

Child Labour

The concept of childhood we have today is largely a modern construct. Attitudes were very different before the Victorian era. During the Industrial Revolution it was usual for adults to work 16 hour shifts, six days a week. For the poor, even this did not pay enough to support the family. As soon as children could walk and talk, they were expected to work.

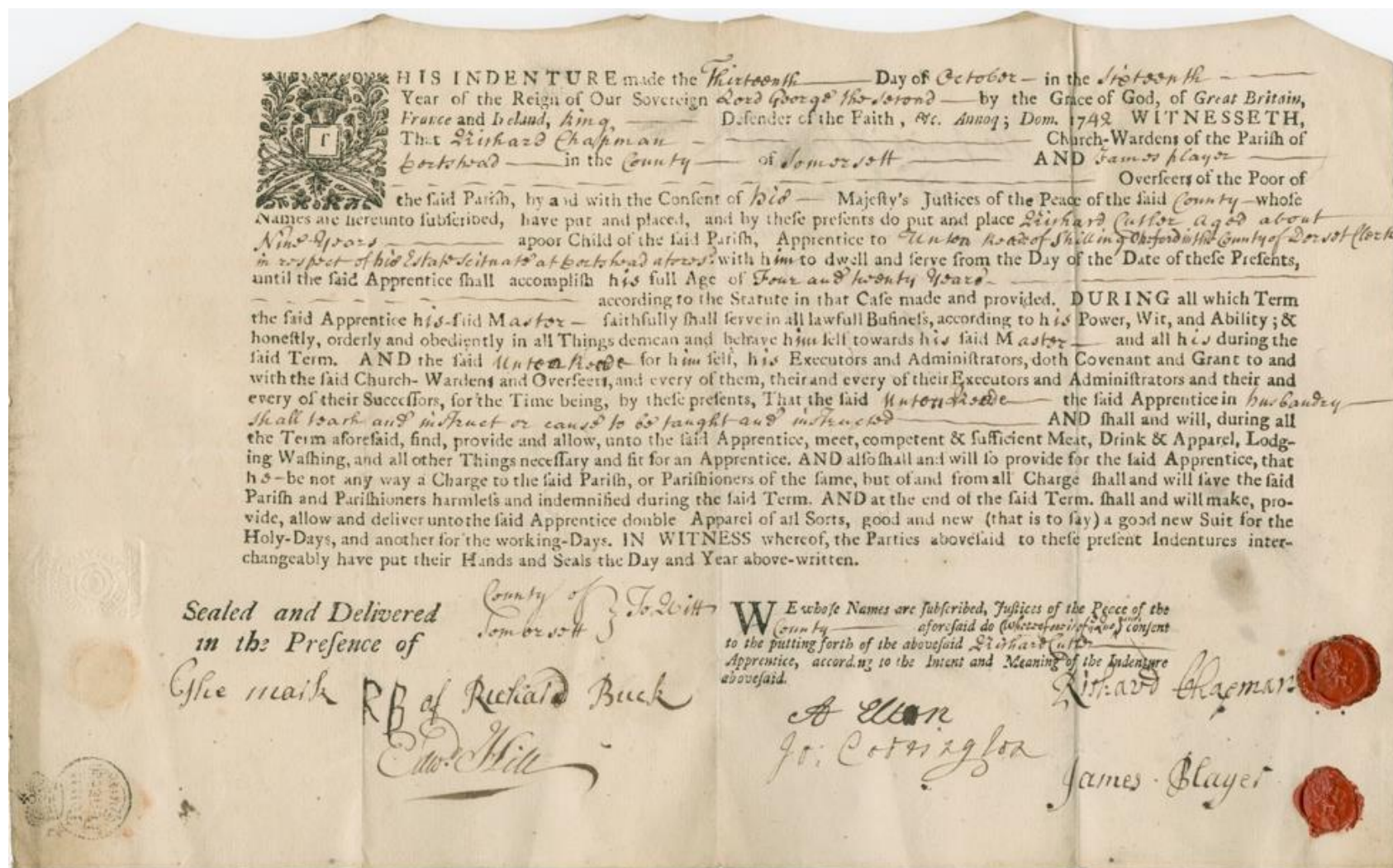
The first Factory Act attempting to regulate and improve conditions was passed by Parliament in 1802. It stipulated that children aged 11-18 in cotton mills could work a maximum of 12 hours a day, and no child under the age of nine was to be employed. The *Chimney Sweepers and Chimneys Regulation Act 1840* prohibited anyone under 21 from sweeping chimneys (by climbing inside). There was no system of inspection and the Acts were widely flouted, but growing social awareness paved the way for more successful efforts. It took a Master Sweep's conviction for manslaughter in 1875 after the death of his 12-year old apprentice to finally stop the practice of sending boys up chimneys.

