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The coal mining occupation through English broadside ballads; Gender stereotypes and social implications[1]

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Abstract

This paper offers insights into the history of coal miners in England on the basis of a distinct source of information, namely broadside ballads. The significance of examining work issues through this genre of popular culture lies in the exposure of underlying stereotypes, which are revealed through this kind of primary source, as well as in the diversity of information that sheds light on the collier occupation through a different perspective. This paper examines the human side of colliers and their experience in the coalmines, as evidenced through broadside ballads and gender stereotypes associated with this specific type of work as well as relevant social implications. Public opinion presented in broadside ballads, and dominant discourse, as expressed in the legal framework and contemporary press, are juxtaposed and examined against the background of secondary literature.

[1] I would like to thank Prof. Costas Gaganakis and Prof. Maria Papathanassiou for their comments on an earlier draft of this work.

A considerable number of the original broadside ballads that were examined, refers to fatal industrial accidents. The broadside ballads on this topic provide useful information on the circumstances surrounding the accidents, thus maintaining their validity as historical events. Nevertheless, the topic of accidents, whether fatal or not, is a common one in ballads and cannot be invariably linked to actual incidents with the outmost certainty. References to the difficulties and hazards associated with coal mining are commonly found. Moreover, various economic and political issues are highlighted; there is a clear reference to coal cost as well as collier wages. The majority of the ballads examined concerns, notably, male workers. Female and child labor are not represented to an equal extent.

Coal mining had a significant place among the British staple industries as Britain had relied heavily upon coal for its fuel even before 1700.[2] The coal industry had an important role during Industrial Revolution and later during the Victorian era until the first decades of the twentieth century.[3] Broadside ballads contribute to the discussion about labour in the mines using not statistics and death rates that have been already presented by secondary literature but rather popular culture.[4] The significance of examining work issues through this genre of popular culture lies in the exposure of underlying stereotypes, which are revealed through this kind of primary source, as well as in the diversity of information that sheds light on the collier occupation through a different perspective. It should be mentioned that the number of ballads about colliers in comparison with ballads referring to other occupations is relatively high indicating that this topic concerned public opinion.

[2]See John Hatcher, *The History of the British Coal Industry Vol. 1, Before 1700: towards the Age of Coal*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1993.
[3]For a detailed history of the coal industry of the period see Michael W. Flinn, David Stoker, *The History of the British Coal Industry Vol. 2, 1700-1830: the Industrial Revolution*, Oxford, Clarendon 1984; R.A. Church, Allan Hall, John Kanefsky, *The History of the British Coal Industry Vol. 3, 1830-1913*, Oxford, Clarendon 1986; Barry Supple, *The History of the British Coal Industry Vol. 4, 1913-1946: the Political Economy of Decline*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1987.
[4]See for example Frederick Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, London, Penguin, 2009 [1845], p. 247-262; Andrew Walker, ''Pleasurable Homes?', Victorian Model Miner's Wives and Family Wage in a South Yorkshire Colliery Disctrict', *Women's History Review* 6:3 (1997) 317-336; Keith Wrightson and David Levine, 'Death in Whickham' in *Famine, Disease and the Social Order in Early Modern Society*, eds John Walter and Roger Schofield, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989; Peter Kirby, 'Attendance and work effort in the Great Northern Coaldfield, 1775-1864', *The Economic History Review* 65:3 (2012) 961-983.

Broadside ballads are the printed version of a story in the form of a song. They can be seen as a bridge between oral and printed culture. In Early Modern Europe, a broadside ballad was a single large sheet of paper, usually of folio size, printed on one side, with three characteristic elements: an alluring poem, a popular tune title, and illustrations.[5] Numerous broadside ballads had their roots in tradition while others were written to commemorate significant contemporary events. In some cases, certain traditional ballads found their way onto paper and became broadsides. In other cases, a publisher or an editor commissioned a writer to compose a ballad. This double origin created a genre of cheap print of universal appeal, available to all. Furthermore, the woodcuts that were included in broadside ballads ensured that balladry was not only tangible and oral, but also visual. Thus, broadside ballads circulated widely throughout the social spectrum. It has been suggested that their woodcuts were probably the most widely consumed and commonly recognized artworks of their time.[6]In the nineteenth century, during the revival of this hybrid source, the traditional ballad themes of previous centuries were reproduced while more contemporary themes, such as working in the coal mines, were also introduced.

