

Electricity.

Armidale was one of the last New England communities to install electricity as a public service. Armidale's power and light needs were met by a gas company until electricity was turned on on 18 August 1922. Prior to this date electricity was provided at Tamworth (1883), Inverell (1911), Tenterfield (1917) and Uralla (1918). Electricity was provided at Hillgrove in 1894. At a special meeting of council held on 22 October 1892, there was consideration of the Hillgrove and Armidale Water Power Electric Bill. The bill was not opposed by council provided permission was obtained before the provision of electricity was extended to the city.

In October 1900, Crompton and Co. purchasers of the Sandon County Electric Light and Power Works at the Gara River sought permission to extend light and power to Armidale. Council agreed to call a special meeting with Mr Erskine, manager of the company. At the meeting held on Tuesday 6 November, council agreed 'to supply ... certain particulars, to enable his company ... submit formal proposals'¹ for the possible provision of electricity.

Mr Leeson of Dulwich Hill placed a scheme before council in April 1911. He 'pointed out the electric light would cause the city to go ahead even more quickly than at present'.² Mayor Solomons spoke of the need for electricity but some aldermen demonstrated their ignorance of the value of electricity with comments by Ald. Cohen: 'A good many of us want electrifying' (laughter) and Ald. Kearney: 'We want more light on the subject'. (laughter)

In reporting the meeting the correspondent in the *Armidale Express*, felt that provided the 'gasworks will not fail as a revenue-producer, no reasonable opposition can be offered'³ but the lighting committee recommended in May that the offer by Leeson be not entertained. Mayor Solomons expressed his disappointment and 'his personal conviction was that Armidale was capable of maintaining both services'.⁴

Greatly concerned about the situation, the editor in the *Armidale Express*, 11 October 1912 wrote:

So long has Armidale refused to seriously consider the question of the installation of an electric light and power service that the municipality, though ranking as a highly important one in every respect, falls behind its compeers in the matter of the use of electricity as a lighting and motive power.

¹ *Armidale Express*, 9 November 1900, p.2.

² *Armidale Express*, 7 April 1911, p.2.

³ *Armidale Express*, 7 April 1911, p.4.

⁴ *Armidale Express*, 26 May 1911, p.3.

On the casting vote of the mayor at a council meeting in August 1913, council agreed to meet representatives of R. Hornsby and Sons, engineers of Sydney to discuss the installation of electric light. The company presented two schemes to council in respect of a local electric light and power service in September. The schemes promised increased profits but one scheme also provided for the sale of the gasworks.

During the Great War, interest in electricity developed and in January 1916 R.M. Franki, an electrical and mechanical engineer 'invited the Council to consult him if it contemplated an electric lighting system'.⁵ In July 1916, J. Pinto of Metz from the Gara Hydro Electric plant offered to supply electric power from his works at Gara and a month later offered to supply bulk electricity. Despite the offer, the water and lighting committee of council would not 'recommend that the proposal be entertained'.⁶ This decision brought an angry response from a newspaper correspondent, Micawber:

Armidale should be in the proud and inevitable position of being the cheapest and most brilliantly-illuminated city in the Commonwealth of Australia, also the most up-to-date in its water power electricity. Does it not seem absurd that with the natural facilities afforded by the streams ... in the vicinity of Gara, Hillgrove and Wollomombi, that the town near it, (Hillgrove excepted) clings to the costly gas and primitive kerosene lamps with their attendant risks.⁷

In the following year, the correspondent in the *Armidale Express*, 31 August 1917 reported Mayor Purkiss was impressed by Mr Pinto's new offer to supply electricity. 'Mr. Pinto is certain a never ending supply of electricity could be furnished for both Armidale and Uralla, and at a very moderate cost'.

A month later in September 1917, W.J. Turner of Hillgrove proposed the supply of electricity from the Styx River Hydro-Electric station. He suggested the 'formation of a syndicate to instal the electric scheme at the same time taking over the gasworks at a valuation to be approved'.⁸ Two weeks later, Mr Hope representing the gentlemen who have acquired the rights of the Hillgrove and Armidale Water Power Electric Co. Ltd. sought permission to meet the Council on their behalf of 'with a proposal to light the streets of Armidale'.⁹

A special meeting of council was called on Tuesday 16 October 1917 to deal with the question of electric light. The clerk read Mr Turner's proposal and Mr Hope's

⁵ *Armidale Express*, 14 January 1916, p.3.

⁶ *Armidale Chronicle*, 26 August 1916, p.2.

⁷ *Armidale Chronicle*, 9 September 1916, p.4.

⁸ *Armidale Express*, 28 September 1917, p.3.

⁹ *Armidale Express*, 28 September 1917, p.3

letter. The Armidale Progress Association had met earlier that day and passed a resolution favouring the lighting of Armidale by electricity. After much discussion the council adopted the committee's recommendations which favoured the installation of electric light and determined that £9500 was a fair price for the gasworks. The Mayor, Aldermen Glass, Lamb and Curtis were appointed to meet other companies seeking negotiations.

Two days later, the Armidale Municipal Progress Association called a public meeting in the School of Arts on Thursday 18 October 1917 to discuss the issue of electricity for Armidale. Robert Richardson chaired the meeting and apart from a number of residents, the mayor attended accompanied by Aldermen Cohen, Lamb, Ashton and Lonsdale. Concerned that the group might attempt to dictate terms to council, the mayor appealed for their assistance and outlined the issues applying to the sale of their gasworks. After a number of speakers, Dr. Harris moved: 'this Association is in favour of installing the electric light system in Armidale if possible'.¹⁰

The aldermen took exception to criticism in the local press concerning council's negotiations. Not amused, the *Armidale Express*, 26 October 1917 commented 'the press have no desire to indulge in any dictation to the Council nor indulge in any unfair criticism'. Whilst negotiations were underway, Tenterfield opened its electric light station on 31 October 1917.

On 6 November 1917 Mr Hope representing the Gara Hydro Electric syndicate submitted an offer to purchase the gasworks prior to the installation of electricity for the city. Council rejected the proposal on the ground 'the terms of the letter were altogether too vague and indefinite'¹¹ But he was asked to provide further detail on the cash offer for the gasworks, the unit charge for the gas and the date of provision of electricity. This information was finally provided and tabled to council in January 1918. After exhaustive consideration, Mr Hope was informed 'the Council considers the time is not opportune ... and does not propose to give the matter any further consideration for the present'.¹²

In August 1919, Pinto met with Armidale Municipal Council to demonstrate 'that he was in a position to offer a supply of current to Armidale'.¹³ At the meeting, he informed council that he had sufficient material in first class order which was purchased at pre-war prices. Council still refused to accept Pinto's offer and again in November Pinto unsuccessfully approached council with the Gara scheme.

¹⁰ *Armidale Express*, 19 October 1917, p.3.

¹¹ *Armidale Express*, 16 November 1917, p.4.

¹² *Armidale Express*, 25 January 1918, p.10.

¹³ *Armidale Express*, 15 August 1919, p.3.

Not impressed by the delays, the *Armidale Express*, 5 March 1920 correspondent wrote 'with every passing month the ratepayers of Armidale ... are becoming more and more insistent ... the city should be modernised by the installation of electric light and power'. In May a consulting engineer Mr Franki visited the area to investigate the possibility of electricity for Armidale. He was accompanied by Mayor William Curtis, and Aldermen Lamb, Purkiss and Mills in his investigation of the Gara as a 'possible water supply'.¹⁴ Then followed, an inspection of the electric plant at the Gara Falls. At the same time, a local businessman Mr Sullivan, met with council and proposed a scheme. In his discussions, he commented:

For the past 16 years electric light had ... been supplied to Hillgrove by a hydro-electric plant in the neighbourhood and even by the old plant there were 320,000 gallons in eight hours and produce about 60 h.p.¹⁵

An optional poll of ratepayers on the question of installing electric light was taken on 23 October 1920. Only 18% of the 764 ratepayers voted with 86 being in favour of electricity and 53 against.

Chief Electrical Engineer in the Public Works, and an expert in hydro-electricity Mr Corin, visited Armidale in December 1920 to 'investigate the possibilities of the Gara Fall'.¹⁶ The Mayor and Alderman Corin, Purkiss and Lamb accompanied Mr Curtin in the inspection of Mr Pinto's power house at Gara and the old dam near the top of the Baker's Creek falls. The *Armidale Chronicle*, 8 December commented:

He should be able to give the council some very useful information bearing upon the possibilities of generating hydro-electricity for Armidale... Mr Corin mentions ... that one of the great draw-backs of hydro-electricity without enormous consumption of current was the capital cost.