The legislation was piecemeal, with labour laws only applying to certain industries. Cotton mills were forbidden to employ children at night from 1831; the rest of the textile industry followed in 1833. Although compulsory elementary education was not introduced until 1870, from 1833 children aged 9 to 13 working in textile mills had two hours schooling per day, on top of their shift. It is doubtful how much they learnt. Maximum working hours for women and children were lowered to ten in 1848.

Business archives held at the University of Nottingham include the local heritage of lace-making and textiles, and there is an excellent collection of water and drainage related records. More information about all of our business collections, as well as resources explaining how to understand and use historical financial and business records can be found on the website of Manuscripts and Special Collections: www.nottingham.ac.uk/mss.

Indenture of apprenticeship between Unton Reade and Richard Cutler; 1742

Richard Cutler, aged about nine years, poor child of the parish of Portishead, Somerset, is placed as an apprentice by Richard Chapman, churchwarden, and James Player, overseer of the poor, to Unton Reade, clerk, of Shilling Okeford, Dorset, in respect of his estate at Portishead. The apprenticeship is to be completed when Richard Cutler reaches the age of 24 years. No trade is specified, but poor children were often sent away as apprentices in unskilled work like labouring so that the parish would not have to pay to support them. (Ref: Ne D 574)



Extracts from the 1842 Royal Commission into the employment of children and young persons in the mines and collieries of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire

JM Fellows was appointed to interview teachers, miners and their families, colliery owners, and local medical personnel, to assess working practices and the physical and moral well-being of children and young people employed in mines and manufactures, which were industries not then covered by the Factories Acts. Although the doctors regard the children as generally healthy, the children themselves reported tiredness and aches, and sometimes much worse:

No. 133: James Webster

He is just 13 years old and has worked in Newthorpe pits for four years... He worked from six to eight with one hour allowed for dinner...He never works on Sundays. He lives a mile from the pit and gets his breakfast, either porridge or tea or bread and cheese. His dinner is sent, bacon potatoes and pudding with bread and cheese for clocking. He catches it [eats it] as he can by the mouthful. He is often ill-used by the corporals and bigger boys, both with fists, sticks and kicks. Nearly two years ago he was stopping in the bank, when the ass went on, the hook caught him in the eye and cheek and nearly tore it out. His face is much seamed. He was out of work for 12 weeks. Mr Norman was his surgeon, his father paid him and they had not a penny from Barber & Co. The pit is wet and they have to walk in it all day. He is quite tired when he had done a whole day's work....He had rather work above ground if he got less, it is such hard work. He went to day school a year before he went into the pit. He goes to the Methodist Sunday School at Cotmanhay. He is now in easy lessons. [Cannot spell cat, dog or cow]

The evidence can be read in 'Report by J.M. Fellows, Esq., on the employment of children and young persons in the mines and collieries of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire on the state, condition and treatment of such children and young persons', edited by Ian Winstanley (East Midlands Collection Oversize Em. O42 FEL and available online at http://www.cmhrc.co.uk/cms/document/1842_Derbyshire.pdf). This image comes from a pamphlet about local history, published in 1936, that features extracts from the report.

(Green, Herbert, Child labour in the coal mines of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire in the nineteenth century: extracts from the Reports of Commissioners, 1842; 1936. Pamphlet Em. O46 GRE)

South part of the district are healthy, and (with the exception of those who have worked at a very early age being bow-legged), not ill-formed. I have observed that their complexion although not altogether to be called sickly, is of a sallow hue; this, I suppose, follows as a matter of course from their being nearly deprived of daylight.

Those children who are employed at the pit mouth, or in farmers' services are straighter on the legs, and better looking than those working underground. I have noticed the children who do not work, or who have not from an early age worked in pits are well and better formed than those, if even of the same family, who have worked at an earlier age than twelve years." (*Ibid.* s. 45/7, p. 255).

Evidence.

Dr. Blake "considers they are generally as healthy as the labourers above ground, which he attributes to their better diet" (Fellows, Evidence No. 10, App. Pt. 2, p. 266, 1. 6).

