Working Hours in Factories

On 16th March 1832 Michael Sadler introduced a Bill in Parliament that proposed limiting the hours of all persons under the age of 18 to ten hours a day. After much debate it was clear that Parliament was unwilling to pass Sadler's bill. However, in April 1832 it was agreed that there should be another parliamentary enquiry into child labor. Sadler was made chairman and for the next three months the parliamentary committee interviewed 48 people who had worked in textile factories as children. Sadler discovered that it was common for very young children to be working for over twelve a day.

Lord Ashley carried out a survey of doctors in 1836. In a speech he made in the House of Commons he argued that over half of the doctors interviewed believed that "ten hours is the utmost quantity of labor which can be endured by the children" without damaging their health. However, Lord Ashley admitted that some doctors that came before his committee did not believe that long hours caused health problems.

Children who were late for work were severely punished. If children arrived late for work they would also have money deducted from their wages. Time-keeping was a problem for those families who could not afford to buy a clock. In some factories workers were not allowed to carry a watch. The children suspected that this rule was an attempt to trick them out of some of their wages.

(1) William Hutton, The Life of William Hutton (1816)

In the Christmas holidays of 1731 snow was followed by a sharp frost. A thaw came on in the afternoon of the 27th, but in the night the ground was again caught by a frost, which glazed the streets. I did not awake, the next morning, till daylight seemed to appear. I rose in tears, for fear of punishment, and went to my father's bedside, to ask the time. He believed six; I darted out in agonies, and from the bottom of Full Street, to the top of Silk mill Lane, not 200 yards, I fell nine times! Observing no lights in the mill, I knew it was an early hour, and the reflection of the snow had deceived me. Returning, the town clock struck two.

(2) Elizabeth Bentley, interviewed by Michael Sadler's Parliamentary Committee on 4th June, 1832.

I worked from five in the morning till nine at night. I lived two miles from the mill. We had no clock. If I had been too late at the mill, I would have been quartered. I mean that if I had been a quarter of an hour too late, a half an hour would have been taken off. I only got a penny an hour, and they would have taken a halfpenny.

(3) Frank Forrest, Chapters in the Life of a Dundee Factory Boy (1850)

In reality there were no regular hours, masters and managers did with us as they liked. The clocks in the factories were often put forward in the morning and back at night. Though this was known amongst the hands, we were afraid to speak, and a workman then was afraid to carry a watch.

(4) James Patterson, interviewed by Michael Sadler's Parliamentary Committee, 30th June, 1832.

I worked at Mr. Braid's Mill at Duntruin. We worked as long as we could see. I could not say at what hour we stopped. There was no clock in the mill. There was nobody but the master and the master's son had a watch and so we did not know the time. The operatives were not permitted to have a watch. There was one man who had a watch but it was taken from him because he told the men the time.

(5) Lord Ashley, speech in the House of Commons, 9th May, 1836

Of the thirty-one medical men who were examined, sixteen gave it as their most decided opinion that ten hours is the utmost quantity of labor which can be endured by the children, with the slightest chance of preserving their health. Dr. Loudon reports, "I am of the opinion no child under fourteen years of age should work in a factory of any description more than eight hours a day." Dr. Hawkins reports, "I am compelled to declare my deliberate opinion, that no child should be employed in factory labor below the age of ten; that no individual, under the age of eighteen, should be engaged in it longer than ten hours daily."

Scavengers

The youngest children in the textile factories were usually employed as scavengers and piecers. Scavengers had to pick up the loose cotton from under the machinery. This was extremely dangerous as the children were expected to carry out the task while the machine was still working.

(1) John Brown wrote about Robert Blincoe's experiences in a textile mill in an article for *The Lion* newspaper (15th January 1828)
The task first allocated to Robert Blincoe was to pick up the loose cotton that fell upon the floor. Apparently, nothing could be easier... although he was much terrified by the whirling motion and noise of the machinery. He also disliked the dust and the flue with which he was half suffocated. He soon felt sick, and by constantly stooping, his back ached. Blincoe, therefore, took the liberty to sit down; but this, he soon found, was strictly forbidden in cotton mills. His overlooker, Mr. Smith, told him he must keep on his legs.

