

ELECTRICITY COMES TO CANTERBURY

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This is a slightly enlarged version of the Canterbury Times article of 22 July 2015

Canterbury city in 1895 celebrated 'the greatest instance of private enterprise that has ever been known in our ancient and historical city'¹. The local press 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. 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 one sole proprietor, Edward Lukey² a wine retailer from Dover. Edward had served as a Dover JP and went on to become mayor of Dover and Sheriff of Canterbury³.

**Central & Healthy
Situation.**

Perfect Sanitation

**Electric Light
throughout.**



Excellent Cuisine.

**Finest Wines and
Spirits.**

Moderate Charges

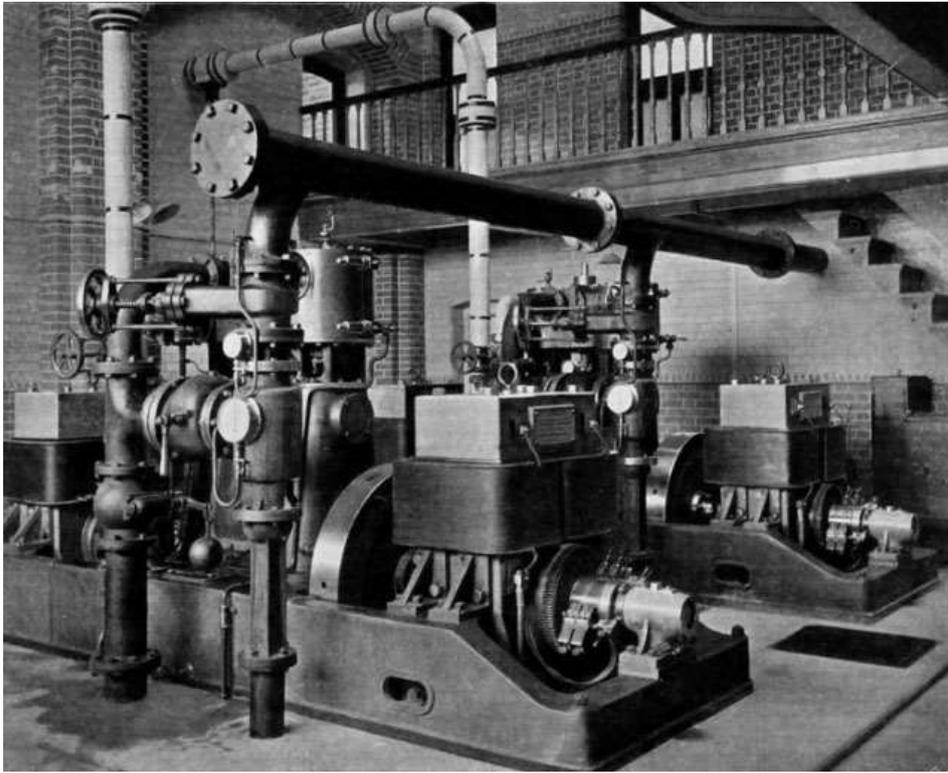
County Hotel in cricket week (hence the floral decoration), very early 1900s⁴

¹ Whitstable Times 3 August 1895

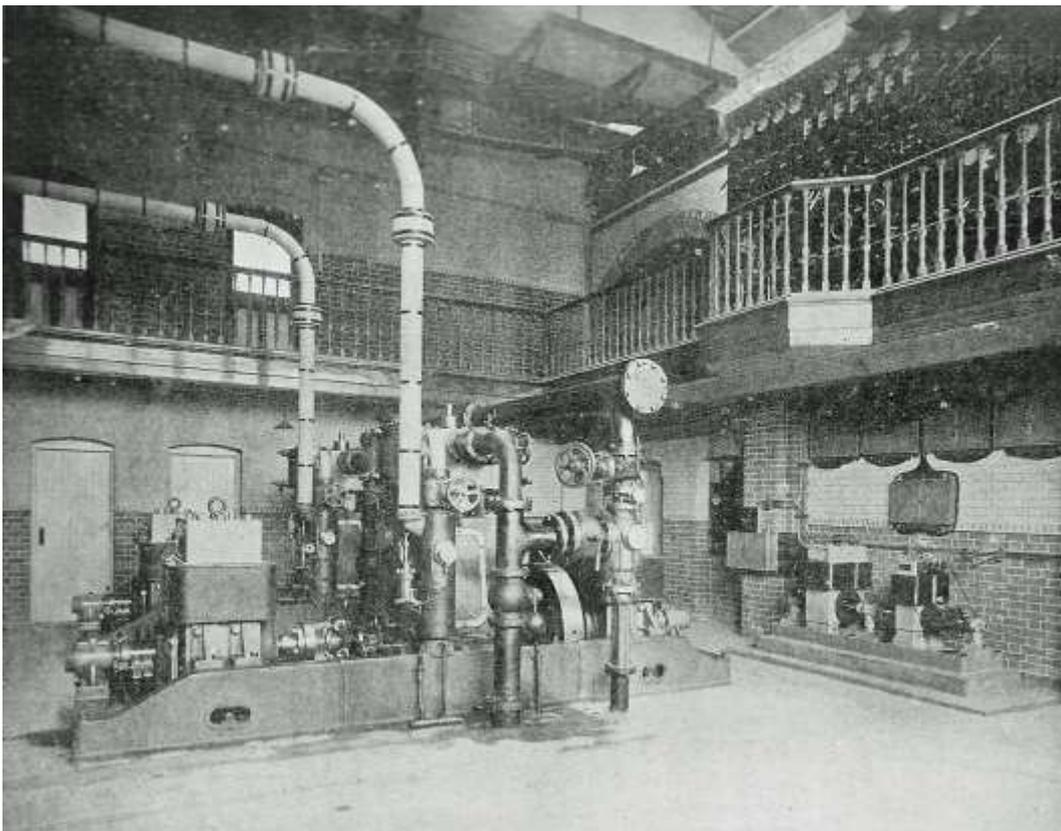
² according to Ancestry born 1848 (Dover) died 1908 (Dover); married Ellen Mary White (1873) Gravesend; they had six children; Edward left will 1908 showing probate to his widow Ellen Mary