William S. Smith, Esq., Surgeon, "As a body he considers them more healthy than the lower classes in the neighbourhood. The cause of this he attributes to their living better, and he always finds a collier child will sooner get the better of an illness, than a stocking maker, as he has the better stamina. (*Ibid.* No. 83; p. 286, 1.57). See also witnesses Nos. 23, 25, 26, 40, 69, 72, 73, 77, 80, 88, 102, 110, etc.

Immediate effects of overworking (Derbyshire, p. 34).

Sub-Commissioner's Report.

"In this district, as has been shown, the hours of work are commonly 14 and are sometimes extended to 16 out of the 24, and the mines in general are the most imperfectly drained and ventilated. Of the fatigue of such labour, so protracted and carried on in such places of work,

the following evidence exhibits a striking picture, and it will be observed that the witnesses of every class, children, young persons, colliers, underground stewards, agents, parents, teachers, ministers of religion, all concur in making similar statements."

Evidence.

"Thomas Straw, aged seven, Ilkiston:—"They would not let him sleep in the pit, or stand still; he feels very tired when he comes out, gets his tea and goes to bed. Feels tired and sleepy on a Sunday morning; would rather be in bed than go to school." (Fellows, Evidence No. 21, App. pt. 2, p. 269, 1.11). John Hawkins, aged eight, Underwood:—"Is tired and glad to get home, never wants to play." (*Ibid.*, No. 108; p. 293 1.16). George Pollard, Strelley, "Feels very tired, his back and shoulders ache; he is always too tired to play" (*Ibid.*, No. 16; p. 295 1.8). Thomas Moulton, aged nine, Trowell:—"They want no play, but go home to bed as soon as they can." (*Ibid.* No. 15, p. 267, 1.35). Matthew Carrington, aged nine, Ilkiston:—"Is very tired, and very seldom goes out of doors." (*Ibid.*, No. 19, p. 268, 1.45). Robert Blount, aged ten, Eastwood:—"He is always too tired to play and is glad to get to bed; his back and legs ache; he had rather drive plough, or go to school, than work in a pit." (*Ibid.*, No. 99, p. 290, 1.34). Joseph Skelton, aged ten, Underwood:—"He is very tired, and always glad to get to bed; had much rather work above ground; they dare not then work them so hard." (*Ibid.*, No. 109, p. 293, 1.35). Aaron Chambers, aged eleven, Watnall:—"He never plays from one week to another; he is too tired without playing; had rather do any work above ground; it is such hard work." (*Ibid.*, No. 101, p. 291, 1.30). William Hart, aged eleven, West Hallam:—"Has felt so tired that he was glad to get home, and too tired to play; has felt very stiff and tired on a Sunday." (*Ibid.*, No. 52, p. 277, 1.40). Joseph Limb,

