

# VCH SHROPSHIRE

## Newport

### Utilities - Gas

This text has been prepared for VCH Shropshire by Professor Richard Hoyle drawing on research and draft text by Sandra Crabb. It is made available to readers in advance of its full publication. We welcome suggestions for improvement, references and, of course, we invite readers to point out errors.

We would welcome fuller information about the last years of the gas works and the clearance of the site.

September 2026

Utilities: gas<sup>1</sup>

By 1829 Thomas Blakemore of Newport mercer had a private gasworks with a gasometer producing gas for the lighting of his recently-erected mercers and draper's shop in Newport.<sup>2</sup>

This may have been a small-scale enterprise. However, the town was eager to adopt the Lighting and Watching Act of 1830 (statute 1830 c. 27) to institute an element of street lighting. Inspectors (managers) appointed under this act had the power to levy a rate. A resolution to take advantage of the act was agreed by the Vestry on 5 Jan. 1831. A newspaper advertisement of 4 Feb. 1831 sought tenders for a contract for street lighting with gas. The Inspectors reported that they had an offer before them from an unnamed person: they sought other proposals.<sup>3</sup> Whether the unnamed person was Blakemore it is impossible to tell.

The demand for gas led to more elaborate provision being made. On 28 Aug. 1835 the Marsh Trustees leased for 99 years a parcel of waste ground between Hen Meadow and Marsh Lane (later Avenue Road) to John Dixon of Wolverhampton. Dixon was to erect, at his own expense, a gas works on the site. The site was extended in 1858 and again in 1914 and it was to serve as the town's gas works until they were decommissioned after Newport was connected to the national gas grid.

The Newport Gas and Light Company came into existence on 25 October 1835. The company had 14 shareholders holding 90 £20 shares - of which Dixon held the first ten - giving a capitalization of £1800.<sup>4</sup> A further share issue of £400 had been made by 1851. In 1851 Bagshaw reported that the works had two gasometers each of which could store 8,000 cubic feet of gas.<sup>5</sup> By this time the company was supplying gas for both domestic use and for street lighting, the latter paid for by the Marsh Trustees.<sup>6</sup>

The 1835 company was dissolved in 1858 and a new company, The Newport Gas Company, established with a capital of £4,500. There were 123 shareholders in the new company, four of whom held twenty £25 shares and eight 10 shares each. The 1858 arrangements remained in place until 1909 when the original capital was increased to £9000

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<sup>1</sup> This section draws on research by Sandra Crabb and a digest of references made by the late Michael Miles, supplemented by additional research.

<sup>2</sup> SA, 1101/9/1, deed of the dissolution of partnership, 2 Apr. 1831. The gasworks is mentioned in the recital of the deed establishing the partnership of 1 and 2 June 1829.

<sup>3</sup> P207/C/1/1, minute 5 Jan. 1831; *Shrewsbury Chronicle* 4 Feb. 1831.

<sup>4</sup> 1101/1493, deed establishing the Newport Gas and Light Company, 25 Oct. 1835.

<sup>5</sup> 1101/1493, deed. 25 Oct. 1835; unexecuted deeds in the same bundle; Bagshaw, p. 405.

<sup>6</sup> NTM/1/1, Minutes of the Marsh Trustees, 1836-51, passim. There are minutes almost annually reporting negotiations with the company for the provision of gas for street lighting.

by the issue of 180 new ordinary shares. But these were paid for out of accumulated profits and allocated to the existing shareholders in proportion to their holdings.<sup>7</sup>

The provision of gas by a private company was increasing anomalous. On its establishment in 1895 the Urban District Council discussed its acquisition of the Company but nothing came of this. The 1929 act made provision for the company's acquisition and the UDC bought out the shareholders in 1930 for £5,000. For the next twenty years the making and the provision of gas was managed by a council department with a manager.

The purchase appears to have caused the Council some difficulties. By 1934 it was being reported that the surplus income was insufficient to cover the repayment of the loans taken to acquire the works. There was then a period of retrenchment. In 1937 the council was again debating the profitability of the enterprise. The following year an approach was made by the Severn Valley Gas Company who offered to purchase the council's interest. This was ultimately rejected, the UDC holding that the offer undervalued the company. The suggestion was renewed in 1941. The council resolved not to consider the sale until after the war.<sup>8</sup>

