



**WIGAN**

**POPULATION** Given in 1935 as 86,186. In 1931 census report as 85,356. Excess of births over deaths about, 5[1] per thousand per year, so there has not been much loss by migration. In 1931 report, males 41,313. Females 44,044. Excess of females over males 2731. Population over 14 given (1931) as 64,871, of which males 31,097, females 33,774. ie. number of children equals 20,485, and excess of females is almost entirely in adult population.

**HEALTH** See Health Officer's report. But note: Birth rate 17.42, death rate 12.4. Birth rate for whole of England 14.8, death rate 11.8. Wigan has second highest birth rate for Lancs. and about 7th highest death rate. Highest death rate in Wigan (Victoria Ward) 17.07. St. Patrick and St. Thomas Wards (said to be poorest quarters) 15.05 and 13.86. Lowest in town (West Pemberton – better class residential) 7.48, ie. about half St. Patrick's.

General health in Wigan appears fairly good. Physique a little sturdier than in London. Struck by the badness of everyone's teeth – have hardly seen a working class person with good teeth. Even teeth of the very young have a curiously frail look and are of the wrong colour (semi-translucent.) In the Hornbys' household (average age about 36) none except Joe (aged 15) had any teeth of their own. Was told here as elsewhere that as you could get false teeth from your health insurance it was considered an economy to do so. General opinion seems to be that it is best to "get shut of" your teeth as soon as possible. Deformities on the other hand not common.

Number of pubs in Wigan proper, 160. Equal to about 1 to 540 of population. Drunkenness nevertheless not common. Large proportion of pubs are beer houses and the smaller ones constantly changing hands. Few free houses.

Number of (retail) sweetshops 147, equal to about 1 to 590 of population. This apparently does not include tobacconists etc. who sell sweets. Struck by immense number of cut-price sweetshops, much cheaper and nastier than London.

Local bread mostly very bad. Immense sales of cheap readymade meat pies. Fruit and vegetables nowhere very good. Favourite local dishes tripe (eaten cold with vinegar) and cowheel. Less teashops than in southern towns. Unemployed are said to eat very largely tinned meat.

**EMPLOYMENT** 1931 census report gives local industries as follow: Mining 7,708 (118 females.) Textiles (not dress) and cellulose, 5,386, mainly women. Manufacture of machinery 2,139. Manufacture of clothing (not knitted) 2,438, mainly women. Transport and communication, 1,966. In business 5,133, about a quarter women. Also minor industries: pottery, woodworking, paper-making etc. In building trade 1,124, almost all men. Unoccupied and retired given as 22,665 (only 2,482 of these men: ie. the others are wives and daughters of those in work.) Unemployed given as 7,708.

Labour exchange for this time of year is 10,000 wholly unemployed and "temporarily stopped." This includes those on P.A.C. but not workhouse paupers. Rough figures are:

- Men wholly unemployed..... 8300.
- Temporarily stopped..... 3 to 400.

Women both classes..... 1500.

About 10,000

Total insured population is about 26,000 men, 10,000 women. Therefore at this time of year about 1 in 3.6 of the insured population is out of work. In the summer (when the pits are producing less coal) proportion rises to about 1 in 3. These figures however do not take account of dependents of unemployed. They should probably be multiplied by something between 3 and 4 to allow for wives and children of registered unemployed. Therefore at any moment at least 30,000 people (rather more than 1 in 3 of population) are drawing or living on the dole. According to officers at Labour Exchange, there has been a "steady core" of about 4,500 miners unemployed for the last 7 years.

Rates of benefit are as follow:

1. "Full benefit" (ie. until stamps are exhausted):

Single man..... 17/- per week.

Wife..... 9/-.

Each child below 14..... 3/-.

(Therefore in typical family of parents and 3 children of whom 1 is above 14, total income would be 32/- per week, plus anything brought in by eldest child. Rent for family of this size would seldom [2] be less than 7/6 per week.)

2. U.A.B. (Unemployment Assistance Board, for those who have exhausted their stamps and are on transitional benefit before being turned over to the parish):

Single man..... 15/- per week.

Man and wife..... 24/-.

Children 14-18..... 6/-.

ditto 11-14..... 4/6.

ditto 8-11..... 4/-.

ditto 5-11..... 3/6.

ditto 3-5..... 3/-.

