

Kibworth Gas Light & Coke Company

1862-1906, 1912-1948

Researched and written by David A Holmes

Introduction

William Murdoch, a Scots engineer who worked for the firm of Boulton & Watt, is credited with the first practical use of producing gas light from coal. By the early 1790s, he had developed a system that lit his house in Redruth. By 1802, Boulton & Watt's Soho Foundry in Birmingham was also lit by gas. The first public gas company started in 1813 when Westminster Bridge was lit by The Gas Light & Coke Company. Gas made from coal was significantly different to natural gas.¹ Manufacture of gas was introduced to Leicestershire in 1821 when the Leicester Gas Light & Coke Company opened for business. The Market Harborough Gas Light & Coke Co. opened in 1833. Supply of gas to towns and villages in the county took place slowly, and only when a sufficient body of local support ensured the investment required would produce a profit for shareholders.

Information for this article on Kibworth has mainly been taken from notes made by Mr Bert Aggas for the first period and company records held at the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland (ROLLR) for the later period. Neither the National Archives nor Companies House were able to find any information in its records though a reference No. BT31/643/2699 has been quoted. In 1943, Peter Mason, manager of the gas works, was authorised by the directors to dispose of all old papers and accounts.

Origins in Kibworth

Mr Bramley, Director of the Leicester firm of contractors, Messrs Bramley & Woodcock, that built the works, said he had held his first discussions about establishing a gas supply in Kibworth some three years before the Kibworth Gas Light & Coke Company opened in 1862 on New Road, next to the railway bridge. The buildings were erected by a local firm, Mason & Loveday, under the direction of the contractors. Today, the only early building that remains is the house on New Road, see photograph below. The *Leicester Journal* reported a dinner held on 21st November at the Rose and Crown to celebrate the opening of the gasworks at which both the Chairman Rev. F. Islip and Company Secretary, Mr T. Macaulay, referred to a number of obstacles that they had had to surmount in order to form the Company but did not elaborate on their nature.²



Remaining Gas Works House, Kibworth, 2013

Mr Macaulay said that £1,240 out of the total of £2,000 capital invested had been subscribed by parishioners. The initial price was set at £4 10s. 0d. *per share*; a deposit of 1s. was payable on 5th June with the balance called at intervals between 30th June and 19th December. Further shares were issued in December 1863 at £5 10s. 0d. each and in May 1864 at £6 5s. 0d. and £6 6s. 0d. each. Such increases reflected the company's immediate profitability.



Original seal of the Company

The supply of gas to the two Kibworths commenced on 23rd October 1862, at which time there were 70 customers with a total of 350 lights and with the expectation that there would soon be many more users.

The Company was formed as a private limited company from the outset, the first directors being:

Rev. F. Islip (Chairman)

Mr Thomas Macaulay (Secretary)

Mr W. Plummer

Mr Edward Cayzer

Mr James Buzzard

Other appointments were:

Mr W.H. Macaulay (Leicester), Company Solicitor.

Mr Gill (Kettering), Engineer.

Mr Finch, works manager.

Mr Wakefield was appointed stoker at the same time as Mr Finch became manager.

This company continued to run the gas works until 1912 when it was liquidated and a new company, Kibworth Gas Company, was formed.

