



Electricity Comes to Congleton!

Based on research by Chris Bradley



Electricity came late to Congleton. Public electricity supplies were available in parts of London in the 1880s and in many provincial towns by the turn of the century. The delay was due at least in part to the existence of a flourishing gas undertaking, started in 1833 and taken over by the corporation in 1866, whose profits helped to relieve the rates.

In 1919, Alderman A. J. Solly suggested that the Gas Committee, of which he was chairman, should consider the establishment of a power station in the town. He had been advised that a 2000hp station would be a paying concern. The cost was estimated at £40,000 to £50,000. The possibility of using water power from the Dane was discussed but the Mayor, Alderman C. D. Bradwell, said he had twenty years experience of the horsepower of the Dane and he estimated the power available at 35-40hp in winter and 15-20hp in summer, scarcely enough to light one large mill.

In June 1926, Mr C. H. Yeatman, the Electrical Engineer to the City of Stoke on Trent, was invited to address the committee on the possibility of Stoke providing a bulk supply of electricity to

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The Chronicle reported on the opening of the town's electric sub-station in its Saturday 28 February 1931 issue. It read in part:

Congleton's New Electricity Undertaking

In dismal weather but good spirits and in a manner that augurs well for the success of the venture, Congleton's new Electricity Undertaking was formally opened on Friday last week, the switching-on ceremony at the Bromley Lane transformer sub-station being followed by a demonstration of the new lighting installation at the Town Hall and an inaugural dinner in the Court Room.

The architect, Mr J. Hood, presented the Mayor with a gold key for the purpose of performing the opening ceremony, and asked the recipient to retain the key after the ceremony as a memento of the auspicious occasion.

In declaring open the sub-station, the Mayor wished the townspeople generally every blessing and prosperity for the future. The electricity undertaking, he felt sure, would go forward and be a credit to the town.

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Congleton; also at the meeting was Mr Arthur Ellis, a Cardiff consulting engineer. A sub-committee recommended that the council should apply for an order authorising them to distribute electricity within the borough, and also that Mr Ellis should be appointed as consulting engineer at £150 per year, plus expenses.

By mid-1927 Mr Ellis was busy preparing a scheme for the town and in September he optimistically predicted that a supply would be available in winter 1928-9. In April 1928 his report was at last circulated to the members of the Gas Committee. It had been delayed to allow the situation of the proposed North West Midland Joint Electricity Authority to be considered, as this authority would bring power directly into Congleton and thus save the town the expense of a supply cable from Stoke-on-Trent.

Primary distribution mains would terminate at a principal substation at some convenient point within the borough (although it later transpired that two separate substations would be needed, one belonging to the Joint Electricity Authority and one to the borough). From this substation, underground mains running along the principal streets of the town centre would distribute electricity. Mr Ellis already anticipated the need to extend the supply to more remote parts of the borough, and had estimated the cost of this separately. His estimate of the cost of the undertaking was therefore: substation £8,975, distribution to town centre £6,717, distribution to outlying parts £16,109.

Discussion in the Gas Committee seems to have been concerned largely with the location of the council's substation. Mr Ellis proposed a site on the Fairground, behind the Capitol cinema. Other members wanted it at the gasworks so that one engineer could supervise both. The decision was put off.

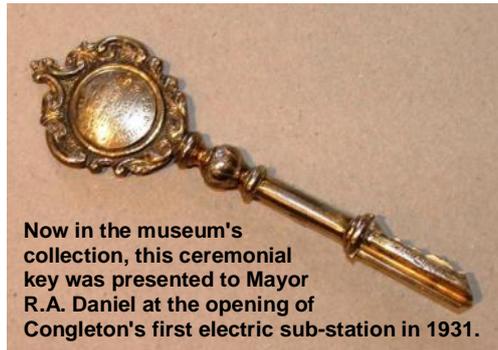
In October 1929 it was agreed that the council's substation should be in Bromley Road, alongside the Joint Electricity Authority's substation. In November the Gas Committee bowed out of the picture when the Town Council resolved to appoint an electricity

committee and in the same month, the Congleton Electricity Special Order, 1929, came into force.