³ Whitstable Times 6 June 1908

⁴ image appears in Evans, Sebastian, and Bennett-Goldney (1903) *Canterbury Mother-city of the Anglo-saxon race*, Canterbury Chamber of Commerce p 82



New Electric Light Works opened in March 1899 - shows Engine and Dynamo room⁵



Engine room and switchboard

⁵ both images on this page appeared in Evans, Sebastian, and Bennett-Goldney (1903) *Canterbury Mother-city of the Anglo-saxon race*, Canterbury Chamber of Commerce p 85



New electricity works opened in March 1899⁶



Manager and staff of the new works in 1903

⁶ both images on this page are available in Local history collection, Beaney House of Art and Knowledge



Mayor George Collard JP who opened the new works⁷

The speeches which followed the impressive meal⁸ (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. The explanation for this lay with 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 lighting⁹. 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 getting 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 March 1899¹⁰. Amongst the long list of speakers was one Councillor Edward Lukey who 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

⁷ two detailed articles appeared in the *Municipal Journal* 10 and 17 March 1899 pp 295 and 331 respectively; a detailed floor plan appeared in *The Engineer* 17 March 1899 p 266

⁸ Whitstable Times 18 March 1899

⁹ Bateman, Audrey (1991) *Victorian Canterbury*, Barracuda Books p 135

¹⁰ the scheme, including the 'dust destructor', cost £20,000 (*Municipal Journal* 10 March 1899 p 295)

proved Edward right. Within a month the Canterbury Corporation Electricity Works had over a hundred clients connected, a further 70 waiting for connection, and plans to extend the plant¹¹. Consumers were offered free connection to the new service providing they signed up whilst the trench outside their property was still open¹². Numbers of consumers reached 195 by March 1900 and 259 by March 1901; the number of street lights reached 280 by March 1901¹³. The School of Art was connected to the new supply in 1899¹⁴, and restaurants¹⁵ and City clubs followed suit¹⁶, first the Conservative Club, then the East Kent Club, and Canterbury Club. The first place of worship to use electricity for lighting seems to have been the Baptist chapel in May 1899¹⁷. The Baptists did not stint with the new installation, lighting the body of the chapel, the gallery, the under-gallery, the organ, staircase, rooms and passages. Technical details for Canterbury's generation scheme (and those of Dover and Faversham) are summarised in electrical engineering directories¹⁸, and revealed in more detail in a comparison of Canterbury and Stafford electricity schemes which appeared in the Municipal Journal¹⁹.

The power station company was nationalised in 1944 and the works were demolished around 1979²⁰. Sainsbury opened their new store on the site in 1984 - it is the subject of a separate article in the CHAS Notebook site. Several reminders of our electrical past can be found in modern Canterbury streets - four electricity boxes and one sub-station in Beer Cart Lane.



electricity boxes²¹ in Watling Street, Pound Lane, Oaten Hill and Longport

sub-station in Beer Cart Lane²²
(now part of Furley Page solicitors)

¹¹ for detailed comparison of Canterbury and Stafford electricity supply schemes see Municipal Journal 13 December 1901 p 969

¹² Municipal Journal 10 March 1899 p 295

¹³ first year results Whitstable Times 5 May 1900; second year results Whitstable Times 11 May 1901

¹⁴ Whitstable Times 4 February 1899

¹⁵ Whitstable Times 18 February 1899 mentions C Wilson's Restaurant

¹⁶ Whitstable times 20 May 1899

¹⁷ Whitstable Times 20 May 1899

¹⁸ eg Fowler's Electrical Engineer's Year Book and Directory 1905 held by British Library

¹⁹ Municipal Journal 13 December 1901 p 969

²⁰ a small collection of records survives at Canterbury Cathedral Archives (CCA-CC-A/J/5)

²¹ the first three of these are known in some areas of England as Lucy Boxes, after the firm that manufactured them; their purpose is unclear

²² city directories suggest a construction date of around 1930