(2) Frances Trollope, *Michael Armstrong, the Factory Boy*(1840)
A little girl about seven years old, who job as scavenger, was to collect incessantly from the factory floor, the flying fragments of cotton that might impede the work... while the hissing machinery passed over her, and when this is skillfully done, and the head, body, and the outstretched limbs carefully glued to the floor, the steady moving, but threatening mass, may pass and repass over the dizzy head and trembling body without touching it. But accidents frequently occur; and many are the flaxen locks, rudely torn from infant heads, in the process.

(3) David Rowland worked as a scavenger at a textile mill in Manchester. He was interviewed by Michael Sadler's House of Commons Committee on 10th July, 1832.

Question: At what age did you commence working in a cotton mill?
Answer: Just when I had turned six.

Question: What employment had you in a mill in the first instance?
Answer: That of a scavenger.

Question: Will you explain the nature of the work that a scavenger has to do?
Answer: The scavenger has to take the brush and sweep under the wheels, and to be under the direction of the spinners and the piecers generally. I frequently had to be under the wheels, and in consequence of the perpetual motion of the machinery, I was liable to accidents constantly. I was very frequently obliged to lie flat, to avoid being run over or caught.

(4) Edward Baines, *The History of the Cotton Manufacture* (1835)
It is not true to represent the work of piecers and scavengers as continually straining. None of the work in which children and young persons are engaged in mills require constant attention. It is scarcely possible for any employment to be lighter. The position of the body is not injurious: the children walk about, and have the opportunity of frequently sitting if they are so disposed.

(5) E. C. Tufnell, one of the Factory Commissioners, wrote about the work of scavengers in 1834.
The scavengers, who have been said (in the Report of the Factory Committee) to be "constantly in a state of grief, always in terror, and every moment they have to spare stretched all their length upon the floor in a state of perspiration." I have seen scavengers idle for four minutes at a time, and certainly could not find that they displayed any of the symptoms of the condition described in the Report of the Factory Committee.

(6) Angus Reach, The Morning Chronicle (1849)
The piecers, either girls or boys, walk along the mule as it advances or recedes, catching up the broken threads and skillfully reuniting them. The scavenger, a little boy or girl, crawls occasionally beneath the mule when it is at rest, and cleans the mechanism from superfluous oil, dust and dirt.
The opinions of two medical gentleman of Manchester, with whom I have conversed upon the subject of factories and health, some to this: that the insalubrity of Manchester and of the Manchester operatives is occasioned not by the labor of the mills, but by the defective domestic arrangements for cleanliness and ventilation.

Factory Food

Factory owners were responsible for providing their pauper apprentices with food. Children

constantly complained about the quality of the food. In most textile mills the children had to eat their meals while still working. This meant that the food tended to get covered with the dust from the cloth.

(1) John Birley was interviewed by *The Ashton Chronicle* on 19th May, 1849.

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 flavor 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.

(2) Matthew Crabtree was interviewed by Michael Sadler's Parliamentary Committee (18th May, 1832)

I began work at Cook's of Dewsbury when I was eight years old. We had to eat our food in the mill. It was frequently covered by flues from the wool; and in that case they had to be blown off with the mouth, and picked off with the fingers, before it could be eaten.

(3) Sarah Carpenter was interviewed by *The Ashton Chronicle* on 23rd June, 1849.

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.

(4) In his book, *A Memoir of Robert Blincoe* John Brown *recounts Blincoe's first experience of eating food in the factory apprentice house.*

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.

Physical Deformities

On 16th March 1832 Michael Sadler introduced a Bill in Parliament that proposed limiting hours in all mills to 10 for persons under the age of 18. After much debate it was clear that Parliament was unwilling to pass Sadler's bill. However, in April 1832 it was agreed that there should be another parliamentary enquiry into child labor. Sadler was made chairman and for the next three months the parliamentary committee interviewed 48 people who had worked in textile factories as children.

On 9th July 1832 Michael Sadler discovered that at least six of these workers had been sacked for giving evidence to the parliamentary committee. Sadler announced that this victimization meant that he could no longer ask factory workers to be interviewed. He now concentrated on interviewing doctors who had experience treating people who worked in textile factories. Several of these doctors expressed concerned about the number of textile workers who were suffering from physical deformities.

(1) Sir Samuel Smith worked as a doctor in Leeds. He was interviewed by Michael Sadler's House of Commons Committee on 16th July, 1832.

Question: Is not the labor in mills and factories "light and easy"?
Dr. Samuel Smith: It is often described as such, but I do not agree at all with that definition. The exertion required from them is considerable, and, in all the instances with which I am acquainted, the whole of their labor is performed in a standing position.

