

## Upper Silesia

Upper Silesia is located in the south of Poland. Silesia is known for coal mines. Coal has been extracted here since 1755. Mines aren't famous only for coal. Flint, salt, gems, precious metals and minerals are extracted in mines too but in Poland the most commonly extracted mineral is coal which is used for heating, for producing energy and pencils, in pharmacy and agriculture.

People working in the mines are called miners. They have one of the most tiring and dangerous jobs in the world. In the time of industrial revolution (16<sup>th</sup> century) lots of mines were built so their owners started to hire children! That sounds incredible but it is true. Kids are smaller than adults so they can get into very small places. You know that work in mines is very hard so miners used horses to transport minecarts with coal. Other animals that were used in mines were canaries. Miners put them into cages and the cages were hung in the caves. If some poisonous gases escaped, canaries died or stopped singing. That was the signal for miners to run away from the mine.

Colliers created some underground legends. The most famous is „Skarbnik”. He is a person protecting natural resources in the mines and underground treasures.

The Patron of miners and mines is Saint Barbara. We celebrate her holiday called „Barbórka” on 4<sup>th</sup> December. Her holiday is on the Intangible Cultural Heritage List. St Barbara is also the patron of: sailors, architects, cooks, blacksmiths. An interesting thing is that Miners have their own greeting „God bless you”.

Miners have had their uniforms since 1817. The formal uniform consists of: Black shako- a cap with a plume and an emblem with „Perlik”(Hammer) and „Żelazko”(pickaxe)

PRL was a period in the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century. That was a very poor period for Poland. Miners competed with each other at their work. One of the miners made 250% of mining norm. His name was Wincenty Pstrowski. Miners lived in „Worker estates”. The owners of the mines built these estates. They consisted of houses, a church, a school, shops,

a hospital and other important places. The most famous are Nikiszowiec, Giszowiec, Borsig, Ficus and Zandka. After World War II soldiers became miners to have money for basic needs. In 1951 women also started to work as miners.

Silesian tragedy was a period when USSR (UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS) deported German miners and equipment from mines.

The exploitation of the mines in Silesia caused a lot of damages and degradation of the environment, which contributed to the decline of the mining industry.

What reminds us today about those times is the industrial monument route- a list of important post-industrial places like Guido mine, Maciej Shaft, Queen Louise Adit and Main Hereditary Key Adit.

**AFTER YOU READ, PLEASE ANSWER THE QUESTIONS BELOW:**

1. What role did canaries play in the coal mines? What other animal was used underground?
2. Why were children hired to work in coal mines?
3. Who is the saint patron of the miners and when is her holiday?
4. What is coal used for?
5. Who was Wincenty Pstrowski?
6. Who built workers' estates and why do you think they were built?