

Key terms:

boycott:

to refuse to buy a product or take part in an activity as a way of expressing strong disapproval

finest:

an amount of money that has to be paid as a punishment for not obeying a rule

phossy jaw:

a disfiguring and painful disease

socialist:

a person that believes all people are equal and should share equally in a country's wealth

strike:

to refuse to continue working because of an argument with an employer about working conditions, pay, or job losses

union:

a group of workers, joining together to protect their interests

What was life like for the workers?

- Working hours: 6.30am (8.00am in winter) - 6.00pm
- Diet of bread, butter and tea for breakfast and lunch
- Many were Irish immigrants
- Workers were as young as 12 or 13 years old
- In 1882 a statue of Prime Minister, William Gladstone was paid for out of their wages



Money in 1888

Pounds (£) 20s in £1
Shillings (s) 12d in 1s
Pence (d)

Workers weekly wage: 4s - 8s

Weekly rent: 2s

Fines at work: 3d - 1s per fine

Match Girls' Strike

Bryant & May factory,
London

5 - 16 July 1888



Annie Besant, 1847—1933

- A socialist
- Campaigned for women's and worker's rights
- A journalist who wrote an article about the Bryant & May match girls titled 'White slavery in London' for a newspaper called *The Link*



Examples of things to be fined for:

being late for work / talking / going to the toilet without permission / dropping matches / having dirty feet

Why did the strike happen?

- Unfair fines
- Workers had to pay for their own materials
- Working with white phosphorus caused phossy jaw
- Three workers were sacked for talking to Annie Besant
- Workers told to sign a document saying they were happy with conditions



The strike

- 1,400 workers refused to sign the document and went on strike
- Besant raised funds to support them
- Besant called on people to boycott Bryant & May products
- The workers went to parliament to discuss their issues



What happened next?

- Workers given their jobs back
- All fines stopped
- Workers no longer had to pay for their materials
- Workers provided with a separate space to eat away from white phosphorus
- Workers allowed to form a union

New unionism: the strike led to a new era of 'unskilled workers' forming unions

Supporting activities

Visit the museum

Book a Living History performance: *Strike a Light! – A Match Girl’s Story*

Meet Maggie McCallow, a Victorian match girl involved in the match factory strike of 1888. Find out how she campaigned for better rights for the workers.

Play our digital game: *A Day in the Match Factory*

Explore the gallery displays and learn more about the conditions in the Bryant & May match factory through an arcade style game where players’ progress is hampered by unfair fines and sickness.

Discuss & debate

- What was the most important factor in the strike’s success? Argue your point
- In many parts of the world, people are still forced to work in dangerous working environments. Research an example of this and report back on:
 - ⇒ Who are the workers?
 - ⇒ Where in the world are they?
 - ⇒ What are the conditions like?
 - ⇒ What can we do to support them?

Art

Protest placard

Design a protest placard for the match girls with a catchy slogan to get your message across. Include an eye catching image or symbol.

Creative writing

Hot seating

An individual or small group of students take the role of a match girl, Annie Besant, or one of the employers and is questioned by the rest of the class about how they feel, why they have got involved in the protest and what they want to happen. This could be set either before, during or after the strike.

From the answers gathered from the hot seating activity and information in the knowledge organiser:

Write a speech or newspaper article

Imagine you are a worker, about to address parliament with your issues and motivations for striking. Write a speech that will motivate Members of Parliament (MPs) to help you.

Imagine you are Annie Besant writing about the match girls for the newspaper *The Link*. Write an article that will encourage readers to support the match girls by donating funds and boycotting Bryant & May products.



Key terms:

boycott:

to refuse to buy a product or take part in an activity as a way of expressing strong disapproval

discrimination:

treating someone unfairly because of who they are

MP:

Members of Parliament

migrate:

a change of settlement to another country

pay cap:

an upper limit on how much an employee can be paid

picket line:

a line of people gathered outside a workplace to increase support of their cause

strike:

to refuse to continue working because of an argument with an employer about working conditions, pay or job losses

union:

a group of workers, joining together to protect their interests

Who were the workers?

Many of the workers came from east Africa but were originally of south Asian descent.

In east Africa, Asian communities faced increasing hostility and discrimination and chose to leave. In some cases, like in Uganda in 1972, they were forced to leave.

Many migrants chose to settle in Britain.

In Africa, many of the Asian migrants had held professional jobs and lived a comfortable life. Having to leave many of their assets behind, they arrived in Britain with very little money.

The workers experienced racism by their employers.

Jayaben Desai, 1933-2010



- Born in Gujarat, India
- In 1956 migrated to Tanzania, east Africa
- Migrated to Britain in 1967
- Led workers on strike in 1976

Grunwick strike

Grunwick film processing factory,
London

1976-1978



Why did the strike happen?

- Sacking of Devshi Bhudia for working too slowly
- Workers not allowed to join a union
- Unfair working conditions
- Compulsory overtime
- Discrimination



The strike

- At its peak 20,000 people supported the strike
- This included different unions including those of miners and postal workers
- Postal workers boycotted the factory refusing to deliver film
- MPs tried to help mediate terms between the two sides and some actively joined the picket line
- Police were reported to have used surveillance on leaders and force against protestors to try and suppress the strike

Outcome

- Challenged stereotype of Asian women as passive
- Postal workers were taken to court and forced to resume business with the factory
- Management refused to give in to any of the demands
- The Trades Union Congress (TUC) withdrew their support
- Protesting workers were not given their jobs back

Supporting activities

Visit the museum

Book a Living History performance: *Moving Stories – Migration & Identity*

Meet Anita Sharma, at school in Manchester in the 1960s. Find out about her summer holiday to India with her parents who were born there. Follow her journey to adulthood as she explores her identity.

Augmented reality (AR) experience

Get up close to objects from PHM's collection and hear the voices of those who were involved in strikes during the 1970s and 1980s.

Download the app for your device using this [link](#). Aim your camera towards the gallery wall and search for triggers to reveal the objects.

Creative writing

Creating memories

Research photographs of the strike online.

Write a recount as a memory of the event in the photograph. Use facts from the knowledge organiser to support this writing. This could be a single sentence in a thought bubble or it could be a longer piece of work written as a memoir of the time.

Drama

Television interview

Jayaben Desai challenged traditional ideas of who leads a protest. What qualities does a good leader need to organise a protest? Consider points such as values, personality and rhetoric.

In small groups come up with a protest about a contemporary work issue (fictional or real).

Choose someone to be a television news reporter, a leader of the protest, an employer at the company and part of a group of protestors. Together, work on your character profiles and write a script to act out.

Conduct an interview for television (use recording equipment if available) to report on the protest.

Discuss & debate

- Do you think there can be good and bad forms of protest?
- Compare the similarities and differences between the Match Girls' Strike, 1888 and the Grunwick strike, 1976-1978. Why do you think one succeeded and the other failed?
- Research and discuss contemporary issues of work place discrimination. Who is affected? Have conditions improved since 1978?