Question: What are the effects of this on the children?
Dr. Samuel Smith: Up to twelve or thirteen years of age, the bones are so soft that they will bend in any direction. The foot is formed of an arch of bones of a wedge-like shape. These arches have to sustain the whole weight of the body. I am now frequently in the habit of seeing cases in which this arch has given way. Long continued standing has also a very injurious effect upon the ankles. But the principle effects which I have seen produced in this way have been upon the knees. By long continued standing the knees become so weak that they turn inwards, producing that deformity which is called "knock-knees" and I have sometimes seen it so striking, that the individual has actually lost twelve inches of his height by it.

Question: Are not the females less capable of sustaining this long labor than males?
Dr. Samuel Smith: Yes. In the female the pelvis is considerably wider than the male. When having to sustain the upright posture for long periods, the pelvis is prevented from being properly developed; and, in many of those instances, instead of forming an oval aperture, it forms a triangular one, the part supporting the spine being pressed downwards, and the parts receiving the heads of the thigh-bones being pressed inwards. When they are expecting to become mothers, sometimes because of the development of the bones of the pelvis, there is not actually space for the exit of the child, which is within the womb. Under these circumstances, it is often the painful duty of the surgeon to destroy the life of the child in order that he may preserve the more valuable one of the mother. I have seen many instances of this kind, all of which, with one exception, have been those of females who have worked long hours at factories. I believe if horses in this country were put to the same period of labor that factory children are, in a very few years the animal would be almost extinct among us. Every gentleman who is in the habit of using horses well knows the effect produced upon them by too long continued labor; you may give them what corn you please, but nothing will counteract the effects of too long continued labor.

(2) Sir William Blizard worked for twenty years as a lecturer on surgery and anatomy at the Royal College of Surgeons. Sir William Blizard was interviewed by Michael Sadler's House of Commons Committee on 21st May, 1832.
Question: Is not the female constitution particularly liable to present and permanent injury, by undue exertion or improper treatment at that particular period?

Dr. William Blizzard: No doubt of it; it is admitted that at an early period the bones are not permanently formed, and cannot resist pressure to the same degree as at a mature age, and that is the state of young females; they are liable, particularly from the pressure of the thigh bones upon the lateral parts, to have the pelvis pressed inwards, which creates what is called distortion; and although distortion does not prevent procreation, yet it most likely will produce deadly consequences, either to the mother or the child, when the period.

(3) William Dodd wrote about the disabilities he suffered from his time as a child worker in his pamphlet A Narrative of a Factory Cripple (1841)
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. The wrist eventually measured twelve inches round and I was worn down to a mere skeleton. I entered St. Thomas's Hospital and on 18th July, I underwent the operation. The hand being taken off a little below the elbow. On dissection, the bones of the forearm presented a very curious appearance - something similar to an empty honeycomb, the marrow having totally disappeared.

(4) Edward Baines, The History of the Cotton Manufacture (1835)
The human frame is liable to an endless variety of diseases. Many of the children who are born into the world, and who attain the age of ten or twelve years, are so weakly, that under any circumstances they would die early. Such children would sink under factory labor, as they would under any circumstances they would die early.

Factory Pollution

One on the major complaints made by factory reformers concerned the state of the buildings that they children were forced to work in. A report published in July 1833 stated that most factories were "dirty; low-roofed; ill-ventilated; ill-drained; no conveniences for washing or dressing; no contrivance for carrying off dust and other effluvia".

Sir Anthony Carlile, a doctor at Westminster Hospital visited some textile mills in 1832. He later gave evidence to the House of Commons on the dangers that factory pollution was causing for the young people working in factories: "labor is undergone in an atmosphere heated to a temperature of 70 to 80 and upwards". He pointed out that going from a "very hot room into damp cold air will inevitably produce inflammations of the lungs".

Doctors were also concerned about the "dust from flax and the flue from cotton" in the air that the young workers were breathing in. Dr. Charles Aston Key told Michael Sadler that this "impure air breathed for a great length of time must be productive of disease, or exceedingly weaken the body". Dr. Thomas Young who studied textile workers in Bolton reported that factory pollution was causing major health problems.

Most young workers complained of feeling sick during their first few weeks of working in a factory. Robert Blincoe said he felt that the dust and flue was suffocating him. This initial reaction to factory pollution became known as mill fever. Symptoms included sickness and headaches.