The Congleton Electricity Special Order is a brief document, taking only two pages to put into effect various provisions of the Electric Lighting (Clauses) Act, with attached schedules listing the streets in which distribution mains were to be installed. The areas to be supplied within two years covered West Street, Swan Bank, Mill Street as far as Antrobus Street, Antrobus Street itself, Duke Street, Bridge Street, High Street, Market Street, Moody Street, Chapel Street, Lawton Street and Little Street.

By the end of July 1930 cable laying had begun and in September the Electricity Committee was asking Mr Ellis for estimates of the cost of extending the cables to 'such further streets as he considered would be remunerative'. On September 22 erection of the substation began. By November the cables were being put up and in January 1931 the Electricity Committee was confident enough to approve plans to extend the mains to Canal Road, Brook Street, Park Lane, Howey Lane, Howey Hill, Wagg Street, Waggs Road and West Heath.

Finally, in February 1931, the great day arrived. A party of council members and others, led by the mayor (Councillor R. A. Daniel), ceremonially entered the new substation and switched on the power. They then adjourned to the Town Hall, and formally switched on the new electric lighting there.



Now in the museum's collection, this ceremonial key was presented to Mayor R.A. Daniel at the opening of Congleton's first electric sub-station in 1931.

Congleton Museum is proud to

announce that we have once again been awarded full accreditation by Arts Council England! The certificate dated 11/10/2012 reads: "The Accredited Museum scheme sets nationally agreed standards for UK museums. To qualify, museums must meet standards on how they are managed, for the services they offer and how they care for collections." Thanks to all our volunteers and members for their support and hard work!

New database aids family history research

A database of Victorian names is an exciting new addition to Congleton Museum's research facilities that will be particularly valuable for those tracing their local family history.

Would be genealogists can search available census data and more from 1831 – 1911 for Congleton and the surrounding townships by name, address and/or occupation. Developed by Keith Heron (a Friend of the Museum), the database also includes civil marriage records from 1837 – 1960 for Cheshire and Staffordshire.

The database will gradually be updated with records of civil births and deaths, as well as information from local trade directories and parish records. Users are also encouraged to provide further family details.

Friends of the Museum may use this important resource tool for free, but a small charge will be made for other users.



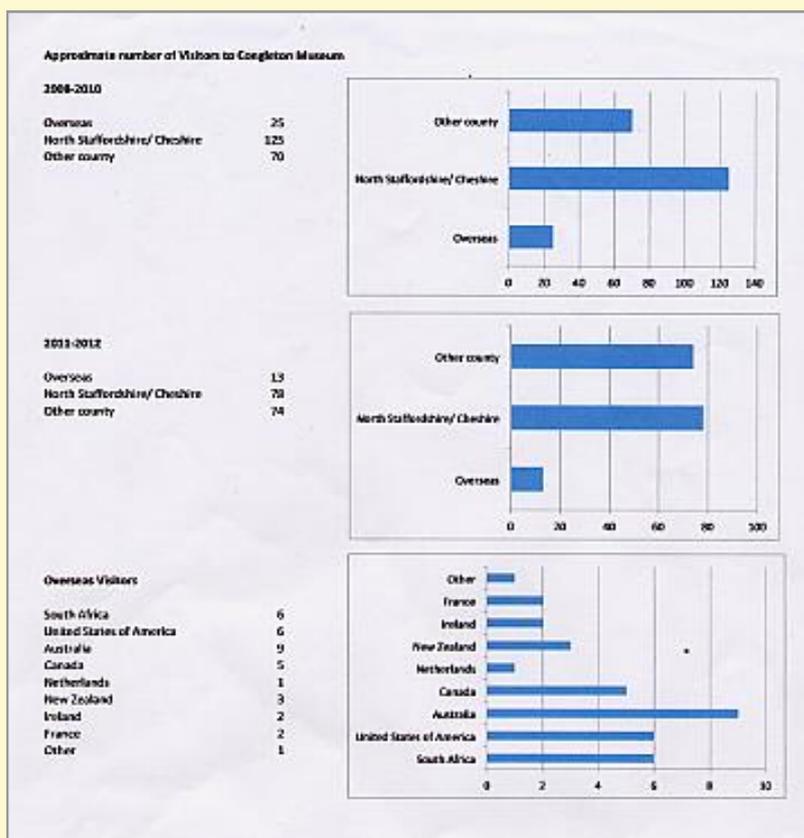
For further details or to book an appointment to use the database, please contact the museum on 01260 276360.

