



Pit Lasses: Women and Girls in Coalmining c.1800-1914

Denise Bates

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Women have long been recognised as the backbone of coalmining communities, supporting their men. Less well known is the role which they played as the industry developed, working underground or at the pit head. The year 2012 is the 170th anniversary of the publication of the Report of the Second Children's Employment Commission. The report caused public outrage in May 1842, revealing that half-dressed women worked underground alongside naked men. Three months later, to protect them from moral corruption, females were banned from working underground. The Commission's report has been neglected as a historical source with the same few quotations widely used to illustrate the same headline points. And yet, across the country, around 350 women and girls described their lives and work. Together, this report and the 1841 census, produce a detailed and surprising picture of a female miner at work, at home and in her community. After 1842 females were still allowed to work above ground. Following a painful transition in the mid-1840s when some former female miners suffered severe hardship women forged a new role at pit heads in Lancashire and Scotland, and then fought to retain it against opposition from many men.

This book examines the social, economic and political factors affecting nineteenth-century female coalminers, drawing out the largely untapped evidence within contemporary sources and challenging long-standing myths. It contains what may be the first identified photograph of a female miner who gave evidence in 1842 and reveals the future lives of some of those who gave evidence to the Royal Commission.

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