

## GEORGE BREWSTER LAST CLIMBING BOY TO DIE ON THE JOB 1863-1875

**George Brewster was born ca 1863. His parents lived in London when his mother became ill, so his married brother William, adopted him & subsequently passed him on to another married brother John, who allowed him to be illegally apprenticed to the master Chimney sweep, named William Wyer.**  
  
**Wyer had a contract to sweep the flues of 3 boilers, 3 times a year at Fulbourn Hospital Cambridge. In Feb 1875, after young George (about 12 years old) took off his coat & put on a cap covering his face, he was sent by Wyer up into a flue of which the door was 12"x 6" & the flue, over 11' long.**  
  
**About 15 mins later, George became stuck & couldn't breath. The entire wall had to be pulled down to get him out. Barely alive & in an exhausted state, a doctor was called. The Doctor removed the soot from his mouth, gave him brandy, then put him in a warm bath, but he died soon after.**  
  
**The cause of death given as suffocation & a post-mortem examination, revealed that the arms were abraded, the head congested & there was a lot of black powder in the lungs & windpipe. The Coroner's Inquest returned a verdict of manslaughter & Wyer was sentenced to 6 months in prison, with hard labour.**  
  
**The Boys that survived to live into Adulthood, must have been very lucky indeed, as the mortality rate of climbing boys (& girls) was very high indeed & two previous acts had been passed, to prevent these deaths, so Lord Shaftesbury wrote a series of letters to 'The Times' & In Sept. 1875 & a 'Chimney Sweepers Act' was passed, requiring chimney sweepers to be authorized by the police to carry on their business in the district, this providing the legal means to enforce all previous legislation. This 'Act' finally stopped the practice of sending boys up chimneys.  
  
Because of these new Acts, George Brewster was one of the last Climbing Boys to die on the job.**  
  
**Reference**  
[http://emoglen.law.columbia.edu/twiki/pub/EngLegalHist/ArmorieDelamirie/](http://emoglen.law.columbia.edu/twiki/pub/EngLegalHist/ArmorieDelamirie/climbing_boys_strange_ch_2.pdf)

**Facts about Climbing Boys**  
  
**\*In 1795 a baby of three and a half years was apprentice in a  
  public house to a master-sweep.  
  
\*They would often climb 'Naked', because clothes were often  
  restricting or they needed to buff the inside of the flue.  
  
﻿\*A lot of boys when they hit Puberty, developed warts which  
  later progressed into Scrotum Cancer. This is the first  
  industrial caused cancer to ever be recognised.﻿  
  
\*Some girls were used as well.  
  
\*The boys would clean the inside wall with their bare hands or   
  scrapers and would scrape their fingers, elbows and knees on   
  the brickwork.  
  
\*On their first few experiences as a climbing boy, Master   
  Sweeps  would scrape their knees and elbows with a wire brush  
   and brine to toughen them up.  
  
\*Often they had to be forced the chimney that was narrow, also  
  being still sore from other climbs. The master sweep sometimes  
  lit a fire in the fireplace to force them all the way to the top.  
  
\*They would have 1 day a year off- May day and would sleep on  
  bags full of soot. Some would only wash once a year, but others  
  once a week to go to Church on Sunday.   
  
\*If a boy got stuck, another boy was often sent up to prick  
  the boys feet, to get him moving, sometimes they both   
  became stuck and died.  
  
\*Chimney sweeps came to be seen as good luck and are still hired today  
  for weddings (I guess, lucky 'cause your house won't burn down)  
  Hence the words in the song 'Chim-Chiminey'  from  
​'Mary Poppins'-  
  "good luck will rub off, when I shake 'ands with you"**