(Apparently no allowance for infants. NB. that a quarter of this is regarded as rent with minimum of 7/6 per week. ie. if a man is paying less than a quarter of his dole as rent, or less than 7/6 of his income is 30/- or below, a corresponding amount is deducted from his benefit. In the typical family considered above, total income might be 31/6 plus eldest child's wages if in work, or 37/6 if not in work. A quarter of this would have to be paid as rent.)

3. P.A.C. (Public Assistance Board – local rates aided by central fund.)

Single man..... 12/6 per week.

Man and wife..... 23/-.

Eldest child..... 4/-.

Any other child..... 3/-.

(Therefore in the typical family above, total income would be 33/- a week, or 29/- plus anything brought in by the eldest child if in work. In addition to the above, coal allowance of 1/6 a week (rather less than price of 1 hundredweight) is granted for six weeks before and six weeks after Christmas. P.A.C. rates were recently lower, I think only 19/- for man and wife, but have been raised owing to a struggle by the N.U.W.M. – or so the latter claim.)

Means-test enforcement is said to be strict and question of rent carefully investigated. There is said to be much spying and tale-bearing, when, for instance, somebody is taking in a lodger, in which case a deduction would be made from his benefit if it were known. Meade told me of a case where a deduction was made because a room used to be rented to a travelling dentist one night a week for 3/-. One of the men at the “caravans” told me that he was seen feeding a neighbour’s chickens and it was reported that he was drawing wages for this and he had difficulty in refuting it [\*].

It may be taken that the average family in which there is no one in work is living on an income of round about 30/-, of which a quarter goes on rent. This is to say that the average person has to be fed, clothed, warmed and otherwise cared for for about 6 or 7 shillings a week.

Evidently there are cases of abuse of the dole. Sometimes young unmarried men who are in reality living at home get an accommodation address in order that they may represent themselves as independent and draw 17/- or 15/- as the case may be.

Of single unemployed men, some live in lodging houses. There are 10 common lodging houses in town housing 400-500 people. Most men of this kind live in a rented room for which they pay 5/- or 6/- a week and see to their own food. Of course in lodgings of this kind they are not encouraged to stay indoors, hence large numbers of them always hanging about the streets. They are not however very much in evidence because the police move them on if they congregate in large bunches. Their chief haunts are, 1. the Public Library newspaper room, where there are never less than 50 men, sometimes much more. 2. Several free billiards halls. 3. (for members) the N.U.W.M. shelter. 4. (above all) the movies. These are extraordinarily cheap and unemployed men avowedly go there to keep warm. You can always get a seat for 4d and at matinees at many picture houses for 2d.

Besides the above classes there is a fairly large number of disabled miners living on “compensation” pensions from the mines. “Compensation” usually seems to be something under 30/- a week, but some are paid a lump sum down. If their compensation falls below a certain sum (I think about 15/-) they can draw the dole. Also the usual old people living on the old age pension, eg. in the house I am in now there is an old man living solely on his 10/- a week pension[\*\*]. He is more or less bedridden and only goes out once a week to draw his pension. He hands his 10/- weekly over to Mrs F. And she “does for” him. I see his meals going up and he does not get much beyond bread and butter, tea and an occasional cake.

On the whole, there is not so much overt poverty in Wigan as one might expect. The most obvious sign of poverty is the poorness of the shops and the extraordinary number of shops that are derelict – in some streets about 1 in 3. Everyone is badly dressed but few noticeably ragged; clogs very common but no bare feet. Less obviously down-and-out people than in London. It is said that no one here spends the night in the streets and there is no derelict and as it were unaccounted-for population, except the casual paupers passing through. There are however a few people squatting in abandoned ruinous houses, for which they pay no rent, near the coal pits. In the time I have been here (a fortnight) I have not seen a beggar, though there are said to be a few. Few if any prostitutes. Last year there were 7 or 8 prosecutions for this during the whole year. In effect what you have here

is a population living on the dole and getting to take it for granted. The people have now grasped that it is not their fault they are unemployed (this is markedly different from 8 years ago) and are coming to look on drawing the dole as the same as having a job.