Museum is a hit with Australians!

My name is George Kenyon and I am a sixth form student at Eaton Bank Academy in Congleton. As part of my travel and tourism course I did work experience at the museum.

I wanted to find out where visitors to the museum came from. I decided to create a graph using 3 categories: visitors from Cheshire and North Staffordshire, visitors from elsewhere in Britain and visitors from overseas.

I was rather surprised by the number of visitors who came from overseas so I created a new graph to show which countries were represented. I found that most of the overseas visitors came from Australia. This may be because they once lived here themselves or have family in Congleton and want to learn about the history of the town.



Meet the volunteer... *Dorothy Robinson*

Our volunteers are our most important resource. You are the backbone of the museum and vital to its continuing existence. Simply stated, without volunteers there would be no museum.



Interview by Colin Lansley

Dorothy Robinson is a busy lady. I had to interview her on site at the museum on Thursday afternoon when she regularly volunteers. We were interrupted by phone calls and people coming in, but we managed.

Dorothy has lived in Congleton all her life; she was born in Somerford in 1932, the eldest of four children, 3 girls and one boy. She moved to Mossley when she married and has been there ever since.

Her first job was as a junior shorthand-typist at Conlowes mill in Congleton where she earned a whopping £2 per week! "That's because I asked," said Dorothy. "I was told at school to ask for £2 per week. 'You won't get it,' they said, 'but ask.' So I asked. Back at school they said I was cheeky, but I was only doing as I was told! I don't think I paid any national insurance contributions until I was 18 and I was 16 when I first started."

Dorothy was widowed in 1987. Her last job was as a registrar at Westlands High School. She retired in 1992 when she was 60.

Q: Why did you volunteer for the museum?

A: Well, I have always been interested in history so I joined the Historical Society. Membership of the museum

trust was £3 per year then; so I was already a member when the decision came to open the museum. Subs had to be put up to £10 when the museum's doors finally opened. I came to an A.G.M where Julia Davenport, who was a trustee, pulled me to one side and said, "We do need more volunteers, why not think about it?" I did have some time on my hands, so I came down on a Thursday to see Louise Adams (then administrator), who showed me round the museum. I stayed all day and the rest is history!

Q: Do you volunteer anywhere else?

A: I'm a member of the museum's textile group, which tries to meet alternate Mondays. I do come to the museum on a Sunday (when I can) to help with the cream teas after the walks. I'm a member

of Congleton Players, of which I'm Honorary Treasurer. I was also Assistant Secretary of the Theatre Trust for a number of years but I resigned in February 2012. I do help out though - front of house, stewarding, etc; I go where I'm needed. I also carry out preparation for the Congleton talking newspaper for the blind once a month. I'm a member of the Trefoil Guild (the non-uniform section of Girlguiding) and help at guider trainings and events.

Q: What do you personally get out of volunteering?

A: I think generally it's satisfaction. It's just nice to be interested in things and meeting people. I like showing people around the museum, and telling them all I know, and being able to say, "have you any questions?" because I know most of the items!

A HUGE THANK YOU

to everyone who donated prizes and to the volunteers who helped out on the museum stall at the Christmas Lights Switch On in November! The tombola and shove ha'penny game raised a massive total of £153 for museum activities!



