

Institution: University of Oxford
Unit of Assessment: 30
Title of case study: Childhood and Child Labour in the Industrial Revolution
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>In a contemporary world preoccupied with the protection of children, it is profoundly shocking to learn that child labour played a key part in Britain's industrial revolution. Indeed that this pioneer economic transition would not have happened in the way that it did without child labour. Jane Humphries draws this startling conclusion from a study of more than 600 working-class autobiographies. These offer unprecedented insights into child labour, family life, careers and schooling. Seen from below, through the eyes of history's everyman, the costs and benefits of industrialization acquire new edge. The impact of Humphries' work has been to change public understanding of this momentous divide by integrating humanity back into economic history and trauma back into the Industrial Revolution.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Humphries began her research on child labour in 2002 at Oxford, drawing on 'long-standing interests in industrialization, wellbeing, women, family and children's work. The underpinning research, begun in 2002, uses over 600 autobiographies by working men of the 18th and 19th centuries to provide a multifaceted account of childhood and child labour in the era of industrialization. These exceptional sources describe family relationships, not just the size and structure of households; and they report life as it was lived, not as their superiors envisaged it being lived. Autobiographical evidence, as Humphries shows, enables rare estimates of average age at starting work, social mobility, the extent and persistence of apprenticeship and the duration of schooling. Age-specific participation rates suggest that 1790 -1850 saw an upsurge in child labour. Children took on these new roles as economic partners and support for struggling, often single, mothers in order to support large numbers of siblings. As a result, they did not only see themselves as victims of a harsh factory system, but as actors contributing to their families' wellbeing and survival. While the memoirs implicate changes in production methods, specifically mechanization, division of labour and factories in this increase, they also show that fatherlessness and large sibling groups, common in these turbulent and high fertility times, often cast children as partners and supports for struggling mothers. Although life was hard, children emerge not as mere victims but as actively striving to make the best of things. In so doing they contributed not only to their families but also to the momentous economic changes afoot.</p> <p>While the nuclear family dominated most memoirs, families fit into networks of wider kin and communities of friends, neighbours, co-religionists and workmates. The Poor Law lurked in the darker moments of many memoirs, and while harsh and conditional, it could also provide greatly needed help. Autobiographers were among those who seized its lifeline back to independence and respectability. Other movements and institutions, temperance, evangelism, Chartism, cooperation, trade unionism, self-help, schools, the law, prisons, friendly societies, hospitals, and the armed forces, are seen afresh through the autobiographers' eyes.</p> <p>Although the causes of child labour identified are historically specific, the model of a labour market with child labour can be generalized. Humphries' research warns against thinking of children's work as anachronistic, surviving only in the most backward firms and industries. Recent news featured two small Gujarati girls sent miles away from home to pick cotton. Shedding its shameful origins, the cotton then passed through modern factories in a supply chain that delivered clothing to western high streets. The Gujarati children's situation was almost identical to that of children working in gangs in 19th century East Anglia, then the most advanced agricultural region in Britain. Child labour persists in many parts of the world today; understanding its history may help bring about its demise.</p>

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

***Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution*, CUP, 2010.** Available on request.

3.1 *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution*, CUP, 2010.

Awarded the Gyorgi Ranki Biennial Prize for an outstanding book on the economic history of Europe by the Economic History Association, 2011.

Academic reviews: “Combining narratives and statistics, Humphries has written a compelling book that provides us with new information on child workers and their families in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This book will be the standard reference for many years to come.” Joyce Burnette, *Journal of Economic History*, September 2011, pp. 794-6. A THES review (1 July 2010) wrote that “significant findings that are eloquently presented... Humphries' accomplished interrogation of these valuable autobiographies demonstrates, young people were far more than bit-part players in Britain's show of industrial greatness.” Katrina Honeyman, THES, 1st July, 2010. <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=26&storycode=412262>

Popular press: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1312764/Britains-child-slaves-New-book-says-misery-helped-forge-Britain.html#ixzz1lceuzgzi> and “Child labour was the crucial ingredient which allowed Britain’s Industrial Revolution to succeed...” *The Independent*, 2nd August 2010.