The dust and floating cotton fiber in the atmosphere was a major factor in the high incidence of tuberculosis, bronchitis, asthma and byssinosis amongst cotton workers.

(1) Dr. Ward from Manchester was interviewed about the health of textile workers on 25th March, 1919.

I have had frequent opportunities of seeing people coming out from the factories and occasionally attending as patients. Last summer I visited three cotton factories with Dr. Clough of Preston and Mr. Barker of Manchester and we could not remain ten minutes in the factory without gasping for breath. How it is possible for those who are doomed to remain there twelve or fifteen hours to endure it? If we take into account the heated temperature of the air, and the contamination of the air, it is a matter of astonishment to my mind, how the work people can bear the confinement for so great a length of time.

(2) William Cobbett reported a visit to a textile factory in the Political Register that he made in September, 1824 (20th November, 1824).

The 1st, 2nd and 3rd of September were very hot days. The newspapers told us that men had dropped down dead in the harvest fields and the many horses had fallen dead in the harvest fields and that many horses had fallen dead upon the road. Yet the heat during these days never exceeded eighty-four degrees in the hottest part of the day. What, then, must be the situation of the poor children who are doomed to toil fourteen hours a day, in an average of eighty-two degrees? Can any man, with a heart in his body, and a tongue in his head, refrain from cursing a system that produces such slavery and such cruelty.

(3) Frank Forrest, Chapters in the Life of a Dundee Factory Boy (1850)

About a week after I became a mill boy, I was seized with a strong, heavy sickness, that few escape on first becoming factory workers. The cause of the sickness, which is known by the name of "mill fever", is the contaminated atmosphere produced by so many breathing in a confined space, together with the heat and exhalations of grease and oil and the gas needed to light the establishment.

(4) William Dodd, A Narrative of William Dodd,: A Factory Cripple (1841)

One great cause of ill health to the operatives in factories is the dust and lime which is continually flying about. Animal skins are soaked in a strong solution of lime. The lime gets intermixed with the wool and hair. It is put through the teaser in order to shake out the lime and dust. The machine, and all around, are covered with the lime and dust. The result is difficulty of breathing, asthma, etc.

(5) Edward Baines, The History of the Cotton Manufacture (1835)

The noise and whirl of the machinery, which are unpleasant and confusing to a spectator unaccustomed to the scene, produce not the slightest effect on the operatives habituated to it. The only thing that makes factory labor trying is that they are confined for long hours, and deprived of fresh air: this makes them pale, and reduces their vigor, but it rarely brings on disease. The minute fibers of cotton which float in the rooms are admitted, even by medical men, not to be injurious to young persons.

(6) In 1835 Andrew Ure described life in the textile factories in his book, The Philosophy of Manufactures.

On my recent tour through the manufacturing districts, I have seen tens of thousands of old, young and middle-aged of both sexes earning abundant food, raiment, and domestic accommodation, without perspiring at a single pore, screened meanwhile from the summer's sun and the winter's frost, in apartments more airy and salubrious than those of the metropolis in which our legislature and fashionable aristocracies assemble.

Piecers

The youngest children in the textile factories were usually employed as scavengers and piecers. Piecers had to lean over the spinning-machine to repair the broken threads. Research by John Fielden suggested that a piecer walked about twenty miles a day.

(1) James Turner was interviewed by Michael Sadler's Parliamentary Committee on 17th April 1832.

The work of the children, in many instances, is reaching over to piece the threads that break; they have so many that they have to mind and they have only so much time to piece these threads because they have to reach while the wheel is coming out.

(2) William Dodd, *A Narrative 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 woolen 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.

(3) John Fielden, speech in the House of Commons (9th May 1836)

At a meeting in Manchester a man claimed that a child in one mill walked twenty-four miles a day. I was surprised by this statement, therefore, when I went home, I went into my own factory, and with a clock before me, I watched a child at work, and having watched her for some time, I then calculated the distance she had to go in a day, and to my surprise, I found it nothing short of twenty miles.

(4) Edward Baines, *The History of the Cotton Manufacture* (1835)

It is not true to represent the work of piecers and scavengers as continually straining. None of the work in which children and young persons are engaged in mills require constant attention. It is scarcely possible for any employment to be lighter. The position of the body is not injurious: the children walk about, and have the opportunity of frequently sitting if they are so disposed.