Even the detailed investigations and the previous offers by J. Pinto, were not enough to persuade council to accept hydro-electric power. Following a meeting with an electrical engineer, H.A. Marshall of Sydney, council agreed in August 1921 to call tenders for the supply of Armidale. Described as 'a momentous meeting' by the local press, a special meeting of council was held on Monday 7 November 1921 to consider a tender lodged by Mr. H.A. Marshall.

The Armidale City Council established an agreement with the City of Armidale Electric Supply Company in 1921 but in January 1922 the council's solicitor

¹⁴ *Armidale Chronicle*, 12 May 1920, p.4.

¹⁵ *Armidale Express*, 11 May 1920, p.4.

¹⁶ *Armidale Chronicle*, 4 December 1920, p.4.

recommended that the draft agreement to supply electricity to Armidale by H.A. Marshall not be accepted. Next month council received correspondence from Marshall naming Thomas E. Cadwalade, electrical manufacturer, Ashfield and Gordon Smith, Bondi, business manager as bondsmen. Once the initial problems were overcome, the new agreement for the electricity supply was finally accepted in June when council was indemnified.

H.A. Marshall and his staff arrived in Armidale on Thursday 16 February 1922 to begin installation and the company located its offices in a temporary office. Council approached the Lands Department in May to have the Market Square reserve revoked and the land dedicated in two areas for a site for the power house and a site for a public baths. The district surveyor informed the mayor and town clerk that the reserve could not be revoked. At the same time, the Armidale Electric Supply Company had bought an allotment and were well on the way to constructing a powerhouse.

The City of Armidale Electric Supply Company was registered with a nominal capital of £25 000 with an immediate issue of £5000 shares of £1 each in the company. Shares taken up in the City of Armidale Electric Supply Company meant a 'five per cent rebate on consumption charges to all shareholders with 25 or more shares'.¹⁷ The Managing Director and Superintendent Engineer H.A. Marshall announced that 'on and after 13 May 1922 the offices of the City of Armidale Electric Supply Company Limited will be situated at the power house, Rusden Street, Armidale'.¹⁸

A further electricity agreement between the council and the contractors was reached on 12 June when council was indemnified. Twelve months after the arrival of H.A. Marshall by train in Armidale, the electricity was switched on Saturday 12 August 1922. The occasion was marked by the cutting of blue ribbon by Mrs Marshall; band playing; speeches and the 100 horsepower Ruston Hornsby suction gas engine providing electricity to the 100 Armidale's consumers. Because Governor Sir Walter Davidson had not given his assent to the agreement the gathering could not be officially recognised by council. A further agreement was reached between Marshall and council on 4 September and the agreement with the Electric Supply Company received the Governor's approval on 22 December 1922. Understandably, the creation of an Armidale supply of electricity signalled the death knell of Hillgrove electricity from the Gara works because a viable market was now closed.

The new power house covered an area of 50 feet frontage by 120 feet deep and included a spacious show room and offices, machine room, workshop stores, baths, meter and barrack rooms situated on the corner of Rusden and Allingham Streets.

¹⁷ *Armidale Chronicle*, 13 May 1922, p.4.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Alderman Johnstone was elected a director of the company in August 1922 and under the Local Government Act 1919 had to resign from council as an alderman. By March 1923 the guarantors for the Electric Supply Company's bank overdraft included graziers, a builder, businessmen, investors, professional men and investors namely: F.J. White, G.F. Nott, Dr Ritchie, S.C. Wilson, Eustace Simpson, J.L.G. Johnstone, Dr Harris, C.F. Tindal, Mrs B.M. Jenkins and N.N. Dangar.

The 'total expenditure of the works, including plant and machinery and the reticulation installation of the town, had cost ... £25,550'¹⁹ by March 1923. To pay for this about £16 000 had been subscribed in shares and about £2000 in debenture issue. Electric street lighting commenced on 1 April 1923 and later 110 blue enamel street name signs were placed on the electric light poles. Council received a report in May that the cost of lighting up the City of Armidale by electricity for April 'was approximately £35, the cost of twelve months would therefore be about £420, as against £650 for gas lighting'.²⁰

Council refused the request of the company in 1924 to an extension of the franchise for a longer period than the first ten years mentioned in the agreement. On 19 December 1924 council 'unanimously decided to become one of the constituent councils in the proposed county council to be formed for the purpose of supplying electricity from the proposed Jackadgery Hydro-Electricity Scheme.'²¹ At a later stage council was reluctantly compelled to withdraw.

New plant costing £5000 purchased in England was installed by March 1925 at the City of Armidale Electric Light Company's power house. It consisted 'of a National six-cylinder vertical engine, directly coupled to a 200 kilowatt English electric alternator'²² and increased the existing plant's capability by one-third.

The manager of the Electric Supply Company Limited informed council in January 1927 that the company would be willing to switch on street lights when required for the whole evening. That November the company purchased plant estimated to cost £3500. The new machinery included 'a 200 h.p. Crosley-Premier horizontal 4 cylinder, 4 cycle crude-oil engine ... coupled with a British Thomas Houston alternator'.²³

A.J. Mead, engineer and manager of the Armidale Electric Supply Company reminded council in May 1928 that the first option of the franchise granted by the council would expire in four years. Directors of the company were faced with the

¹⁹ *Armidale Chronicle*, 24 March 1923, p.3.

²⁰ *Armidale Chronicle*, 5 May 1923, p.4.

²¹ *Armidale Chronicle*, 24 January 1925, p.6.

²² *Armidale Chronicle*, 4 March 1925, p.6.

²³ *Armidale Express*, 11 November 1927, p.5.

need 'to spend approximately £7,000 on improvements and additions'²⁴ and thus sought extension of the franchise for a further ten years. He urged council meet with the directors to discuss the matter. Council informed the company the matter was for a further council and could not extend the proposal beyond 5 January 1933. The *Armidale Chronicle*, 26 May 1928 believed the attitude was incomprehensible and commented: 'The Company's request was fair and reasonable'.

The *Armidale Chronicle*, 4 July 1928 published the annual report of the City Of Armidale Electric Supply Company. The report summarised the company's business for the past six years:

Revenue: 1923, £2069; 1924, £2513; 1925, £7040; 1926, £9435; 1927, £10,770; 1928, £12,334. Expenses: 1923, £3481; 1924, £5599; 1925, £6574; 1926, £10,770; 1927, £7873; 1928, £7650. Net loss: 1923, £1772; 1924, £782. Profit: 1925, £466; 1926, £2677; 1927, £2897; 1928 £4968.

By June 1928 a Crossley-Premier 200 h.p. unit to supplement the existing plant was being assembled on concrete beds. The cost of the plant and its installation was about £3500.

Consulting engineer, R.J. Franki informed council in July 1930 council 'would show a profit of £2,200 a year as a result of taking over the local Electric Supply Company and purchasing current from Tamworth'.²⁵ Heated exchanges between aldermen took place at a special meeting in July called to discuss the Franki report but finally council appointed representatives to confer with representatives of the Armidale Electric Supply Company to determine the value of the company's plant. In August council decided unanimously against granting an extension of the present franchise to enable the company to obtain bulk current from Tamworth or to instal additional plant.

Initially the company entered into a ten year contract with council 'and the franchise definitely stipulated 8d per unit as the price for lighting current'.²⁶ Council did allow the company to increase its charges to 9d but in February 1932 council believed the company should now adhere to the price mentioned in the contract. In the same month, council reduced lighting from 9d to 8d against the company's wishes.

Council refused to renew the franchise in 1931. The franchise was due to lapse in December 1932 and in May council accepted a resolution from the water and lighting committee: 'That in order to commence preliminary negotiations the city

²⁴ *Armidale Chronicle*, 9 May 1928, p.3.

²⁵ *Armidale Express*, 4 July 1930, p.6.

