

## Gas

### Early Days

The first stone of the intended new gasworks at Malton was laid late in June 1832 [1]. The streets of Malton were lit with gas for the first time on 12th November 1832 [2] 'The works adjoin the river, and from the beauty of the design, and the superior execution of the workmanship, the building from the bridge, has a very handsome appearance.'

These first works were constructed by Messrs. John and James Malam, and purchased for £4,000, by a proprietary of £10 shareholders in 1836 . . . The Gas Works are near the bridge: there are three gasometers, which will hold about 37,000 cubic feet of gas' [3]

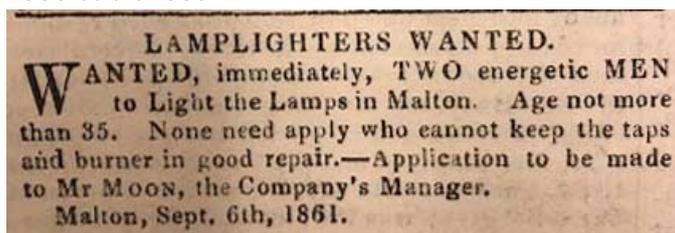
### The Malton Gas Light and Coke Company

The Malton Gas Light and Coke Company was formed in 1836 and became an unlimited company in 1862 (National Archives). There were various amalgamations over the succeeding years. Some documentation is in the archives at Transco plc. In October 1840, a dispute is reported over payments between the Lamp Inspectors of the borough and the Directors of the Gas Light and Coke Company. At a meeting between the parties, shareholders and inhabitants it was decided to leave the town in darkness [4]! My assumption is that the Lamp Inspectors managed the gas lighting on behalf of the ratepayers. An insight into Victorian practicalities and cost control is given in a report in 1841 [5]. 'The arrangement as to putting out the lights, will be the same as last season . . . namely two-thirds of the lamps to be put-out about eleven o'clock at night, and one third of the lamps to remain burning until about 5 o'clock in the morning.' Business must have been satisfactory since at a meeting of the directors 'it was unanimously resolved that a reduction in the present rate of gas be made from 6s 8d to 5s 8d per 1000 cubic feet.'

Every night, the gas lamps in the streets would be lit by employees of the Malton Gas Company, in accordance with the contract with the Malton Local Board. In September 1861, the Malton Messenger carried an advertisement for two lamplighters - "none need apply who cannot keep the taps and burner in good repair" [6]

In 1865 the gasworks were probably extended since the Yorkshire Gazette carries an advertisement in the name of William Moon, secretary & manager, Gas Works, for the sale of a steam engine, two boilers and a gas holder, 'to be cleared away to make room for an extension to the gas works' [7]. Mr. Moon may have resigned shortly after since an advertisement appeared in 1867 'WANTED by the MALTON GAS LIGHT and COKE COMPANY, a Person fully competent to take the Situation of SECRETARY and MANAGER at their Works.' [8]

In May 1866 the company was 'putting down new mains in the streets, and have gone deeper than usual in Castlegate' [9]



*Malton Messenger, 14 September 1861*

# The Malton Gas Company

In 1879 the organisation was renamed, restructured, or both as the London Gazette of 25 November 1879 carries proposals for an Act of Parliament to dissolve the Malton Gas Light and Coke Company and form the Malton Gas Company. This document details the objectives of the company and describes where its premises were located. At this time there was agitation amongst residents as they believed the increased capital proposed would induce the company to lay pipes to the surrounding villages therefore keeping costs high to the townspeople. They also objected to the difference in price charged to the North Eastern Railway [10]. Shares in the gas company appeared to be a sought after investment. They changed

hands at local auctions as described in 1888 [11] when it was stated that the last time the shares were offered in public, in March 1884, they fetched £22 5s per share. At the auction on the Tuesday, Mr. T.J. Blanche paid £25 10s and £25 5s for a number of shares, excluding the 10% dividend declared that morning. Three years later [12], the shares were selling for £27 2s 6d.

Eventually, the electricity company won the contract to light the streets of Malton. However, some 28 years later, the council awarded the contract back to the gas company which 'sold gas more cheaply than any other company of the same size in the British Isles [13]

## Accidents

**Gas Explosion.**—On Monday evening a rather serious explosion of gas took place at the house of Mr Ward, glass and china dealer, Yorkersgate. During the day, workmen had been engaged in fitting some pipes upstairs, and in screwing down the boards two screws were driven right through the lead pipes. The gas was turned off after the work was finished, and remained so till night, when it was again turned on for lighting up. As a light could not well be got, the gas fitter was sent for. He took a candle, and had just found out where he thought the fault lay, when a loud explosion took place. The defective pipe was laid between the ceiling of the shop and the floor above, and the force of the explosion blew the plaster off the ceiling for about a yard in width right across the shop, and also in a sitting room behind. It also blew down one shutter from the window. The effect of the explosion and of the plaster falling among the crockery may be imagined. The contents of the shop were smashed and thrown in all directions, and the place appeared a perfect wreck. Valuable sets of china tea and dinner services, glass, ornaments, &c., were in many cases destroyed, some being entirely demolished, others rendered useless by the breaking of the principal pieces. The gas is said to have been only turned on about five minutes when the accident happened, but the amount of damage is extraordinary for the quantity that could have escaped in that time.