Make FRIENDS With Books

At its inception in 1985 the museum trust recognised that one of its functions would be to provide opportunities for historical research which would complement and extend those already provided by the local library. Since then the museum has actively sought to acquire as many publications associated with Congleton and the surrounding area as it can.

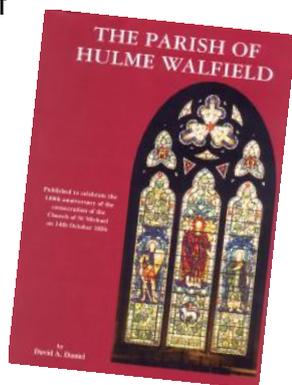
When the museum opened in 2002 this growing collection was housed in purpose built bookshelves so that it could be made available for both group and individual research. Over the past 10 years the collection has continued to grow through donations and purchases and is now an excellent specialist library.

Due to the rare and fragile nature of some of items in this collection open access is not possible, but it is a facility which is available to all Friends of Congleton Museum. If you have a particular sphere of research you are following or wish to understand a little more about the history of the town and the surrounding area you might find it useful to make an appointment so that someone may be available to help you.

The collection comprises books and pamphlets on local history, the churches and other aspects of Congleton life including education, industry and leisure.

One of these is a booklet entitled "The Parish of Hulme Walfield", written by David Daniel in 1997 to celebrate the 140th anniversary of the parish church of St Michael. This fascinating book not only covers the history of St Michael's church and the school, it also features brief biographies of members of local families and a history of the village, including the suggestion by a Dr Gower, in 1725, that there was a Roman encampment at Walfield! However it is more probable that the earliest settlement there is Viking.

This book is available from the museum shop, price £5.00 with Friends receiving their usual 10% discount.



Remember! Friends of Congleton Museum are entitled to free use of the museum's research facilities!

Awesome Artefact

The Scold's Bridle or 'Brank'

The town bridle was last used in 1824, when Jane Runcorn was charged with shouting at the churchwardens and constables as they went around the town making sure all the public houses were closed during the morning service.



On being examined by the Mayor, Mr Bulkeley Johnson, the churchwardens reported that, on the previous day, near the 'Cockshoot', Jane Runcorn had called

them 'all the scoundrels and rogues she could lay her tongue to.'

She also told them, "it would look better of them if they would look after their own houses rather than go looking after other folks, which were far better than their own". The judgement of Mayor and Justices was that "she should have the town's bridle put upon her and that she be led, by the magistrates' clerk, through every street of the town as an example to all scolding women".

HOT OFF THE PRESS

A new local history booklet from Peter Boon

“During the 18th and most of the 19th century all town transport depended on the pulling power of horses. On the farms in the 18th century, oxen were probably used too. Such was the number of horses that blacksmithing was a major industry.”

The above extract is from the latest local history booklet by Peter Boon, “Ancient routeways and former transport in & around Congleton”. Now on sale at the museum for £2, it uncovers the old methods of travelling in the town from walkways to horse-drawn vehicles.

To view a full list of local history booklets available from the museum shop, please visit our website at www.congletonmuseum.co.uk.



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Opening Times

Tuesday - Friday

12.00 - 4.30pm

Saturday

10.00 - 4.30 pm

Sunday

12.00 - 4.30pm

Monday - Closed

For holiday opening times please contact the museum.

Forthcoming events

3rd March 2013

Surprising Trades

Walk led by Peter Aston



We think of Congleton as a mill town but what have been its other significant trades? What else was it famous for? This walk investigates the town's association with other industries such as the manufacture of cigars and billiard balls.

7th April 2013

Ancient Places

Walk led by Ian Doughty



Follow in the footsteps of the medieval priests as they walked from Astbury to Congleton to take Divine Service at the Higher Chapel of St Peter's. Depending on the weather waterproof footwear may be required.

Walks: £5 or £3 for Friends of the Museum (includes cream tea) - meet at the museum at 2pm. Please contact the museum to book a place.

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