

Gas lighting

The idea of bringing gas to Deddington began to be discussed during 1850. The *North Oxfordshire Monthly Times* published four letters in August and September 1850 pointing out the benefits. One correspondent, signing himself 'Lampas', also identified a moral advantage - the introduction of gas lighting of the streets would render "immorality and indecent conduct easy of detection".

A public meeting to promote the establishment of a gas company was held at the Town Hall in July 1851. The *Oxford Journal* in February 1852 reported: "This matter is again in agitation". By March 1852 an engineer had produced preliminary plans, and in May 1852 a Provisional Committee had been formed.

In August 1854 a notice by the Deddington Gas, Coke, & Coal Company (provisionally registered) invited applications to subscribe for shares. The nominal share capital was £1,200. Investors were offered the prospect of a return of 5%. At the same time work commenced on the construction of the gas works at the eastern end of Earl's Lane.

Houses and shops in part of Deddington were lighted by gas for the first time in March 1855. Subsequently a number of iron lamp posts were erected, and the town streets were lighted with gas for the first time in January 1856.

In March 1856, however, it was reported that the newly installed gas lamps were not being lighted "in consequence of the apathy of the inhabitants in raising the necessary funds for the purpose".

This led to the requisitioning of a ratepayers' meeting (Vestry) to discuss levying a gas lighting rate. Notice of the meeting was given in the usual way by affixing the same to the door of the parish church.

At a subsequent Vestry chaired by the Vicar's churchwarden, Charles Faulkner, the 14 ratepayers present resolved that 5 inspectors should be appointed, and set a lighting rate to raise £30. 9 persons were nominated as inspectors, requiring a poll of ratepayers at the Town Hall.

At a shareholders' meeting in May 1856 the directors reported an improving financial position, and that there were 33 shareholders. Some additional street lamps were erected in November 1856.

It was not all plain sailing, however. From time to time the retorts at the gas works would burst, and in January 1857 there were complaints about the impure state of the gas.

Lack of funding, leaving the town in "dreary darkness" in November 1857 led to a meeting of 19 ratepayers to set another lighting rate and to appoint 6 inspectors.

In February 1859 a report on the Reading Room and Public Library (opened July 1858), now located in the Town Hall, noted that the premises were lighted with gas. The restoration works at the parish church also included the installation of gas lighting.