²⁶ *Armidale Express*, 24 February 1932, p.8.

of Armidale Electricity Supply Company be invited to submit its settling price, in detail, for Council's consideration'.²⁷

Consequently the company supplied a detailed statement of the valuation of £30 369 at the end of June. At the same time it applied for an alternative extension of the franchise for the next twenty five years. The special committee appointed to investigate the take over of the company, presented its preliminary report to council in July. The committee recommended the appointment of a qualified person to provide a comprehensive report. The Brisbane engineering firm Harding, Frew and Company was selected from thirteen applicants at a special meeting of council on Thursday 25 August to act as consultants concerning the proposal to take over the undertaking. C. Harding Frew consulting engineer appeared to present his report to council in September. 'Subject to certain financial arrangements being finalised,' he 'recommended the Armidale City Council purchase the electric supply undertaking from the company, and run it as a municipal concern'.²⁸

Following a heated debate at a special council meeting on Monday 19 September 1932 observed by the consulting engineer, staff, the auditor W.S. Forsyth, the chairman and secretary of the Electric Light Company, F. Lamb and A.J. Meade, aldermen rejected the report despite the fact that complete valuations were not finalised. Four days later council reversed the decision until the consultant's valuation was completed. The consulting engineer, H. Frew again presented his report to council in November and recommended council should exercise its option but at a special meeting held on Monday 21 November council decided against purchase of the company by eight votes to four.

A public meeting convened by Mayor W.H. Watson at the request of a number of prominent residents, was held in the town hall later that month and by a large majority a motion was carried that the council should purchase the company. Consequently, council planned an optional poll of ratepayers of the electors on 21 December to secure an expression of opinion from the Armidale community. Two questions were asked: Question 1 (for electors and ratepayers)- Are you in favour of council exercising its option of purchase of the assets of the City of Armidale Electric Supply Company. Question 2 (ratepayers)- Are you in favour of council borrowing the sum of £25 500 for the purchase of the City of Armidale Electric Supply Company. The referendum created only little interest: 33% of the electors voted on question 1 with 708 in favour and 429 against. For the ratepayers, 58% voted 292 for and 309 against. Thus 'by the very narrow margin of 17 votes ... ratepayers of Armidale upheld the Armidale City Council, in its decision not to purchase the City of Armidale Electric Supply Company's electricity undertaking'.²⁹

²⁷ *Armidale Express*, 18 May 1932, p.3.

²⁸ *Armidale Express*, 19 September 1932, p.4.

²⁹ *Armidale Express*, 23 December 1932, p.4.

In March 1933 council determined that the account of £754 3s 6d from the consultant Frew was excessive and asked him to submit the account 'to an arbitrator appointed by the Institution of Engineers, Australia'.³⁰ At the time, council was confronted by a number of disputes within and outside council and heated exchanges took place between aldermen in January 1934 when they discussed the electric light franchise. Ald. Watson proposed successfully a motion seeking the Department of Local Government 'to send an efficient officer to Armidale to make an inquiry regarding the new electric supply franchise'.³¹ That month, engineer, Sir John Butters was appointed arbitrator in the dispute between council and A.E. Harding Frew.

The Mayor, Aldermen M.H.O'Connor and A. Homer Fletcher left for Sydney in February 1934 to meet with the Minister for Local Government Mr Spooner concerning the electric light franchise. A.H. Benjamin, an electrical engineer from the Department of Public Works visited Armidale in April on the mayor's invitation. 'His principal mission was to decide whether Armidale presented a suitable case for bulk supply'.³² Council approached the minister in June for a decision on the franchise agreement to allow council to call tenders for 'two new oil driven generating sets to meet the 1935 winter load for Armidale'.³³

An acrimonious and bitter debate took place in July 1934 when the communication from the Minister for Local Government, Mr Spooner concerning the franchise and the report on the undertaking of the A.H. Benjamin, an officer of the Public Works Department was tabled. Council was informed it had no power to grant a franchise in perpetuity. The dispute continued in August when council discussed a letter from the company concerning 'the method of determining depreciation of plant, etc., and the period of tenure'.³⁴ At this stage, council and the company had not reached an agreement on these matters. Aldermen Watson, Dawson and Rowe left the chambers which compelled Mayor O'Connor to close the meeting. On Monday 3 September 1934 council agreed 'to grant the company a franchise for a period of 10 years from date of the Governor's approval before having the right to first exercise of option of purchase'.³⁵

The engineer and manager, A.J. Mead called tenders in October 1934 for the erection of a new store and meter room, a new pump room and removal and removal and re-erection of partitions in the engine room.

³⁰ *Armidale Express*, 22 March 1933, p.6.

³¹ *Armidale Express*, 24 January 1934, p.4.

³² *Armidale Express*, 11 April 1934, p.3.

³³ *Armidale Express*, 13 June 1934, p.4.

³⁴ *Armidale Express*, 22 August 1934, p.4.

³⁵ *Armidale Express*, 5 September 1934, p.6.

The proposals of council embodied in the franchise to be granted to the City of Armidale Electric Supply Company were not approved by the Local Government Department and a special meeting of council was held in October 1934. At that stage, a minority letter from council had been forwarded to the Department as well as a petition signed by over 1000 Armidale residents. Protracted and at times, bitter debate dominated many council meetings in 1934 and 1935 concerning purchase of the company. Council invited company representatives in March 1935 to meet with council to determine the purchase price of the assets. The *Armidale Express*, 15 May commented: 'the Council's duty is to finalise the matter at the earliest opportunity, and certainly before December next, when its right to exercise its option of purchase recurs'. However the company was not prepared to meet with council because of council's decision to appoint a valuator to examine the electricity assets.

At the same time as these negotiations were underway, a conference took place at Glen Innes to investigate a scheme to cost £250 000 utilising the headwaters of the Dandahra Creek, forty miles from Glen Innes. The towns to be served included Armidale, Glen Innes, Inverell and Tenterfield and delegates undertook 'to bring the proposals before their respective Council'.³⁶ Council agreed to be represented at a further conference at Glen Innes in April 1935.

In June 1935 R.J.Reynolds the Sydney valuer appointed by council to value the assets of the company was instructed to commence his work immediately. Acting on instructions from the Board of Directors, the manager informed council 'no permission will be given by the company for the inspection and valuation as set out in your letter'.³⁷

Reynolds, an electrical engineer arrived in Armidale in July 1935 but the mayor, the town clerk and Reynolds were formally refused admission to the works by the Chairman of the Directors, Mr Lamb. At a special meeting of council, aldermen decided to refer the dispute to arbitration but the *Armidale Express*, 15 July 1935 commented: 'we maintain that Council could strengthen its hand by taking a poll of ratepayers at once, as there is no guarantee that even after the costly legal fight the ratepayers will endorse the decision to purchase'.

As a result of two conferences between the Armidale City Council and the directors of the Electric Supply Company by November, it was announced 'a tentative agreement had been arrived at regarding the future control of the undertaking'.³⁸ Next month council agreed to permit the company to carry on under the existing franchise until completion of the purchase.

³⁶ *Armidale Express*, 20 February 1935, p.2.

³⁷ *Armidale Express*, 10 July 1935, p.6.

³⁸ *Armidale Express*, 27 November 1935, p.4.

Council was informed in March 1936 by the Local Government Department that an ordinary loan under section 177(1) of the Local Government Act 1919 was not available for the purchase of assets of an existing electricity undertaking. Council could not secure necessary funds for the purchase of the company without a referendum from the ratepayers. In May the valuation report of L.J. Reynolds on the electrical undertaking was presented to council. Representatives of council and the Electric Supply Company met in camera in June to consider the points in dispute in the attempt to avoid costly litigation and then the *Armidale Express*, 24 June 1936 announced 'Peace Proclaimed At Last'. At the same time, council advertised its proposal to borrow £35 000 to acquire the electrical supply undertaking.

In July 1936 details were published of the conditions under which council proposed 'to purchase the undertaking of the City of Armidale Electric Supply Co. Ltd.'³⁹ A number of aldermen expressed concern about some features of the advertisement concerning the loan and this stand was reinforced by the Department of Local Government and Works which informed council in July 1936 that 'the financial arrangements, did not meet with the approval of the Department ... and in certain particulars alterations were required'.⁴⁰ The points of objection were overcome and in August the terms and conditions with the Commonwealth Savings Bank loan were accepted. Council again advertised its intention to borrow £33 000 in September for the purpose of purchasing the assets of the City of Armidale Electricity Supply Co. Ltd.

Some further delays were caused by the department insisting on clarification on conditions of the loan but finally the formal handing over of the electricity undertaking to council took place on 30 November 1936 at the power house. The mayor presented a cheque for £32 733 6s 11d to the chairman F. Lamb and the *Armidale Express*, 2 December 1936 commented: 'good fellowship permeated the gathering, and in the subsequent speeches opportunity was taken for the public withdrawal of statements made in the heat of innumerable debates which raged during the period of transition'.

Private franchise provided electricity in Armidale and Uralla up to 1936. In that year Armidale City Council took over the franchise holders in Armidale and an agreement was reached in 1938 to supply electricity to the Municipalities of Walcha and Uralla.