HOUSING In the census report of 1931, total number of occupied houses given as 18,573, or 82,704 rooms. Equals average of a little over 4 people per house or just over 1 per room. Taking half or even two thirds of these to be bedrooms, it is clear very few people here sleep in a room of their own. At date of census the number of families was given as (NB. almost certainly understated) 1,617 in excess of number of dwellings. Present number of houses not exactly procurable, but since 1931 990 houses are given as having been built and perhaps 100 demolished. Excess of families over houses should now therefore be somewhere in neighbourhood of 700 or 800 plus the number in caravans (see below.) Number of houses built during 1934 was 589, 284 by private enterprise and 304 by the Corporation. Great numbers of houses are condemned and theoretically the people from these houses are given Corporation houses instead, but there are never enough of these and the condemned houses remain standing. Probably in the whole town there are several thousand families (not individuals) who cannot get a livable house because there is not such a thing to be had.

Some typical houses I inspected were the following [\*\*\*]:

In Wallgate Quarter. Rows of "one up, one down" houses. This means one room upstairs and one room downstairs. Under the stairs there is an alcove measuring about 5 feet by 5 feet and serving for larder, scullery and coalhole. Kitchen measures about 12 feet by 10, and room upstairs corresponds to it. Open fireplace with oven at the side (all houses in Wigan have this) in kitchen. Tiny yard and outside lavatory at back. Rent 4/9, rates 2/6 – total 7/3. Rows of others as above, but instead of the alcove there was a recess about 2 feet deep containing the sink – no room for larder etc. Lavatories are common to several houses [\*\*\*\*] and are in little sheds on the alley behind. These houses have no back doors. To go to the lavatory you have to go out by the front door and round the end of the block – 50 or 100 yards if you live on the middle of the street. Rent 3/2, rates 2/- – total 5/2.

Rows of others with no alcove at all, merely a sink in the kitchen just inside the front door. No back door. Rent 3/9, rates 3- – total 6/9.

I was told these conditions are typical all over Wigan. One result of having no back doors is that the women habitually throw refuse out into the gutters in front. Most of the houses I inspected were in fairly good repair, but some I have passed without going inside are almost falling to pieces. A great many houses in the town have sunk owing to subsidence of old mining workings below. Many windows are as much as 20 degrees out of true, and, of course, it is impossible to open them. This taken for granted locally and looked upon as a joke. Out of 20 or 30 houses I have inspected, only 1 (the one I am in now, which is a 7-room house) has a bathroom. No hot water laid on in any of the houses, though when building them it would have been simple to instal a boiler behind the fireplace. People who have a house of any description cling to it however inconvenient it is, and some I spoke to had been in their houses 20 or 30 years. I notice they do not as a rule complain of their landlords but say they are quite well treated.

The worse<sup>o</sup> feature here are the colonies of caravans. The number of these is given in the Health Report as 180, and I visited colonies of them amounting to about 100. They are batches of old gypsy caravans, tramcars, buses etc dumped on pieces of waste ground and each inhabited by a family. Interior measurements vary between 6' by 5' by 6' high and about 15' by 6' by 6' high. Some fo them

are not even constructed of wood but are simply old wagons with semi-circular slats on top over which canvas is stretched, so that you have only canvas between you and the outer air. All have a tiny cottage kitchener inside. As for water, there is a hydrant common to the whole colony. In some I inspected the inhabitants had to walk 150 yards to fetch water. There are no sanitary arrangements at all. The people make what arrangements they can (most of them construct little huts in the tiny patch of ground surrounding their caravan) and once a week dig a deep hole in which they bury their refuse. Some I suppose are inhabited by a single individual, but I did not see one in which there were less than 2 people, and most of the families were fairly large. One, measuring about 12 or 15 feet long, had 7 people living in it. Conditions inside these places have to be seen to be grasped. It is almost literally impossible to turn round, and all the people, especially the children, are unspeakably dirty. All the caravan-dwellers said that in winter they had to keep their fires alight all night to keep warm, and the damp, of course, soaks up through the floor. I was shown mattresses (this was about 11 am.) which were wringing wet. There is never room for more than one or at most two beds, and with families of almost-adult children this raises fresh problems. In one caravan there were a mother, a father, a son and a daughter, the two last around 18 years old. The mother slept with the daughter and the son with the father – they were plainly afraid of incest. A question I would have liked to ask, but had not the nerve, was what happens in these places when anyone dies. Rents, according to size of caravan, vary from 5/- a week to 8/- including water.