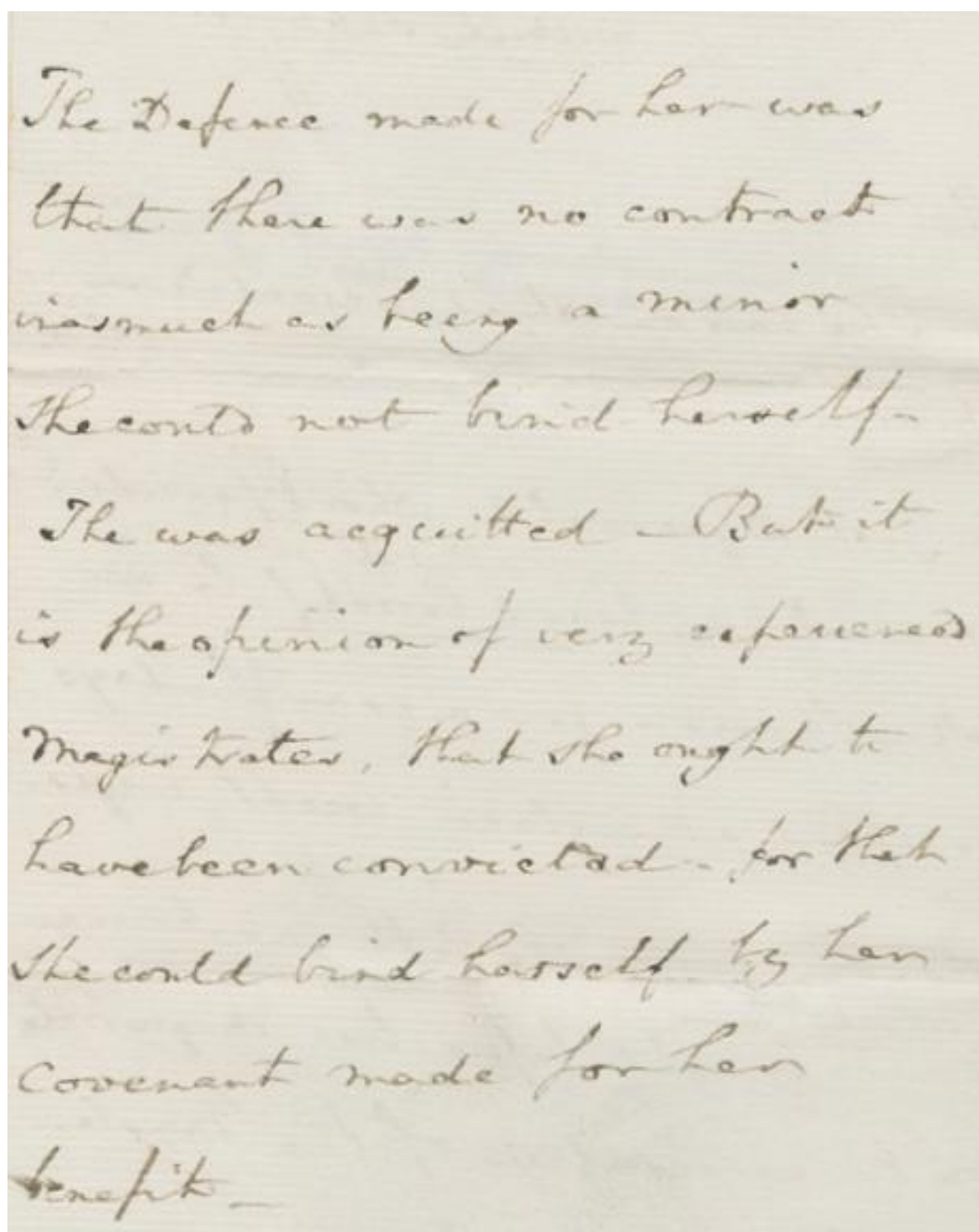
Copy extracts of reports concerning the employment of children in factories; 1833

Extract from the report into the bobbin net trade, recounting an inspection of the factory. It concluded that the children did 'not appear to me to require legislative protection either by reason of the intensity or duration of their labour'. It also expressed concerns about the impact that prohibiting persons under the age of 18 from night-work would have (on profits, not on the children). (Ref: Bo X 1)

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Report of Mr Power May 13th 1833
Bobbin net Trade
" Mr Drinkwater tells me he has entered at
" large into the subject of factories which contain
" frames for the manufacture of bobbin net lace
" both those worked by power & those worked merely
" by hand - I will only therefore observe upon this
" subject what no doubt will be sufficiently
" apparent also from his report that the children
" indirectly employed in these in the various occupa-
" tions of threading winding & winding off do not
" appear to me to require legislative protection
" either by reason of the intensity or duration of their
" labor the services required from them being pe-
" riodical & occasional rather than continuous & con-
" stant; but it will be important to observe how
" the working of such machines may be affected
" by the prohibition of night work for all persons under
" the age of eighteen "

Opinions regarding whether minors can bind themselves to serve; 1835

This extract of a letter demonstrates that whether a minor [under the age of 21] could sign a legally-binding employment contract and face judicial punishment for breaking it was a matter of some debate. In this case, a girl of 18 living with her parents became a cotton spinner, but left and was brought before the magistrates by her employer. She was acquitted because she was under age and therefore could not bind herself. The Duke of Portland's letter expresses a wish that she had been convicted, and urges the matter be referred to the Solicitor General Sir William W. Follett for his advice. (Ref: PL L6/13/2)

A photograph of a handwritten letter on aged, cream-colored paper. The handwriting is in a cursive script, likely from the 19th century. The text is written in dark ink and is slightly faded. The paper shows some signs of age, including slight discoloration and a few small stains. The text is arranged in two paragraphs, with the first paragraph being longer than the second. The first paragraph discusses a legal defense for a minor, and the second paragraph discusses the outcome of the case and a wish for a different result.