Rendel, Palmer and Tritton, consulting engineers, London were commissioned by the N.S.W. government to make a detailed report on the development of electricity in the state. Terms of reference included: reporting on power demand; investigating alternatives to steam power generation; investigation of new hydro electric schemes including the Wollomombi, Chandler, Oaky and Styx Rivers as

³⁹ *Armidale Express*, 10 July 1936, p.6.

⁴⁰ *Armidale Express*, 22 July 1936, p.7.

well as investigating the supply and main transmission as well as local distribution.

Once organizations such as the Armidale orphanage which was outside the boundaries of the municipality applied for the installation of electricity, it was necessary for council to enter into an agreement with the Dumaresq Shire. In December the shire advised council it would approve 'the draft agreement for the proposed extension of electricity to the area of the Dumaresq Shire'⁴¹ but retained the right to make alterations. In January 1937 the Department of Works and Local Government forwarded a number of comments for council's consideration in the matter of extending the electricity undertaking into the Dumaresq Shire. The Dumaresq Shire approved of the draft agreement in May and in August, the Department of Works and Local Government approved the extension of the electricity.

The engineer manager, A.J. Mead advised council in January 1938 that the total generation for 1937 was 1 041 475 units compared with 899 830 in 1936.

In February 1938 council adopted a draft agreement for the supply of electricity in bulk to Uralla. Gostwyck Shire forwarded the signed electricity supply agreement and 'council decided to complete the agreement and submit it, for departmental approval'.⁴² That month the Governor also approved the agreement for the supply of bulk electricity to Walcha Municipal Council.

The first annual report of Armidale's electricity undertaking was presented in May 1938 and revealed a prosperous position. In July 1938 council was informed the Governor had 'approved the installation ... of an additional generating unit having a full load rating not exceeding 400 kilowatts'.⁴³ Council applied for a loan of £5000 in August for the erection, construction carrying out of extensions to the electricity works as well as the purchase of necessary machinery and equipment. Council agreed to call tenders for 'additional generating plant for the electricity powerhouse and a travelling crane, estimated to cost approximately £13,000'.⁴⁴ A.E. Axon of Brisbane was to be employed as consulting engineer to assist the manager Mr Mead decide the type of plant to be selected- gas or oil once tenders were received. He attended a special meeting of Council on 17 September and recommended both new generators should be suction gas and the installation of special wood handling equipment to deal with increased volumes of wood. Mr Mead returned to Queensland with Mr Axon to inspect a number of gas and oil installations at Stanthorpe, Warwick, Toowoomba, Dalby, Kingaroy, Murgon, Gympie and Nambour.

⁴¹ *Armidale Express*, 16 December 1936, p.2.

⁴² *Armidale Express*, 6 July 1938, p.2.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Armidale Express*, 31 August 1938, p.7.

By September 1938 the electricity trading fund showed a debit balance of £1970 10s 'after an expenditure of £5161.11.9 including principally the purchase price of equipment for the electricity transmission line to Uralla'.⁴⁵ Uralla was provided with reticulated electricity by November.

In December 1938 council took action to borrow a £16 000 loan over a fifteen year period for the purchase and installation of additional generating plant. At the same time the tender of Arthur Snashell Pty Ltd was accepted:

for the supply, delivery and erection of two 400 horse power Commonwealth gas producers, two 400/360 B.H.P. Fag 8-cylinder National vertical suction gas engines, two 235 KW Crompton Parkinson alternators with spares and auxiliaries for the sum of £13 228. 8s.⁴⁶

Tenders were also to be called for the erection of a water cooler and for a firing platform and wood hoisting equipment.

The 1938 annual report indicated the net surplus was £1281 8s 6d and the total number of consumers was 1696.

In January 1939 the Department of Works and Local Government advised council the Governor approved the proposal to raise an ordinary loan of £5000 for the extension of the electricity works and the purchase of machinery and equipment. The tender of F. Snashall, Sydney for £16 000 was accepted for the purchase of new generating plant in February. By that stage, £12 000 had been 'spent on the extension of the electricity supply to Uralla and Walcha'.⁴⁷

Agreements for the supply of electricity to the Shires of Gostwyck and Apsley were changed to include all amendments suggested by the Department of Works and Local Government in February 1939 and then submitted for the Governor's approval. Reticulated electricity was provided for Walcha by April. Council had just ordered new generating plant for £16 000 but in May was informed by the Department of Works and Local Government plant could not be financed by an ordinary loan under Section 177 of the Local Government Act.

The electricity committee advised council in July 1939 that the request for the Uralla Municipal Council to extend mains outside the municipal area was receiving consideration. At the same time the committee tabled costs of rural extensions and government subsidies. But in August, the Uralla Council was

⁴⁵ *Armidale Express*, 28 September 1938, p.7.

⁴⁶ *Armidale Express*, 21 December 1938, p.3.

⁴⁷ *Armidale Express*, 6 February 1939, p.4.

advised 'that the Council could not depart from the terms of the agreement, to allow electricity extensions outside its area'.⁴⁸

The contractors bedded down the bedplate of the first engine, which, with its alternator, was delivered complete at the power house in August 1939. A start was also made on the water cooling tower and both producer foundations were completed. The Department of Works and Local Government advised council in October consent had been given to the installation of two main generating units in the Armidale power house. The agreement of the extension to the Apsley and Gostwyck Shires was also approved and the proposal to raise a special loan of £16 000 for extension of the electricity undertaking was granted in November 1939.

During 1940, two 400 h.p. gas engines with producers were installed for £13 500 along with a new £2500 switchboard and these installations provided daily service for a greater part of the year. The Department of Works and Local Government in December 1940 emphasised council's responsibility in withholding permits for enlistment to men need to maintain electricity supply systems.

In 1940 council discussed the establishment of the 1000 k.w. scheme Styx scheme 'but this did not find favour with the Electricity Advisory Committee because it conflicted with the Styx George's Creek scheme'.⁴⁹

Because of the shortage of transport to carry firewood, council informed the Department of Local Government that gas would 'be considered as a substitute for wood to generate electricity ... in the future'.⁵⁰ Such action was not taken and the contractor encountered problems in obtaining the cartage of wood to the electricity undertaking. Following council approaches, Captain J.H. Abbott promised in May 1943 to 'take up the matter with the Liquid Fuel Control Board'.⁵¹ The Hon D.H. Drummond also promised to seek an additional petrol allowance.

Council voiced its objection in March 1943 to the Commonwealth Controller of Electricity's report 'that Armidale could carry on with four generating units to maintain supplies for Armidale, Guyra and Uralla'.⁵² At that stage, the plant had three wood and three oil fuel units.

Engineer and manager S.D.Berry reported to council in February 1944 he had met with Uralla and Gostwyck Shire Council representatives. These 'members ...

⁴⁸ *Armidale Express*, 16 August 1939, p.7.

⁴⁹ *Armidale Express*, 26 September 1947, p.5.

⁵⁰ *Armidale Express*, 12 August 1942, p.6.

⁵¹ *Armidale Express*, 2 June 1943, p.6.

⁵² *Armidale Express*, 10 March 1943, p.6.

expressed complete satisfaction with the way Armidale Council was operating electricity supply in their area'.⁵³ In April council announced its policy on the supply of electricity to new rural customers where a recommendation for supply was made by the local War Agricultural Committee.

During 1944 difficulties began to emerge in the plant available. Efforts were being made by February to locate a second hand stack to eliminate the smoke nuisance at the power house. Concerned at the continued failure of the gas engines at the power house, council asked the National Gas Engine Co. Ltd., in England in June 1944 'what it proposes to do in the matter of compensation or ... alterations'.⁵⁴ At the same time council rejected a report submitted by Wilson, mechanical engineer of the Toowoomba Electric Supply Company on the gas engines. The engineer and manager S.D. Berry obtained a quote in February 1945 for an English turbine generator set for £7000 which could be delivered in 18 months. The Minister for Local Government, J.J. Cahill advised council in May 1946 that the application to raise £10 000 for the purchase and erection of new generating plant had been approved by the Lieutenant Governor. Because of increasing demands for electricity, council installed a new Mirrlees diesel 400 k.w. engine in September and in October placed an order for a 1000 horse power diesel generating unit.

