

Quorn's Gas Works

Today, most of us like to think of Quorn as a large rural village however, in the 19th and early 20th centuries, Quorn saw itself as a 'go ahead' small urban town embracing the latest advances in technology and had significant industrial elements. This is evident in one respect by the fact that Quorn, ahead of other villages and towns in the county, had its own Gas Works.

It was the highly respected Mr. James Higham steward to Sir Richard Sutton, Master of the Quorn Hunt who first broached the subject of introducing gas into Quorndon and on 11th April 1853, the inhabitants of Quorndon and Mountsorrel gathered at the National School room to hear about measures that would bring a gas supply to both Parishes. The meeting was well attended by residents from both places, it was chaired by the Rev. R. Stammers.

Experienced gas engineers and contractors Mr. Penny and Mr. Colquhoun of Sheffield had both made a survey of the parish and were convinced that the project might be successful. Mr. Higham, too, was of the same opinion, because of the fact that no gas company had ever been known to fail. Both Mr. Penny and Mr. Colquhoun, went on to give some detailed information as to the probable expense of erecting a gas works, laying down mains, etc. They both expressed their confidence in the success of the project. Joseph Tacey, Joseph Inglesant, James Higham, of Quorndon, and Richard Everard and William Wale of Mountsorrel were elected to a provisional committee.

Incredibly, by today's standards, £3000, in 600 shares of £5 each were raised for the purpose of carrying out the project straight away and the construction of the Gas Works including a Managers House, started immediately on a piece of land between the River Soar and the Leicester Road known as 'The Brinks'. It was a piece of land with a sudden drop down toward the river and of little use for agriculture. Some five miles of mains pipe were laid linking the two villages. Mr. Joseph Camm a School Master, mapmaker, farmer and Royal Insurance agent was appointed as the manager. Later, his son James would follow in his footsteps and become the Gas Works Manager, also undertaking other jobs, including rate collector, registrar of births marriages and deaths.



The Branksome from Leicester Road with the Gas Works site in the 1950's

One year later, on Tuesday the 14th February 1854, at the White Hart Inn, Quorn, the directors and shareholders of the Quorndon and Mountsorrel Gas Company, met to celebrate the introduction of gas light into the villages of Quorndon and Mountsorrel and announced that in its first year 134,000 cubic feet of gas were produced, quite an achievement when at this time the gas was being used for lighting purposes only.



Signs of the gas company supply connection points can still be found in the villages. These are in Quorn and show a property that took the gas and one that didn't, with the supply available but not connected.

Mr Thomas Cradock, an active and powerful supporter of the project took the chair of the meeting and after the usual loyal toasts, he proposed the health of

the contractor, Mr. George Bower, of Saint Neots, and expressed the very great satisfaction which that gentleman had given by the way in which he had carried out his contract, in confirmation of which he read a letter from Mr. Charles B Robinson, of Leicester, an eminent gas engineer, who eulogised highly Mr. Bower's work, and stated that the Quorndon and Mountsorrel Gas Works would bear favourable comparison with any small works of a similar character in the kingdom. To commemorate the evening local poet Eliza Inglesant of Rose Cottage, Quorn, had composed a special poem which she presented to the company.

The company continued to prosper and at the 1862 Annual meeting it was stated that there was a large balance in hand and a 10 percent dividend was declared. Barrow upon Soar had recently been added to the network at a cost of £1000. It was announced that the company would now be known as the 'Quorndon, Mountsorrel and Barrow Gas Company.' A name which didn't appear to become official, as by the next meeting in 1863 the title 'Quorndon and Mountsorrel Gas, Coal and Coke Company' was being used. It was resolved at this meeting to increase the company share capital from £5000 to £7000 to provide for a new gasometer and a new 6-inch diameter mains to Barrow. The company were now maintaining some 14 miles of pipelines. T. G. Messenger a Loughborough and Quorndon based plumber, glazier, gas fitter, etc had been entrusted to lay the mains and was advertising to connect and install interior fittings into homes and properties.

Coal and Coke sales had become another part of the business and by March 1871 the Quorndon and Mountsorrel Gas, Coal and Coke Company, as it was now known were ordering 400 tons of superior gas coal, at least a third of which was South Yorkshire Silkstone Nuts, the remainder being from Derbyshire. The best gas was made from the best coals but of course that was expensive. The waste product left in the retort after the burning of coal was coke and this was sold to the public for their house heating. In December 1877, as a Christmas gift for its customers a 'considerable quantity of excellent coke' was advertised for sale at reduced rates.

