation, space and lack of cleanliness at home. Children are generally healthy but a lot have problems when they grow older as they get chest infections.

When they finish their shift they prefer to start playing games rather than go home for their food.

# Character Fact Sheet

## Richard James

### Who was Richard?

**Age:** 16

**Job:** He is a moulder in the forge. He has been working for 6 years.

**Where:** British Coal and Iron Company's Forges, &C., Ruabon

**Family:** Mother and father. His father also works in the forges.

**First job:** Forge work

**Education:** He went to school and was taught reading, writing and figures. His parents paid 2 shillings for him to go to school.

**Church:** He goes to the Methodist chapel and goes to Sunday school.

**Pay:** He earns 1 shilling and 8 pence a day\*.

### What else do we know about Richard and his job?

**Times and hours:** He works five days a week but sometimes six. He works from 6am to 6pm. He often works overtime which he likes as he gets more money. He also works at night and has worked 36 hours in a row.

**Health:** He has been sick before but from a fever and as he belongs to a club this helps pay for the doctor and lost wages. He always washes after work.

**Work conditions:** He does not think the work is very hard and likes the work. He is not beaten or badly treated by the older men.

He goes home for his meals and is allowed half an hour for breakfast and an hour for dinner. He received a present of 3 shillings for doing his work well by the head moulder and other have also received this.

**What the wages are spent on:** He gives his wages to his mother.

\* There were 12 pence in a shilling and 20 shillings in a pound.



# Character Fact Sheet

## Richard Lee

### Who was Richard?

**Age:** 17 in 1841

**Job:** Pushing or pulling the coal wagons (pyches) in the pits.

**Where:** Plas Kynaston Coal and Iron Works.

**Family:** Mother and father

**First job:** He has been working for seven years.

**Education:** He can read but not write. He went to Chirk free school for 2 years before he started work. He reads the Bible and Testament. He goes to Sunday School.

**Church:** He goes to church.

**Pay:** 2 shillings and 6 pence a day\*.

\* There were 12 pence in a shilling and 20 shillings in a pound.

### What else do we know about Richard and his job?

**Times and hours:** He would earn enough if he had 6 days of work but sometimes it is only 3 days as the engine needs repairing or cleaning, or picks are sharpened and tools are repaired.

**Health:** He does not wash before he eats but is always well. He has good eyes although when he comes into the sunlight his eyes feel odd for a few seconds.

**Work conditions:** His parents send him warm food each day. He has good clothes. He is in the pit for 12 hours a day. He says the air is foul. There was an explosion last week where a boy was burnt, but not badly. No one is beaten and no punishments are allowed.

**What the wages are spent on:** Most of his money goes to his parents. He is a member of a Friendly Club called the Lodge Club for which he pays 2 shillings and 6 pence a year for the doctor. He also pays 1 shilling a month so that he will receive 6 shillings a week if ill or disabled and £2 to £3 to put towards his funeral.



# Character Fact Sheet

## Edward Price

### Who was Edward?

**Age:** 16

**Job:** Forge Worker

**Where:** Bont y Consulty Iron Works, Ruabon

**Family:** Mother, father, 3 siblings

**First job:** He has been working for 5 years. He was first a collier boy and was taken into the pits by his father. He used to pull the pyches (coal wagons) by a girdle. He did not like the work as he was not paid fairly, the conditions were damp and the older boys beat the younger ones. He left to go to school for a few months before starting work in the forge.

**Education:** He can read and when he has time he reads the Bible and religious books. He could write but has forgotten a lot of what he had learnt.

**Church:** He goes to Wesleyan chapel and the Sunday school every Sunday.

**Pay:** 2 shillings and 6 pence a day\*.

### What else do we know about Edward and his job?

**Times and hours:** He works over time in the summer when there is more light, working two and half extra hours, three or four times a week. He sometimes works at night but not often.

**Health:** He has bread and butter with tea or coffee for breakfast, potatoes for dinner and bread and milk for supper. He is a tee-totaller (doesn't drink alcohol).

