

MCMXIV COMMEMORATING 1914-2014

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# Suspensions rife over German links to a Kent coal company

## Anglo-Westphalian Colliery changed name at start of conflict and director quit

THERE may have been carnage at the front, but the essentials of life were still required. **RICHARD WEST**, founder The Chaucer Education Project (vle.tcep.org.uk), looks at the importance of coal-mining in east Kent...

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 bore holes were sunk to locate coal in Kent. Twenty-nine of those bore holes 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; Snowden, 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



**HARD BUT VITAL WORK:** Miners working at a Kent colliery coalface in the 1920s

being established: Shakespeare, 1896 to 1915; Adisham; Cobham, 1947 to 1953; Guilford, 1906 to 1920; Woodnesborough; Maydensole; Stonehall, 1913 to 1921; Wingham, 1910 to 1914; Goodnestone; and Fredville. Coal was found during test bores at a further three sites but no additional work was carried out: Barham; Nonington; and Waldershare.

Each of the proposed Kent collieries was situated in a rural area. 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 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.

Permission to transport coal along the Sarre Penn and out to sea via the Wantsum Channel was refused because of the damage which would be caused to the natural habitat along the water-

way. The mouth of the River Stour and the Wantsum Channel together separated the Isle of Thanet from the rest of Kent. Coal prospecting then moved to the parish of Westbere, between the Canterbury to Margate road to south of the Canterbury to Minster railway line, to which a branch line for the colliery was constructed.

The report by EM 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. This was an established proven method used in Germany to keep water out of shafts but was relatively new in Britain.

Three months later, Great Britain declared war with Germany.

### Resolution

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.

In moving the resolution, the chairman, Joseph Shaw K.C., stated "the press had got an idea



that they should be so used."

It seems the local director, Willi Peritz, might have become a "guest of the nation" at Alexandra Palace, where internees were held during the First World War when considered to be enemies of the country.

The German involvement with the Kent Coalfield during the war also resulted in questions being asked in the House of Commons.

On August 17, 1916, Ronald McNeill, Unionist MP for the St Augustine constituency in Kent, asked the president of the Board of Trade "If he is aware that a German named Kearton, manager of a colliery at Chislet, Kent, is constantly to be seen driving about in a motor car, especially when any movement of troops takes place in the district; whether this man has a licence to use a motor car, and, if so, for what reason the licence was granted; and if he will say what allowance of petrol has been allotted to him under the recent restriction orders?"

Mr Harcourt replied "The Chislet Colliery Company have been licensed to be supplied with 10 gallons of petrol a month for a motor car. I understand that no licence for petrol for a motor car has been issued to Mr Kearton personally. The remainder of the Hon Gentleman's question relates to matters with which the Home Office appear to be concerned, and I will draw their attention to it."

### Shafts

Construction of the colliery was stopped by the Government during the First World War. Sinking of the two 16 feet 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. The low percentage content of ash, sulphur and phosphorus placed Chislet coal on a par with some of the best coking coals in the country.

In 1920, 2,300 tons of coal were raised to the surface at Chislet Colliery.

But strikes and lack of money for repairs are held responsible 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.

## Jim the Dog a rock in our defence

ALL the evidence of Jim the Dog's talent has vanished except for a photo from the archives of the Imperial War Museums, which captures him standing alert and proud on a cliff-top at Epple Bay on the coast of Birchington.

It is here that men based at a series of coastguard stations, spaced three miles apart and in view of each other, were given the role of being the eyes and ears of the Kent coastline.

It was only once the likes of Jim had proved themselves unofficially that Col Edwin Richardson, a soldier, breeder and dog-lover, fought to create the very first War Dog School.

As the number of German Zeppelins increased, Jim and his coastguard masters could no longer stop the attacks alone.



**STALWART:** Jim the Dog at on the cliff-top at Epple Bay

With the ability to fly higher than the first planes of their time and to cut their engines on a tick-over before dropping their bombs and then floating off into the sky, the Zeppelin

appeared to be the ultimate terror weapon.

And so a more formal watch was created along the coast from Thanet to safeguard our valuable harbours.