



Witness 1 John Moss

Mr John Moss, an overseer, was questioned by parliament.

“Q: Were any children employed at the factory?”

A: There were 111. All apprentices from London between the ages of seven and eleven.

Q: What were the hours of work?

A: From five o'clock in the morning till eight at night.

Q: What time was allowed for meals?

A: Half an hour for breakfast and half an hour for dinner.

Q: Would the children sit or stand to work?

A: Stand.

Q: Were they usually tired at night?

A: Yes, some of them were very tired. I have frequently found some asleep on the factory floor.

Q: Were any children injured by machines?

A: Very frequently. Very often their fingers were crushed and one had his arm broken.”

Witness 2 Elizabeth Bentley

Michael Sadler asked the questions

Question: What were your hours of labour?

Answer: As a child I worked from five in the morning till nine at night.

Question: What time was allowed for meals?

Answer: We were allowed forty minutes at noon.

Question: Had you any time to get breakfast, or drinking?

Answer: No, we got it as we could.

Question: Did you have time to eat it?

Answer: No; we were obliged to leave it or to take it home, and when we did not take it, the overlooker took it, and gave it to the pigs.

Question: Suppose you flagged a little, or were late, what would they do?

Answer: Strap us.

Question: What work did you do?

Answer: A weigher in the card-room.

Question: How long did you work there?

Answer: From half-past five, till eight at night.

Question: What is the carding-room like?

Answer: Dusty. You cannot see each other for dust.

Question: Did working in the card-room affect your health?

Answer: Yes; it was so dusty, the dust got up my lungs, and the work was so hard. I got so bad in health, that when I pulled the baskets down, I pulled my bones out of their places.

Question: You are considerably deformed in your person in consequence of this labour?

Answer: Yes, I am.

Question: At what time did it come on?

Answer: I was about thirteen years old when it began coming, and it has got worse since. When my mother died I had to look after myself.

Question: Where are you now?

Answer: In the poor house.

Question: You are utterly incapable of working in the factories?

Answer: Yes

Question: You were willing to have worked as long as you were able, from your earliest age?

Answer: Yes.

Question: And you supported your widowed mother as long as you could?

Answer: Yes

Witness 3 Eliza Marshall

Interviewed by Michael Sadler

Question: What were your hours of work?

Answer: When I first went to the mill we worked from six in the morning till seven in the evening. After a time we began at five in the morning, and worked till ten at night.

Question: Were you very much fatigued by that length of labour?

Answer: Yes.

Question: Did they beat you?

Answer: When I was younger they used to do it often.

Question: Did the labour affect your limbs?

Answer: Yes, when we worked over-hours I was worse by a great deal; I had stuff to rub my knees; and I used to rub my joints a quarter of an hour, and sometimes an hour or two.

Question: Were you straight before that?

Answer: Yes, I was; my master knows that well enough; and when I have asked for my wages, he said that I could not run about as I had been used to do.

Question: Are you crooked now?

Answer: Yes, I have an iron on my leg; my knee is contracted.

Question: Have the surgeons in the Infirmary told you by what your deformity was occasioned?

Answer: Yes, one of them said it was by standing; the marrow is dried out of the bone, so that there is no natural strength in it.

Question: You were quite straight till you had to labour so long in those mills?

Answer: Yes, I was as straight as any one.

Witness 4 Hannah Brown was interviewed by Michael Sadler, 1832.

Question: How early did you begin to work in the mills?

Answer: At nine years old.

Question: What hours did you work?

Answer: I began at six o'clock, and worked till nine at night.

Question: What time was allowed for your meals?

Answer: No, none at all.

Question: Did this work affect your limbs?

Answer: Yes, I felt a great deal of pain in my legs.

Question: Did it begin to produce deformity in any of your limbs?

Answer: Yes; both my knees are rather turned in.

Question: Was there punishment?

Answer: Yes

Question: Has Mr. Ackroyd ever punished you in any way?

Answer: Yes; he has taken hold of my hair and my ear, and pulled me, and just given me a bit of a shock, more than once.

Question: Did you ever see him adopt similar treatment towards any others?

Answer Yes: I have seen him pull a relation of mine about by the hair.

Question: Do you mean he dragged her?