This state of affairs is not due to poverty but to housing shortage, since these rents are about the same as for houses; only the houses are not available. The Health Report only mentions them on a very discreet manner and the Census Report makes what is evidently a deliberate falsification with regard to them. "Structurally separate dwellings of 1 room" occupied by 1 family are given as only 25. But the Health Report now admits 180, and in 1931 there were presumably more, since this business has admittedly been going on since 1919 and some effort has been made to get the people out into houses. The importance of this lies in the fact that there are said to be caravan-colonies in all the Lancashire towns. By omitting<sup>o</sup> mention of these the census report enormously understates the number of families living in one room.

There are not many "back to back" houses in Wigan. I have only seen one row of them.

One mitigation of bad housing conditions is that fuel is cheap. Coal is 1/11 a hundredweight for "best" (2/7d in London) and I think you can get coal of sorts for 1/6. There is also immense and constant thieving of coal from the "dirt-trains." (See diary.) I gather that several tons of coal and "cannel" a day are stolen by the unemployed. Coal cannot be stolen directly from the pits by the working miners, but they steal short lengths of pit-props for kindling wood and to some extent collaborate with the men who rob the "dirt-trains" by allowing as much coal as possible to remain among the dirt.

RELIGION No exact figures obtainable. Number of churches and chapels of all denominations in Wigan proper seems to be about 40 with about 60 clergy – the numbers are possibly a very little above this. This means allowing about 1 church or chapel to about 2000 or 2500 of the population. Even allowing for the fact that the Catholic churches have a number of successive Masses on Sundays, it is clear that not half the population make any kind of observance. As to numbers of the different denominations, the Anglicans have about 12 churches with 22 clergy, the Catholics about 6 with 17 clergy, the rest belong to various sects. Nonconformity however is said not to be preponderant here. The biggest community are the Catholics with the Anglicans a fairly good second. Large numbers of the population are of Irish descent and Irish names are common though they all speak with the Lancashire accent.

[\*] See over page. [which reads] As usual, there is extraordinary variation in the different cases. eg. in this house alone: old Jack, superannuated miner aged 75, lives on his old age pension of 10/- plus 2/6 from the parish. He has a home, ie. a married son or daughter not certain which) & used to live there till the Means Test came in. But now, under the Means Test, they would get less dole if it were known they had a paying lodger, so he has to turn out into lodgings.

On the other hand: Mr F., who keeps this place, has the tripe-shop, which presumably brings in profit, & also takes in lodgers up to the number of about 9, paying varying amounts from 25/- a week downwards. Also sells teas, casual meals, cigarettes etc. etc. On top of this he has the impertinence to draw the dole & has never been found out.'

[\*\*] Two of these in this house. But they also receive 2/6 a week from the parish. In Manchester & Salford 5/-.

[\*\*\*] See also additional notes on housing

[\*\*\*\*] Great majority of houses have their own lavatory

### **ADDITIONAL NOTES**

Melbourne Street (Wallgate quarter.)

2 up 2 down. Living room 12-14 ft. by 9 ft. Boiler. No gas stove. No cellar. Coal hole. Windows will open but not very well. Chimneys bad. Floor of W.C. frequently flooded, either by leaking roof or overflow of cistern. Landlord refuses repairs. When I came in, husband was scrubbing floor, wife, in poor health, sitting in rocking chair, very down in the mouth and rather dirty. 3 persons (parents and son) in house, all adults. Father is on Means Test, ditto son, the latter only receiving 12/6 as he lives at home. ie. total income of family 36/6 a week. Father worked 42 years in pit. Has lost middle finger of right hand but for some reason got no compensation. Rent 4/1½, rates 2/2. Have been in this house over 30 years. Asked whether would like corporation house; no, because too far out of town. "These houses'd be all right only he (landlord) won't do nothing to 'em." House is very dark.

Victoria Street, fronting on Melbourne Street (further down from above.) Back to back. 2 up 2 down. Living room 12 ft by 10 ft. No coal hole, only small recess in kitchen. Boiler. Gas stove. No cellar. Windows refuse to open. Chimney smokes. Landlord refuses repairs. 6 people in house, two parents, 4 children, of whom 2 are aged 25 and 15. Clean decent people and not despondent. Rent 5/-, rates 2/6. The Victoria Street side of these back to back houses a filthy miry alley. Some people have to walk about 50 yards to reach lavatory.

