

Mr. Charles Ashman, the manager of a Radstock coalmine said that ...

Boys begin working underground aged eight and are employed in opening doors for ventilation. Boys between about nine and 16, work at pushing carts of coal. Older boys, up to 20, help to fill sledges with coal at the coalface.

None of the children works hewing coal at the coalface, as they do not have the strength needed.

John Beard was 10 in 1842 and said that ...

He began working at the Radstock Coal Company three-quarters of a year ago. He helps his 60-year-old uncle to haul carts of coal on the incline.

He begins work at four in the morning, and comes up generally between two and four p.m.

He has met with one accident from his arm slipping and getting jammed.

He can read the Bible, but cannot write.

John Pratten was 16 in 1842 and said that ...

He began working underground at seven years old and pushed with his brother, who was 10 years older, and had the hardest work.

He usually goes down the mine at five in the morning and comes up at about three p.m.

Generally, he takes bread and cheese down with him, but sometimes does not have the time to eat it. He cannot read or write.

David Gulliver was 10 in 1842 and said that ...

He began two years and a half ago as a pusher with another boy. He goes down at four or five o'clock in the morning and stays till one or two p.m. He has time for meals and for sleep but not when underground. He has never tried any other kind of work, nor wished to as he is quite satisfied.

He can read a little, but cannot write. He goes to school on Sundays. He began at 5d (2p) a day, and now gets 9d (4p).

Student tasks

1. Why was coal an important source of power in the nineteenth century?
2. Why were children employed in the coalmines of the UK in the nineteenth century?
3. Use the evidence above and the images from the PowerPoint to imagine life as a boy in a mine on the Somerset coalfield. Write a diary for one day of your life.
4. Use the evidence above to write a letter to the editor of a newspaper arguing that children should not work underground in coalmines.
5. Use the evidence above to make a dominoes game for children working in the Somerset coalmines.

This resource is one of a group of resources for KS1,2 and 3 on the subject of the Somerset Coal Canal and coalfield.

More information from the [Somersetshire Coal Canal Society](#).

