

## Children in the Mines

### 3. Dangerous Work

Even more dangerous was taking the coal up to the surface on the ladders that they used then. In those days the coal was carried in baskets. There was the danger of just slipping and falling, but more often large pieces of coal would fall out of the basket being carried by the person above you on the ladder. This is what Agnes Moffat told the government in 1840:



An accident happens as children carry coal up a ladder to the surface

“Began working a’ 10 years of age. Work 12 and 14 hours daily. Can earn 12 shillings in a fortnight if work be not stopped by bad air or otherwise. Father took sister and I down; he gets our wages. I fill five baskets; the weight is more than 22 cwt [a little more than a tonne]; it takes me five journeys. The work is awfully sore for females. Had my shoulder knocked out a short time ago, and laid idle for some time. It is no uncommon thing for women to loose their burthen [the coal that they are carrying] and drop off the ladder down the dyke below. Margaret McNeil did a few weeks since, and injured both her legs. When

the tugs which pass over the forehead break, which they frequently do, it is very dangerous to be under a load. The lassies hate the work altogether, but they canna run away from it.”

Families were so poor that the children were forced to work rather than go to school. If they did not, then the family could not

eat or pay the rent for their home, usually just one room in a shared house. This meant that many children rarely had time to play, and when they did have time they were often too tired. It was unusual for children to learn to read or to write, although some did at Sunday Schools run by the churches. Children who worked in the mines and factories lived their whole lives cold, dirty and hungry.

In 1842 the Government started to change things. Following a terrible accident in a mine in which 26 children died it was made illegal for children and women to work underground. Although at first some mine owners ignored the new law, things began to get better.