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Messenger 29 April 1871

There were accidents as a result of gas use and installation. In April 1871, gas was laid on in the bedrooms of Mr. Ward's china and glass shop in Yorkersgate [14]. A joiner had damaged the pipes and the leaking gas filled the void between ceiling and floor. When a light was taken upstairs there was a large explosion -

'the smash among the china and glass defies description.'

An 'alarming, and very destructive explosion' occurred in the shop of Mr. J.S. Harrison, printer and bookseller, Castlegate. Some alterations in the shop had resulted in workmen fracturing a pipe behind a large bookcase which was blown from its fixings and 'sent flying across the shop, almost through the window' [15]

## Malton Gas Company

The following is taken from the article 'Malton Trades and Industries: No 5. Malton Gas Company' - Yorkshire Gazette, 8 January 1912.

About three-quarters of a century ago the leading townsmen of Malton were busy in their minds considering the formation of a company to acquire the then newly-erected gasworks, which had been constructed by one John Malam, an enterprising gas engineer and speculator, who went about the east of Yorkshire planting gas works in promising towns. Malton found him at work near the county Bridge in 1834, erecting the nucleus of the present works. Various public and semi-public meetings were held, and finally the Malton Gas Light and Coke Company was formed with a Board of twelve directors. Those gentlemen were William Allen, John Hopkins, John Gas

Slater, Henry Smithson, John Agar, Joseph Barnes, James Dunlop, George Holiday, John Pratt, Alfred Simpson, Thomas Taylor and John Wright. The mention of those names will call up in the minds of old Maltonians many reminiscences of the past, which, however, we cannot deal with here. The capital of the new company was fixed at £4,000 and no shareholder was to have more than 20 £10 shares. The late Mr. Samuel King filled the office of secretary.

The first public lamp to be lit by gas was in the centre of the Market Place, and until recently there were people living who saw it lit. To get a light without a wick was a novelty to most of the inhabitants, but the new illuminant was not very freely adopted, as the charge made for it was high.

The method of charging first adopted was a fixed sum for each burner, burning a given number of hours, but that system soon gave way to the more satisfactory way of paying for the gas by measure or meter. For the first nine years of its career the company charged 13s per 1,000 cubic feet. In July, 1845, it was reduced to 10s, two years later to 8s 4d. In 1850 to 6s 8d, and in 1857 to 6s. Successive reductions were made as the consumption increased until the price now stands at 2s 6d per 1,000 feet, although in the meantime materials and labour have increased in cost.

In 1880 the company ceased to exist as a joint stock company with a limited liability, having in that year had granted to it by Parliament statutory powers. As is usual when charters are granted, various conditions were imposed. The area within which the company could supply gas was defined as the Borough of Malton. The price of gas was fixed at 4s for 1,000 feet as a standard, and when that price was charged the dividend was not to exceed ten per cent; but a provision was made that should the price be reduced or increased below or above 4s per 1,000 feet, then the company might pay a quarter per cent more or less for every penny the price deviated from 4s in inverse order to the price. Fortunately for Malton and Norton and the shareholders, the company have never found it necessary to charge as much as 4s per 1,000, although it is plain that their sliding scale of price and dividend gives a mutuality of interests to the consumers and the shareholders. The company has never exacted its full "pound of flesh" under the sliding scale arrangement, but had it done so it would at the present time be paying a dividend of 14 1/2 per cent. Conditions were also laid down in

the statutory enactment respecting the purity and illuminating power of the gas to be supplied.

The original board of twelve directors was by the Act limited to a maximum of seven; there are at the present time five gentlemen holding that office. The capital has increased as the business grew from the original £4,000 to £29,000, and the consumption of gas now reaches 55 million cubic feet per annum.

The attitude of suppliers of gas in times back towards the public was "you can take it or leave it." The town has for some years past been altogether different, and custom has been eagerly solicited and inducements to consume gas offered by letting out various apparatus. To gain additional custom the smaller houses have gas fittings, cookers, etc., supplied under the penny slot system, and it is interesting to note that more than one half of the total number of the customers of the company are now catered for in this way.

The company, although standing in the public mind as a monopoly, has never been without competitors. They have always had the tallow candle and the oil lamp to contend against; in latter days the electric light has entered the field and made an attempt to eclipse the gas light, but, notwithstanding all the alleged advantages of its competitor, gas continues to hold its own and to flourish. The present chairman of the directors is Mr. Hugh W. Pearson, and the manager and secretary is Mr. Henry Tobey. As our readers will remember, Mr. Tobey is this year's president of the North of England Gas Managers' Association, whose last half-yearly meeting was held at Malton.

## The End

The United Kingdom Gas Corporation acquired 94.3% of the shares of The Malton Gas Company in 1936 [16]

## References

- [1] Yorkshire Gazette, 30th June 1832
- [2] Hull Packet, 4th December 1832
- [3] City and Topography of the City of York and North Riding of Yorkshire by T. Whellan & Co, 1857
- [4] Yorkshire Gazette, 3 October 1840

- [5] Yorkshire Gazette, 2 October 1841
- [6] Malton Messenger, 14 September 1861
- [7] Yorkshire Gazette, 29 April 1865
- [8] Yorkshire Gazette, 26 October 1867
- [9] Shields Daily Gazette, 18 May 1866

[10] Yorkshire Gazette, 11 February 1880

[11] York Herald, 11 August 1888

[12] York Herald, 6 March 1891

[13] Leeds Mercury, 3 August 1933

[14] York Herald, 29 April 1871

[15] Yorkshire Gazette, 6 October 1883

[16] Leeds Mercury, 1 May 1936