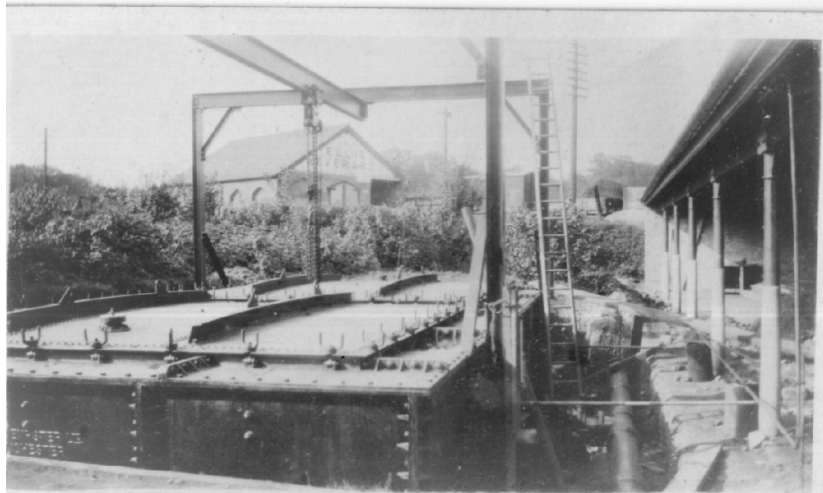
Growth & development 1862-1906

Mr Wakefield was appointed the first stoker but resigned after one month and was replaced by James Buxton. Buxton remained with the company until 1891. During this time his responsibilities increased so that he was responsible for all yard sales of coke, lime, cinders etc. His successor, Gray Monk, was stoker for about 18 months until he resigned and Ephraim Sprigg took over. The job seems to have changed because Sprigg is referred to as manager. Sprigg resigned in 1906 and was replaced by Mr G. Mason.

In many ways erecting the gas works in 1862 was easy compared to other ancillary activities. Apart from building the gas works, it was necessary to establish a system of piping to distribute gas to individual customers. Handbills were distributed in September offering "free supply and fitting of pipes to all persons who agree to burn gas and reply by 1st October". Thereafter customers were charged for the supply of pipes at the rate of 3d. *per* foot (1/2 inch dia.), 4d. (3/4 inch dia.) and 5d. (1 inch dia.). Bramley & Woodcock supplied pipes while Mr Gill supplied lamp posts. Fifteen street lamps had been erected by the time gas supply started in October 1862. Another lamp post was erected in December on Weir Road and a bracket was fixed to a wall on new houses in Kibworth Harcourt. The number of street lamps continued to grow over time. In May the following year, two lamps were erected on the railway line on the Market Harborough side of the station and were lit between dusk and 10pm.

As time passed and business increased, the directors recognised that the plant was working to its limit and improvements were necessary. In 1871 they appointed Mr Robinson as chief engineer with the specific request that he inspect the plant and make suggestions as to how it could be improved. Robinson proposed that a new gas holder and larger distribution pipes should be acquired as soon as possible in order to satisfy customer demand. Additional land would be required before these proposals could be put into effect. The directors decided to finance the expansion by issuing new shares. 300 shares at £5 each were issued, all except 37 of which were bought by existing shareholders. The remainder were sold by public auction. Land was purchased from Mr Haymes and by the time all the

main work and other ancillary items had been completed, it was found necessary to issue another 300 shares. All the work was completed by June 1873 at a cost of £1,609 3s. 0d. Thereafter, regular repairs and improvements were made, as for example when a new chimney was erected in 1879 and when new retorts were fitted in 1883.



New retorts

There are regular references for the need to extend distribution further. In June 1863, it was agreed to lay pipes as far as Smeeton Westerby so gas could be supplied before the following April at a cost of £200. Meanwhile, a distribution pipe was laid to Kibworth Hall during summer 1864. Following discussion in September 1864, the directors decided not to supply Carlton Hall, presumably because terms of supply could not be agreed. Between August and November 1868 there was correspondence between Captain Whitmore and the company concerning the possibility of supplying gas to Gumley Hall. By November it seems no agreement about the cost of laying pipes had been reached and the company decided not to proceed. For the same reason it was decided not to erect street lamps in Smeeton Westerby. A pipe was laid in 1870 along Church Road as far as The Villas and the church. By 1876, we learn that a new pipe was to be laid from Cross Bank to Smeeton Lane and from the church to the Coach & Horses. At the same time a request was received for pipes to be laid as far as the Land Society ground, which was soon called New Town. There are regular references to the supply of gas to individual houses. Sometimes requests were refused, either because it would have cost too much to lay pipes or the customer was not considered to be financially sound. Rather surprisingly, the first reference to a gas leak was not recorded until 1881.

