

OPEN FOUNDATION COURSE

1987

AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

DAVID NEIGHBOUR

THURSDAY 10 - 00 am TO 12 - 00 noon

TERM 111 RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT

TOPIC NEWCASTLE GAS COMPANY LIMITED

1866 - 1987

APPROXIMATELY 1500 WORDS

DATE DUE 25th SEPTEMBER, 1987

Newcastle needed gas! This was decided by a meeting of gentlemen on Friday 1st December, 1865. The meeting was held in Rouse's Hotel which stood on the site of the present David Jones Pty. Ltd., Hunter Street, Newcastle.

Following discussions by the meeting, the need to establish a gas works in Newcastle was proved. On the 2nd July, 1866 the first general meeting was held with a committee being formed. The members elected to the committee were:- Mr. A. Ingall; Mr. A. Rodgers; Mr. William Henry Whyte; Dr. Brooks; Mr. David Ross; Mr. J. B. Winship and Dr. Irwin. Mr. E. A. White was then appointed to Honorary Secretary of the committee. On 15th October, 1866 Mr. White resigned and was succeeded by Mr. E. C. Merewether.

On 28th December, 1866 the Company's Act of Incorporation was passed through both Houses of Parliament. A Deed of Settlement containing 112 clauses was subsequently drawn up outlining the objectives of the company and its obligations to its shareholders.

The new company was to be known as "The Newcastle Gas & Coke Company Limited".

In March, 1866 four possible sites were visited and inspected by a consulting engineer. He recommended the first site in Steel Street, which was purchased for a cash sum from the Australian Agricultural Company of Newcastle.

Part of the building contract was awarded to local builders Gates, Bowry & Gibbs. Due to difficulties in construction the work failed. It was decided to award the contract for the completion of building to Mr. A. K. Smith from Melbourne.

The plant for the works arrived on board the vessel "Blackbird" on 24th September, 1867. With the construction moving rapidly forward the first consumption of gas by the public was on Saturday 26th October, 1867. By the end of 1867, 9,582 yards of main had been laid through the streets of Newcastle.

Repeated offers to light the streets of Newcastle were made to the Municipal Council, but were always rejected. It was not until 1875 that a contract was let to light the streets. On new year's eve 31st December, 1875 they were first turned on. To assist in the celebrations the lights were left on all night.

With a firm establishment in the city, the Gas Company began reaching out towards the suburbs. In 1876 the laying of mains to Hamilton was commenced with the streets of Wickham being lit by gas in 1880.

In 1887 it was decided to increase the capacity of the works. A new gas holder and subsidiary plant was ordered from England. A new retort house was also constructed to assist with the new demand. Press reports of the day gave great praise to the company for its enterprising efforts of expansion.

The 1890's saw gas cooking come of age despite 1892 being a year of great depression. The company still managed to make progress due to the wide acceptance of gas for cooking.

With the increase in consumption, land was purchased at Clyde Street, Hamilton in 1910. By the end of that year a rail siding had been installed from the main Northern Line and a high pressure main laid between the old works in Steel Street and the new works at Clyde Street.

Gas manufacturing was commenced at Clyde Street on Tuesday 21st January, 1913. The plant was made of thirty two Glover-West vertical retorts in banks of eight.

Following the establishment of the steel industry at Port Waratah and the First World War, it was again decided to increase the capacity of the Clyde Street works. A second retort house was constructed with larger and more modern steam-type retorts. The first section commenced gas making on the 23rd November, 1929. This retort was gradually extended until 1947 when all ten settings were in operation.

Between the two world wars, gas reticulation had spread throughout the inner suburbs with a submarine main being laid across the harbour to Stockton in 1915.

The Waratah Gas Company was purchased in 1922. This was the first independent company aquired with another works being purchased in 1941. This was the Wallsend Gas Works. Both works were to close soon after their acquisition with gas being supplied to both areas from Clyde Street.

The second World War saw an increase in Newcastle's population. With the franchise being limited to the Greater Newcastle Area it was decided to extend into the Shire of Lake Macquarie. Permission to lay mains into the Shire was granted and work started on 5th September, 1950.

With all this new activity and expansion, new carbonising and coke plants were ordered from England in 1948. A lack of material slowed the construction down, with gas making commencing in No. 3 retort house on 2nd March, 1955.