Rejecting the offer may have been a mistake. At the end of August 1941 the supply completely broke down. In November it was reported that the pressure was low. This produced a caustic letter in the *Newport Advertiser* suggesting that the gas works were only fit for salvage: 'Newport has the unique privilege of possessing a gas works with NO GAS and a Council full of it, but unfortunately this will not light'.<sup>9</sup> There was a further interruption in service in September 1942. These episodes were blamed on a combination of wartime staff shortages and old equipment.<sup>10</sup> It was decided to erect a new gasholder in 1944. In justification, the council were told that the works could not run at maximum efficiency because there was inadequate storage so gas could not be produced throughout the night. Treasury sanction for the expenditure was given in June 1945 but it was 1948 before a tender was accepted. By that time the nationalisation of the gas industry was expected. Vesting day was on 1 May 1949.<sup>11</sup>

The gasworks can be seen in its most developed form in a plan of 1955 reproduced in Figure 1 below.

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<sup>7</sup> SA, 1101/103/1 including Director's minutes; 360/1/30, Minute book, 1907-31.

<sup>8</sup> *Newport Adv.*, 11 Feb. 1938; 13 July 1938 (reports of UDC meetings); DA11/100/13, 14 July 1943.

<sup>9</sup> *Newport Adv.* 5 Sept., 12 Sept. 14 Nov., letter by S. A. G. 28 Nov. 1941 (and another accusing the council of incompetence 2 Jan. 1942).

<sup>10</sup> *Newport Adv.* 11 Sept., 18 Sept. 1942.

<sup>11</sup> *Newport Adv.* 10 Mar., 15 Sept. 1944, 16 Apr., 28 May 1948; 22 May 1949.

The West Midlands Gas Board closed and sold part of the site in 1963. The OS map of 1987 calls the site 'gasholder station' and shows a single gasholder. This had been dismantled by 2005 and the site was consequently built over. The manager's house survives as a private dwelling at 17 Avenue Road.

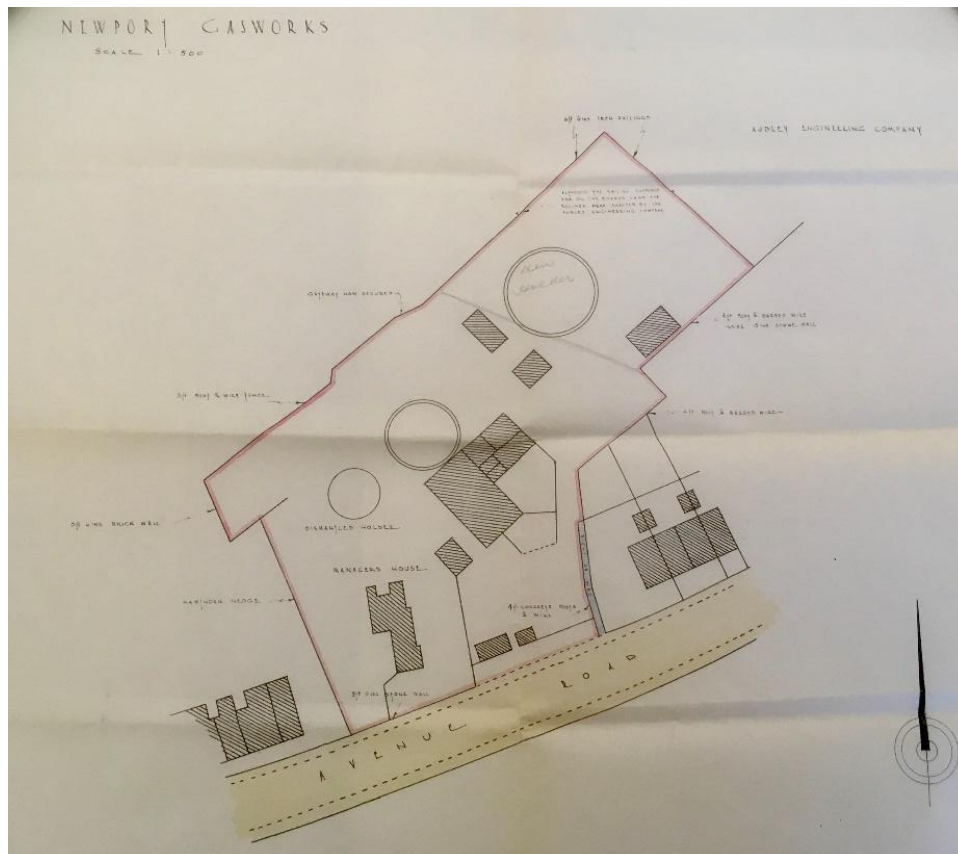


Figure 1. Plan showing Newport Gas works c. 1955. Scale 1:500.  
SA, DA 11/150/5/2/10.