The Defence made for her was
that there was no contract
inasmuch as being a minor
she could not bind herself.
She was acquitted - But it
is the opinion of very experienced
Magistrates, that she ought to
have been convicted - for that
she could bind herself by her
covenant made for her
benefit -

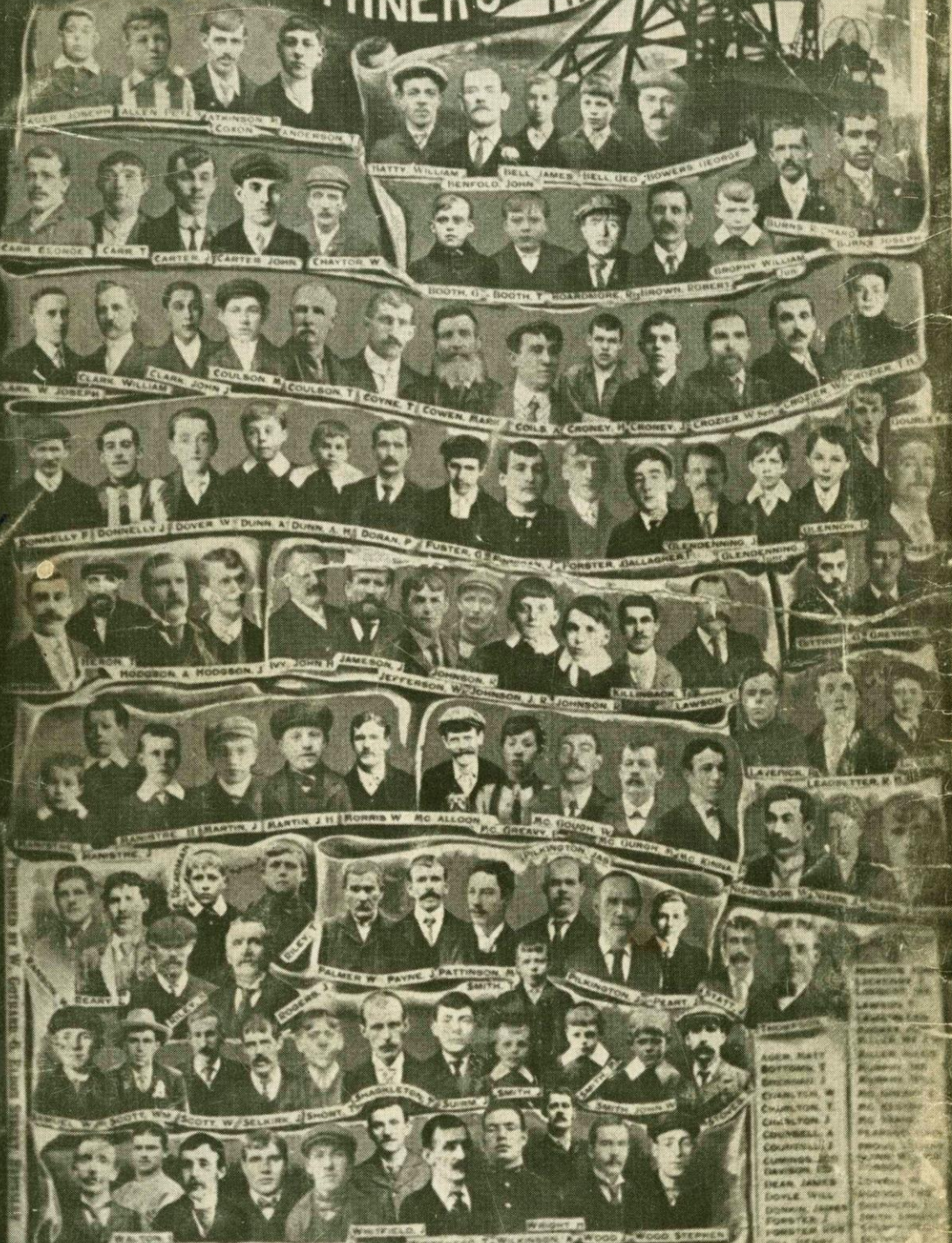
Back cover of 'The Death Pit', showing an illustration of a young victim and a memorial featuring the portraits of many of those killed

The West Stanley Colliery disaster took place on 16th February 1909, when two explosions occurred in quick succession in the shafts below ground. Some of the miners were killed by the initial force and heat of the blast; others by carbon monoxide and other toxic gasses that accumulated in the mine after the explosions. Of the 168 people killed, 59 were under the age of 20, with the two youngest victims being 13 years old. The image was used on the cover of Forster's pamphlet, which describes in some detail both the accident and the issues of safety it raised (Forster, E., *The Death Pit: the untold story of the mass death in a mine*; 1970. Pamphlet Em O46.FOR).

DURHAM

168 MINERS LOST THEIR

LIVES
FEB 16TH
1909



THE PORTRAITS ABOVE ARE ARRANGED IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER. THE 30 SURVIVORS ARE PRINTED ON SEPERATE PHOTO.

IN THE WEST STANLEY COLLIERY EXPLOSION