The initial method of calculating charges was as follows:

No of lights	Price per quarter
1	6d.
2	9d.
3	1s.
5	1s. 6d.
10	2s.
20	2s. 6d.
30	3s.

By October 1863, the method of calculation had changed to a charge per 1,000 cu. ft. The charge per 1,000 cu. ft varied, generally downwards, over time, as the following chart illustrates:

Date	Price/'000 cu.ft.
Oct 1863	6s. 8d.
May 1864	6s. 3d.
April 1865	6s. 0d.
April 1866	5s. 6d.
March 1873	6s. 8d.
Nov 1874	6s. 0d.
Nov 1875	5s. 10d.
Oct 1877	5s. 6d.
Jan 1879	5s. 0d.
June 1884	4s. 7d.
July 1890	4s. 10d.

The volume of gas supplied increased fairly regularly from 1.2 million cu. ft. in 1866 to 2.2 million cu.ft. in 1890 with only a few years when there was a decline. Apart from gas, the company sold coke, spent lime, tar and ashes to the public.

The single largest raw material requirement was coal. The very first order was given to the Staveley pit in Derbyshire. Prices varied considerably from year to year and there are occasional references to strikes in the mines. Between 1867 and 1873 the price rose from 14s. 2d. to 25s. per ton and then fell gradually until, by 1885, it was only 11s. 11d. The company seems to have been very loyal to the Staveley pit for it is not until 1889 that there is mention of purchasing from any other source. By 1900, a separate siding had been laid from the railway station to the gas company so that coal could be tipped direct on to the company's stockpile.

The company seems to have been profitable from the very beginning. Up to 1892, a dividend of 5% or 6% was normally paid with a maximum of 7% being paid in 1883. The level of dividend fell rapidly in the following years until 1894 when no dividend was paid. The minutes provide some insights into development of the villages and why dividends might have been higher or lower than the actual amount paid. The profit in 1864 would have been £37 more if it had not been necessary to replace a roof that had blown off during a storm. By the late 1870s it was recognised that the cost of production was higher than many other gas companies. A new chimney was commissioned in 1878 and completed the following year which was more efficient and meant less coal was used. It is clear that the number of customers increased regularly as the villages expanded. Nevertheless, the company's profits could be significantly affected by unexpected changes. Gas consumption, and therefore income, fell in 1881 because two big houses were closed for the winter. The reason no dividend was paid in 1894 was partly because Kibworth Hall was closed.

Control of bad debts soon became an important concern of management; as early as 1864, legal proceedings had been taken against several customers. The situation seems to have reached a level by the following year that the directors decided all customers whose accounts were due by 21st June and not paid by 29th September would be cut off. We may assume the exercise was successful for minutes of the 1867 Annual General Meeting refer to a 50% reduction in the level of bad debts. The problem of late payment is reflected throughout the minutes. In 1876 a statement was added to the company's bill head stating that 'all accounts not paid within a quarter of the due date would be handed to the Trade Protection Society for collection'.

Payment by parishes for gas used to light street lamps raised a particular set of problems as this was the responsibility of each parish vestry. At a meeting held at the Rose & Crown, Kibworth Harcourt Vestry Minutes of 1864 show that a minority of rate payers felt the charge was excessive.³ The matter must have been on-going between the two parties. In 1872, the company threatened to remove all street lamps if the Vestry did not immediately settle the outstanding account. The matter was resolved when Mr Hunt of Kibworth Hall agreed to guarantee payment for all gas consumed.

Despite the largely downward level of prices, some customers requested reductions. In February 1877, Midland Railway requested that the price be reduced from 5s. to 4s. 6d., which was already a reduced price. The company agreed to the request. The same price was also granted to both Parish Vestries.

Liquidation and Reorganisation – Kibworth Gas Company Ltd.

The reasons for liquidating the old company are unknown and minutes of the company, transcribed by Mr Bert Aggas, cease in 1906. There is no indication that gas ceased to be supplied during the changeover period, so we must assume that this went smoothly.

