

More on Stroud Gas works - I

18 April 2020

To GSIA Members

Thank you for your comments on the item on the railway coal tip at Stroud gasworks. This one is from a non-member who has kindly agreed I could circulate it.

Ray Wilson

"When I started working for Wicliffe Motor Co. at the age of fifteen we used to go to the gasworks for the coke for the stove which was the only source of heat in our workshop. A year or so after that they finished producing gas but kept one of the gas holders to maintain local supply and Wicliffe bought most of the area for workshops and the gas board held on to the area which contained one holder and a monitoring unit. On the ground which the Wicliffe bought there remained an enormous round hole where one of the earliest holders had been dismantled, it was very deep and was used as a landfill facility and when lorries came to tip their loads into it they had to be very careful not to reverse too far! I know that there are some scrapped cars in there.

Eventually, when the hole was filled the area was covered with scalping and was used as a car park for new unsold cars. The Wicliffe management asked me to take some photographs of the area, I used to be a very keen amateur photographer using two 35 mm Nikon cameras and I appeared to be the company photographer in a somewhat de facto sort of way. I took several pictures but I struggled to get an overall view of the area, then I noticed that the one remaining holder was full and at it's highest and I thought the view from the top of it would be magnificent. I ventured into the gas board area and asked if it was possible for me to take a photo from the top of it. I was told that only the inspector could authorize this and he wasn't there until later on in the afternoon. Later that day the inspector unlocked the door at the base of the holder frame and took me through. We climbed up a stairway leading to the top and as we passed from one section to another I commented that the water in the sealing channels was all but boiling and steam was coming from it. He told me that it needed to be hot because if it froze the consequences would be disastrous. I never thought of that and I must admit it was a very cold day. I got a superb shot of our premises from the top of the holder but the view of the surrounding area was magnificent. I remember that almost anywhere you went in the Stroud area you could see that gas holder when it was full.

When natural gas came onto the scene what was left of the coal gas in the local pipework was burnt off and the remaining holder was dismantled. During the dismantling when the workmen had removed one of the side panels I ventured inside the holder when they were at lunch and took some photos of the inside, it resembled a giant umbrella, quite strange. I must try and find those pictures.

We secured the premises with fencing but we still suffered from miscreants entering the premises at night and the only way we could see how they were getting in was over the bridge over the river where the standard gauge trucks used to bring in the coal. Trying to block the bridge was tricky and the management wanted to dismantle it. I inspected the bridge with dismantling it in mind

but reported back informing them that it was more substantially built than at first envisaged. Certainly more than a hack saw job and in any case there were gas main pipes and others crossing at that point so the bridge remained.

When we took on the Nissan franchise we had to build a new showroom and the digger kept coming across the old narrow gauge lines when digging out the foundations and shortly after tarmacking the parking area a large curved crack appeared in the tarmac where the old holder had been, obviously all the old landfill debris had consolidate a bit more.

I found the article you sent very interesting and it stirred up many of my memories."