This paper has two main aims, to examine: firstly, the human side of colliers and their experience in the coalmines, as evidenced through broadside ballads; and secondly, gender stereotypes associated with this specific type of work as well as relevant social implications. For this purpose, public opinion, which is presented in broadside ballads, and dominant discourse, as expressed in the legal framework, in 1842 Mines Regulation Act in particular, and contemporary press, are juxtaposed and examined against the background of secondary literature.[7] The paper draws on

[5]Eric Nebeker, 'The Heyday of the Broadside Ballad', *English Broadside Ballad Archive*, 2007. Accessed 22 February 2018, http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/page/heyday-of-the-broadside-ballad.
For more information about the origins and the history of the English broadside ballad see Hyder E. Rollins, 'The Black-Letter Broadside Ballad', *PMLA* 34 no. 2 (1919), 258-339;Claude M. Simpson, *The British Broadside Ballad and Its Music*, New Brunswick 1966; Christopher Marsh 'Ballads and Their Audience' in *Music and Society in Early Modern England*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2010, p. 225-287; Patricia Fumerton, Megan Palmer, Katherine Brokaw (eds), 'Living English Broadside Ballads 1550-1750, Song, Art, Dance, Culture (Special Issue), *Huntington Library Quarterly* 76:2 (2016).

[6] Marsh, Christopher, 'Best-selling Ballads and their Pictures in Seventeenth-century England', *Past &Present* 233 (2016) 53.

[7]The special interest in the 1842 Mines Regulation Act is based on the fact that British state with this particular Act inaugurated sex-specific protective legislation. See also Jane Humphries, 'Protective Legislation, the Capitalistic State, and Working Class Men: The Case of the 1842 Mines Regulation Act', *Feminist Review* 7 (1981) 1-33.

nineteen original broadside ballads dealing with the collier occupation. Their numerous variations and reprints, which were published between 1784 and 1910, have also been examined. This sample was drawn out of *Broadside Ballads Online from the Bodleian Libraries*.[8] It includes only ballads with the theme 'coalmines and mining'.[9] The topics that emerged, through the examination of this material were related to working and living conditions of miners as well as female and child labour in coal mines.

In balladry, working conditions in coal mines are burdened by risk, thus the songs about accidents are not rare. For example, in December 1875, newspapers all over England published the news about a 'Frightful Colliery Explosion near Barnsley'. Newspapers published updates about this 'dreadful, terrible, awful, disastrous explosion' providing information on the number of bodies that were brought up. A newspaper reported, 'At six o 'clock on Monday morning more than 300 men and boys descended the Swaith Main Colliery near Barnsley, to commence work and in less than four hours afterwards nearly half the number had, it was feared, succumbed to the deadly effects of after-damp.'[10]A witness gave a very sad description of the pit where 'widows, mothers fathers and children [were] crowding in large numbers to identify' the dead bodies.[11]A broadside ballad about the specific colliery explosion entitled *Lines on the terrible colliery explosion near Barnsley loss of 120 lives* was also printed.[12]Another example is the broadside ballad with the extensive and quite descriptive title *Lines on the accidents & colliery explosions that took place in South Wales and Yorkshire on Saturday and Monday, Dec. 4th and 5th [1875], by which 23 were killed at New Tredegar, 12 in Pentrych, and 150 in Yorkshire. … Hymn composed for the occasion, and sung over them*.[13] In the second

