The History of Child Labour in Sheffield

Extract From ‘The Dream’

Local campaigner, James Montgomery wrote many poems about climbing boys (more commonly known as chimney sweeps).

The extract below describes a boy’s experience of climbing a chimney while the fire was still hot.

Fair pictures in their golden frames,
And looking-glasses bright;
Fine things, I cannot tell their names,
Dazed and bewitch’d me quite.

Master soon thwack’d them out my head –
The chimney must be swept!
Yet in the grate the coals were red;
I stamp’d, and scream’d, and wept.
With his two iron hands he grasp’d
And hoisted me aloof;
His naked neck in vain I clasp’d.
The man was pity-proof.

So forth he swung me through the space,
Above the smouldering fire;
I never can forget his face,
Nor his gruff growl, ‘Go higher!’

As if I climb’d a steep house side,
Or scaled a dark draw-well,
The horrid opening was so wide,
I had no hold, - I fell;

Fell on the embers, all my length
But scarcely felt their heat,
When, with a madman’s rage and strength,
I started to my feet.
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Questions - The Dream

Q1. What did the boy in the poem see in the room before he was sent up the chimney?

Q2. What was it like inside the chimney?

Q3. How has life for children changed since the 1800’s, please describe in your own words.