Upon liquidation of the old company, all its assets were transferred to the new body. The first meeting of the new Kibworth Gas Company was held at the company's offices on 26th August 1912. Mr Harry Grant was elected Chairman. Mr John Loveday became Secretary and was also appointed Collector. Mr Peter Mason became the new Manager, for which he was to be paid 35 shillings per week plus company house and garden, gas and coal. Mr Harris was appointed engineer and technical adviser. Lloyds Bank were appointed bankers while Owston, Dickenson, Simpson & Bigg were the company's solicitors. All details of the transfer were completed so the new company could trade from 2nd October 1912.

Some 52 shareholders in the old company, holding 6,400 shares, were credited with shares in the new company. 2,225 new shares were issued to finance erection of a new gas holder. As a result of all the changes, the Loveday family became the largest shareholders though George Mattock was the largest single shareholder. The gas holder was erected the following year by R. & J. Dempster at a cost of £2,270.



New gas holder is situated to left of house.

About the same time, a one acre field next to the company was purchased from Mr R.B. Haymes so that the site consisted of 1 acre, 2 roods and 38 $\frac{3}{4}$ poles with a frontage of 450 feet 6 inches on New Road.⁴

In December 1912, the Company wrote to Fleckney Parish Council promising to supply gas to Fleckney on the same terms as to Kibworth customers if a pipe is laid and an initial 200 customers are guaranteed.

At the beginning of 1914 a field was acquired and three plots of land, 600 square yards each, were divided into allotment gardens. One plot was used by the two stokers who each paid 4s. 6d. rent per annum while Mr Mason was granted free use of the remainder of the field. About this time it was decided to convert the old meter house into a wash room.

The death of Mr Waterfield, Senior, is reported in December 1914. He had been a director for 25 years and was replaced by Mr T. Coleman.

The first reference to supply of cookers was December 1912 in a letter to Fleckney Parish Council. Then on 15th August 1915 there is another reference in the minutes of the Directors' Meeting.⁵ At this time, most cookers were rented to customers with payment for gas being made by inserting coins into a meter. Usage seems to have been regularly monitored for, in May 1915 the directors decided to remove cookers from customers' homes if consumption of gas did not average 2000 cu. ft. a quarter unless a quarterly rent of 6d had been paid. Presumably not too many cookers were reclaimed for the company ordered 6 cookers from Richmonds of Warrington at £2 12s. 6d. each. Following discussion, it was agreed to purchase another 12 cookers in October 1917.

War time 1914-18

The first world war had a profound effect on all aspects of life in Kibworth. At the outbreak of war in 1914, the price of Hardwick coal had fallen to 15s. 5d. *per* ton. Consequently, the company reduced the price of coke to customers by sixpence *per* 1000 cu. ft. However, It was not long before the effects of wartime started to impinge on coal prices; in October 1915, the price of Rothervale coal had risen to 21s. 6d. and then to 22s. *per* ton during the following year. Mr Mason was authorised to buy 400 tons from Harold Hickson & Co. @ 20s *per* ton and 600 tons @ 21s 6d from Rothervale Colliery. Another 400 tons were bought from Hickson & Co. the following year at the same price.

As a result of increased coal prices, the Company increased the price of gas in May 1915 to Kibworth customers from 3s. 9d. to 4s. 1d. *per* 1,000 cu. ft. The price paid by parish councils for street lighting also increased proportionately. All these increases reflect the level of inflation being experienced. By the end of the war, domestic customers paid 5s. and commercial customers 4s 6d *per* 1,000 cu. ft.

War bonuses were paid to workers in all industries to counter the effects of inflation. In May 1915 the stokers received a bonus of 2s. *per* week. Mr Mason's bonus was 5s. paid as a bonus, increasing his wage to £2 *per* week. Davies, the apprentice, received 1s bonus. In June 1917, Mr Mason received another bonus of 5s. *per* week while the stokers received 2s *per* week. By January 1918, the bonus had increased to 10s. *per* week. At the same time, the price of gas to consumers was increased by 3d. *per* 1,000 cu. ft. By the end of the war Mason's wage had risen to £3 *per* week without war bonus. Later that year a wage claim was received from the National Union of General Workers.