[8]*Broadside Ballads Online from Bodleian* Libraries, (hereafter BBO), University of Oxford. Accessed 22 February 2018, http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk.
[9] The sample includes all the results of the search by theme 'Coalmines and mining', thus it consists of 19 ballads works and 65 editions. See *BBO*>Browse by Themes> Coalmines and mining. Accessed 22 February 2018, http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/search/themes/Coalmines%20and%20mining .
[10]'Frightful Colliery Explosion Near Barnsley', *The Prescot Reporter and St. Helen's General Advertiser*, December 11, 1875, p. 5.
[11]Ibid, p. 5.
[12]*Lines on the terrible colliery explosion near Barsley loss of 120 lives* ([1785]), Bodleian Libraries, BBO Roud Number V7863, http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/search/roud/V7871.
[13]*Lines on the accidents & colliery explosions that took place in South Wales and Yorkshire on Saturday and Monday, Dec. 4th and 5th [1875], by which 23 were killed at New Tredegar, 12 in*

column of this broadside, the same text is printed in Welsh and, at the bottom, a list of the names of those who lost their lives at Pentrych is provided.[14]

The specific details provided; the reference to a precise time and place, as well as, in some cases, the slightly different form of the ballad are factors indicating that these accidents mentioned in balladry were not fictional but historical events. In addition to the accuracy of the information, the content of the broadside suggest that ballads about working accidents had two aims; to circulate the news and to honour those who lost their lives.

Other ballads go beyond these aims to express colliers' fears and narrate their troubles. Such ballads surpass geographical boundaries more easily, but they cannot be linked to historical events. Despite their lack of plausibility, the topic of industrial accidents is popular among this group of ballads as well. References to the difficulties and to the dangers that colliers face are frequent. In a ballad entitled *Patient Joe, or The Newcastle collier*, the hero avoids death through sheer luck when a dog steals his lunch and he rushes to recover it.[15]After that almost funny incident, he returns back only to find out that his co-worker had lost his life in a working accident. In another ballad, the protagonist is trapped underground. Exhausted as he is, he falls asleep and he dreams of his wife who prays for him. This story has a happy ending since the victim's co-workers finally manage to drag him out.[16]

From the previous examples, it is clear that ballads gave emphasis at the high risk that was linked with mining. Through these songs the colliers' bond with the community and especially with their family as well as their rough living conditions are highlighted. The high risk that was depicted in balladry and the difficult living conditions of miners have been also discussed at the secondary literature. In the introduction of his book *British Labour History 1815-1914*, E. H. Hunt compared the

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Pentyrch, and 150 in Yorkshire. …… Hymn composed for the occasion, and sung over them ([1875]), Bodleian Libraries, BBO Roud Number V7872, http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/search/roud/V7872.

[14]See also *lamentation, of twenty-five poor colliers, who were stopped up in a coal-pit ... at the Haussees colliery, Shropshire .. Hymn, composed for the occasion, and sung over them* ([1818, 1819]), Bodleian Libraries, BBO Roud Number V7878, http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/search/roud/V7878.

[15]*Patient Joe, or The Newcastle collier* (1784-1859), Bodleian Libraries, BBO Roud Number V1926, http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/search/roud/V1926.

[16]*The pitman's dream*, Bodleian Libraries, BBO Roud Number V14041, http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/search/roud/V14041.

life of a farm labourer and a coal-miner.[17] On the one hand, the standard of living for the latter was higher. His diet was better, including more protein and his house, in contrast with the farm labourer's, was warm thanks to cheap, and sometimes even free, coal. On the other hand, coalminer deathrates were significantly higher. Infant mortality was exceptional high while children of farm labourers, despite their parent's poverty, were more likely to survive. In 1861, 934 coal-miners lost their lives on duty. For every 90,000 tons of coal mined, one life was lost.[18] Hunt stressed the diversity of working-class experience and explained that conditions may have varied even for people of the same occupation.