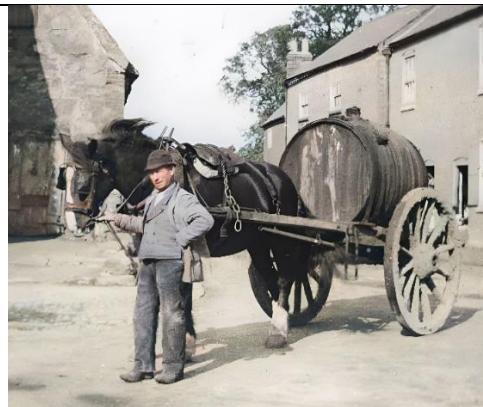
The coal was delivered to the works by rail to Barrow Station or by boat to the company wharf. Coal stocks were maintained at a level to cover for supply interruptions caused by strikes however, in May 1921 the works warned the

Barrow Council that if the coal strike was not ended, within a fortnight they would be unable to maintain supplies to the Barrow sewage station to work the pumps.

The company income came from the domestic customers and local councils who were charged for the gas they used for lighting, streetlamps and other services including the use of the weighing machine. On December 6th, 1904, New Quorn was rocked by a loud explosion that was caused by leaking a gas pipe in Barrow Lane (Barrow Road today). The Rev Kelcey writing in the Parish Magazine in June 1905 of his visit to the Gas House, he was reminded that day and night there are always men on duty there and two lamplighters are employed to light the streetlights. He comments that between them they walk 77 miles a week. It was not until 1907 that the gas was used for heating as well as lighting and at that time 2,005,000 cubic feet a year was being used.

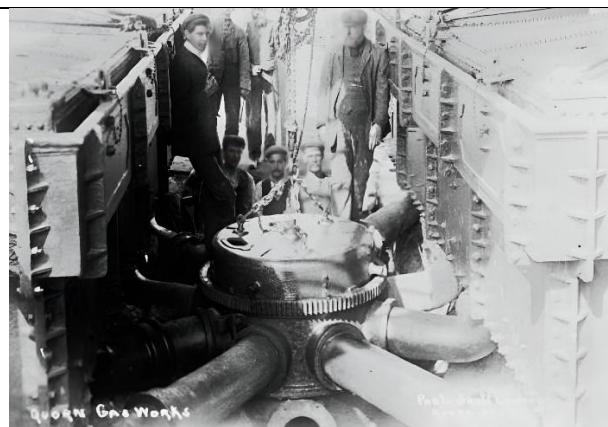
When the site at the 'brinks' was chosen for the gas works, it was fairly isolated and away from the village centre but as the village prospered and expanded outward, complaints about the pungent smells and haze increased. Documents of the time record that sometimes in Quorn, the smell 'was abominable and detrimental to health'. This was because gas was difficult to purify, and it was hoped that improvements in 1885, under manager James Camm, would help. This programme of improvements included enlargement of the Retort House. This was where the coal was heated to generate the gas which was syphoned off. Sadly, in 1858, William Luff, employed at the gas works had been suffocated by gas when it escaped, while he was removing an obstruction from the siphon. The waste product left in the retort was known as coke. A new Tar and Liquor Well was also made. In spite of the pollution problems the village children were often taken to sniff the tar at the Works, as it was believed to be beneficial in relieving congestion from coughs and colds.

The Tar Tub was a familiar sight in Quorn. Tar was loaded into the tub at the Gas Works and taken to Barrow sidings by the Gamble brothers who also brought coal from Barrow Station to the Gas Works if required.



Improvements continued when Stanley Kemp, formerly manager of Tuxford Gas Works, took over from James Camm, as manager in 1919. He oversaw the installation of a semi-automatic charging machine for feeding the coal, a new governor house for the monitoring of gas pressure and gas output, two new gas holders, a new engine house and a new oxide plant for cleansing the gas. The streetlamps in the villages were fitted with automatic clocks, which turned the lamps on and off at the appropriate times bringing an end to the role of the village lamplighters. The coming of gas to Quorn meant that it had been one of the earliest villages in Leicestershire to have street lighting. In 1860, what was known as the '12 Candle Standard' was introduced and all gas companies were required to meet this standard. A test rig and photometer were installed to give a constant indication of the light quality of the gas being produced.

Gas lights remained in use until the arrival of electric light when, on a Wednesday night in 1957, Quorn was reported as having a night spent in a 'blaze of glory' during the changeover, when both gas and electric streetlights were on.



