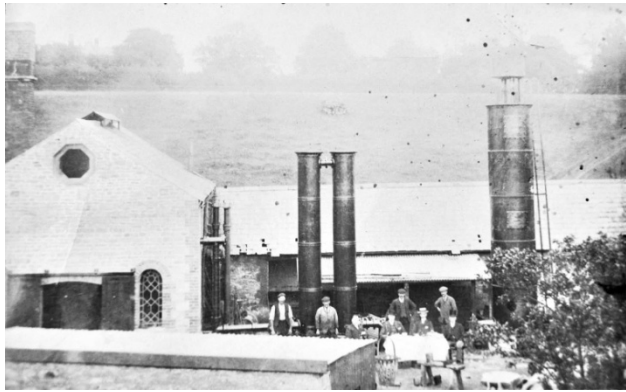
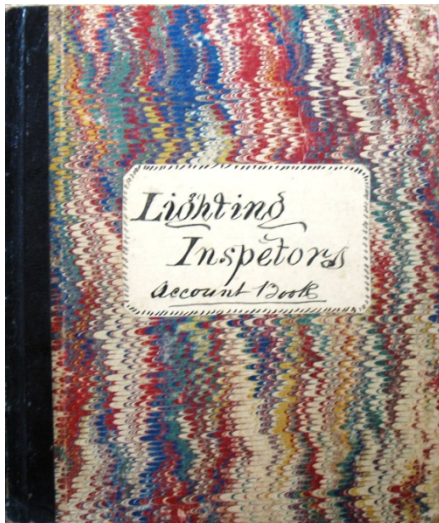


The Milborne Port Gas Works

Recently Richard Duckworth posted on his Facebook page one of his more out-of-the-way photographs from his collection (now held by the History Group). It was of the Retort House that was situated in Kingsbury and was used to produce gas from burning coal which was then pumped around the village.



Above is the Retort House on the left - now used by Johnson Stalbridge Linen Services - and is situated to the right before you cross the river to the north side of Old Tannery Way.

[illegible]

POLIO _____ 5 JULY 1932
 193 _____



To the Milborne Port Gas Co., Ltd.

Secretary: J. CLIFFORD.
 Manager: G. KING.

Office: "NORTHWOOD," NORTH STREET.

METER INDEX.		Coke last affixed number.		
Last Quarter				
11-0	7-0	600	At 5/6 per 1000 cubic feet	3 0
Rent of Meter <i>4 Quarters</i>				6 0
" " Cooker				

Coke, Fittings, &c., as per accompanying account



£ 7



Lutball
 29. 7. 1932.
 pounds
 shillings and pence
Jacob Clifford
 0/-

Please send bills when you pay the Account.
 Interest charged on overdue accounts.

Why reproduce this now? Well, by coincidence, looking through our bookshelves at the museum, I came across this account book, and these invoices were discovered amongst the Commonalty archives, probably saved by Richard, who was Chairman of the Commonalty at one time.

This short history is taken from the Somerset Industrial Archaeological Society (SIAS): *Built by the Milborne Port Gas Company in 1856 and closed in 1957. According to the census there was one employee in 1881, [a Samuel Tulk, first a gas stoker in Sherborne eventually becoming manager in Milborne Port in 1891]. Originally there was a retort house and a gasholder on the east side of the road; by 1904 there was a second gasholder on the west*

side of the road and the original holder had gone by 1930. The only gasworks in Somerset to be transferred to the Southern Gas Board on nationalisation in 1949.

The central invoice above might dispute the time frame given by the SIAS because it is dated 1866 and would appear to lay out the set-up cost from the Glasgow based Laidlaw & Son gas company and the builder Alfred Reynolds of Milborne Port.

282 shares were issued at £5 a share, probably about £790 today, so not many villagers could have afforded a foot in this enterprise.

Gas was originally only for public streetlights (31 were recorded in 1876), until 1880 when Mr Andrew's had a private lamp above his door (King's Head Hotel).

The Lighting Inspectors account book first entry is 1867 which seems to back up the later start of the company. It includes a running cost of gas used as well as a version of our health and safety policy with the Inspectors – in 1868 Charles Ensor & Silas Dyke being overseen by two magistrates from the Medlycott family.

Milborne Wick appears in the account book but with reference to oil for their lamps in lieu of gas.

The second invoice is for the use of gas at the Guildhall by the Commonalty in 1932.

Here are a couple of accounts about the gas works by Fred Pearce from his booklet 'A Gloving Village 1919-1935':

Gas was slowly replacing oil lamps and candles in the homes, and the last street lighting by oil lamp was at Russell Place, Court Lane, and the steep flight of steps to the Baunton Orchard path, now South View corner. Lit every winter evening by Mr Bob Burgess, carrying his short ladder and then extinguishing them at 10 pm.

A common sight on winter Saturday mornings would be boys and girls pushing a wide variety of homemade trucks, boxes on pram wheels, sometimes an old pram itself, for bags of coke from the gas works 6d a bag. Most villagers had a shed or fowl house so sometimes a can of tar would be collected for an annual coat. Mr Harry Dewfall would turn the wheel and the silky, pleasant-smelling liquid would slowly glug out.

Hugh Vincent

June 2026