For several weeks prior to July 1944, it was 'necessary to periodically restrict supplies to power users, and on occasions street lights have been turned off until the commercial lighting'⁵⁵ load had eased. Most of the trouble had been caused by the persistent seizure of pistons in the gas producing engines at the powerhouse. That month the Mayor Ald. L.E. Dawson and the council's electrical engineer met with the Local Government Department in Sydney to discuss the electricity supply problems. After consultation with Mr Brain, Chief Electrical Engineer of the Local Government Department, council decided to:

- (1) proceed with inquiries for two 750 k.w. steam turbines and boilers;
- (2) request quotations from Tamworth for bulk supply;
- (3) obtain ... reports and estimates for a modified hydro electric scheme on the Gara River.⁵⁶

Armidale City Council met members of the Uralla and Walcha Municipal Councils and Gostwyck, Apsley and Dumaresq Shire Councils at Armidale on 31 August 1944 to discuss the electricity supply questions. Representatives of the municipalities and shires at the meeting criticised one of the proposals by the State Government that Armidale procure its electricity supply in bulk from Tamworth. Other proposals suggested by the government included the

⁵³ *Armidale Express*, 23 February 1944, p.11.

⁵⁴ *Armidale Express*, 14 June 1944, p.11.

⁵⁵ *Armidale Express*, 12 July 1944, p.6.

⁵⁶ *Armidale Express*, 26 July 1944, p.11.

establishment of a steam turbine station at Armidale and a hydro-electric scheme at the Gara river.

In a detailed report to council in September 1944, the electricity engineer and manager S.D. Berry recommended an investigation of a possible establishment of a generating station at the Styx River. Council supported the recommendation. In October council adopted a recommendation from Berry that permission be sought from the State Electricity Advisory Committee 'to install a 1000 k.w. water generating set on the Styx River at an estimated cost of £56 184⁵⁷ or alternatively an Oaky River system at an estimated cost of £83 160.

In the six months period ended 30 June 1944, the electricity undertaking showed income totalled £9938 and expenditure £11 709; a loss of £1771. Despite a request for permission to raise the cost of the local electricity tariff, the Department of Trade and customs informed council in June 1944 'it was most unlikely ... that approval for an increased tariff would be given'.⁵⁸ Concerned with the estimated accumulated loss for 1943 and 1944 of £5250 and the refusal by the Commonwealth Government to increase charges, aldermen threatened 'to give the Prices Branch 28 days notice that unless finality was reached, council would ignore the Branch's edit and increase charges'.⁵⁹ Council registered a protest to the Local Government Association in January 1945 'against any proposal of the State Government which would operate to take full control of their electricity undertakings'.⁶⁰

The electricity works received a setback in December 1944 when a major fire occurred at the electricity department and destroyed hundreds of tons of firewood, thousands of gallons of fuel oil, a large weatherboard building and a two-ton motor truck.

Delegates from Uralla, Walcha, Dumaresq, Apsley and Gostwyck municipalities and shires, attended a conference organised by Armidale Municipality Council on 30 January 1945. The conference discussed two alternatives: 'firstly, the purchase of bulk supply from Tamworth, and secondly, the installation of a hydro-scheme either at the Styx River or at the Oaky River'.⁶¹ Action was taken in February to employ Donoghue and Carter, consulting engineers of Sydney to survey the field concerning a proposed hydro-electric scheme. In April, council informed the State Electricity Advisory Committee that 'it urges the merits of the Oaky Scheme of hydro electricity development'⁶² and requested approvals to enable money to be borrowed for necessary generating plant and equipment.

⁵⁷ *Armidale Express*, 1 November 1944, p.5.

⁵⁸ *Armidale Express*, 28 June 1944, p.8.

⁵⁹ *Armidale Express*, 29 November 1944, p.5.

⁶⁰ *Armidale Express*, 10 January 1945, p.6.

⁶¹ *Armidale Express*, 31 January 1945, p.6.

⁶² *Armidale Express*, 23 April 1945, p.4.

Acting on advice from the Department of Local Government and the Electricity Advisory Committee, council took steps in June to implement the Styx River hydro-electric scheme. That month, representatives of Walcha, Uralla, Dumaresq, Apsley and Gostwyck Shires met with Armidale City Council in camera to confer on the proposed scheme. Members of the Armidale City Council and Dumaresq Shire, accompanied by Captain J.D. Brown and S.D. Berry inspected sites of the proposed hydro-electric scheme on the Styx and Oakey Rivers.

Council's request for a price increase was forwarded to the Commonwealth Prices Commissioner in February 1945. Council was advised in March that the application would be submitted to the Prices Stabilisation Committee once 1944 accounts were received. Meantime 'claims could be lodged with the Deputy Prices Committee in Sydney for payment of the subsidy in accordance with the decision of the committee to subsidise council from July 1, 1944'.⁶³ Council decided to apply.

By March 1945 a dispute had arisen between the City Council and Uralla Municipal and Gostwyck Shire Councils over whether Tamworth Council would supply Uralla and Walcha or bulk power to Armidale only. Then in April the Uralla, Walcha, Apsley, Dumaresq and Gostwyck electricity bulk supply committee circulated a letter 'asking the Minister for Works to consider the cancellation of existing arrangements between Armidale City Council and the councils represented on the committee'.⁶⁴ Dumaresq Shire Council was not prepared to support the move because it did not have an agreement with Armidale. The Dumaresq Shire also decided to oppose the development of the Styx River hydro electric scheme because of a possible detraction 'from the potentialities of the Styx-Georges Creek scheme as suggested by Messrs Rendall, Palmer and Tritton'.⁶⁵

Tamworth City Council informed Armidale in October 1945 it was not prepared to pay £2000 for the "retarded use" of Armidale's generating plant or purchase the transmission line between Armidale and the boundary of Dumaresq and Gostwyck Shires or the second hand utility truck. If the items listed 'were omitted from Armidale's offer, the Tamworth City Council would make an inspection and valuation of the remainder of the transmission line and the sub-station, with a view to purchase'.⁶⁶

The auditor reported the electricity undertaking was losing £10 daily and council applied in March 1946 'to the Prices Commission for all tariffs except primary

⁶³ *Armidale Express*, 7 March 1945, p.8.

⁶⁴ *Armidale Express*, 13 April 1945, p.6.

⁶⁵ *Armidale Express*, 13 July 1945, p.8.

⁶⁶ *Armidale Express*, 31 October 1945, p.8.

domestic ... be increased by 1/2d per unit as from April 1'.⁶⁷ In September council made a further application to the Prices Commissioner for an immediate increase of 1/2d per secondary unit because of expected losses.

In August 1946 council decided to inform Dumaresq Shire that Armidale was in a position to supply current to the shire council for distribution' and asked Dumaresq 'to indicate its requirements and the point of supply. Following a request by the Armidale Chamber of Commerce, the electricity committee took action in September to 'prepare for publication a report on council's plans for the development of the city's electricity supply'.⁶⁸ Council reaffirmed its intention that month of proceeding with the Styx River hydro-electric proposal.

In October 1946 council agreed to meet representatives of Uralla and Walcha municipal councils to discuss 'conditions of release of these councils from the franchise covering electricity supply'.⁶⁹ A request for extension of electricity supplies to Dumaresq, Rocky River, Kentucky and Kentucky South was received by council in January 1947. A conference was to be held at Armidale on 12 February. Dumaresq residents were informed in February that council was willing and able to extend electricity. Dumaresq Shire preferred to purchase electricity in bulk from the City Council and then arrange distribution. Council was also willing to extend electricity to Gostwyck Shire Council but 'long delays in the supply of materials and equipment make it impossible to state within what period of time the work could be carried out'.⁷⁰

Representatives of Armidale, Uralla, Gostwyck, Apsley, Walcha and Dumaresq municipalities and shires met Tamworth Council, the Department of Local Government and the State Electricity Authority in Armidale in February 1947. Uralla and Walcha indicated they were considering taking electricity from Tamworth in bulk rather than Armidale. The conference decided to notify councils 'steps should be taken immediately to investigate matters concerning the generation and distribution of electric current'.⁷¹ Renewed requests for the extension of electricity were made by Dumaresq and Gostwyck Shire Councils for Dangarsleigh, Dumaresq, Rocky River and Kentucky areas in June.

Ald. L.E. Dawson informed council in March 1947 that a conference of representatives of the Regional Development Committees 1, 2, 3, 8 and 12 was to be called to discuss electrical development in northern N.S.W. Following the call by the state authority and support from northern councils, a conference was held at Glen Innes on Saturday 19 April to discuss major rural electricity extension plans for the northern part of N.S.W. The conference recommended that 'five

⁶⁷ *Armidale Express*, 6 March 1946, p.8.

⁶⁸ *Armidale Express*, 4 September 1946, p.8.

⁶⁹ *Armidale Express*, 16 October 1946, p.13.