The difficulties that a collier faced are also inferred by ballads with political and financial references. At least two of the ballads openly discuss coal cost and collier salaries. In one of them, entitled *Why are coals so dear?* the narrator takes stand in favor of colliers against the accusation of exceedingly high coal prices.[19]He claims that colliers are not responsible. The masters are to blame. Masters make great profits and fortunes quickly enough, while the colliers risk their lives. In a ballad entitled *The Collier's Defense* the high risk is also mentioned.[20] It explains the difficulties of this occupation, and it stresses the fact that many of them lost their lives due to working accidents—leaving many orphans behind. These ballads not only point out the danger of mining but also praise the brave and industrious character of men working in coal mines.[21] The enhanced wages of the colliers mentioned are related not only to the high risk but also to the fact that skilled colliers were frequently in short supply. In particular, during the later seventeenth and early eighteenth century, contemporaries complained for a combination of 'high wages and a reluctance to work'.[22] It should be noted that the higher wages were paid only to the

[17]E. H. Hunt, *British Labour History 1815-1914*, London, 1981.
[18]Ibid., p. 3
[19]*Why are coals so dear?*, Bodleian Libraries, BBORoud Number V10187, http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/search/roud/V10187.
[20]*The Collier's Defence*(1840-1866), Bodleian Libraries, BBO Roud Number V7879, http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/search/roud/V7879.
[21] See also *Jolly collier lads*, Bodleian Libraries, BBO Roud Number V4180http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/search/roud/V4180; *The brave collier lads* (1838-1859), Bodleian Libraries, BBO Roud Number V502, http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/search/roud/V502; *The jolly collier*, Bodleian Libraries, BBO V4181, http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/search/roud/V4181.
[22]John Hatcher, 'Labour, Leisure and Economic Thought before the Nineteenth Century', *Past & Present* 160 (1998) 86.

hewers and not to all the manual work-force of the colliery.[23] Hewing demanded not only strength and courage, but also skill and experience.[24]

In the ballads that were presented so far, as in the majority of ballads of the sample, women had a secondary role or they were totally absent. In fact, the ballad entitled *The Collier Lass* is the only song in the sample under examination where the narrator takes on a female persona.[25] In the first verse, the narrator mentions her name and her place of origin. She highlights the fact that both her parents work in the mine. She explains that she has a big family, including 7 children. Thus, she must work at the mine, too. It is quite interesting that she mentions she is aware of the fact that the audience is feeling sorry about her and her fortune but she is trying to keep her spirits high. In the next two verses, the young collier girl refers to the hazards lurking in mines.[26] Subsequently, she draws the audience's attention to the hardships that are linked to the particular occupation.[27] Despite their suffering, their ragged cloths, and their black faces, according to the narrator colliers are kind-hearted and free in spirit. Their hearts are clean even though they work underground. In the last verse, the content and the mood are different. The girl is seeking a way out of this life through marriage. She mentions that despite her parents' advice, she has a collier boy in mind. She states that if he is good, trustworthy, and also interested, she would marry him. Otherwise, she will wait for another chance so she will 'no longer be a collier lass'.

It is clear thus far that bad financial conditions made women and single girls like this heroine work outside the household. If other members of the family worked

[23] Ibid., p. 86.
[24] Ibid., p. 86.
[25] *The Collier Lass* (1796-1866), Bodleian Libraries, BBORoud Number V7863, http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/search/roud/V7863.
[26] '…By the greatest of dangers, each day I am surrounded,
I hang in the air be a rope or a chain,
The mine may fall in, I may be killed or wounded,
May perish by damp, or the fire of a train…', *The Collier Lass.*
[27] '… All the long day you may see we are buried,
Deprived of the light and the warmth of the sun,
And often at night from our beds we are hurried,
The water is in, and barefoot we run…', *The Collier Lass.*

in a mine, it was possible for women to work there as well.[28] During the eighteenth century, an increase in the population was noted as a result of the elimination of serious epidemics. As Olwen Hufton explains, the enlargement of the social pyramid that occurred because of this population increase made labour cheap.[29] Female labour was the cheapest of all. The image of a hard-working woman, who has to work in order to contribute to her household, leads to feelings of sympathy towards the heroine. The tune that traditionally accompanies the previous ballad reinforces this feeling.