We can glean some idea of how war affected Kibworth. In June 1916, it was reported that the volume of gas supplied had been less that year than every month in 1915. Somewhat surprisingly, the volume of gas supplied during 1917 was more than every month in 1916.

Development of the aeroplane changed methods of warfare and meant it could no longer be assumed that war would be fought overseas. Consequently, in 1916, the directors decided to insure the works against 'hostile aircraft'. A policy was taken out with Alliance Insurance Company for a premium of £9 10s. 0d.

An interesting sidelight into road transport development appears in January 1918 when an application was received from Mansfield Garage for the company to supply gas for filling containers for use in motor cars. It was agreed to supply gas at the domestic price less 10% .

At the beginning of the war, government policy assumed costs and prices would find their own level. It was not felt necessary to take any direct action to control either supply or prices. Only later, as the war dragged on and became such a drain on the country's reserves did government start to intervene. The Company became a member of the National Gas Council during August 1918. About the same time, the Controller of Mines advised that the supply of coal would be limited.

Despite the problems experienced in maintaining gas supplies during the war, the company maintained a reasonable level of profitability for a 5% dividend was paid every year.

Good and bad times, 1918-39

Following the end of hostilities, the Company seems to have resumed normal business as far as possible. The bout of inflation immediately after the war no doubt accounted for an increase in gas prices as well as wages; Mason's wage increased almost 8% to £3 10s. 0d. Government had taken control of gas prices during the latter days of the war and continued to do so in the immediate aftermath. Another feature of government control occurs in March 1920 when the Company had to seek permission from the local Coal Overseer to increase the price of coke from £1 16s. 0d. to £2 0s. 0d. *per ton*. By the end of the year, coke was being sold at £2 0s. 0d. *per ton*, then at £3 0s. 0d. before returning to £2 10s. 0d. *per ton* in November 1921.

The National Insurance Act of 1908 was the first attempt at welfare reform. Some aspects, such as payment of an old age pension were introduced immediately but many of these reforms were not fully introduced until after the war. One effect illustrated in the minutes was payment of sick pay at the rate of 10s. *per week* in 1919 to a stoker for about three months. The Workman's Compensation Act of 1916 only came into practical effect some time later. In 1921 the Company decided to insure with the National Gas Council for its liabilities under this Act.

Another stage in the village's development started at the end of 1919. Plans were drawn up to build some bungalows on New Road. The builders subsequently contributed towards the cost of laying pipes to the bungalows. About the same time a plan was drawn up to erect houses on a new street off New Road, originally named Council Street but now called Stuart Street. Market Harborough Rural District Council agreed to survey land for a new gas main to service these houses.

Following the attempt in 1912, it appears that Fleckney still did not have a gas supply in January 1920. The Company wrote to Fleckney Council explaining that they could not afford to supply gas to Fleckney and asked if the local Council would contribute towards the cost of laying pipes.

The 1920s was a time of development and change; pre-war attitudes were no longer accepted. Following the short boom after the war, the country experienced a long period of economic uncertainty with regular strikes by key workers such as the miners, dockers and railway workers as they struggled against reduced wages and falling living standards. The gas company found that the price of coal from Barnsley Main Colliery fell from £2 1s. 6d. in November 1921 to £1 15s. 6d. a year later, a reduction of 27%. By October 1934, the price had fallen to £1 4s. 3d. The company reduced its prices to reflect the cost of raw materials. The level of price reduction was tempered by the need to hold a larger than necessary coal supply to meet their needs should it become difficult to obtain supplies. In April 1924, 183 tons were held in stock pending a threatened coal strike. In the same year, the company agreed to lay a gas main as far as Smeeton Rectory.