Clayton Street. 2 up 2 down. Living room 14 ft by 10 ft. Gas stove. Boiler. Coal hole. Walls let in damp. 2 parents and 1 child in house. Husband on dole, wife works 9 hours a day in spinning mill. Net wages 21/- a week. House very dark – scullery dark enough to need lamp all day. Landlord not too good. Rent 5/4, rates 3/6. Some similar houses in this row are rent 6/-.

In the houses opposite, walls bulging to an extent one would hardly believe. Some have recently been re-faced, but begin bulging anew. Doors and windows hanging at strange angles.

York Street. 3 up and 2 down. Living room about 14 ft. each way. Boiler. Coal hole under stairs. House very dark, but dry. Windows will open. Good landlord. 3 persons in house, of decent type and cheerful. Husband gets dole of 24/-, son, aged about 18, works down pit, for net wage (after stoppages and bus fares) of about 25/-. Miners who work at this pit [\*] are obliged to buy their coal from the company – ie. to take out part of their wages to in coal – at 1/6 a bag. Said to be very bad coal. Rent of house 5/4, rates ¾. They are in arrears with rent and paying off arrears at rate of 2d a

week. Landlord has never been known to evict. This appropos° of an old woman down a neighbouring street who kept a little fish shop, was evicted and sold up for her rent and has now disappeared none knows where.

The "Unemployed Leader", October 1935, states:

Great majority of houses in Wigan have no baths.

502 families of 1-10 occupy only 1 room.

2,284 families occupy two rooms per family. (540 of these families consist of 5-12 persons.)

2,699 families occupy 3 rooms per family. (322 of these families consist of 7-15 persons.)

Number of persons living in overcrowded conditions in Wigan is 10,000.

Number of houses needed to relieve overcrowding is 1143.

Number of caravan-dwellers (ie. families) 188 as against 80 in 1932.

Number of back to back houses 160.

Number of houses "scheduled" (not stated whom by) as unfit for human habitation, 2,099.

Infant mortality rate 110 per thousand.

Maternal mortality rate 9 per thousand.

NB. to check as far as possible with figures in health report.

#### **ADDITIONAL NOTE**

CORPORATION HOUSES: Great disagreement about these. Jerry Kennan's house in the Beech Hill Estate is as follows:

Downstairs: Large living room with kitchener fireplace (oven at side), boiler behind fire, cupboards and fixed dresser, composition floor. Small hallway. Largish kitchen.

Upstairs: 2 largish bedrooms, 1 small (suitable for boxroom or bedroom at pinch.) Bathroom-W.C. with hot and cold water.

In the kitchen up-to-date electric cooker, hired from Corporation at much the same rate as gas-cooker. Electric laundering machine (automatic wringer in aluminium tank and automatic mangle) costing about £20, purchasable on hire-purchase at 2/3 per week. This company is financially backed by the Corporation. Electricity is fairly cheap.

Smallish garden. These vary, but mostly a little smaller than an allotment°.

Rent 11/3 inclusive. Bus fare into town 2d.

Houses appear well-built and convenient and are quite agreeable to look at. Various restrictions. eg. Not to keep poultry or pigeons, take in lodgers, sublet or start any kind of business, without permission of Corporation. Gather that this is easily accorded in the case of lodgers but would be refused in the case of keeping poultry or keeping shop. Kennan is very satisfied with house and

proud of it. Houses are well kept. Corporation are good about repairs but keep tenants up to the mark with regard to keeping place tidy etc.

On the other hand, Welly Estate Corporation houses:

Downstairs: Living room, about 14' by 10'. Kitchen a good deal smaller than this. Tonly larder under stairs. Small but fairly good bathroom. (Did not see W.C. – probably outside.) Gas stove. Electric light.[3] Upstairs: Best bedroom about 12 by 10 with tiny fireplace. Another same size without fireplace. Another tiny one – 7' by 6'. Best bedroom has small wardrobe let into wall.

Small garden – about 20 yards by 10.

Number in family 6. Parents, son aged 19, daughter 22, daughter 13, son 8. Catholics. None in work except eldest son. For those on P.A.C., as here, when rent is over  $\frac{1}{4}$  income allowance is made.