Quorn Gas Works about 1907 by William Shuttlewood



Jack Greasley was the Foreman and lived at the Gas House from 1901 - 1911

The directors at this time were Dr Unitt, who was the chairman, Mr Turner, Mr. Speight and Mr Dobson from Mountsorrel. Cecil White was the Company Secretary. The works staff were Jack Greasley, the Foreman who lived in the 'Gas House' and fitters, Walter Price and Samuel Trueman. Stokers Jack Sykes, G. Gartshore, A. Evans and Mr Williamson. The remainder of the staff were J. Smith, Bill Hallam, Eric Corah, Reg Kinch and Lawrence Larkin. The office staff were Wilf Bailey and Reg Freer.

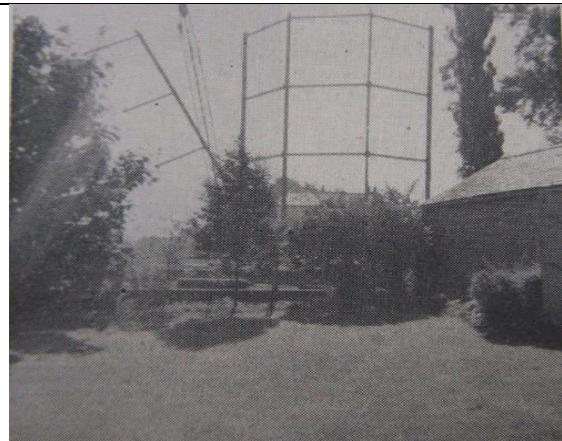
A new weighbridge was installed in 1930, and several exhibitions promoting the latest gas appliances were held in the Village Hall. Gas appliances were now available, not just for lighting and heating but for fridges, irons, hair curlers, cleaning, and drying clothes, etc. In spite of the improvements in gas production, the range of appliances, and sales drives, it was in 1938, after 85 years, that the Quorn Gas Works closed unable to compete against a growing move toward electricity. Gas was to be supplied from Loughborough so the Quorndon and Mountsorrel Gas, Coal and Coke Company went into Voluntary Liquidation and all claims and debts had to be submitted to the Liquidator before the 31st March 1938.

The Gas House, 106 Leicester Road, Quorn in 1961. Courtesy of the Brown family who lived there from 1960 until 1965. The old gasholders in the background.



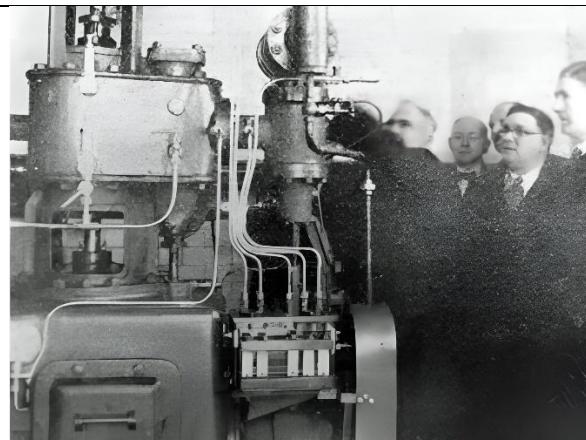
Following the works closure, the gas house upstairs home remained and was rented out, but the office and gas show room downstairs were closed. The gasholders were used for storing gas locally until they and the house were demolished in 1966. Following demolition and clearing of the area a small housing development was built on the site and named 'The Brinks'. The Loughborough Gas and Coke Company which was incorporated in 1868, by 'Special Order' was permitted the takeover of the Quorndon and Mountsorrel

Gas, Coal and Coke Company. Following the nationalisation of the industry in 1948 gas supplies were under the auspices of the East Midlands Gas Board (EMGB) with supplies distributed from Litchurch through a giant trunk pipe. The days of town gas as it was known, were numbered, as natural gas supplies came online in 1964. A massive appliance and equipment conversion programme was completed in 1976.



In 1966, the two gas holders were demolished after having been in service for over 90 years. A mobile jib crane was used and provided a holiday spectacle for some of the village children.

The 'heavies' arrive to assist with the clearing of the site in the 1960's. The snowy weather doesn't seem to be any problem for them.



Alderman A. Lacey at the Loughborough Gas Works switches on the Quorn gas supply at a ceremony in February 1938. Watching on are Councillor George Read chairman of the gas and Electricity Committee and Mr L. A. Ingram gas engineer.



This picture taken on Leicester Road in the 1930s, is looking north from the Gas Works entrance and the 'Gas House', since demolished.

A small development was built on the former gas works site at the Branks.

