

men out of work or to force them to work for lower wages themselves. So the miners' trade unions, which men could join and women could not, campaigned hard against the employment of women:

### SOURCE 15

*Keep them at home . . . to look after their families . . . there is then some chance of a higher rate of wages being enforced.*

Miners Association of Great Britain and Ireland, 1842

After 1842 women could still work on the surface of coal mines. The miners' unions were determined to get rid of them even from there. In 1865 the miners of Northumberland and Durham petitioned Parliament about several matters, including the employment of women as surface labourers. They claimed it was degrading for women to do this kind of work. It was this petition which led the House of Commons to set up a Select Committee to look into the matters raised by the miners.

## Evidence to the Select Committee

The Select Committee interviewed people between 1865 and 1867. William Pickard, the Miners' Agent (union representative) of the Wigan District, strongly opposed women working on the pit brow. He was asked what exactly it was about the work that degraded women. He replied:

### SOURCE 16

*If they are employed from six o'clock in the morning to five or six at night, their absence from home leaves domestic duties entirely in a jumblement [in confusion]; and when the husband comes home it leads to much unpleasantness and much altercation [argument], and leads the men to go and spend their time elsewhere.*

Report from the Select Committee on Mines, 1866

This surprised the MP who had asked the question. He said he could see how the women's work might be inconvenient to their husbands, but that did not explain why it should be described as 'degrading' to the women.

Pickard could only repeat that pit brow work did not allow women to carry out their home duties 'as satisfactorily as they ought'. Then he suggested that the women could find alternative

'honourable employment' in factories (source 17) or in domestic service. This was a contradiction, since work of this kind would also have taken the women out of the home. If Pickard noticed it, he did not say so.