Answer: Yes, about three or four yards.

Witness 5 Joseph Hebergam was interviewed by **Michael Sadler** 1832.

Question: At what age did you start work?

Answer: Seven years of age.

Question: At whose mill?

Answer: George Addison's Bradley Mill, near Huddersfield.

Question: What were your hours of labour?

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

Question: What intervals had you for refreshment?

Answer: Thirty minutes at noon.

Question: Had you no time for breakfast or refreshment in the afternoon?

Answer: No, not one minute; we had to eat our meals as we could, standing or otherwise.

Question: You had fourteen and a half hours of actual labour, 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 labour 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.

Question: When did your brother start working in the mill?

Answer: John was seven.

Question: Where is your brother John working now?

Answer: He died three years ago.

Question: What age was he when he died?

Answer: Sixteen years and eight months.

Question: What was his death attributed to?

Answer: He died from an injury to his back after working long hours in the factory?

Question: Did his medical attendants state that the back injury was owing to his having been so over-laboured at the mill?

Answer: Yes.

Question: Have you found that, on the whole, you have been made ill, deformed and miserable, by the factory system?

Answer: Yes. If I had a thousand pounds, I would give them to have the use of my limbs again.

Witness 6 Mark Best interviewed 2 June 1832.

Question: One of the Witnesses has stated, that in some mills it was so mixed with the material of the work that the refuse hangs about the mouth when they are eating their food; is that the case?

Answer: In a dusty place bits of material will fly about till they can scarcely see themselves.

How can the dust hang round their mouths?

Answer: It does in those dusty rooms, where they work with the wool.

Is it a common thing for them to clean their food which has been in these dusty rooms?

Answer: Yes, it is necessary sometimes to do so.

Were they always able to eat their food then?

Answer: Sometimes in those dusty places it takes away their appetite, and they cannot eat it, and some of them are obliged to desist from their labour two or three times a week.

Speaking of the long hours of labour, how were those children treated when they were kept at their work for such a time?

Answer: In those rooms I have been in, spinning rooms, they have small boys and girls to take the bobbins off, and those that are the last they beat with a strap to make them look sharp (be alert).

Do you mean to say they beat them at Mr Marshall's and the rest you have named?

Answer: Yes.

Did you see that the beating was worse towards the termination (end) of the day, when the children got tired?

Answer: Yes, when they were tired they were obliged to use them worse to make them keep up.

Have you reason to think that in any of those mills the masters or the managers were aware that the children were thus beaten and strapped?

Answer: Yes, they knew it very well; they encouraged them to do it. Mr. Stirk's was the last place I was at, and the young Mr. Stirk made a strap for me himself, and told me to use it freely, and make them look sharp.

Will you describe the sort of straps which are made use of?

Answer: They are about a foot and a half long, and there is a stick at the end: and that end they beat them with is cut in the direction of my fingers, thus, having five or six thongs, some of them.

Are some of them set in a handle?

Answer: Yes, and some are not.

Some of them are regularly made for the purpose?

Answer: Yes.

You say you had one of them delivered to you by a master, who urged you to make use of it and to lay it on freely?

Answer: Yes.

Is Mr Stirk's a large establishment?

Answer: No, not very large.

Do you think that you could have got the quantity of work out of the children for so great a number of hours without that cruel treatment?

Answer: No, I dare say I should not, for that number of hours I could not, I think; it is a long time; I think they could not, without beating them, get the quantity of work they want. The speed of the machinery is calculated, and they know how much work it will do, and unless they are driven and flogged, they cannot get the quantity of work they want from them.

So that the children have to be kept up to their work, more particularly towards the evening by this flogging?

Answer: Yes.

Were they fined as well as beaten occasionally?

Answer: Yes.

For what were they fined?

Answer: For various things; if they were caught combing their hair before they went home, or washing themselves; they were fined for such things as those.

What reason was there for fining them for washing themselves?

Answer: It was to prevent their doing such things.

Do you know on what account they wished to prevent their washing and combing themselves? Was it to prevent their taking up time?

Answer: Yes, it was.

Was there any other reason for preventing it?

Answer: If they caught them doing any other thing, such as cleaning their shoes or doing anything so as to go home decent at night.

