

Kresen Kernow learning resource: children and mining

Among Kresen Kernow's extensive mining archive collections is a copy of the Children's Commissioner's report into the Employment and Condition of Children in Mines and Manufactories from 1842. The report consists of thousands of pages of oral testimony about children working in mines, including from children as young as 5. Children in Cornwall were also interviewed, and this resource is based on the oral testimony of two of them: Martha and Richard.

You can read more about the report, and see the full digitised version, on the British Library's website: <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/report-on-child-labour-1842>.

This resource consists of:

- 1) Richard Jeffrey's extract from the Report
- 2) Martha Buckingham's extract from the Report
- 3) A Question Bank that could be used orally or to create a comprehension activity
- 4) Child and Character Profile activities
- 5) A Sorting activity
- 6) A True or False activity

Did you know that we also offer a free mining workshop at Kresen Kernow and in your classroom? Contact us to find out more, or if you have any queries about this resource.



1. Richard Jeffrey's account

No. 92. (H. 36.) *Richard Jeffery*, 9 years and 1 month old. Examined at the Consolidated Mines, May 14th, 1841 :

No. 92. He belongs at the "boxes" (picking tables). Gets 6s. a month. Has been eight months here. Has had very good health. His hands get sore when he is long at the "shambles" (the heap to which the stones rejected by the pickers are taken). He stays till eight o'clock now. Is tired with his day's work. Lives two miles and a half off. His father died out at Mexico with the cholera. His mother was left with four, three girls and himself. He is the youngest. Does not go to school. Has never gone yet. His mother cannot afford to give him clothes to go in. Two of his sisters work at this mine; the other is a dress-maker. He cannot read. 60 65

2. Martha Buckingham's account

10 No. 86. (H. 30.) *Martha Buckingham*, 14 years and one month old. Examined at the Consolidated Mines, May 15, 1841 :

Has been at work about four years; always at this mine. Has been employed "picking" all the time, except "carrying" now and then, and griddling" or "spalling" once in a way to help "the pair" when they are busy. "Carrying" is the hardest work; this gives her sometimes a pain in the back. Now and then she does this for the whole day. She gets wet sometimes in the winter, the wind and rain driving under the shed. Catches cold sometimes; most of the girls do. Has been kept at home a fortnight together by cold, caught chiefly by getting her feet wet in coming and going. The girls cannot get a pair of shoes to change when they come to the mine; it is hard enough to get one pair to wear. She also "overheated her blood" by carrying and working hard, and has had a breaking out since. She usually comes to work at seven in the morning, and goes home at half-past five, but at sampling, which occurs about once a-month, they come at six and stay till eight. They do this for a week sometimes, and sometimes for a fortnight. This is the case now. She lives at Bissoe Bridge (three miles distant). Gets her supper after she goes home, and goes to bed as soon as she can—at half-past nine or ten. She gets up at four. Are seven in family. Has no father; he died in Scotland about eight years ago. Was a miner. All are older than herself, except one. All work to the mines, except the youngest. One brother is ill; he was working at Poldice in a hot place, and then had to fill the kibble in cold water. She gets her breakfast before leaving in the morning. No time is allowed for "crowst" (lunch), but about nine or ten they take a bit of pasty when the agent is not looking, holding it with one hand and working with the other. When they work overtime they are allowed to stay at home a day when the sampling is over; they are not paid anything more than the regular wages. There is not regular work for all in the summer; but in the winter all come, or very nearly all. They are allowed half an hour for dinner. They warm the pasties and hobbans at the "dry" when the weather is cold. They take their dinners under a shed; the girls all together. An anker (small barrel) of cold water is brought for them to drink. No water is to be had except for a long way off. She feels very tired to walk home. No tasks are given; they always work till half-past five. When they work late on the other days they leave work at half-past five on Saturdays. She goes to Sunday-school with the Methodists. Learns to read and spell, with the Catechism. 15 20 25 30 35 40

No. 8 .

She reads pretty well. Has cough, and a papulous eruption; but has the appearance of being generally healthy.

3. Children's Commissioner's Report – Question Bank

Below is a list of questions which relate to Martha and Richard's interviews from the Children's Commissioner's Report. They could be used orally in class or to create a reading comprehension activity.

- How old is Martha/Richard?
- What is the name of the mine where they work?
- How long has Martha/Richard worked there?
- What jobs did children do in the mines?
- What are Martha's/Richard's working hours?
- Which job does Martha find the hardest and why?
- Martha sometimes catches colds. What causes this?
- How far does Martha/Richard have to work to work?
- What happened to Martha's/Richard's father?
- Do other members of Martha's/Richard's family work in the mine?
- Do the children working in the mine get breaks?
- How long is Martha's break for dinner?
- Do the children working in the mine go to school?
- Is the work the same throughout the year?
- How much does Richard get paid?
- Do you think the children working in the mine are treated well? Explain your answer using evidence from the interviews.
- Would you like to work in the mine? Explain your answer using evidence from the interviews.
- Life was hard for children in Victorian times. Explain why using evidence from the interviews.

