

The Industrial Revolution 2

The Age of Coal

The factories needed people to work in them, so the families who had worked on farms, but had been put out of work by the invention of farming machinery, had little choice but to move to the towns to work in the new factories. Villages like Manchester grew very fast to become large towns as more and more people were forced by their poverty to move there.



A girl pulls a heavy tub of coal up a steep slope in a coal mine

The new factories with their steam engines needed something else as well as people to work them. They needed coal to power them. So, coal became very important, and new

coal mines and people to work them also became very important. Many years later coal would also be needed for running trains, and later still ships. Coal was also needed to heat the homes of the people in the ever bigger towns and cities, where they could not gather wood from the hedges and woodlands around, as they had done in the past when most people lived in the countryside. But the big need for coal was as the fuel to heat the huge steam engines which powered the machines in the new factories.

Many families worked in the new coal mines - including the children. The people were paid so poorly that they could not have afforded to pay

for their homes or their food if the children as well as the adults had not worked in the factories and in the mines.

In the twentieth century steam engines in factories would give way to electricity to power machinery. Most of our electricity continues to be made by steam engines but most of the steam which generates the electricity in Britain is now made in boilers heated by gas or oil, with a small amount heated by nuclear energy. Some coal fired electricity generating power stations still exist in the United Kingdom, but only a few. In other countries, such as the USA, India and China, hundreds of millions of tons of coal are burnt to make electricity every year.