Rent 10/3 inclusive. Rather more than a mile from town – no bus, I think. People are very discontented with house. Complaints are as follow:

House is cold, draughty and damp. Fireplace in living room gives out no heat and makes room very dusty – attributed to its being set too low. Fireplace in best bedroom so tiny as to be useless. Smallest bedroom practically useless as such. Walls upstairs cracking already (Verified this myself.) Middle bedroom and living room very dark. Doors do not fit well. Owing to uselessness of small bedroom, 5 are sleeping in 1 bedroom (2 beds), 1 (the son, I suppose) in the other. Notice that these people were previously in filthy house in town which I inspected recently and made every effort to get out of it. Now want to get back. Gather from their and others' remarks that the Corporation houses seem chilly and unhomelike, partly because they are far from town, partly because this lot are set on top of a windy hill. This lot certainly are jerry-built but it is probably the proximity and stuffiness that these people miss more than anything, especially in winter. Gardens here all neglected.

NB. Nearly all the people living in this estate are unemployed.[4]

MINERS. 8 or 10 coal mines in and about Wigan. The deepest about 1000 yards. The most up-to-date said to be the Maypole and Rose Bridge, which I have not seen. The only one I have seen hitherto is Crippen's, which is old-fashioned but said not to be worse than the generality. Depth of Crippen's about 300 yards (more to the deepest working, I think), and distance from cage to present coal face about three quarters of a mile. This last is apparently an average distance. In some mines it is 3 miles. The important thing here is that at any rate in an old-fashioned mine this distance from the cage to the coal face has got for the most part to be covered bending double, sometimes crawling. 3 miles would take quite an hour and a half to do this way. Miens vary greatly in temperature. Crippen's is dry and rather hot – I judged the temperatures in the hottest place to be about 100 degrees. Some are much hotter than this, some very cold, some very wet. Miners are all used to walking doubled up and can do it very fast without apparent fatigue, but don't pretend to like it. They almost always work lying down or at best kneeling, but prefer this because they say that a "high face" is usually unsafe. (See diary for account of Crippen's pit.)

Present rate of wages are:

Coal-getter... 10/11d a day.

Dataller... 8/9d a day.

Rates for piece-work not exactly obtainable, but said to average about  $\frac{1}{4}$  a ton. It is only in a few pits that the coal-getters are paid on piece-work. The dataller (man who attends to the roofing) would of course always get a fixed wage. Working full time, therefore, a coal-getter's wage would be at most £3-5-6, a dataller's £2-12-6, a boy's wage round about £1 a week. Stoppages amount to about 5/-, thus:

Hire of lamp.....	6d
Insurance (unemployment and health).....	1/5
Pick-sharpening.....	-/6
Check-weighman.....	-/9
Infirmary.....	./2
Hospital.....	-/1
Benevolent fund.....	-/6
Union fees.....	-/6
Total.....	4/5d

But on top of this there are bus fares. The mines are all on the outskirts of Wigan but owing to the housing shortage the miners have to live wherever they can and there are few cottages near the mines. Nearly all the men live in Wigan. The buses (owned by the corporation) are neither very good nor very cheap. (No such thing as a 1d fare in Wigan – the least is  $1\frac{1}{2}$ d.) An average week's payment for bus-fares would be 2/-. Therefore there is about 6/6d to come off a miner's wage each week. When on part-time he pays the same stoppages except perhaps the check-weighman (man paid by the miners themselves to see that weighing is fairly done) which is sometimes remitted for those on part-time.

The time of one shift is  $7\frac{1}{2}$  hours. The important thing to notice that this is time spent at the coal face, ie. the time spent in getting there has to be added on. It is nothing out of the way for this to take 3 hours, so that the usual time spent at work is round about 10 hours. Add to this the time spent in getting to and from home, and it is about 11 hours.

Cannot yet obtain at all exactly the amount of coal extracted by 1 miner in a year. According to the Samuel Commission a miner in 1913 was only producing about 300 tons a year. Not stated whether this referred to actual coal-getters or to all concerned (datallers, electricians, men who work the cage etc.) but presumably the latter. At present it seems that a team of 35 men working one of the big machines, given good coal, may turn out 450 tons of coal in a day. But one has got to add onto these the datallers etc., bringing the number up to about 60-65. Of course this average would not be kept up, owing to the variation in coal and the fact that many mines run part-time in summer. But it is clear that the average output per man might be somewhere in the neighbourhood of 1000 tons per year. NB. to get more exact figures.