(5) E. C. Tufnell, one of the Factory Commissioners, wrote about the work of piecers in 1834.

Three-fourths of the children employed are engaging in piecing at the mules, which, when they have receded a foot and a half or two feet from the frame, leave nothing to be done. If a child remains during twelve hours a day, for nine hours he performs no actual labor.

(6) Angus Reach, *The Morning Chronicle* (1849)

The piecers, either girls or boys, walk along the mule as it advances or recedes, catching up the broken threads and skillfully reuniting them. The scavenger, a little boy or girl, crawls occasionally beneath the mule when it is at rest, and cleans the mechanism from superfluous oil, dust and dirt.

The opinions of two medical gentleman of Manchester, with whom I have conversed upon the subject of factories and health, some to this: that the insalubrity of Manchester and of the Manchester operatives is occasioned not by the labor of the mills, but by the defective domestic arrangements for cleanliness and ventilation.

(7) J. R. Clynes became a piecer in Oldham in 1879.

When I achieved the manly age of ten I obtained half-time employment at Dowry Mill as a "little piecer." My hours were from six in the morning each day to noon; then a brief time off for dinner; then on to school for the afternoons; and I was to receive half a crown a week in return.

The noise was what impressed me most. Clatter, rattle, bang, the swish of thrusting levers and the crowding of hundreds of men, women and children at their work. Long rows of huge spinning-frames, with thousands of whirling spindles, slid forward several feet, paused and then slid smoothly back again, continuing the process unceasingly hour after hour while cotton became yarn and yarn changed to weaving material.

Often the threads on the spindles broke as they were stretched and twisted and spun. These broken ends had to be instantly repaired; the piecer ran forward and joined them swiftly, with a deft touch that is an art of its own.

I remember no golden summers, no triumphs at games and sports, no tramps through dark woods or over shadow-racing hills. Only meals at which there never seemed to be enough food, dreary journeys through smoke-fouled streets, in mornings when I nodded with tiredness and in evenings when my legs trembled under me from exhaustion.

Workhouse Children

Many parents were unwilling to allow their children to work in these new textile factories. To overcome this labor shortage factory owners had to find other ways of obtaining workers. One solution to the problem was to buy children from orphanages and workhouses. The children became known as pauper apprentices. This involved the children signing contracts that virtually made them the property of the factory owner.

Pauper apprentices were cheaper to house than adult workers. It cost Samuel Greg who owned the large Quarry Bank Mill at Styal, a £100 to build a cottage for a family, whereas his apprentice house, that cost £300, provided living accommodation for over 90 children.

The same approach was taken by the owners of silk mills. George Courtauld, who owned a silk mill in Braintree, Essex, took children from workhouses in London. Although offered children of all ages he usually took them from "within the age of 10 and 13". Courtauld insisted that each child arrived "with a complete change of common clothing". A contract was signed with the workhouse that stated that Courtauld would be paid £5 for each child taken. Another £5 was paid after the child's first year.

The children also signed a contract with Courtauld that bound them to the mill until the age of 21. This helped to reduce Courtauld's labor costs. Whereas adult males at Courtauld's mills earned 7s. 2d., children under 11 received only 1s. 5d. a week.

Owners of large textile mills purchased large numbers of children from workhouses in all the large towns and cities. By the late 1790s about a third of the workers in the cotton industry were pauper apprentices. Child workers were especially predominant in large factories in rural areas. For example, in 1797, of the 310 workers employed by Birch Robinson & Co in the village of Backbarrow, 210 were parish apprentices. However, in the major textile towns, such as Manchester and Oldham, parish apprenticeships was fairly uncommon.

(1) Letter from John Betts to Richard Carlile (24th February, 1828)

In 1805 when Samuel Davy was seven years of age he was sent from the workhouse in Southwark in London to Mr. Watson's Mill at Penny Dam near Preston. Later his brother was also sent to work in a mill. The parents did not know where Samuel and his brother were. The loss of her children, so preyed on the mind of Samuel's mother that it brought on insanity, and she died in a state of madness.

(2) Sarah Carpenter, interviewed in *The Ashton Chronicle* (23rd June, 1849)

My father was a glass blower. When I was eight years old my father died and our family had to go to the Bristol Workhouse. 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.

It was the mother of Joseph Russell who first found out where the children were, and told my mother. We set off together, my mother and I, we walked the whole way from Bristol to Cressbrook Mill in Derbyshire. We were many days on the road.

