

Shrewsbury Gas Works & the Shrewsbury Canal

On January 7th 1820 the following advertisement appeared in Shrewsbury:

'The Mayor having received an application from several respectable inhabitants to convene a meeting for taking into consideration the expediency of lighting this town with gas, requests the friends and approvers of that measure to attend him at the Town Hall, on Thursday, January 13th 1820, at eleven o'clock in the forenoon.

The chief motives which induce those who have the adoption of the gas lights in view are the following:-

- (1) *That streets are much better lighted, and afford better security to the inhabitants from nocturnal depredators and from the nuisances of disorderly persons;*
- (2) Shops have a stronger and more brilliant light without the danger that more or less attends the use of candles and without the injury often arising from accidental dropping of oil;
- (3) Private persons have the opportunity of introducing gas lights into any and every part of their houses; at once meeting brilliancy with, perfect safety, cleanliness and elegance;
- (4) The almost universal adoption of gas lights proves that they meet the approbation of the public; and from a pecuniary point of view are satisfactory to the proprietors, who have in some instances, it is said made from 10 to 20 per cent on their shares;

LASTLY – From enquiries recently made, there is reason to believe that the shareholders here will receive a fair annual percentage on the money advanced, at least 6 per cent, probably considerably more.'

Things must have moved quickly for the Act of Parliament to permit the town's gasworks received Royal Assent on July 8th and the Shrewsbury Gas Light Company began its supplies on September 8th of the following year.

The site chosen for the gasworks was on the banks of the Shrewsbury Canal on a piece of land adjoining New Park Road, now occupied by the Fitness First carpark. The canal had opened just 24 years earlier and the demand for gas in the town brought a significant increase in trade on the canal, not only the importing of coal from the east Shropshire mines but for the transport of other commodities away from the works.

As demand increased so the gasworks expanded to occupy the whole of the site up to St Michaels Street where the Fitness First building now stands. In 1903 the company acquired more land to the north, beyond the Maltings and Corn Mill but still beside the canal, for a new works. This was known as the

“Top Yard”. Gas making transferred to the “Top Yard” but the old site remained in use, containing office, workshops and as a site for selling coke to householders. Part of the office block remains on the corner of St Michael's Street and New Park Road.



Almost all that remains of the once extensive gasworks is the office building on the corner of New Park Road. The canal route is to be found beyond the gaswork's wall to the right of this photograph.

With the introduction of new plant in 1932 production of nearly 1.5million cubic feet of gas per day became possible. At about the same time however, the last regular canal traffic to Shrewsbury came to an end. This was the carrying away of the sulphuric acid from the gasworks to Oldbury in the West Midlands.

By 1948-9 600 million cubic feet of gas were produced in the year that saw Nationalisation of the Gas Industry but with the introduction of natural gas the production of town gas ceased in the 1960s. Little evidence remains of this industry that served the town well for a century and a half, but the route of the canal through the area remains and is a public footpath.

(map on next page)