3.2 Tawney Lecture: “Child Labour and the British Industrial Revolution” Keynote Plenary Lecture delivered at the Economic History Society Annual Conference, Durham 2010. Podcast:

<http://www.ehs.org.uk/ehs/podcasts/tawney2010.asp>. An article length version of the text is forthcoming in the *Economic History Review* (peer-reviewed journal).

3.3 ‘Child Labour: The Experience of Today’s Advanced Economies and Lessons from the Past’, *World Bank Economic Review*, vol. 17, No. 2, 2003, pp. 175–196. (peer-reviewed journal).

<http://elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/pdf/10.1093/wber/lhg016>

ESRC Professorial Fellowship, ‘Memories of Industriousness: The Industrial Revolution and the Household Economy in Britain 1700-1878’, 2009-2011 (£248,058.48)

In recognition of her work, Humphries was made a Fellow of the British Academy in 2012.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Humphries work was published as an academic monograph which attracted a wide audience and became the basis for an award-winning BBC documentary, seen by a broad and international audience [5.i]. It stimulated a general public to engage actively with family history and uncover new sources on child labour during the industrial revolution. The documentary inspired members of the public to research their own family histories. It influenced other film-makers seeking to bring history to a wider public. It also drew attention to the fundamental part played by child labour in industrialising countries today.

Public understanding of history:

By combining accounts of everyday life in working peoples’ own words with a panoramic view of momentous economic change, *Childhood and Child Labour* made the economic history of Britain accessible to an audience outside academia. This is unusual because the public’s huge appetite for history rarely extends to economic history, given that it is unfairly thought dry and technical. It provided a stimulus to discussion of past and present problems and policies relating to children and their families. Reviews appeared in the *Daily Mail*, *BBC History Magazine*, and *The Independent* (see above).

Subsequently, *Childhood and Child Labour* was selected by BBC History Magazine as one of the first offerings in its new Book Club. The discussion of *Childhood and Child Labour* appeared in *Historyextra.com*, the official website of *BBC History Magazine* [5.ii].

The research reached its largest audience and had its widest impact through its distinct and

material contribution to the documentary *The Children Who Built Victorian Britain*, (BBC4) directed by Julian Carey and produced by Christina Macaulay, which Humphries co-wrote and presented. Humphries' research for *Childhood and Child Labour*, extended to include accounts by working women and girls, underpinned the programme [5.i]. The documentary dramatizes the events of the industrial revolution through the eyes of child workers, depicting them not just as victims of poverty and neglect but as active agents for improvement and progress. A key component of the documentary is the use of animation to dramatise the testimonies, illustrate the nature of children's jobs and document family lives. The animation involved engagement with students from the International Film School in Newport who contributed to the film. A second pre-screening took place at the International Film School in Newport, November 22nd 2010, where the animators, the director and Humphries, discussed the collaboration and the way in which the animations brought the historical testimony to life. *The Radio Times*, 29th January-4th February 2011, p. 83 and 86, and *Time Out* provided positive advance reviews. Humphries was interviewed on *Woman's Hour* on 31st January 2011. Widespread interest in working-class memoirs and in child labour created by the book and the documentary in symbiosis led to several radio interviews and other public engagement: *Analysis*, Radio 4, 20th September 2010; *In Our Time*, 30th December 2010; *Nightwaves*, 14th March 2013; *Nightwaves*, 10th April 2013. [5.iii]

Transmitted twice on 1/01/2011, the BBC documentary attracted respectable viewing figures (over 300,000) on each transmission and was shown again on 1/08/2011 [1]. The documentary continues to be viewed and discussed on YouTube as well as via blog, email and postal correspondence. For example, the version accessible via <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=87eVOpbcVo> has been viewed 49,076 times as of April 17th 2013 [5.iv]. The documentary has been used to inform and transform children and young people's ideas of childhood in the past and of the economic history of our country by schoolteachers and in higher education. For example, a teacher from Australia wrote "I am currently presenting a 90 minute workshop to gifted children aged 9 - 12 years, on the topic of the role of children during Britain's Industrial Revolution. I've made extensive use of your book on this subject and also of the very excellent BBC 4 documentary which I accessed via YouTube. The overall response from children who have attended my program - numbering around 500 - has been overwhelmingly positive. They are fascinated by the animated accounts from people of their own age that are scattered throughout the documentary, and have taken on a real understanding of the reality of their lives and the genealogical connections that exist for many of their own families today" [2].

