

On holidays, the keelmen could be easily identified by their short blue jackets, slate coloured trousers, yellow waistcoats and white shirts.

For work they wore a uniform of a short blue jacket and a blue or black panama- style hat.

Before they went on board their boats they had to make sure that they had plenty of nutritious food with them so that they could keep their energy levels up.

A typical keelman's basket would contain:

A good joint of meat

A large loaf of bread (made from the very best flour)

A bottle of beer



Seated around their cabin or huddock, covered in coal dust and sweat, the keelmen would enjoy their food and tell jokes.

Being a keelman was extremely hard and time - consuming work. Their job was to load the coal at the colliery staiths, to take it to the ship and to offload it. On average it took between 12 and 15 hours to load the coal, carry it down the river to the waiting ships, which were called colliers, and travel back again.

At the end of a day's work, the keelmen enjoyed meeting up in the many taverns of Sandgate where they drank beer and recounted the events of the day. The pubs and taverns were smoky, boisterous and sometimes rowdy places.