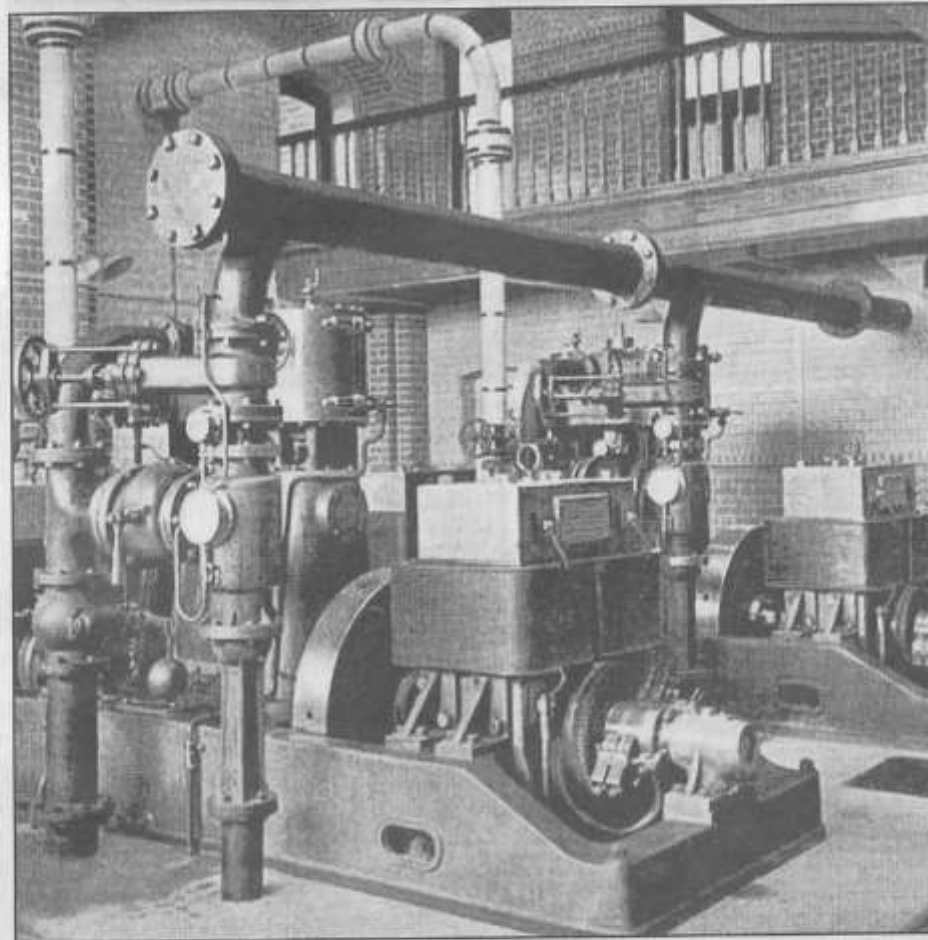


THE WAY WE WERE

Hotel sparks the first interest in electric lighting



POWERING UP: The engine and dynamo room of the New Electric Light works in 1899

Way We Were



David Lewis
Canterbury
Historical and
Archaeological
Society

120 YEARS ago this month, Canterbury, according to a local paper, celebrated 'the greatest instance of private enterprise that has ever been known in our ancient and historical city'.

They were referring to the opening of the completely refurbished County Hotel (now the ABoDe hotel).

The festivities, spread over three days in July 1895, conducted tours of the new premises for 800 local citizens, a demonstration game by two professionals in the new billiard room and a seven course slap-up meal for local dignitaries in the new dining room.

One feature admired by all was the bright electric lighting which ran throughout the new establishment.

Vision

The hotel venture had not





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Vision

The hotel venture had not been initiated by a national chain, or even by a joint stock company. It represented the vision and effort of the sole proprietor, Edward Lukey, a wine retailer from Dover.

Edward had served as a Dover JP and went on to become mayor of Dover and Sheriff of Canterbury.

The speeches which followed the impressive meal (turtle soup, salmon with lobster sauce, braised sweetbreads, sirloin of beef, lamb, turkey, ox tongue, roast quail, Genoese pastry, and the rest) steered clear of the fact that the electric lighting scheme which lit their meal so well was driven not by the long promised city electricity supply, but by a private generator.

Explanation for this lay with the city council, where several councillors had substantial interests in the city's gas company, and stood to lose financially if a modern electricity supply displaced the gas contracts for street and domestic lighting.

These councillors repeatedly ignored laws requiring a declaration of interest before taking part in debates and voting on the subject.

Public approval of the County Hotel electric lighting proved effective in pushing the council to review its position on a public supply of electricity. Following more delays over who should run the new body and whether it should include a Refuse Destructor, the Electric Lighting Works (with Refuse Destructor) was opened on the site that is now Sainsburys Kingsmead in



FIRST LIT: The County Hotel (now ABode) bedecked with flowers for Cricket Week in the early 1900s

March 1899.

Amongst the long list of speakers was one Edward Lukey, hotel proprietor and now councillor.

When Edward proposed the toast to the consulting engineer and contractors, he chose his words with care.

"If Canterbury has been slow in the past it does not mean to be behind other bodies in the future," was greeted with applause.

Time proved Edward right. Within a month the Canterbury Corporation Electricity Works

had over 100 clients connected, a further 70 waiting for connection and plans to extend the plant.

By 1901 the new plant was supplying 259 consumers and Canterbury streets were lit by 280 electric lights.

Several reminders of our electrical past can be found in modern Canterbury streets – four electricity boxes and one sub-station in Beer Cart Lane. The trouble is we're not sure what exactly they did. Can you help please?

■ For more details and more photos, see the CHAS web site.



GRID: The old sub-station in Beer Cart Lane, now part of Furley Page Solicitors