Further feedback has demonstrated that the documentary inspired people to engage with the problem of child labour: "Just wanted to say what an excellent programme on BBC4, last night. Felt you addressed so many issues but above all you gave young children, working in industrial Britain, real status - rather than the 'romanticised view of child labour' even despite the horrors of it all!" [3]; "I would like to say to you that your work in showing how society managed children in early 19C Britain is marvellous. Can you do more, with BBC or any other medium available? I never thought that I would see, in so simple and direct a manner, available for everyone, the realities which the Hammonds and Thompson put into historical study, unfortunately available for a far smaller audience. I know that concerns for similar patterns in today's developing countries may not fall within your remit, but what you are doing will, without doubt, I believe, reach people who are active on behalf of children in those countries. Finally, while I would not make any assumptions as to your position regarding your subject apart from the teaching of history, I hope that such excellent work as you have produced will enjoy a life of its own, a life I would assume to be very beneficial beyond history".

The Tawney Lecture, delivered in Durham in April 2010, appears as a podcast on the Economic History Society website, accessible to students, researchers and the public. The podcast was played 380 times in 2011, 522 times in 2012, and 226 times January – mid-August 2013 [4]. Along with the other Tawney lectures and teaching podcasts, it constitutes a vital part of the EHS's outreach activities. The project's success in making economic history accessible to the public resulted in invitations to speak to audiences of curators and conservators (Geffrye Museum, 18/03/2011), and groups of amateur historians (Local and Social History Day School on Child Labour, Oxford University, Continuing Education, 12/05/2012).

Conservation and Identification of New Historical Sources:

Viewers of the documentary sought advice on the value of family diaries and memoirs and how to safeguard and possibly deposit such materials. Humphries has obtained copies of three additional hitherto unknown autobiographies from the nineteenth century and was allowed access to an additional source which remains in family possession. These will feature in the new work on women's autobiographies and ultimately be deposited at the Brunel University archive of working-class autobiographies, so providing future scholars with more primary source material. The overriding message is that the documentary and its underlying research has changed the way that people think about childhood, child labour and Britain's economic past.

Impact on Historical Documentary-making:

The programme's significance was recognised at the International History Makers festival in New York, January 2012, where it won the award for the best history programme [5.v]. The award not only recognised the importance and originality of *The Children Who Built Victorian Britain* but will help to secure new opportunities for the production and marketing of high quality vehicles for public education and enjoyment. The director, Julian Carey was there to accept the award and acknowledged Humphries' input in his acceptance speech. Since its original transmission, Humphries has been invited to show *The Children who Built Victorian Britain* on several occasions and discuss both the content and process of transforming scholarly material into a documentary for a general audience, for example as Keynote Address, Posthumus Conference, Antwerp, 2011.

Campaign Against Child Labour:

The documentary's claim that children were not mere victims but active agents for change has synergies with the work of Save the Children Canada's 'Children and Work Programme' and, after seeing it, officers of the organisation recruited Humphries to its Advisory Board, to help develop child centred research initiatives aiming to include children's own voices in debates about child labour, schooling and the formation of human capital [5].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Testimony

- [1] Viewing figures obtained from Executive Producer, BBC Wales Factual and Music Department
- [2] Email from teacher in Australia
- [3] Email from viewer of BBC documentary
- [4] Correspondence with EHS officer, Wiley
- [5] Corroboration available from Child Protection Officer, Save the Children Canada

Other evidence sources

- [5.i] *The Children Who Built Victorian Britain*:
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00dlrcn>; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00t6t3r>;
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00y21v0>
- [5.ii] BBC History Today: <http://www.historyextra.com/book-club/childhood-and-child-labour-british-industrial-revolution>
- [5.iii] Radio follow up: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-11351057>;
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00wr9r7>; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01rr922>
- [5.iv] YouTube links:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=87eVOpbcoVo>;
<http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL37A7C0985535C01A>;
<http://britain.docuwat.ch/videos/britain-1700-1900/children-who-built-victorian-britain->
<http://www.studyhistory.co.uk/Y8/factory%20conditions%20-%20Children%20of%20the%20Revolution'%20video%20task.doc>
- [5.v] International History Makers award:
<http://www.historymakersintl.com/includes/newsletters/mobile.php?theme=history&id=4>;
<http://www.c21media.net/archives/75657>