Nevertheless, their contemporaries did not always share the same opinion. In May 1842, a scandal concerning women working in coal mines broke out after some disturbing publications in the press. Women and girls wearing trousers, harnessed like animals, dragged heavy carts of coal. In the following days, the interest of the public escalated, the *Report of the Children's Employment Commission* and a plethora of relevant articles came out in the press.[30] It is worth noting that the scandal was not provoked by the brutal work, harmful to women's health, but by the claims that women worked topless alongside naked men.[31] The accompanying images reinforced the notion that women working in the pits were being corrupted by the coalmine environment; and, thus, they were losing their morals. As a result of this moral bankruptcy, they also lost their ability to become good wives and good mothers.[32]In the summer of the same year, female labour was marginalized. The reason was the Mines Acts that were introduced by Lord Ashley, along with other factors such as women's lower wages. As a man stated 'The comparative cheapness of the work of

[28]For family labour in the coalmines see Humphries, 'Protective Legislation', 1-33, especially p. 11-16. For the role of family labour groups and kinship networks on colliers' recruitment see John Langton, 'Proletarianization in the Industrial Revolution: Regionalism and Kinship in the Labour Markets of the British Coal Industry from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Centuries', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 25:1 (2000) 31-49.

[29]Olwen Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her. A History of Women in Western Europe 1500-1800*, London, Harper Collins 1995, p. 15.

[30]*The Condition and Treatment of the Children employed in the Mines and Colliers of the United Kingdom Carefully compiled from the appendix to the first report of the Commissioners With copious extracts from the evidence, and illustrative engravings*, London, 1842.

[31]'It seems to be a common practice for girls to work with men who are stark naked, the employment requiring that they should be with them alone in a dark chamber, where the coal is excavated, for a quarter of an hour at a time, fifteen or twenty times a day. One of the witnesses observes "The girls throw aside all modesty with their petticoats."', 'Moral Condition of Miners', *The Morning Chronicle*, Monday, May 9, p. 7. See also *The Condition and Treatment of the Children*, p. 26, 78.

[32]'It is almost needless to add, that they make bad wives and thriftless housekeepers', *The Morning Chronicle*, Monday, May 9, p. 7.

females seems the main reason for employing them'.[33] It is possible that men realized that restricting the supply of female labour led to higher wages for themselves.[34] At the same time, masters also stood to benefit since young men were more productive than women and girls. Nonetheless, it was true that men often, more often than women, worked naked.[35] Thus, the moral dimension was present, based on the notion that having girls of reproductive age in such an environment was morally condemned.[36]

Boys also worked in mines. A ballad entitled *The Little Jim, The Collier boy* holds a special place in the sample that was examined. It is the only ballad in the sample where one of the main characters is a child.[37] The scene is set in the place where the boy lives with his family, a thatched cottage in bad condition but, nonetheless, neat and clean. During a dark and stormy night, the little collier lies in his deathbed. In his final moments, his mother is by his side praying for him in silence in order not to disturb him. She expresses her unconditional love but soon the audience witnesses the last breath of the child. The father, who is also a collier, hears the awful news as soon as he returns home. The ballad ends with the bereaved parents grieving over their dead son.[38]

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[33]Ibid, p. 7. For more information about wages see *The Condition and Treatment of the Children*, p. 82-84.

[34]This opinion has been challenged by Humphries, see Humphries, 'Protective Legislation', 1-33.

[35]'…for though the girls are clothed, at least three-fourths of the men for whom they 'hurry' work *stark naked*, or with a flannel waistcoat only…', *The Condition and Treatment of the Children*, p.26 ; 'In great numbers of the coal-pits in this district the men work in a state of perfect nakedness, and are in this state assisted in their labour by females of all ages, from girls of six years old to women of twenty-one, these females being themselves quite naked down to waste', *The Condition and Treatment of the Children*, p.26; 'We have already seen that […] the girls and boys, and the young men and young women, and even married women, and women with child, commonly work almost naked, and the men, in many mines, quite naked;', *The Condition and Treatment of the Children*, p. 76-77.

