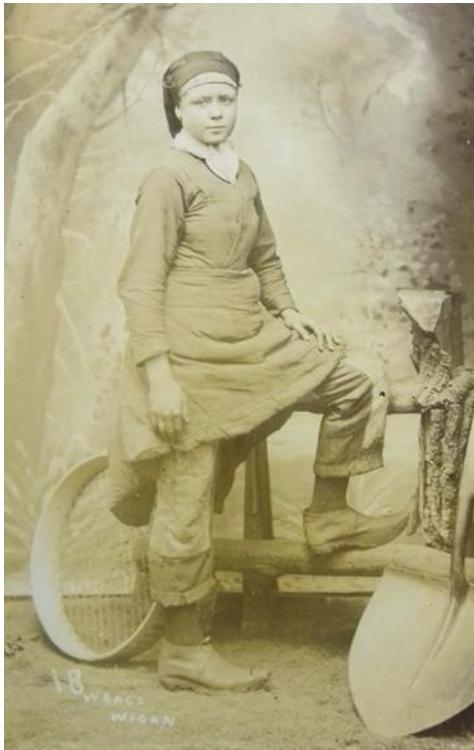


Duxbury Park Colliery: The Story of a Pit Brow Lass

We are very fortunate in having an account of working life at Duxbury Hall Colliery. Such accounts are not common; to have an account written by a woman is particularly rare. Duxbury Park Colliery was originally known as Farnworth House and was started around 1876 by Thomas Whittle. From 1883 until its closure on 29 December 1917 it was run by the Duxbury Park Colliery Co. Ltd. When it closed it was acquired by the neighbouring Ellerbeck Colliery and used as a pumping pit to remove mine water.

Alan Davies's book "The Pit Brow Women of the Wigan Coalfield" provides a full history of women working in West Lancashire pits with photographs.



Our Duxbury Park Colliery Pit Brow Lass was later known as Mrs. P. Holden. Her maiden name is unknown. She worked at the colliery for 10 years from the age of 13 to 23, for 6 days per week. Her weekly wage was 7 shillings. (£28.72 in current values). This wage was handed to her mother who in return gave her 3d a week to spend (£1.03 in current values). She lived at Tinklers Barracks. These were cottages close to the Leeds to Liverpool Canal near to the bridge linking Hoggs Lane and Yarrow Bridge to Limbrick. She tells her story in her own words:-

“I had three miles every morning to go to my work, so it tied me to get up every morning at 4 o’clock, as I did odd jobs about the house, before setting out for my work at 5 o’clock.



I had to travel down Hogg’s Lane, and it was very unpleasant to travel alone, before the trees were cut down, in Three Steps Wood, but I did it for ten years in all sorts of weather. I was tied to start off for my work at 5 o’clock, if I wanted to meet other Pit Brow Lasses for company, at bottom of Hogg’s Lane to Pit, as there was about ten lasses from Chorley and we used to all meet together on River Yarrow Bridge.



So I set out, with my basket on my arm, and a full can of tea in my hand. I wore a red head wrap, tied around my head, to keep the coal dust out of my hair, then a nice shoulder shawl thrown over my head wrap. I wore a black velvet blouse, and a blue striped Pit Skirt. I made my own Pit Brats (aprons), out of Irish Linen. I wore a man’s jacket to come home in, also pit breeches as well. I took a pride in my clogs, they shone like a raven.

Off I set out to my work, singing to myself, happy as a lark. Some mornings would be pitch dark, sometimes bitter cold frosty mornings; raining. Snowing or blowing, made no difference I had to keep going. I remember one very cold

morning, it was knee deep in snow, there was a blizzard on, it had been snowing all night. I don't know how I got down Hogg's Lane, I was covered with snow and I kept falling down. As the snow fell down, it seemed to freeze on my face, but I kept plodding through. I didn't half rub my hands and suck my fingers, even rub them in my hair. Above once I have cried, I have been that cold, and so far to travel, but I kept going until I got to Yarrow Bridge Hotel.



The lasses were waiting, we could not get any further. First one miner, then another shouting, "Come on lasses get hold of our jackets, at back of us, and we'll pull you to top of Bolton Road." So we were glad of the offer; they kept saying "Walk in our footmarks", and we did and they made us puff.

It kept up snowing, we got to top of Bolton Road. We kept meeting miners, as had been working on Night Shift. As we crossed the road to go up Wigan Road, the miners coming back kept shouting, "Turn back lasses, everything is blocked wi' snow, there'll be nowt doing today, they con't even shunt waggons under screens, there's nowt coming up pit, only Neetmen." So we turned back for whooam, plodding back in snow, icicles on our noses, miners was the same. We got as far back as River Yarrow Bridge. There was a Trap passed us with a miner in it, plowing through the snow, going towards Chorley. We stopped to watch it. There happened to be an old miner in his black face stood on River Yarrow Bridge watching the same. If I am not mistaken, it was Old Derry off Duke. We asked him if somebody had got hurt, he says, as he turned round very quick, "I ink there is, I ink there is, two or three bloody legs broke." We had to laugh, but we soon found out it was a miner, that had been on night shift had got hurt, and they were taking him to Rawcliffe Hospital (Founded 1892).

Morning after we went to our work as usual, the snow shifters had been, and made a road for us to travel. We managed to get to Pit, but we had no empty Waggon, so they sent us running full tubs of coal on Pit Top; as we call it Pit Brow. We used to wait on Brow for full tubs of coal coming up in cage. The Brow man would be waiting for cage coming up, he would lift up the lever, and push the full tubs out of the cage with his foot. No time lost, the Lasses grab the tub, and runs it to a shoot which has a tippler, attached to the shoot. We kick the tub of coal down the shoot, and it runs into a waggon, in rail road below. Now that shoot is called through and through, because more dirt than coal goes down it, copperous as well. Now that coal has to be stacked in rooks, until we get enough empty waggons to carry on our own work in the Screens. Now, if you'll take notice, stacked coal, if stacked too long, it starts smouldering. That is with copperous being left in the coal, when it is being stacked.

Now there were three shoots, and two steel moving belts; each shoot had a shaker attached to it, a iron riddle, as made slack. There was cobble belt, nut belt, there was seven lasses on a belt, three on each side, then one lass close to shoot, with a iron rake, ready to spread the coal out, as it was tipped down the shoot.

If it was blowing or raining, the coal dust would fly back up small shoot, into your face and eyes. We did not need rocking when we got home. We were sending as many as twenty, or over, waggons of coal out per day.

We was leaving Pit at 5 o'clock, and I had three miles to walk back Whoam.

Next day, we would be on a Sample Waggon, a big order had come in for House Coal Nuts, and not until that Waggon was full, dare we look up while picking out Dirt, Copperous and even Shale, while our fingers bled at the end. We had to do it, for sake of us losing fresh orders.

We had half hour's break for dinner, and at that time I was getting one and twopence (£4.80 today) per day. I worked six days per week, and never once late. If we wanted to have a drink of water, we had to go to Throstle Nest Wood to fill our cans under a spring, as the water at pit tasted of oil."