The period from 1925 to 1927 was dominated by two events, namely the General Strike of 1926 and the fight against electricity coming to the village. In 1925 there is reference to the possibility of electricity being supplied to the village. It is not surprising to learn that Kibworth Gas Company sought to retain its right to be sole supplier of power in the area. In March 1926, the Company asked the local Member of Parliament, Lt. Col Newby, to use his influence against the proposed Electricity Bill. The problem of fighting an unwanted intruder was temporarily forgotten in order to maintain gas supply during the General Strike. Gas companies united under the Gas Council to find supplies. The Directors held a special meeting in June 1926 to consider the coal strike. Mr Mason was instructed to buy 100 tons from Beswick Colliery or anywhere. If he was unsuccessful, it was agreed that he should attend a meeting at Birmingham to share in a bulk purchase of American coal. The following month he reported that he had been unable to buy coal anywhere. He was asked to write and ask for six trucks of American coal from a consignment bought by the government. In October, a circular was sent to all customers asking them to economise in the use of gas.

The General Strike only delayed the arrival of a competing source of power. In November 1927, the Company's solicitors advised that it had no right to object to another company supplying power to the village. In August 1930, Beauchamp Parish Council decided

to light the streets by electricity even though the gas company offered a discount of 10 % off its standard rate. Electric lighting required new lamp standards to be erected so two sets of standards were in existence until the gas lamp standards were removed by the company in late 1936.

Harry Grant resigned as chairman in December 1934 due to ill health. He had been chairman since 1921. John Waterfield was elected chairman in his place and remained so until nationalisation in April 1948.

Despite losing the contract for street lighting, Kibworth Gas Company seems to have thrived during the 1930s. Sixteen new customers were signed up during 1934. During the same period, 22 additional cookers, 10 gas coppers, 6 gas fires and 4 geysers were installed, while 77 cookers were removed and repaired and 13 new cookers were fitted though it is unclear whether these were additional to or part of the 22 units. The minutes also note that 3 customers had changed to electricity. A new gas showroom was opened in October 1935, built by A. Boulton at a cost of £445.

In December 1937 it was decided to change the method of charging so that discounts were given to larger gas users.

Two items of significance occurred during the period immediately before the outbreak of war. In September 1939, the directors agreed to build an air raid shelter. About the same time, Leicester Corporation applied to supply gas to Fleckney. The company opposed the application. In February 1940, a letter was received from Wartnaby (solicitors) enclosing copy of the reply from Leicester Corporation's Parliamentary Agent to the company's objection. Unfortunately there is no mention of what was said in the reply. The directors agreed to leave the letter on the table for discussion at a later date should anything be received from the Board of Trade. There is no further mention of the subject in the minutes.

1939 - 1948 War and Nationalisation

The Directors' minutes of this period do not indicate any signs of panic, rather of a company that continued to provide a service to the area to the best of its ability. There is regular reference to the amount of gas produced. After an initial reduction at the beginning of the war, production varied from month to month with increases more often than decreases. Introduction of double summer time in 1941 reduced the amount supplied. The minutes note that gas production in December 1943 was the highest ever at 1,980,800 cu. ft., beating the previous highest of 1,980,000 cu. ft. in December 1929, and equated to 16,659 cu. ft. *per* ton of coal. The minutes note that the volume had been achieved despite not supplying street lighting. Gas supply continued at this level until the end of the war. However, gas supply fell every month during 1946 and 1947 as shortage of coal and other requirements was acute.

The price of most items was more centrally controlled during the second world war than it had been during the previous one. The price of coal increased during the war but only at a rate that was approved by the Ministry of Fuel and Power. In the same way, gas prices could only be increased after obtaining Ministry approval. Wages were centrally controlled in the same way as materials. The company was a member of the National Gas Council and abided by the terms of any national wage agreement. War bonuses were paid but not as often as before.

The directors supported the war effort by contributing towards a number of appeals. Several donations of two guineas were sent to Great Ormond Street Hospital and Queen Charlotte's Hospital in London. In 1943, the company bought £500 of 3% Defence Bonds.

The company only employed a small number of workers so it was a serious problem when the clerk, Mr O.G.Yates, was called up in September 1940. Mr Alec Evans from Aberystwyth was employed as temporary clerk for the duration of the war. The only other reference to military service was in January 1942 when the minutes state it had been reported that Percival Pargiter, a junior fitter, had died of his wounds in Malaya. Manpower and the movement of labour was strictly controlled during the war. In September 1945, it was noted that two stokers had sought permission from the Labour Exchange to leave the company.

