

Students lay Ypres wreath

BROADSTAIRS students took part in the historic wreath-laying Last Post ceremony at the Menin Gate in Ypres last month.

The 35-strong party from The Charles Dickens School made the trip to the battlefields of Belgium and Northern France as part of the school's contribution to commemorate the centenary of the start of the First World War.

Teacher Simon Crabtree said: "Now that the last British veteran from World War One has died, it has become even more important for new generations to be made aware of, and continue to celebrate, the huge contribution made by British men and women



CENTENARY: Charles Dickens students at the Menin Gate in Ypres

100 years ago. "The trip allowed students the opportunity to see firsthand the environment and conditions that soldiers had to endure."

Head teacher Andrew Olsson said: "We are very proud of our students – they were excellent ambassadors for our school and for their generation."

Rapid rise and fall of king coal in Kent

By **Richard West**

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via.tcep.org.uk

ONE-HUNDRED years ago, in May 1914, construction of Chislet Colliery commenced. Coal mining was to become East Kent's only heavy industry.

The honour of discovering the Kent Coalfield went to Francis Brady, chief engineer of the South Eastern Railway, in February 1890, when he was seconded to the Channel Tunnel Company established by the railway company.

Between 1896 and 1919, 40 boreholes were sunk to locate coal in Kent. Twenty-nine of those showed the existence of coal.

Fourteen collieries in Kent subsequently progressed beyond the planning stage; most were located within a triangle bounded by Canterbury, Dover and Deal, in an area which became established as the Kent Coalfield.

Viable

Only four of those collieries were to prove viable in the longer term: Tilmanstone, begun 1906, raising first coal to the surface in 1912; Snowdown, begun 1908, raising first coal in 1912; Chislet, begun 1914, raising first coal in 1918 and Betteshanger, begun in 1924, raising first coal in 1927.

Ten collieries either failed to open or closed within a few years of the fledgling Kent Coalfield being established. Coal was found during test bores at a further three sites but no additional work was carried out.

Each of the proposed Kent collieries were situated in rural areas. The problem from the outset was how to transport coal from the mines to the customers and where to house the miners and their families.

German industrialists took an interest in the Kent Coalfield's potential. Test bores were drilled at: Hoades Wood, near Sturry; Reculver, near Herne Bay; and Chitty and Chislet Park, near Canterbury.

The Anglo-Westphalian Coal



AT THE COALFACE: A Kentish miner in the 1920s

Photo: Dover Museum and Bronze Age Boat Gallery

Syndicate Limited leased land from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners at Chislet Park, commencing January 1, 1912. The leases for the land were of various lengths, with the shortest being 60 years.

The report by E.M. Hann, general manager of the Powell Duffyn Steam Coal Company Limited, dated September 19, 1913, confirmed the coal to be of good quality and suitable for gas making, coke manufacture and steam generation. The Anglo-Westphalian (Chislet, Kent) Colliery Limited company was incorporated on November 6, 1913.

Construction of Chislet Colliery's first shaft began in May 1914. Work on sinking both shafts stopped at 30 feet depth, due to water bearing sand. A German contractor was employed to bore 11 holes around each shaft, into which cement was then forced at a pressure of 600 pounds per square inch to harden the sand layer.

Three months later, Great Britain declared war with Germany.

At an Extraordinary Annual General Meeting held in London on October 29, 1914, The Anglo-Westphalian (Chislet, Kent) Colliery Limited changed its name to The Chislet Colliery Limited.

Construction of the colliery was stopped by the

Government during the First World War. Sinking of the two 16 foot diameter shafts resumed in early 1915. North shaft was completed in July 1918 and reached 1,470 feet deep. South shaft was completed in August 1919 and reached 1,480 feet but still awaited essential equipment.

The estimated quantity of workable coal was 75 million tons.

In 1920, 2,300 tons of coal were raised to the surface at Chislet Colliery. However, strikes and lack of money for repairs are blamed for parts of the mine collapsing during its early years, causing subsidence of the ground above. In 1929, the colliery was re-organised and relations between the company and staff were improved, resulting in increased output and profits, together with better social lives for the miners.

As the local community had no experience of mining, the workforce derived from traditional mining areas, especially South Wales where coal companies held shares in the company developing Chislet Colliery.

Chislet Colliery Halt on the Canterbury and Ramsgate branch of the South Eastern and Chatham Railway opened in 1920. Before Chislet Colliery opened, the local population was around 1,000. In 1936, 390,000 passenger journeys

were made from Chislet Halt to Ramsgate on miners' trains.

In 1924, Chislet Colliery Housing Limited was established, to build a village, later named Hersden, of 300 houses close to the colliery.

Chislet Colliery had an important role during the Second World War as a training pit for what became known as the "Bevin Boys". From December 1943 onward, one in ten young boys and men selected by ballot on conscription for war service did not go into the armed services but worked in the coal mines.

Between March 1945 and 1952, pit ponies worked at Chislet Colliery, with comfortable stables provided below ground.

On January 1, 1947, Chislet Colliery, along with all other collieries in Great Britain, was nationalised and brought under the control of the National Coal Board by the provisions of the Coal Industry Nationalisation Act 1946.

Chislet Colliery closed completely on July 25, 1969.



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thanetgazette.co.uk/nostalgia

Part-night street lights



Street lights in selected areas across Kent will be switched off between **midnight and 5.30am**.

This will save around **£1 million** in energy bills, help protect the environment and reduce light pollution.

To find out which lights will be switched off in your area and when, visit our website.

kent.gov.uk/streetlights
#kentstreetlights



Talk on church's role in conflict

GRIEVING families, troops billeted far from home, Belgian refugees, wounded soldiers, hastily rearranged weddings, baptisms of babies, whose fathers had died in war a few weeks before they were born, serving on committees to bring relief to those in financial distress, fighting for a "dug-out" (air raid shelter) for the children of the school of which he was chairman of managers – these were but some of the tasks of the Reverend Charles Pendock Banks, vicar of St Saviour's Church Westgate on Sea in the First World War.

They were in addition, of course, to his "usual work" in the conducting of services in the parish church.



WAR WORK: St Saviour's Church in Westgate on Sea

The subject of the monthly talk at the Westgate Heritage Centre, which is in St Saviour's Church, tomorrow (Saturday) at 10.30am is The Role Of The Church In Wartime. It is based on the church records and other

archival material and will include references to the work of Christ Church Congregational (URC) church.

There is a display of material relating to Westgate in the First World War.

Group in war tribute

YESTERYEAR Theatre Company present We Will Remember, a programme of material from 1914-18, war songs, films, poetry and letters.

The production will be on August 2 at The Theatre Royal, Margate, 7.30pm. Tickets £10, concessions £8.

All profits donated to Help for Heroes. Call the box office on 01843 29611.

Jean Selfe, the director is particularly proud of the cast. She said: "They are young and strongly patriotic, feeling deeply the emotions contained in the material."

■ For details call Jean Selfe on 01843 304189.