[36]'The system of having females to work in coal-pits prevails generally in this neighbourhood. I consider it to be a most awfully demoralizing practice. The youths of both sexes work often in a half-naked state, and the passions are excited before they arrived at puberty. Sexual intercourse decidedly frequently occurs in consequence. Cases of bastardy frequently also occur;…', 'Moral Condition of Miners', *The Morning Chronicle*, Monday, May 9, p. 7. See also *The Condition and Treatment of the Children*, p. 79

[37]*Little Jim, The Collier boy* (1840-1901), Bodleian Libraries, BBORoud Number V503, http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/search/roud/V503.

[38]'… The cottage door was opened-
The collier's step is heard,
The father and the mother meet,
Yet neither speak a word.
He knew that all was over,

This ballad does not openly mention child labour. Nonetheless, the title as well as the fact that the father of the little collier was also working in a coalmine implies that the child worked with his father as many other children did.[39] There are references in other ballads of capable children who worked along with their parents. E. P. Thomson pointed out the intensification of child labour between 1780 and 1830.[40] Child labour, however, in the context of the household was a reality long before that.[41] Children were contributing in accordance to their age and skills, while the conditions in mines were much harder. In 1840, Lord Ashley convinced the Parliament to appoint a commission so as to investigate the conditions concerning child labour in mines, among other issues. As a result, *The Report of the Children's Employment Commission* included colliers' testimonies and images.[42] It was published in May 1842 and it provoked further discussion. The first impression that middle classes got about colliers was that they were uneducated, without religion, that they drank a lot of alcohol and had disgusting habits. The report also mentioned other topics such as the high mortality rate of colliers. A month later, Lord Ashley requested legislation towards the amendment of working conditions.[43] The *Mines and Collieries Bill* was passed by Parliament in the same year.[44] This Act prohibited women and girls, as well as boys under the age of 10, from working underground but did not set limitations to the working hours. Later, in 1860, *The Coal Mines Regulation Act* of 1860 improved safety rules and raised the age limit for boys from 10 to 12.

He knew his child was dead.', *Little Jim, The Collier boy*.

[39] 'It is well known, that many of the colliers would literally die for want, if they did not take their children to work, almost as soon as they can speak and walk. Think what a trial this must be to an intelligent man, to have his dear children immured for 14 hours every day in the gloomy dungeon. How he must deplore the necessity of his situation, which compels him to rob his children of *ease, education* and *comfort*, in order to procure a present and scanty existence. Without thus, doing violence to his feelings, in sending his children to work, he, and the rest of his family, must forego every comfort of life.', United Association of Colliers, *A Voice from the Coal Mines: or, A Plain Statement of the Various Grievances of the Pitmen of the Tyne and Wear: Addressed to the Coal Owners, their Head Agents, and a Sympathetic Public, by the Colliers of the United Association of Durham and Northumberland*, South Shields 1825, p. 35-36.

[40] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, London, Penguin Classics, 2013 [1963], p. 369.

[41] Ibid., p. 366-384.

[42] *The Condition and Treatment of the Children employed in the Mines and Colliers of the United Kingdom Carefully compiled from the appendix to the first report of the Commissioners With copious extracts from the evidence, and illustrative engravings*, London, 1842.

[43] See *Speech of Lord Ashley, in the House of Commons, on Tuesday, 7th May (cor. June), 1842, on Moving for Leave to Bring in a Bill to Make Regulations Respecting the Age and Sex of Children and Young Persons Employed in the Mines and Collieries of the United Kingdom*, London 1842.

[44] See also Humphries, 'Protective Legislation', 1-33.