Maintenance of the plant and equipment continued during the war. In 1940, it was decided to purchase A.R.P. Gas Stoppers in case air raids should damage gas mains. The same year, following the example of Lutterworth Gas Company, the company ordered a small gas diluting plant which enabled gas to be produced more efficiently. The plant started up in August the following year. In September 1941 Taylor Davis supplied a new inspection chamber to the main sewerage drain. Work also started on laying a new gas main to Smeeton Westerby. This work was presumably subject to the same approval process by the Ministry of Works as applied in 1946 to the excavation and back-filling of a trench for a gas main to new houses being erected on land off Church Road, now called Hillcrest Avenue.

Several directors retired during this time. J.H. Horton resigned in May 1940 due to ill health and was replaced by R.G. Watson who purchased Horton's shares. In January 1940, W.E. Briggs, a former director, died. Company Secretary, J.J. Loveday, died in February 1941. In 1942, Mrs Gladys Thomas, owner of 250 shares, asked the directors to find a purchaser. The shares were eventually taken by some of the directors, Mr J. Waterfield, Mr J.M. Millington, Mr J. Laundon, Mr R.G. Watson and Mr H.G. Watson.

The one acre field that had been purchased in 1912, had been divided into gardens and leased to a number of people. In 1943, notice to quit was given to the tenants as from Michaelmas 1944. Mr Mason was then allowed to take over the gardens free of charge.

Relatively little information can be gleaned from the minutes about the time leading up to nationalisation. In November 1943, Mr P.J. Harris, the company's consultant gas engineer, reported back on a meeting he had attended on post war planning. Unfortunately, no details of the meeting are given. In June 1946, the Gas Council asked Kibworth Gas Company to appoint a representative to attend a meeting on 19th July to consider nationalisation of the industry. H.G. Watson was appointed and instructed to vote against any proposal. He reported back in August but no details are given. In July 1947, discussion took place between the company and Market Harborough District Council about the possible supply of bulk gas to Kibworth. Harborough Council responded favourably to the request but there is no subsequent information if this actually took place. By February 1948, nationalisation was imminent and the directors sought an overdraft of £1500 to clear all outstanding debts. Throughout the life of the second company, it was consistently profitable, paying a dividend almost every year. The final meeting of the company was held on 27th April 1948. The chairman, Mr J. Waterfield, thanked directors and staff for all their hard work over many years and hoped the Gas Council would continue to use Kibworth Gas Company facilities in future years.



Site of gas works in 2013

¹ Whereas natural gas extracted from the ground is 96+% methane, coal gas, also called town gas, was mainly hydrogen (50+%), methane (30+%) and carbon monoxide (8%: toxic) with smaller amounts of other gases. To produce coal gas, small pieces of coal were shovelled into 6 metre long horizontal tubes, called retorts. After closing the retort doors, the coal was partially burnt by very hot coke burning underneath the retorts and the gases and other volatile substances from the coal were distilled off, cleaned, separated and stored. Cleaned gas was stored in gas holders and piped to customers as required. The partially burnt coal resulted in more coke which could be used to fire the next batch of coal or sold as coke to other industries or to the public. Quick lime was used as part of the cleansing process and waste lime was sold. Other by-products included tar (road surfaces), creosote (wood preservative), ammonia (fertiliser) and chemicals used to produce dyes and pharmaceuticals.

² *Leicester Journal*, 28th Nov. 1862.

³ ROLLR, DE5417/11, Kibworth Harcourt Parish Vestry Minutes, 29 Sept. 1864. Also ROLLR, DE5417/133, Kibworth Beauchamp Churchwardens Accounts.

Parish vestries were responsible for day-to-day administration of every parish until 1894 when parish councils were established and assumed responsibility.

⁴ *London Gazette*, 12 Nov. 1912.

⁵ In 1889, Manchester Gas Company was first to supply gas cookers, on rental, to customers.

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