Sample research paper on historical records on air pollution

Business, Industries

\n[toc title="Table of Contents"]\n

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Introduction

Air pollution in Britain can be dated as far back as the 12 century. According to history, the root of air pollution in this era was the continuous use of coal as a means of fire for cooking or heating by the early people. Because of the over use of domestic fire, smoke mixed with other pollutants caused major pollution on a local level which then after a period became more than a local problem but instead a national problem. As Great Britain grew, and urban setting started cropping up so did air pollution. Most urban settings at the time still used firewood as their main sources of fire with cropping industries using coal. In this study, one is going to examine the two major causes that led to air pollution in Great Britain from 12 century to 19 century, which are the smoke sea coal and industrial revolution.

In 1157, the wife of Henry the second moved out of the Tutbury Castle in Nottingham due to air pollution that was caused by the burning of firewood. According to her, the smoke from the firewood that was being burned within

and outside the castle was unbearable. In 1306, Edward I burned the use and meaning of sea coal, and imposed a death sentence for whoever caught burning or mining sea coal. Elizabeth I then strengthened the proclamation after a rear appearance in parliament where she prohibited anybody living in London from burning sea coal (Else, 2009). It is important to note that the evolution of industries at the time was extremely important to the economy of Great Britain. Among some of the first industry that cropped up at the time included, ceramics, smelting of metal, and leather turning industries. The beginning of the industrial revolution brought about more pollution problems. Sea coal became one of the most necessary commodities in running of the industries. In this medieval era, sea coal was used as a source of fuel that was the lifeline of many if not all industries at the time.

The history of sea coal in Britain dates back to medieval times. During instances of fuel wood shortages, tradesmen who owned small shops used use sea coal as a subsidy. The continues use of sea coal by the breweries, industries, smiths, limekilns and forges brought about much debate and criticism from local citizens, who complained of being affected by the worsening air quality in their localities. In 1578, one of the people who complained of the air quality in London was the queen herself. Queen Elizabeth I criticized one of the breweries that were located in proximity to the Westminster Castle of over using sea coal hence affecting the air around London. By the mid-17th century, London was engulfed with a thick cloud of smoke. Historians trace this to a rapid shift from using firewood to using sea coal for both domestic reason and the emerging industries (http://topdocumentaryfilms. com/filthy-cities/).

One of the first public figures who cautioned on the state that London was in was John Evelyn. According to him, the smoke from the overuse of sea coal had caused great harm to both the health of the population in London at the time and the architecture of what he termed as the ‘ greatest city on earth.’ Some of the solutions that he offered in his pamphlet included the relocation of pollution industries to other places far from London and its dwellers. Evelyn argued that such states of pollution could not be allowed in other cities, in the world, live alone Europe (Evelyn,).

Industry revolution

In 1760 to 1830, Britain was the leading country in the industrial revolution. The 18th century saw a radical shift from a country that relied on handicrafts manufacturing to one the was dominated by new industries and technological machines. Some of the changes that were experienced then included new machines such as steam engines that were thought to increase production and the use of iron (Thorsheim 2006).

In 1780 to 1848 the need to process iron and coal was at its peak. In order to do this, most industries at Britain at the time used sea coal which was hazarders to the air, hence aggravating more pollution. This era saw a rise in slums within the city and an increased use of coal as the main source of energy by worker and companies alike. 1848 to 1895 saw the rise in transport industries. The main source of energy at the time was coal, which was used to construct rail trucks and stem engines. An increase on the slum dwellers and more apparent smog started to emerge in the city’s atmosphere. 1895 to1940, can be considered as the epitome of

industrialisation. In the period, Britain saw electrification of urban households and industries. The main source of energy used to burn the steel metal alloys and copper need for electrification was coal. Because of this air pollution was at its peak due to many industries cropping up and water pollution also had started (Mark, 1995).

The great smog

The late 19th century will remain as the worst period of disasters to ever hit the city of London, and, in fact, any city in the world. Historical records report a cloud of suffocating smoke that descended on the city silently during the mid-morning hours. The cloud was reported to have lifted four days after, and caused over four thousand deaths during its wake. However, the history of the great smog can be traced back before the industrial revolution age in Britain (Watson 2012). Historic half hatred attempts to bring about conditions that would have saved the city can be traced as far back as the 12th century, when the problem that led up to the smog was first identified by identified (Watson 25th June 2012). Before the industry revolution era in Britain, London was home to less than ten thousand people. However, with the coming of age in the industrial revolution the population of London quickly swelled.

However, the economic effects of the smog could not be quantified to the human loss that had been caused by the smog. However, one of the first smog in Britain was recorded in 1679, with no recorded number of victims (Evelyn). The second smog was recorded in 1892, where an estimated nineteen people lost their lives after falling into a river, due to lack of

visibility. Even after those incidents had been recorded, no real actions were taken to halt the burning of sea coal by industries. However, after the great smog, an act prohibiting the use of coal was passed in 1956, known as the Clean Air Act.

The graph below shows the rise of smoke and sulphur dioxide and the number of deaths caused by air pollution during the great smog.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the history of air pollution in Britain can be traced as far back as the 12th century. The use of sea coal, as documented, in the 12-century leading up to the 17th century was unprecedented. Even with decrees from the King prohibiting the use of coal, coal was still widely revered in Britain as the best choice of energy. The revolution in industries saw an influx of population in many cities around Great Britain. London was most affected by the industrial revolution, since most of the industries seemed to crop up in the city. John Evelyn, among other political scholars of the time, tried warning of the impending dangers that coal had on air pollution, but no hide was taken. The growth of the industry also saw an influx in the number of slums that were coming up around London. All this, finally, culminated to the great smog, which is still revered as the worst air pollution tragedy in the world.

The tragedy saw the death of thousands of people through, direct and indirect, air pollution. The result of centuries of uncontrolled air pollution in Britain saw a birth of the Clean Air Act that governed the amount of smoke

realised in the air today. The events leading to the great smog helped shape London to what it is today.

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