**Work conditions:** He does not find the work hard and likes it.

**What the wages are spent on:** What the wages are spent on: Money is often scarce as his father and brother are colliers (working in the pits) and are often without work and his money has to support the whole family. His grandfather sometimes helps them.

\* There were 20 shillings in a pound.



**Name:** Edward Price

**Age:** 16

**Job:** Forge Worker





# Character Fact Sheet

## Jonathan Roberts

### Who was Jonathan?

**Age:** 11

**Job:** Piler of the iron in the forge

**Where:** Bont y Consulty Iron Works, Ruabon

**Family:** Mother and 13 year old brother, who also works in the forge. His father went to America when he was born and they have heard nothing from him for five years.



**First job:** Forge work. His mother got him the job and he is glad to have the work.

**Education:** He has been to school a little. He can read a Welsh Testament but cannot write.

**Church:** He goes to the chapel three times a week and to Sunday School.

**Pay:** 10 pence a day\*.

### What else do we know about Jonathon and his job?

**Times and hours:** He works in the day one week and the night the next week. His day shift is 6am to 6pm and his night shift 6pm to 6am. He sometimes works overtime from 6pm till midnight as they need the money. He does not play after work as he goes home to his mother and then to bed.

**Health:** He is always in good health.

**Work conditions:** The men are kind to him and never beat him. The forges are very hot but his mother brings him milk and water to drink. He has been burnt a few times.

**What the wages are spent on:** His mother gets his wages and that of his brother. This is all she has except for a little extra she makes baking white bread to sell.

\* There were 12 pence in a shilling and 20 shillings in a pound.



**Name:** Jonathon Roberts

**Age:** 11

**Job:** Piler







# Character Fact Sheet

## Thomas Rees

### Who was Thomas?

**Age:** 48 in 1842

**Job:** Roller (working a machine that shapes the iron)

**Where:** Acrefair Ironworks Forge

**Family:** He has 5 children, 2 of them work with him in the forge, one is 15 and one 12.



**First job:** Started when he was 5 or 6 as a collier boy in the pits in South Wales. His first job was to open the air doors in the pits. His mother told him he had to go to earn money to pay for his food and clothes. He was frightened at first but went in with his father's friend. He cried a lot. After a while he got used to being under the ground. He then went to work in forges when he was 7 or 8.

**Education:** He never went to school as had no opportunity to go to a day school and was too tired to go to Sunday School. He is very sad at not being able to read and sees how much enjoyment others get out of reading, especially the Bible. His boys went to school before they started work at the forges and can read and write well. They go to school in the evening when they work by day but are too tired when they work at night.

### What else do we know about Thomas and his job?

**Church:** His family goes to church every Sunday.

**Pay:** He earns £2 a week. The boys earn 4 shillings to 9 shillings a week\*.

**Times and hours:** He works in the day one week and the night the next week. His day shift is 6am to 6pm and his night shift 6pm to 6am.

**Health:** He thinks the children are not affected by the night work except that they do not sleep or eat as well on the days after a nightshift. They always wash themselves before eating and before going to bed.

**Work conditions:** The work is heavy and very hot and they get very thirsty. He drinks 4 pints of \*small-beer a day and a gallon of water. The boys usually drink buttermilk or water. The boys are very tired and he does not like to see them having to do such hard work but they are pleased to have work. Some boys and men get burnt.

**What the wages are spent on:** He spends these on food, clothing, drink and a subscription to the club. He cannot save any money.

\* There were 20 shillings in a pound.

\* Small-beer – very weak beer.





# Character Fact Sheet

## Joseph Jones

### Who was Joseph?

**Age:** 35 in 1841

**Job:** Roller (working a machine that shapes the iron)

**Where:** Acrefair Ironworks Forge

**Family:** Wife and 4 children. His 10 year old son has been working with him for a month.



**First job:** Began work at 9 years old straightening the bars from the rolls, earning 8 pence a day.

**Education:** He went to school for a short time before he began work and learned how to read but did not go back to school except Sunday School where he still goes. His 13 year old girl was in school and can read and write. His 10 year old son was at school and can read too. He knows a lot of people who send their children to Sunday School to learn. He thinks that education is a great advantage and to be able to read and write means children are better behaved.

