

## THE SEARCH FOR COAL IN THE EASTERN COUNTIES

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The Eastern Counties Coal Boring and Development Syndicate Ltd was formed in 1893 to search for coal, by means of experimental boreholes, at Stutton, south of Ipswich, and at Weeley, near Colchester.

A deep boring (for water) at Harwich (Essex), by the harbour and just west of the Great Eastern Hotel, in the 1850s, had commenced six feet above high water mark and penetrated Post-Chalk deposits (78 feet), Chalk (890 feet), Gault Clay and Greensand (61 feet) before penetrating a hard dark bluish-grey slaty rock for 69 feet. This slaty rock was considered to be of Palaeozoic age, showing that strata of early Cretaceous, Jurassic, Triassic and probably late Palaeozoic age were not present. In 1890 a deep boring at Dover in Kent entered workable seams of coal (to become the Kent Coalfields) at a depth of rather over 1,100 feet below high-water mark, showing that these rocks lie beneath part of the south-east of England. Carboniferous age rocks come to the surface, with coalfields, in Somerset and in Belgium. In 1891 John E. Taylor asked (East Anglian Daily Times, 11 April) - with coal the source of so much of the wealth of the country, the question was whether more local deposits contained workable beds of coal.

The first attempt of the new Syndicate, in 1894-1896, was upon the land of Mr Graham of Crepping Hall, Stutton, Suffolk, in low ground south of the Hall. The contractors for the boring, the Virion Boring Company of Whitehaven, successfully reached the junction of the Cretaceous and the much older rock at a depth of 994 feet. The boring showed: Valley Gravel 16 feet, London Clay and Reading Beds 54 feet, Chalk 874½ feet, Gault Clay 49½ feet (slightly different figures in different accounts), Palaeozoic rock, with high dip (about 40 degrees, to the west). With the assistance of the diamond boring tool the Palaeozoic rock was penetrated for over 530 feet. At the British Association for the Advancement of Science meeting in Ipswich in September 1895, William Whitaker delivered a paper on 'The Trial-Boring at Stutton' and exhibited a specimen of a borehole core of the hard Palaeozoic rock. What was this rock? he asked. There was no sign of fossils to be found, it did not resemble Carboniferous or Devonian rocks, but there was the possibility that it was of Silurian age. Professor Galloway, a mining engineer of University College, Cardiff, visited Stutton on 5 November 1895, had some cores broken up and examined, but there was no trace of fossils.

The second boring for coal commenced at Weeley, Essex, on 15 February 1896, passing through London Clay and Reading Beds (196 feet), Chalk (822 feet) and Gault (76 feet) before entering the Palaeozoic rock.

The Palaeozoic rocks were believed, in the absence of fossils, to be of Silurian age, formed before the Carboniferous period - that search for coal-bearing deposits had been unsuccessful.

Nearly ninety years later a borehole at Somerton in north-east Norfolk proved a small coalfield over 1,300 metres down.

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