Towards a more precise interpretation and, thus, better understanding of the message that ballads bear, it would be fruitful to describe and to categorize broadside ballads into three categories adapting the Braudelian terminology of historical time.[45] The first category includes ballads mass printed throughout the period, without any significant changes. These ballad themes did not change either, allowing colliers to be part of an already established narrative.[46] The second category includes ballads that were popular for a few decades. Usually, the goal of these ballads was to criticize and to express frustration. Ballads with complaints about the high price of coal can be included in this category. The third category comprises ballads involving particular events. Understandably, the last two categories are the most interesting ones for a historian because they provide more information on the social and cultural changes that occurred in the field of labour during the period under examination. By adopting the proper methodology, and taking into account the limitations that the nature of the particular primary source generates, the examination of broadside ballads in combination with other primary sources could shed light on the topic from diverse perspectives.

A considerable number of the original broadside ballads that were examined, approximately one quarter of the sample, refers to work accidents and, in fact, most of them were real events. This is not surprising. Accidents are to this day a popular theme concerning mines. Examining representations of coal mining communities in feature films, Bert Hogenkamp claims that 'a mining film without a disaster is like a western without a shoot-out'.[47] Broadside ballads on this topic provide useful information on the circumstances surrounding accidents, thus maintaining their validity as historical events. Nevertheless, the topic of accidents, whether fatal or not, is a common one in ballads and cannot be invariably linked to actual incidents with

[45]This idea was introduced in Robin Ganev, *Song of Protest, Songs of Love, Popular Ballads in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2009, p. 44.
[46]There are for example almost identical songs; the only difference is the occupation of the main character. See *The rambling sailor/ The rambling miner/ The rambling solder* (1813-1910), Bodleian Libraries, BBO Roud Number 518, http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/search/roud/518 .
[47]See Bert Hogenkamp, 'A Mining Film without a Disaster is like a Western without Shoot-out: Representation of Coal Mining Communities in Feature Films' in *Towards a Comparative History of Coalfield Societies*, eds Stefan Berger, Andy Croll and Norman LaPorte, Ashgate, Aldershot 2005, p. 86-98.

the utmost certainty. References to the difficulties and hazards associated with coal mining are commonly found. Moreover, various economic and political issues are also highlighted; and, in at least two of the examined broadside ballads, there is a clear reference to the cost of coal as well as collier wages. Similarly, the stereotypes that emerge through broadside ballads are of great interest. The majority of the ballads examined concern, notably, male workers. Female and child labour are not represented to an equal extent. Hence, the examination of relevant ballads, as case studies, can lead to valuable insights into gender issues. On the one hand, the stereotypes about male colliers that emerge through broadside ballads are positive ones in general. Their bravery, industriousness, and militancy are praised. Nonetheless, 'the myth of the radical miner' was challenged by Dick Geary.[48] On the other hand, in the vast majority of these ballads, women are presented as the colliers' mothers and wives, widows and orphans. They also work in the pit but in all cases it is clear that they do so because they are poor and, having no other choice, need to support their family. As it is stated, 'The lassies hate to work altogether, but they canna run away for it'.[49] Thus, women in these ballads are presented either in distress or in need.

Taking into account the public dispute concerning colliers, the fact that female and child labour are not represented extensively in balladry could be perceived as strange. It does seem reasonable, however, if we consider the prevailing notions of the period concerning women and children. Nonetheless, the exceptions that were presented -the poor child and his parents' lament as well as the collier lass who gains the audience's sympathy- create a different image of the collier occupation from what was presented in official reports. A possible explanation regarding conflicting representations might be found if we consider the popular origin of broadside ballads and the sorrowful content of the particular ballads. In particular, it is reasonable to assume that common people, colliers and their families, sung these songs to themselves in order to express their fears, to share their sorrow, and honour their dead colleagues, or to encourage each other. Thus, they chose to represent this side of their occupation and to praise themselves. In conclusion, broadside ballads can constitute a

[48]See Dick Geary, 'The Myth of the Radical Miner' in *Towards a Comparative History of Coalfield Societies*, eds Stefan Berger, Andy Croll and Norman LaPorte, Ashgate, Aldershot 2005, p. 43-64.
[49]*The Condition and Treatment of the Children*, p. 50.

useful source for historians, on the specific topic, by either providing information on contemporary events or allowing the emergence of different notions, prevailing or not, that cannot be easily traced in other sources.