⁷⁰ *Armidale Express*, 5 February 1947, p.13.

⁷¹ *Armidale Express*, 14 February 1947, p.13.

regional committees, embracing an area bounded by Murwillumbah, Kempsey, Tamworth and Wialda ... be invited to appoint two delegates to an Investigation Committee on rural electricity'.⁷²

Council announced an increase in electricity tariffs in June 1947 for domestic and industrial power. Lighting primary units were to remain at 6d per unit. Council also determined to press for an increase in the government subsidy for 1946.⁷³ Council revealed that the income and expenditure for the 12 months ended 31 December 1946 showed 'after allowing for a £1 000 subsidy, the undertaking had shown a deficit of £3 500'.⁷⁴ J.P. Abbott MHR agreed to take up the matter of the subsidy with the minister.

The Electricity Development Act, 1946 established an 'Electricity Authority, empowering it to recommend the constitution of new county districts and the alteration of existing boundaries'.⁷⁵ The Authority developed a policy of extending electricity to rural areas and grants were introduced in 1947 under a rural subsidy scheme.

A conference was held in Armidale on 25 September 1947 between representatives of the State Electricity Authority and Tableland local government authorities. The conference decided to recommend to interested councils the establishment of: a hydro-electric generating station on the Oakey River; the formation of a county council to control the generation and distribution of electricity and a power agreement with Tamworth City Council where this council purchases Oakey electricity and sells power to the county council when there is a deficit of power generated.

Some aldermen were disappointed the Styx scheme was not favoured but accepted the Oakey River scheme. Council informed the Department of Local Government in October 1947 of its desire to join the County Council for the purpose of generating electricity by a scheme established on the Oakey River. But assistance was sought from the New South Wales Electricity Authority to obtain plant to assist council in the interim.

Dumaresq Shire asked council 'to proceed with rural extensions with as little delay as possible'⁷⁶ in November 1947. The lack of transformers and material held up work on the extensions but some survey work was underway.

⁷² *Armidale Express*, 23 April 1947, p.8.

⁷³ *Armidale Express*, 11 June 1947, p.4.

⁷⁴ *Armidale Express*, 25 June 1947 p.5.

⁷⁵ F.A. Larcombe, *The Advancement of Local Government in New South Wales 1906 to the Present. A History of Local Government in New South Wales: Volume 3*, Sydney University Press in association with the Local Government Association of New South Wales, Brisbane, 1978, pp. 258-259.

⁷⁶ *Armidale Express*, 12 November 1947, p.5.

A motion to hasten the formation of a County Council to control the generation and distribution of electricity was passed by council in November 1947. Formation of the County Council was initially delayed by the amalgamation of the Uralla Municipal Council and Gostwyck Shire Council. A conference was held in Armidale in April 1948 and recommendations on council and shire representation were forwarded to the Minister for Local Government Mr Cahill. The Minister announced the constitution of the New England County Council which was gazetted in the *N.S.W. Government Gazette*, No 84, 23 July 1948. Members of the County Council were the City of Armidale, the Municipality of Walcha and the Shires of Apsley, Uralla and Dumaresq.

In March 1948 council's consulting engineer H.G. Carter recommended Armidale City Council construct a line from the Tamworth-Inverell line to Armidale. Council adopted recommendations from the finance committee in April to apply for loans totalling £100 000 for construction of the line to bring power from Tamworth, continuation of the line to Oaky River and to Guyra. Thus the first objective of council in July was the completion of the Torryburn-Armidale power line to ensure transmission from Tamworth. The line was to be extended to Oaky River for power for use in the construction of a generating station and a further line to Guyra was also to be constructed.

The New England County Council met for the first time on 20 August 1948 and the elected delegates included Aldermen Ken Jones, D.D.H. Fayle, D.W. Cameron (Armidale City Council), T.C. Bath (Walcha Municipal Council), Councillors G.R.N. Gill (Apsley Shire Council), R.M. Heagney (Uralla Shire Council) and J.T. Elliott (Dumaresq Shire Council). Ald. Ken Jones was elected chairman and thus commenced a period of twenty five continuous years of leadership for this organisation.

Council announced that from 1 July 1950 the New England County Council was 'completely severed from the City Council and a portion of the existing counter' would be 'made available for a member of the County Council staff'.⁷⁷

The spur line to Armidale from the Torryburn take-off point was completed in 1951. The County Council now took action to close its local diesel generators and they went out of service on 9 September 1951 'after having maintained supply to the Armidale District with only minor rationing during the very difficult post war years when heavy power rationing was being experienced throughout the state and particularly in the metropolitan area'.⁷⁸

The first contract for the hydro scheme scheme was let in 1949 and the power generated by the plant was provided in February 1956. The Minister for Local

⁷⁷ *Armidale Express*, 24 May 1950, p.3.

⁷⁸ 'History of the New England County Council', in L.A. Gilbert and E.S. Elphick (Editors), *New England Readings*, Armidale College of Advanced Education, 1982, p.299.

Government and Highways, the Hon. J.B. Renshaw opened the scheme on 19 May 1956. 'During the opening address the Minister granted permission for a second generating unit to be installed and work proceeded forthwith on this unit, resulting it becoming operational in 1958'.⁷⁹

GAS.

A number of Armidale residents petitioned Mayor John Moore to call a public meeting to consider the formation of a gas company on 12 May 1883. The meeting, chaired by the mayor and attended by about 100 people was held in the town hall on Friday 25 May. H.S. Meyers presented a proposal on behalf of David Storer and Sons for the construction of a gasworks to cost £7000 or £8000. A gas committee comprising John Bliss, William Drew, John Adam McDonald, Duncan H. McDonald, M. Guigni, Robert Phillips, Joseph Scholes (Junr), John Trim (Senior), Dr. Wm. Sheldon, Peter Simpson and Charles Wilson was formed to consider the various proposals and expert advice. A public meeting attended by between 50 to 60 people and chaired by the mayor, heard a report on the proposal on Friday 13 July. Detailed discussion took place and a report was received from a representative of Storer and Sons, Mr Kitchen, the Dubbo gasworks engineer. John Moore proposed the establishment of the Armidale Gas Company and the *Armidale Express*, 3 August 1883 published the prospectus of the company and the list of provisional directors. At a meeting of provisional directors in August 1883 the 8000 shares were allotted to local capital. Two months later, John Moore formally proposed the establishment of the Armidale Gas Company.

The private company was headed by Mayor John Moore, a businessman and John Bliss a butcher. The contract for the gasworks with Gibbs and Grainger was initially signed in July 1884 to be completed in April 1885 but delays prevented its completion by this date. By August the company determined to lay about 12 000 extra feet of piping to reach a larger of consumers. The plant which used a coal carbonising process for gas extraction was opened by the mayor on Friday 23 October and the town was lighted by gas on the following Saturday.

The 1884 Municipalities Gas Act meant councils were empowered to establish gas works or to combine for their construction or the resumption of an existing undertaking. By this legislation, council could raise special loans to purchase gasworks from private firms. At a council meeting held on 28 May 1889, council decided to approach the directors of the Armidale gasworks concerning purchase of the business. In reply, the directors were willing to sell for £9500 cash or £10 000 debentures at ten years at 6%. The mayor was asked to convene a public meeting to consider the proposal.

Only 25 residents attended the public meeting convened and chaired by the mayor in the new town hall on Friday 21 June. 'After a dreary and purposeless

⁷⁹ Ibid.

discussion⁸⁰ the mayor terminated the meeting. Despite the lack of public support, Aldermen Duncan, Harper, Butler, Lonsdale and the mayor were appointed in August as a committee to confer with the directors of the company. A gas engineer Mr Wark from Tamworth was asked to complete an inspection report. Following the report, the committee recommended the purchase of the gasworks for £9500 with the works and plant complete; £500 deposit to be paid and a proper agreement drawn up and possession to take place on 1 January 1890. The town clerk was authorised to borrow £10 000 to pay for the works.⁸¹ That month an extraordinary meeting of shareholders was held to sanction the actions of the directors to sell the works to the Borough Council.

Both the directors and shareholders agreed to the sale but council encountered difficulties in the attempt to raise the necessary money. The Australian Joint Stock Bank, Commercial Bank and A.M.P. declined to lend the £10 000. Following the Governor's permission to borrow the money the town clerk was instructed to call tenders for debentures at 6% per annum at twenty years on security of the gas works.⁸² The tender of Josiah Mullins and Sons was accepted in December 1889 for the debentures and the Mayor, Alderman Trim, Simpson and Drew were instructed to sign the debentures on council's behalf and the town clerk was instructed to set the seal of the Council.⁸³

In December 1889 the gasworks manager Mr Samuel Rutter asked to be retained as manager and offered his services in any other capacity. Council informed him that they would consider his position and promised that no injustice would be done to him.