Mrs. Newton fondled over my mother when we arrived. My mother had brought her a present of little glass ornaments. She got these ornaments from some of the workmen, thinking they would be a very nice present to carry to the mistress at Cressbrook, for her kindness to my brother. My brother told me that Mrs. Newton's fondling was all a blind; but I was so young and foolish, and so glad to see him again; that I did not heed what he said, and

could not be persuaded to leave him. They would not let me stay unless I would take the shilling binding money. I took the shilling and I was very proud of it.

They took me into the counting house and showed me a piece of paper with a red sealed horse on which they told me to touch, and then to make a cross, which I did. This meant I had to stay at Cressbrook Mill till I was twenty-one.

(3) John Birley interviewed in *The Ashton Chronicle* (19th May, 1849)

I was born in Hare Street, Bethnal Green, London, in the year 1805. My father died when I was two years old, leaving two children, myself and Sarah my sister. My mother kept us both till I was about five years old, and then she took badly and was taken to the London Hospital. My sister and I were taken to the Bethnal Green Workhouse. My mother died and we stayed in the workhouse. 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. They said, "Well John, you are a fine lad, would you like to go into the country?" I said "Yes sir".

We had often talked over amongst ourselves how we should like to be taken into the country, Mr. Nicholls the old master, used to tell us what fine sport we should have amongst the hills, what time we should have for play and pleasure. He said we should have plenty of roast beef and get plenty of money, and come back gentlemen to see our friends.

The committee picked out about twenty of us, all boys. In a day or two after this, two coaches came up to the workhouse door. We were got ready. They gave us a shilling piece to take our attention, and we set off. I can remember a crowd of women standing by the coaches, at the workhouse door, crying "shame on them, to send poor little children away from home in that fashion." Some of them were weeping. I heard one say, "I would run away if I was them." They drove us to the Paddington Canal, where there was a boat provided to take us.

(4) John Brown, *A Memoir of Robert Blincoe* (1828)

In the summer of 1799 a rumor 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.

(5) George Courtauld, letter to Mr. Mann (11th December, 1813)

I have 8 children coming from Islington on Tuesday next and 8 or 10 more on Thursday. I had my choice from upwards of 50 girls of different ages and accepted all but one that were within the age of 10 and thirteen. They are from a very well-conducted workhouse and I really expect and earnestly hope that by continued care and attention my establishment of apprentices will prove a nursery of respectable young women fitted for any of the humble walks of life.

Apprentice House

Many parents were unwilling to allow their children to work in these new textile factories. To overcome this labor shortage factory owners had to find other ways of obtaining workers. One solution to the problem was to obtain children from orphanages and workhouses. These children became known as pauper apprentices. This involved them signing contracts that virtually made them the property of the factory owner.

One of the first factory owners to employ this system was Samuel Greg who owned the large Quarry Bank Mill at Styal. Greg had difficulty finding enough people to work for him. Manchester was eleven miles away and local villages were very small. Imported workers needed cottages, and these cost about £100 each.

By 1790 Greg became convinced that the best solution to his labor problem was to build an Apprentice House and to purchase children from workhouses. The building for the apprentices cost £300 and provided living accommodation for over 90 children. At first the children came from local parishes such as Wilmslow and Macclesfield, but later he went as far as Liverpool and London to find these young workers. To encourage factory owners to take workhouse children, people like Greg were paid between £2 and £4 for each child they employed. Greg also demanded that the children were sent to him with "two shifts, two pairs of stockings and two aprons.

The 90 children (60 girls and 30 boys) at Styal made up 50% of the total workforce. The children received their board and lodging, and two pence a week. The younger children worked as scavengers and piecers, but after a couple of years at Styal they were allowed to become involved in spinning and carding. Some of the more older boys became skilled mechanics.

(1) John Birley was interviewed by *The Ashton Chronicle* on 19th May, 1849.

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. Supper was the same as breakfast - onion porridge and dry oatcake. We all ate in the same room and all went up a common staircase to our bed-chamber; all the boys slept in one chamber, all the girls in another. We slept three in one bed. The girls' bedroom was of the same sort as ours. There were no fastenings to the two rooms; and no one to watch over us in the night, or to see what we did.

(2) In his book, *A Memoir of Robert Blincoe* John Brown recounts Blincoe's first experience of the factory apprentice house.