**Church:** His family go every Sunday to the chapel as do many people he knows.

### What else do we know about Thomas and his job?

**Pay:** Paid by the ton and receives between 30 and 60 shillings a week\*.

**Times and hours:** 6am to 6pm. Sometimes he works overtime with his children.

**Health:** He does not think the work is healthy.

**Work conditions:** Hot, heavy and thirsty work.

**What the wages are spent on:** He hasn't saved any money as all goes on keeping his family. He subscribes to a friendly club to give him some support if he is ill.

\* There were 20 shillings in a pound.



**Name:** Joseph Jones

**Age:** 35

**Job:** Roller



# Character Fact Sheet

## Ann Lloyd

### Who was Ann?

**Age:** 40 in 1841

**Job:** Forge Worker

**Where:** Acrefair Ironworks

**Family:** Ann is married to Abela Lloyd and they have seven children. Three of her sons, aged 21, 14 and 12 work in the forges.



**First job:** She had to start working when she was quite young. She was very busy at work and looking after her family.

**Education:** Her oldest child had a good education and can read, write and add money but the younger children have very little education as they could not longer afford it. Sometimes the older children go to Sunday School, but refuse sometimes as they are too tired or their clothes are not good enough.

**Church:** Ann and her husband always go to church or chapel but the boys do not always go.

### What else do we know about Ann and her job?

**Pay:** She used to earn 30 shillings but now only earns 10 shillings. Her older sons earn between 14 pence and 3 shillings and 6 pence a day\*.

**Times and hours:** Usually Ann and her sons work 6am to 6pm but every other week her sons work all night.

**Health:** They are all in good health and never complain of the hard work but the boys are sometimes very sleepy.

**Work conditions:** The conditions are very hot and smoky in the forge. It is hard work and they all have to be strong.

**What the wages are spent on:** Wages are low and she cannot afford to buy much meat but feeds the family as well as she is able with bread, potatoes, bacon and milk. They do not spend much on drink.

\* There were 12 pence in a shilling and 20 shillings in a pound.



**Name:** Ann Lloyd

**Age:** 40

**Job:** Forge Worker





# Character Fact Sheet

## William Jones

### Who was William?

**Age:** 42 in 1841

**Job:** Unemployed as of three weeks ago when 700 people lost their jobs

**Where:** Acrefair Ironworks

**Family:** He has 4 children and a wife.



**First job:** He was a farm servant then went down the coal pits for 3 shillings a day. He found the work hard at first and was frightened. He hurt himself a lot and lost his appetite and his spirits but became used to it after half a year. He worked there for four years and saved and bought a horse and cart from where he sold coal. 2 years ago his horse died and he had to go back underground in the ironworks. He earned 2 shillings and 8 pence a day and his 14 year old son earned 1 shilling and 10 pence\*.

**Current situation:** He is trying to find work and so is his son but he may have to take his family into the workhouse if he cannot get work. A lot of the other men have either left the country to look for work or are begging.

### What else do we know about William and his job?

**Education:** He has learnt to write and can read a little and is learning at Sunday School as are his children.

**Church:** He goes to Chapel with his family.

**Pay:** Unemployed

**Times and hours:** Unemployed

**Health:** His family is very poor. His diet is potatoes, bread, milk and they have coarse woollen cloth or thick flannel for their clothing.

**Work conditions:** The conditions for children are generally good but he has seen boys beaten for not working fast enough and has known them be made to work longer than 6 in the evening and has heard the children cry and want their supper.

**What the wages are spent on:** He was able to live and keep his family well until he lost his job as he does not waste money or spend it on drink. Families have to sell their belongings such as their clocks and then their houses before they are given any help.

\* There were 12 pence in a shilling and 20 shillings in a pound.



# Role-play Questions

You could ask...

- What is your name?
- **What is your age?**
- What is your job and where do you work?
- **Do you have any family?**
- Can you read and write?
- **Do you go to church/chapel?**
- How much do you earn?
- **What is your health like?**
- What are your working conditions like?
- **What do you spend your wages on?**