- Find and copy a phrase from Martha's interview that shows that work in the mines was tiring.
- Find and copy a phrase from Martha's interview that shows that the children would eat a bit of pasty in secret.
- Find and copy a phrase from Richard's interview that shows that his family did not have much money

4. Child Profile

Use the information from the Children's Commissioner's report to create a profile for either Martha or Richard.

Name:	
Age:	
Family:	Health:
School:	Pay:
Jobs at the mine:	Working hours:

4a. Example Richard profile

Name: Richard Jeffery	
Age: 9 years and 1 month	
Family: Lives with his mother and his three sisters. His father died in Mexico from cholera.	Health: Very good health but gets sore hands when working at the shambles (the heap where rejected stones are taken).
School: Does not go to school. Has never been. Cannot read.	Pay: 6 shillings a month
Jobs at the mine: picking at the boxes (picking tables)	Working hours: Works until 8pm

4b. Example Martha profile

Name: Martha Buckingham

Age: 14 years and one month

Family: There are 7 people in Martha's family. Her father died in Scotland about 8 years before. He had been a miner. Her brothers and sisters are all older than her, except one. All, except the youngest, work in the mine.

Health: She sometimes catches a cold. Often from getting wet feet on the walk to and from the mine. Has a cough and a rash (or spot??) but generally appears well.

School: Goes to a Methodist Sunday school where she learns to read and spell using the Catechism. Reads pretty well.

Pay: Doesn't get extra pay when she works overtime but gets a day off when the sampling is over.

Jobs at the mine: picking, carrying, griddling, spalling

Working hours: Usually 7 until 5:30 but works from 6 until 8 during sampling.

4c. Character Profile

Create a character profile for a child who worked in a Victorian mine. Use your learning about the conditions in the mines and the interviews from the Children's Commissioner's Report to help make your ideas authentic.

Name:	
Age:	
Family:	Health:
School:	Pay:
Jobs at the mine:	Working hours:

5. Sorting activity

After reading Martha and Richard's interviews, pupils sort the statements (see overleaf) according to whether they refer to Martha, Richard or both children's experience of working in the mines.

<u>Martha</u>	<u>Richard</u>	<u>Both</u>
Catches a cold sometimes	Gets sore hands	Father has died
Usually works from 7am until 5:30pm	Is paid 6s each month	Has siblings who also work at the mine
Lives 3 miles away	Lives 2½ miles away	Is tired by the end of the working day
Doesn't get a break until dinner time	Has worked there for 8 months	There is no money for clothes or shoes to wear for work
Goes to Sunday school	Does not go to school	
Does a range of different jobs		
Has a bit of pasty in the morning, eating it with one hand while still working with the other		

Martha

Martha

Richard

Richard

Both

Both

Martha

Martha

Richard

Richard

Both

Both

Catches a cold
sometimes

Is paid 6s
each month

Has worked there
for 8 months

Usually works from
7am until 5:30pm

Lives 3 miles away

Does not go to school

Has some pasty in the
morning, eating it with
one hand while working
with the other

Doesn't get a break
until dinner time

Goes to Sunday school

Has siblings who also
work at the mine

Lives $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles away

Does a range of different jobs

There is no money for clothes or shoes to wear for work

Is tired by the end of the working day

Gets sore hands

Father has died

6. True or False

Pupils use their knowledge of Martha and Richard's interviews to decide whether the statements are true or false. For those statements that are false, pupils use evidence from the interviews to explain why. The answers are given below. Print and cut versions are available overleaf.

<u>True</u>	<u>False</u>
The work is hard and very tiring.	All children go to school to learn to read and write.
The work they do can be painful at times.	You have to be older than 10 to work in the mine.
Brothers and sisters often also work in the mine.	Children working in the mines get regular breaks.
Pasties were a common food for miners.	The children are provided with uniforms to wear for work.
They often catch colds.	They get paid well.
They have to walk to work.	They do the same job each day.
They work long hours.	
They have to get up very early each morning.	

True

All children go to school to learn to read and write.

False

The work is hard and very tiring.

You have to be older than 10 to work in the mine.

The work they do can be painful at times.

Children working in the mines get regular breaks.

Brothers and sisters often also work in the mine.

The children are provided with uniforms to wear for work.

Pasties were a common food for miners.

They often catch colds.

They have to get up very early each morning.

They have to walk
to work.

They do the same
job each day.

They work long hours.

They get paid well.