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 birth, 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.

Punishment in Factories

Children who worked long hours in the textile mills became very tired and found it difficult to maintain the speed required by the overlookers. Children were usually hit with a strap to make them work faster. In some factories children were dipped head first into the water cistern if they became drowsy. Children were also punished for arriving late for work and for talking to the other children. Parish apprentices who ran away from the factory was in danger of being sent to prison. Children who were considered potential runaways were placed in irons.

(1) Sarah Carpenter was interviewed about her experiences in The Ashton Chronicle (23rd June, 1849)

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.

There was an overlooker called William Hughes, who was put in his place whilst he was ill. He came up to me and asked me what my drawing frame was stopped for. I said I did not know because it was not me who had stopped it. A little boy that was on the other side had stopped it, but he was too frightened to say it was him. Hughes starting beating me with a stick, and when he had done I told him I would let my mother know. He then went out and fetched the master in to me. The master started beating me with a stick over the head till it was full of lumps and bled. My head was so bad that I could not sleep for a long time, and I never been a sound sleeper since.

There was a young woman, Sarah Goodling, who was poorly and so she stopped her machine. James Birch, the overlooker knocked her to the floor. She got up as well as she could. He knocked her down again. Then she was carried to the apprentice house. Her bed-fellow found her dead in bed. There was another called Mary. She knocked her food can down on the floor. The master, Mr. Newton, kicked her where he should not do, and it caused her to wear away till she died. There was another, Caroline Thompson. They beat her till she went out of her mind.

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 if 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.

(2) Jonathan Downe was interviewed by Michael Sadler's Parliamentary Committee on 6th June, 1832.

When I was seven years old I went to work at Mr. Marshalls factory at Shrewsbury. If a child was drowsy, the overlooker touches the child on the shoulder and says, "Come here". In a corner of the room there is an iron cistern filled with water. He takes the boy by the legs and dips him in the cistern, and sends him back to work.

(3) John Brown interviewed Robert Blincoe in 1828 about working in a textile mill.

Blincoe was promoted to the more important employment of a roving winder. Being too short of statue, 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.

(4) Joseph Hebergram was interviewed by Michael Sadler's Parliamentary Committee on 1st June, 1832.

Question: What were your hours of labor?

Answer: From five in the morning till eight at night.

Question: You had fourteen and a half hours of actual labor, at seven years of age?

Answer: Yes.

Question: Did you become very drowsy and sleepy towards the end of the day?
Answer: Yes; that began about three o'clock; and grew worse and worse, and it came to be very bad towards six and seven.

Question: How long was it before the labor took effect on your health?
Answer: Half a year.

Question: How did it affect your limbs?
Answer: When I worked about half a year a weakness fell into my knees and ankles: it continued, and it got worse and worse.

Question: How far did you live from the mill?
Answer: A good mile.

Question: Was it painful for you to move?
Answer: Yes, in the morning I could scarcely walk, and my brother and sister used, out of kindness, to take me under each arm, and run with me to the mill, and my legs dragged on the ground; in consequence of the pain I could not walk.

Question: Were you sometimes late?
Answer: Yes, and if we were five minutes too late, the overlooker would take a strap, and beat us till we were black and blue.

(5) Robert Blincoe was interviewed by John Brown in 1828.
The blacksmith had the task of riveting irons upon any of the apprentices, whom the master ordered. These irons were very much like the irons usually put upon felons. Even young women, if they suspected of intending to run away, had irons riveted on their ankles, and reaching by long links and rings up to the hips, and in these they were compelled to walk to and fro from the mill to work and to sleep.

(6) Samuel Davy was seven years old when he was sent from the Southwark Workhouse to Penny Dam Mill in Preston.
Irons were used as with felons in gaols, and these were often fastened on young women, in the most indecent manner, by keeping them nearly in a state of nudity, in the depth of winter, for several days together.

(7) Edward Baines, The History of the Cotton Manufacture (1835)
It is alleged that the children who labor in factories are often cruelly beaten by the spinners or overlookers that their feeble limbs become distorted by continual standing and stooping, and they grow up cripples. That they are compelled to work thirteen, fourteen or fifteen hours per day. Views such as these have been repeatedly given of factory labor which have persuaded many to think they must be true. But this is the exception not the rule.