Number of miners killed 1927-1934 given as 7839. ie. 1118.4 per year.

Number of injuries for same period given as 1,200,042. ie. 121,434.5 per year. Number of miners actually at work about 750,000. (NB. to get more exact figure.) Therefore about 1 miner in 700 [\*\*] is killed every year and about 1 in 7 [\*\*\*] injured. But have not hitherto succeeded in discovering how many of these injuries are serious. Injuries means injuries reported and the miners are instructed to report all injuries, even minor ones. The causes of accidents are 1. Falls of stone. These are very frequent and the reason why they do not lead to more injuries is that experienced miners can generally tell by tapping whether the roof is safe. Also the pit-props give warning by creaking. In Crippen's mine we saw here and there "pot-holes" – circular holes in the roof from which a lump of stone, usually big enough to kill a man, had suddenly shot out. 2. Explosions, due to gas. The gas is said to be ignited by a pick striking sparks from stone, or by fusing of electric wires, or by "gob fires." These are fires that break out spontaneously in damp coal dust, which apparently gets hot in the same manner as a hot-bed. When they break out they are stifled with sand or bricked over, but are always liable to break out afresh. 3. Heavy falls of stone which cut off isolated parties of men. 4. Falls due to carelessness in blasting. Blasting is only supposed to be done when there is no one working, eg. on Sundays, but in order to same time is often done at other times. It is only done to loosen the coal but may on occasion bring the roof down. The charges are touched off by an electric wire at a distance, but have been known to go off prematurely. 5. Accidents to the cage. The distance to be descended is anything from 100 to 1000 yards. The one I went down in did 300 yards in about ½ a minute, ie. an average speed of about 12 mph.,[5] but it slowed down greatly towards the end and was probably touching 30 or 40 in the middle. Some in the deeper mines are said to touch 60 mph. or even more. The man working the cage has an indicator which shows him how fast it is working, but it is possible for him to make a mistake and there have been many deaths in this way. Apart from accidents miners are said to be healthy, except for those who start off with a tendency to tuberculosis, in which case the dust they are constantly breathing does for them. Their lungs are said to be quite black. Many miners suffer from rheumatism, owing to violent changes of temperature and working in a cramped position. It is noticeable that the rate of accidents do not decrease although the number of men engaged decreases – ie, proportionately there are more accidents. All miners concur in saying that this is due to speeding-up and that much of the new machinery is unsafe, at any rate with the Lancashire coal. For example, with the new coal cutters they have to cut 6 feet into the face before re-propping, and they say this is too far for safety. All say also that the steel girders now largely used are less safe than the wooden props. The latter creak when they are giving way but the steel girders are liable to fly out without warning.

Baths Only 2 of the local mines have baths at the pit-head. In the miners' cottages there is probably not 1 in 50 that has a bath.

### **ADDITIONAL NOTES ON HOUSES**

(All in Scholes quarter.)

Street of 5-room houses, 3 up 2 down, rent and rates 9/1.

2 up 2 down, with tiny scullery. Paper etc. in very bad repair. 1 cellar. No back door or yard. Landlord refuses repairs. Rent 6/6, rates 3/9.

2 up 2 down, front room fairly large – about 16 by 10. Six houses share back yard with one lavatory each. Very bad repair. Terribly bare interiors upstairs. Bare floors, rickety iron bedsteads covered only with old overcoats and other rags. Rent 4/1, rates 2/9.

2 up 1 down. Hole under stairs for coal. Back door but no back yard. No scullery. Sink in living room. Very bad repair. Floor (of stone) sinking and uneven. Windows will only open a few inches. No boiler. Rent 4/-, rates 2/6.

Condemned. 2 up 2 down. Gas stove. No boiler. Rooms about 12 by 10. Very bad repair and landlord refuses repairs. Tenant has been in this house 38 years. Opposite these a shocking little row of back to back houses which I did not succeed in entering. Almost all windows patched either with paper or boards. Horrible miry alley about 8 feet wide and tumbledown W.Cs. Landlords apparently always refuse repairs when house is condemned.

Condemned. 1 up 1 down. Rooms about 15 by 15. No scullery. Coal hole under stairs. Boiler. Floor going lopsided and no windows will open. Decently dry. Good landlord. Rent 3/8, rates 2/6.