Did they fine them for doing this during the hours of work, or for doing it after the hours of work were over?

Answer: If they did it, it was in case of their doing it when the work was going on.

Were the children allowed, when the work went on well, to clean themselves at all in this manner?

Answer: No, they did not allow them to do any such thing; they do not even allow them to speak to one another.

Witness 7 David Rowland was interviewed by Michael Sadler in 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 constant movement of the machinery, I was liable to accidents all the time. I had very frequently to lie flat, to avoid being run over or caught (in the machine).

Question: How long did you continue at that employment?

Answer: From a year and a half to two years.

Question: What did you go to then?

Answer: To be a piecer.

Question: Did the employment require you to be upon your feet all the time?

Answer: It did.

Question: You continued at that employment for how long?

Answer: I was a piecer till I was about fifteen or sixteen years of age.

Question: What were your hours of labour?

Answer: Fourteen; in some cases, fifteen and sixteen hours a day.

Question: How had you to be kept up to it?

Answer: During the latter part of the day, I was severely beaten very frequently.

Question: Will you state the effect that the degree of labour had upon your health?

Answer: I never had good health after I went to the factory. At six years of age I was

healthy with red cheeks and strong; I had not been in the mill long before my colour disappeared, and a state of debility came over me, and a paleness.

Note

A piecer had to mend broken threads very quickly while the machine was still working. They had to have small quick fingers or they would be damaged by the hard wooden shuttle that flew from side to side at very fast speeds

Witness 8 Samuel Coulson interviewed 4 July 1832 (FATHER)

Have you any family?

Yes.

Have any of them worked in a mill?

Yes, three daughters.

At what age did they begin to work?

The elder was going 12, and the middlemost going 11 and the youngest going 8 when they went to the mill first; they are older now.

At what time in the morning, in the brisk time, did those girls go to the mills?

In the brisk (busy) time, for about six weeks, they have gone at 3 o'clock in the morning and ended at 10 or nearly half past at night.

What intervals were allowed for rest or refreshment during those 19 hours of labour?

Breakfast a quarter of an hour, and dinner half an hour, and drinking a quarter of an hour.

Is that all?

Yes.

Was any of that time taken up in cleaning the machinery?

They generally had to do what they call drying down; sometimes this took the whole of the time at breakfast or drinking, and they were to get their dinner or breakfast as they could; if not, it was brought home.

Sometimes they could not get their breakfast at all?

Sometimes they could not.

How long ago was this?

It is better than a year since.

Had you not great difficulty in awakening your children to this excessive labour?

Yes, in the early time we had them to take up asleep and shake them, when we got them on the floor to dress them, before we could get them off to their work, but not so in the common hours.

What were the common hours?

Six o'clock in the morning till half past eight at night.

Supposing they had been a little too late, what would have been the consequence during the long hours?

They were quartered in the longest hours, the same as in the shortest time.

What do you mean by quartering?

A quarter [of a day's pay] was taken off.

If they had been how much too late?

Five minutes.

What was the length of time they could be in bed during those long hours?

It was near 11 o'clock before we could get them into bed after getting a little food. My wife used to stop up all night, for fear that we could not get them ready for the time: sometimes we have gone to bed, and one of us generally woke up.

What time did you get them up in the morning?

In general me or my wife got up at 2 o'clock to dress them.

So that they had not above 4 hours sleep at this time?

No, they had not.

For how long was that?

About six weeks it held; it was only done when the throng (busy time) was very much on; it was not often that.

The common hours of labour were from 6 in the morning till half past eight at night?

Yes.

With the same intervals for food?

Yes, just the same.

Were the children excessively tired by this labour?

Many times; we have cried often when we have given them the little food we had to give them; we had to shake them, and they have fallen to sleep with the food in their mouths many a time.

What were the wages in the short hours?

Three shillings a week each [15p]

When they wrought those very long hours, what did they get?

Three shillings and sevenpence halfpenny. [18p]

For all that additional labour they had only 7½d [4p] a week additional?

No more.

Could you dispose of their wages, when they had received them, as you wished?

They never said anything to me: but the children have said, "If we do not bring some little thing from the shop I am afraid we 'shall lose our work'": and sometimes they used to bring a bit of sugar or some little oddment, out of their wages.