(8) Samuel Fielden, Autobiography of Samuel Fielden (1887)
Todmorden lies in a beautiful valley, and on the hillsides are small farms; back about a mile are the moorlands, which could be made into fine farms, as the topography of the moors is more level generally than the enclosed land. There are numerous large mills in the town, Fielden Brothers being the largest; it contains about 2,000 looms.

When I arrived at the mature age of 8 years I, as was usual with the poor people's children in Lancashire, went to work in a cotton mill, and if there is any of the exuberance of childhood about the life of a Lancashire mill-hand's child it is in spite of his surroundings and conditions, and not in consequence of it. As I look back on my experience at the tender age I am filled with admiration at the wonderful vitality of these children. I think that if the devil had a particular enemy whom he wished to unmercifully torture the best thing for him to do would be to put his soul into the body of a Lancashire factory child and keep him as a child in a factory the rest of his days. The mill into which I was put was the mill established by John Fielden, M.P., who fought so valiantly in the ten-hour movement.

The infants, when first introduced to these abodes of torture, are put at stripping the full spools from the spinning jennies and replacing them with empty spools. They are put to work in a long room where there are about twenty machines. The spindles are apportioned to each child, and woe be to the child who shall be behind in doing its allotted work. The machine will be started and the poor child's fingers will be bruised and skinned with the revolving spools. while the children try to catch up to their comrades by doing their work with the speed of the machine running, the brutal overlooker will frequently beat them unmercifully, and I have frequently seen them strike the children, knocking them off their stools and sending them spinning several feet on the greasy floor.

When the ten-hour movement was being agitated in England my father was on the committee of agitation in my native town, and I have heard him tell of sitting on the platform with Earl Shaftesbury, John Fielden, Richard Ostler, and other advocates of that cause. I always thought he put a little sarcasm into the word earl, at any rate he had but little respect for aristocracy and royalty. He was also a Chartist and I have heard him tell of many incidents connected with the Chartist agitation and movement.

Accidents

Unguarded machinery was a major problem for children working in factories. One hospital reported that every year it treated nearly a thousand people for wounds and mutilations caused by machines in factories. A report commissioned by the House of Commons in 1832 said that: "there are factories, no means few in number, nor confined to the smaller mills, in which serious accidents are continually occurring, and in which, notwithstanding, dangerous parts of the machinery are allowed to remain unfenced."

The report added that he workers were often "abandoned from the moment that an accident occurs; their wages are stopped, no medical attendance is provided, and whatever the extent of the injury, no compensation is afforded."

In 1842 a German visitor noted that he had seen so many people in the streets of Manchester without arms and legs that it was like "living in the midst of the army just returned from a campaign."

(1) Dr. Ward from Manchester was interviewed about the health of textile workers on 25th March, 1819.

When I was a surgeon in the infirmary, accidents were very often admitted to the infirmary, through the children's hands and arms having being caught in the machinery; in many instances the muscles, and the skin is stripped down to the bone, and in some instances a finger or two might be lost. Last summer I visited Lever Street School. The number of children at that time in the school, who were employed in factories, was 106. The number of children who had received injuries from the machinery amounted to very nearly one half. There were forty-seven injured in this way.

(2) John Brown, *A Memoir of Robert Blincoe* (1828)

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 agonized 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.

(3) William Cobbett reported a visit to a textile factory in the *Political Register* that he made in September, 1824 (20th November, 1824).

The 1st, 2nd and 3rd of September were very hot days. The newspapers told us that men had dropped down dead in the harvest fields and the many horses had fallen dead in the harvest fields and that many horses had fallen dead upon the road. Yet the heat during these days never exceeded eighty-four degrees in the hottest part of the day. What, then, must be the situation of the poor children who are doomed to toil fourteen hours a day, in an average of eighty-two degrees? Can any man, with a heart in his body, and a tongue in his head, refrain from cursing a system that produces such slavery and such cruelty.

(4) John Allett started working in a textile factory when he was fourteen years old. Allett was fifty-three when he was interviewed by Michael Sadler and his House of Commons Committee on 21st May, 1832.

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.

19TH C. ENGLISH CHILD LABOR

BYLO CHACÓN - HTTP://WWW.SPARTACUS.SCHOOLNET.CO.UK/IRCHILD.MAIN.HTM

Scavengers	Piecers	Working Hours	Workhouse Children	Food in the Factory
Apprentice Houses	Physical Deformities	Punishments	Factory Pollution	Accidents