2 up 2 down and pantry as well. Share a yard with a number of other houses. Gas boiler. Rooms about 14 by 12. Dry. No windows will open. Rent 10/-, rates 3/6.

2 up 1 down and coal hole. Terribly squalid interior. Old woman at first got it into her head that we were from the Corporation and intended to bully her about overcrowding etc., and gave us tremendous ticking off.[6] "I don't want you buggers nosing round 'ere. I've lived in this 'ouse and I'll be buried from it. I'm not going to let no bugger turn me out," etc. Presently relented and gave us the information we wanted. Four generations living in this house. Catholics. The woman's mother, aged 97, evidently wrong in the head, sat looking on with expressionsless face. Furniture falling to pieces and everything very dirty. Rent 3/4½, rates 2/1.

2 up 2 down. Backyard. Coal hole. Walls are falling absolutely to pieces. Water comes into upstairs rooms in quantities. Downstairs windows will not open. Floor lopsided. Bad landlord. Rent 6/-, rates 3/6.

Greenough's Row. Uncertain whether these houses are condemned or not. Some tenants say yes, some no. They were inspected a few days ago. 1 up 1 down and kitchen. Front room 13 by 8. Walls coming away and water comes in. Back windows will not open, front windows will. Landlord has not done repairs for a long time past. 10 in family – 8 children very near together in age. The people have recently been warned that they will be evicted for overcrowding, but the Council have got to find them another house first. Catholics (all in this row seem to be Catholics.) Landlord has not done repairs for a long time past. Rent 4/-, rates 2/3.

Next door. Same arrangement but smaller front room. Water comes in upstairs. Windows will open but are loose. One blew out recently. Catholics but "Religion won't feed you." Landlord refuses repairs. Rent 4/6, rates 2/3.

Further up street. 2 up 1 down. Walls good. 4/- rent, 2/6 rates.

Next door. 2 up 1 down. Share backyard with 4 others. Windows will open. Back kitchen lets in water when it rains. Asked landlord for repairs and "e larfed at me." Rent 4/2, rates 2/6.

Next door. Same arrangement. 6 in family. No complaints except some defect in chimney. Also the common lavatories are a few feet behind the back door, and in front just across the street (15 feet wide) are lavatories of next row of houses, so you have them behind[7] you and in front of you. Rent 5/-, rates 2/6.

Next door. End house. The end houses have rooms a little bigger so are a bit higher in rent. No complaints here – people actually enthusiastic about this house (in good repair except back bedroom which lets in damp) because they have recently escaped into it from the first house in the

row, in which they had lived for years. This house is said not only to let in quantities of water but to be sinking rapidly and kitchen floor so askew that you could hardly stand up straight. The woman's father is now living alone in that house. "I couldn't bear to live with him no longer. He's got like a cancer in his mouth and it was a-punishing me to live with him." These people very bitter about the idea of condemning houses and putting the tenants into Council houses which are 3/- or 4/- a week more. Rent here 5/-, rates 2/6.

Owing to the cramped back yards, all the people in this row throw refuse into the street, which is littered with tealeaves, bread etc.

[\*] ditto with most pits. I don't know whether they can enforce this, though

[\*\*] 900 (J. Jones)

[\*\*\*] 6 (J. Jones). [Orwell's calculations are incorrect. He takes 1927-34 as seven years. That means 1,119.86 killed per year and 171,434.6 injured. Of 750,000 miners, that is 1 in 670 killed per year and 1 in 4.37 injured. Were this an eight-year period it would be 1 in 765 killed and 1 in 5 injured per year. Peter Davison]

### **NOTES**

[1] 5 | 4

[2] seldom | never handwritten emendation

[3] Gas stove. Electric light. | handwritten addition

[4] NB. Nearly...unemployed. | handwritten addition

[5] 12 mph. | 10 mph. Despite Orwell's recalculation and the handwritten alteration he made, the speed is still incorrect. A mile is 1,760 yards, so 300 yards in half a minute is a mile in 3 minutes; that is 20 mph.

[6] off | handwritten addition

[7] behind | before

The ° sign is used to denote Orwell's mistakes.

### **Peter Davison**

Orwell's notes on Wigan after research at Wigan library. From the Complete Works, X, 346, p. 531