John Mede, James Edward Salmon, Charles Graham Wilson and John Bliss were appointed liquidators in January 1890 to wind up the Armidale gas Company. That month, Alderman Lonsdale reported to council that the committee appointed had met directors of the gas company and had taken over works and extras amounting to £165; making in all £9665. Two weeks later a debenture sum was received from Mullins and Sons with the cheque to be paid into the City Bank for the municipal gas account. A lighting committee of Mayor Wilson, Lonsdale, Duncan and Drew were appointed directors of the company in February and instructed to provide monthly reports. Mr Rutter was appointed sanitary inspector, clerk of works and manager of the gasworks at no increase of salary in February.

A special council meeting was held in September 1890 to consider gas prices. The gas committee recommended that the price be lowered by 10d to reduce the price to 12s 6d per 1000 cubic feet. A further reduction was offered for those

⁸⁰ *Armidale Express*, 25 June 1889, p.5.

⁸¹ Council minutes, 10 September 1889.

⁸² Council minutes, 12 November 1889.

⁸³ Council minutes, 31 December 1889.

who used up to 5000 cubic feet per month and there was to be a 5% reduction if bills were paid before the 15th day of each month. Because of increasing gas consumption, the committee also recommended the purchase of a new gas holder and tank from Parramatta in October 1890 as there was not enough storage for the next winter. Council also decided to raise a loan of £1500.

The council meeting on 24 February 1891 received a report that the gasworks had been recently flooded and to prevent flooding action was taken to construct a bank around the works by H. Schmutter. A coal contract for the next 12 months were awarded to Singleton Coal Company. By that time, the gas holder, tank and purifiers had all been pulled and the concrete work was nearly completed. Two new retorts were installed and two furnaces thoroughly repaired in time for winter. The embankment round the gasworks was completed in March and the manager reported the new gas holder and tank work was progressing well.

In August 1891 the gas committee was asked to consider a reduction in the price of gas to 10s per 1000 cubic feet and 7s 6d for cooking stoves and fires.

Because of concern about the opening of roads for pipe laying and the need for consultation between the gas manager and city engineer, council instructed Mr Rutter to prepare a plan showing the positions of gas mains in each street. Council directed that no new mains were to be laid unless under the engineer's supervision.⁸⁴ By the end of 1892, there were more than fifty gas lamps in the streets and parks throughout the city.

In April 1894 Mr Rutter was given two months notice by council that his services were to be dispensed with on 30 June. Applications were to be called for with an annual salary of £150 with house, light and fuel free. Duties involved the supervision of manufacture and distribution of gas, the collection of debts, keeping of books and all clerical work in connection with the works. W.S. Moore was appointed as manager and secretary in July and in August, he applied to council for the salary to be restored to £200. Council approved an additional sum of £25 be voted to his salary. In November 1895 he moved his family from the manager's house at the works because of its damp state.

The *Armidale Express*, 2 September 1898 reported that council approved the purchase of a new boiler, a new bench of four retorts had just been completed and the building was strengthened at a cost of £80. The report continued, 'In Mr P. Schmutter the Council have a very capable manager, and the ratepayers may congratulate themselves upon having property which is now proving to be the financial stay of the municipality'. In November 1900 the gasworks account was in credit £998 and £300 was taken and placed in the general account because it 'was overdrawn to the extent of £1149'.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Council minutes, 8 December 1891.

⁸⁵ *Armidale Argus*, 10 November 1900, p.3.

In October 1901 council determined that £200 be placed in the bank to the credit of the gasworks as a sinking fund. The April 1904 bank statement showed that the gas account was in credit to £428 0s 8d but the gas committee was asked to investigate if a greater amount of gas could be obtained and sold with the same amount of labour. In order to increase the amount of gas consumption council decided in November 1904 to canvas ratepayers wishing to use gas for cooking and lighting. The lighting committee determined prices for gas cooking and lighting but council also determined that before this arrangement be carried out a consumption averaging not less than 50 tons of coal extra be guaranteed. The committee was empowered to lease, hire or sell stoves, cookers and other gas consuming appliances. A truck of Gunnedah coal was also to be procured for a trial and the committee empowered to instal a few irrasdescent mantles on street lamps as a trial.

In December 1912 manager P. Schmutter recommended the expenditure of £145 on the gasworks. Civil engineer William Wark presented a detailed report in January 1913 'on bringing the plant and administration right up to date'.⁸⁶ He also met a number of aldermen on an inspection of the plant. Twelve months later, the *Armidale express*, 30 January 1914 announced council had installed 'five retorts at a cost of £95; and a new station Governor (was) being installed at a cost of £289 15s, as well as another appartus costing £30'. Work was also at hand to lay an additional pipe line costing £360 to give increased pressure whilst other commitments to the amount of £500 had been undertaken. A further £81 was approved for the construction of nine retorts at the gasworks in August 1916.

The Gasworkers Wages Board had also sat in 1914 for two days and the award was expected to be issued in 1915.

In November 1916 council reviewed the position concerning the local gas supply. Following an appeal to residents to be more economical, excellent results were achieved but according to a Federal proclamation, 'the Council would be liable to a penalty if any further gas were used for light, heating, or power'.⁸⁷ Because of the action of residents, council was not prepared to take further action.

In August 1917 the gas manager informed council that the coal on hand would last only fourteen days and council took action to forbid the use of gas for cooking or heating. However the mayor obtained permission for the release of a truck of coal commanded by the railway authorities and the first of thirty tons of coal arrived in Armidale in September. The manager commented the crisis is over 'but we still must be economical in consumption, as required by the Coal

⁸⁶ *Armidale Express*, 14 January 1913, p.8.

⁸⁷ *Armidale Express*, 1 December 1916, p.3.

Board'.⁸⁸ Three weeks later, council removed restrictions on cooking purposes but Town Clerk, Milner urged consumers 'to practice economy'.⁸⁹

The gas trading account provided funds for council work and the purchase of buildings. In July 1908 council borrowed £400 from the gas account to be placed at the credit of the sanitary account to extend the water mains to the eastern boundary of town. The building left vacant by the Fire Brigade within the grounds in 1922 was purchased from the Fire Commissioners in Sydney for £50 and re-erected in the Town Hall yard.⁹⁰ The brigade had been stationed there within the gasworks since 1889. During a snow storm and a flood in August 1949, the gasworks store, formerly a part of the fire brigade headquarters was damaged by fire as result of sulphur catching alight.

The new gas manager indicated his willingness to move into the residence in June 1919. This residence was used until in October 1947, the gas committee recommended the provision of a residence for the manager away from the works.

By December 1919 the gas retorts had been dismantled and the bricks and fireclay had arrived for construction of the new retorts. The contractor expected to start in January 1920.

In March 1921 the gas manager Mr J. Simpson drew council's attention to the possible use of gas for cooking and heating services. 'Nearly 80% of the gas he makes is used between 6 p.m. and midnight'⁹¹ and he felt that consumption would double if residents understood the economy of gas cooking. But the absence of a demonstration and show room made progress very difficult. In February 1922 he asked for the provision of a showroom for the sale of stoves, gas fire and other heating appliances. His request was granted and in July he reported the showroom was just about meeting expenses. In March 1923 council effected insurance on the following property at the works: manager's residence £400; office and workshop and contents £200; meter house and station meter £200.

In June 1923 the manager of the works was 'directed to sink a star well about 6ft in diameter, with a view to expediting the pumping of tar'.⁹² The manager reported in November there was a need for the regenerative bench of six retorts to be reset at a cost of £400.

The introduction of electricity did influence the gas works undertaking but not to the extent anticipated. The *Armidale Chronicle*, 25 November 1925 illustrated the consumption of gas from 1920 to 1925: 1920 14 577 500 cubic feet; 1921 16

⁸⁸ *Armidale Express*, 14 September 1917, p.3.

⁸⁹ *Armidale Express*, 5 October 1917, p.2.

⁹⁰ *Armidale Chronicle*, 26 July 1922, p.3.

⁹¹ *Armidale Express*, 1 March 1921, p.4.

⁹² *Armidale Chronicle*, 13 June 1923, p.3.

676 400 cubic feet; 1922 18 000 000 cubic feet; 1923 14 883 000 cubic feet; 1924 13 456 100 cubic feet; 1925 14 000 000 cubic feet .