Significant changes in the company came in 1962. Extensions to the reticulation system were made to new housing development areas in the South and West of the city. These areas were Merewether Heights, Shortland and Gateshead West.

Television was also introduced to Newcastle through NBN Channel 3. Newcastle Gas Company was the first local company to be contracted to advertise on television. Live demonstrations on cooking with gas were conducted weekly by the company's Home Service Section.

2-way radio control was fitted to the fleet of fourteen vehicles. This enabled the company to give the consumers of Newcastle a better and more efficient service.

With the availability of a new petroleum based feedstock in 1967, the company enquired about a new Catalytic Reforming plant. The firm of Vickers Zimmer Limited were contracted on 31st January, 1968 to build a plant at the Hamilton works. December, 1968 saw the commencement of gas making from the new plant. Gas production from the retort houses was discontinued in March, 1969.

On the 21st October, 1971 the company's name was changed to Newcastle Gas Company. This was brought about because coal was no longer used as a base feedstock in gas production.

Being a by-product from the refining of petroleum from crude oil, the naphtha based feedstock suffered from increased pricing due to the import parities. In 1977 the company chose to use liquified petroleum gas as an additional feedstock to naphtha.

To assist with increases in load demands, and preparation for natural gas, a simulated natural gas plant was built at Stockton. Gas making started from this plant on 6th June, 1978. Two more plants were built, one at Mayfield in November, 1978 and one at Cardiff in August, 1979. These two plants were to supply gas to specified industrial consumers in their respective areas.

Newcastle Gas is now one of the major suppliers of energy to the Newcastle area, both to domestic and industrial consumers. The company is also involved in supplying LPG through its subsidiary company Speedie-Gas (Newcastle) Pty. Ltd. Another enterprise is the construction of homes through Castle Estate Pty. Ltd. and the management and development of property with Castle Real Estate Pty. Ltd.

In 1979 Newcastle Gas Company merged with the Australian Gas Light Company. With the merger came the availability of natural gas to Newcastle. A major re-development program had to be implemented to upgrade the existing mains, metering and service facilities. New management and support systems had to be developed and installed ready to assist in the arrival of natural gas in 1981.

Initial control of the gas from the Moomba gas fields was to be from Sydney at the Mortlake Control Centre. Local control was transferred to Newcastle with the construction of the Regional Operations Centre in Ravenshaw Street. This control centre is fully equipped with modern technology and computerised equipment, backed up by a highly qualified team of operators and maintenance personnel.

Natural gas arrived in Newcastle in July, 1982. With the arrival one of Australia's greatest engineering feats had been completed. A pipeline 1,300 kilometers long was laid from Moomba to Sydney. It was extended to Newcastle in 1981/2. The 175 kilometer section costing \$85 million and employing 500 people.

With the arrival of natural gas a special department was established at Girling Street, Islington. The task of this department was to convert and update all domestic and industrial appliances to suit the new gas. With conversion, a rehabilitation program was started to upgrade the existing mains system.

The conversion of Newcastle was completed in 1985 and attention was turned towards the coal fields. Aberdare County Council was acquired by Newcastle Gas Company on 12th December, 1983 with all operations being directed from the head office in Newcastle.

The conversion department were again busy converting Cessnock, Kurri Kurri and Maitland areas. This task was completed in 1984 and the works at Cessnock were shut down, closing ~~an~~ a historical chapter in the coal fields. The mains systems in this area also underwent a rehabilitation program with some sections being fully replaced.

The rehabilitation of Newcastle and the Coal Fields systems are continuing in an effort to give both consumer areas a more efficient supply of gas.

Since the merger with the A.G.L. Group of Companies and the arrival of natural gas the Newcastle Gas Company has gone through many changes, both in its managerial and operational sections. The company is continually updating its computer systems along with its service and distribution sections with a few facial changes - all designed to present a more efficient company to the public.

On 7th September, 1987 the A.G.L. Group of Companies celebrated 150 years of service to the domestic and industrial community. ↘

Newcastle Gas Company has grown and developed with the city of Newcastle and its surrounding areas. The company will celebrate 120 years of service to the area on 26th October, 1987. It will endeavour to continue growing and assisting Newcastle in the future.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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2. Jubilee Souvenir Report. 1866 - 1916
3. Gas Expansion (provides for the future). 1955
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5. The First 100 Years. 1966

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1. The First 114 Years. 1981
2. A Great Achievement. 1982

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