In October 1926 council decide to appoint an expert to investigate the gasworks. The consulting engineer Edgar Foster M.I.E. appointed by council 'to inquire into and report upon the administration, manufacture, and distribution aspects of the municipal gas works undertaking'⁹³ submitted his report in January 1927. A special meeting of council was held on Friday 5 August to consider the unsatisfactory state of the retorts at the gas works, and to consider the financial position of the undertaking. Later that month, Auditor E.H. Sadgrove presented a report to council on the gas works in August 1927 which criticised 'certain aspects of administration'⁹⁴ with particular reference to loss of gas and alleged neglect in the sales department.

Council was now confronted with the heavy financial obligation with the installation of new retorts. Andrew Wilson, chief engineer and manager of the Australian Gas Light Company visited Armidale on Monday 5 September to confer with the Water and Lighting Committee regarding the setting of retorts at the gas works. To this stage, the retorts had been liable to flood water and the *Armidale Chronicle*, 7 September 1927 commented, 'the Council might be well advised to consider the possibilities of financing the removal of the retorts to the other side of Beardy-street, before entering into any further heavy expenditure'.

Wilson reported to council in November 1927 that an expenditure of £6000 was necessary to put the gasworks in thorough order. Council was prepared to accept the offer of the Australian Bank of Commerce to finance improvements and additions to the gasworks estimated to cost £6000 in December. By February 1928, Messrs Hurl and Company and Gibbons (Australia) were the only tenderers for the gas works improvement scheme and the tender was forwarded to the consulting engineer, A. Wilson. J.A. Buckler, supervising engineer from the Department of Public Works, Armidale conducted an enquiry on 28 March at the Council Chambers to report on the proposal by council to float a £6000 loan for the gasworks. Mayor A. Horner Fletcher, Alderman M. Stephens, W.H. Watson, M.H. O'Connor, J. Simpson (Gasworks Manager) and F.W. Milner (Town Clerk) gave evidence.

In May 1928 manager J. Simpson reported excavations for the new retort house have been completed and contractors were making good progress with the new building. At an estimated cost of £6500, the new carbonising plant was handed over to council by the contractors in October. Speaking on behalf of the engineer Andrew Wilson, a Mr Fowler 'congratulated the council on the plant, which was one of the most up-to-date plants in Australia for its size'.⁹⁵

⁹³ *Armidale Chronicle*, 22 January 1927, p.2.

⁹⁴ *Armidale Chronicle*, 31 August 1927, p.3.

⁹⁵ *Armidale Express*, 2 November 1928, p.11.

Following the resignation of J. Simpson in May 1928, Harry Sheldon formerly the distribution manager was appointed manager of the gasworks and water supply from 1 June 1928. Ill health forced his retirement in June 1933. Council officers convinced him to take leave but his health deteriorated and he died in March 1935. Council decided to call applications for the position of gas manager in June 1934 and C.M. Ambrose, former deputy manager of the gasworks at Bathurst was appointed manager in July. He commenced duty on 13 August at a salary of £358 15s per annum.

Auditor W.S. Forysth and Company reported concern with the gasworks trading account in July 1929. The trading loss for 1928 'was £489.12.3 as compared with a loss of £617.19.3 in 1927, and a loss of £1,038.17.4 in 1926'.⁹⁶ The gasworks showed a profit of £132 for the year ended 31 December. The price of gas was reduced from 9s 6d to 8s 6d per 1000 cubic feet in 1931 and although there were reduced sales compared to 1930, there was a profit of £191. Council further reduced gas prices from 8s to 7s 6d per 1000 cubic feet from 1 April 1935.

Concerned about the state of the gasworks, members of the council gasworks committee felt in June 1934 that an investigation should be made to effect improvements. The mayor's 1934 annual report indicated the improvements completed that year: 'Tenders were called for a new retort setting at a cost of £393. Gas service extended to South Armidale at a cost of £200. Repairs of £105 to the gas manager's residence'.⁹⁷

The foundation for the new tar boiler was completed in April 1935 and shortly the boiler was to be lifted into position. In October tenders were called for demolishing and rebuilding portion of the old retort house. The mayor's 1935 annual report also indicated that during the year pipe moulds were purchased and installed 'for the making of concrete pipes by our works staff in wet weather'.⁹⁸

A new booster arrived in January 1937 and work was undertaken to place it 2 feet 6 inches above the present floor of the meter house to place it above flood level. At a later date it was planned to lift 'all mains and appliances in the house about 2 ft'.⁹⁹

The University of New England College applied in 1937 for the extension of gas and electricity to the institution. Council determined 'a probable outlay of £2,200 (gas) and £650 (electricity)¹⁰⁰ but required further information on probable usage. The advent of war delayed possible and in September 1944 Dr Edgar

⁹⁶ *Armidale Chronicle*, 6 July 1929, p.2.

⁹⁷ *Armidale Express*, 28 November 1934, p.8.

⁹⁸ *Armidale Express*, 18 December 1935, p.9.

⁹⁹ *Armidale Express*, 3 February 1937, p.3.

¹⁰⁰ *Armidale Express*, 13 October 1937, p.7.

Booth, Warden of the New England University College, expressed the opinion to council there was little possibility of government assistance for the laying of a gas main to the University College. Twelve months later in September 1945, the University College again asked council to connect the college with the city gas main and sewerage. But it was not until May 1949 that council took action to 'apply for plant and equipment needed to supply gas to the New England University College'.¹⁰¹

Manager C.M. Ambrose reported to council in January 1938 that the gas manufactured in 1937 was 13 334 200 cubic feet, an increase of 360 300 cubic feet on that made in the previous year. In August 1938, council sought an agreement with Dumaresq Shire giving council the right to sell gas outside the municipal area. That month, the manager of the gasworks was given powers similar to the electricity manager for the collection of overdue gas accounts and the possible cutting of supply if accounts were overdue.

The tenders of D.A. McPherson for the erection of a showroom at a cost of £238 3s and by A.W. Kester for a coal shed for £289 9s were accepted in November 1939. At that time, an additional storage tank of 300 gallons capacity was being erected at the gas works depot. Additions to the coal shed were completed in January and the showroom in February 1940. The manager informed council in March the new engine being installed by contractors was still not ready for use although installation had commenced in August 1939. The critical water shortage by December led to the gas manager sinking a trial hole in the creek bed near the works with a pump and other equipment installed.

In December 1941 the price of gas was raised to ensure a viable operation and during that year charcoal burning was introduced. Orders were received from a radius of 50 to 80 miles but it was difficult to meet the demand. Mayor Ald McBean hoped 'the incoming gas committee will thoroughly investigate this profitable business, and take immediate steps to install the requisite burning plant'.¹⁰²

The Minister for Munitions suggested to council in March 1943 that 'one of the old generating sets may be required for military purposes'.¹⁰³ The tender of Wellings Ltd. Sydney at £1920 for a new retort bench and other works was accepted in June 1943 with the work to be completed in six months. The mayor's annual report indicated that because of the shortage of firewood and increased costs, there was a record manufacture of about 19 million cubic feet for 1943.

¹⁰¹ *Armidale Express*, 11 May 1949, p.4.

¹⁰² *Armidale Express*, 3 December 1941, p.6.

¹⁰³ *Armidale Express*, 24 March 1943, p.6.

Gas prices were pegged during the war and immediate post war period but prices could not meet production costs. Consequently the overdraft of the gasworks increased to £6000.

In February 1948 the manager was authorised to proceed with the erection of additions to the retort house and Wellings and Co. were directed to proceed with the erection of six retorts. Council took action to apply for a loan of £2500 to cover the costs. In that same month, council adopted a recommendation from the gas committee that tenders be called for a modern plant as soon as plans and specifications were completed by the manager.

Council announced the need in May 1948 for increased gas tariffs brought about by the overdraft in the gas trading account, a 40 hour week, an increase in the basic wage and increases in the price of coal and freight. At the same time, council announced its intention to provide installation services. In October the Department of Local Government suggested that council approach the minister to convene a board of inquiry before a new tariff was brought into effect. In November 1948 the gas tariff had been increased, estimated to yield an increase of £3000.

In January 1949, the vice-chairman of the gas committee, Ald. D.W. Cameron presented to council 'a £20 000 scheme for modernising Armidale gas plant and relocating it near the railway station'.¹⁰⁴ Council approached the Commissioner for Railways for land south of the railway line to construct a new gas station but the commissioners informed council in July 1949 it was not prepared to dispose of any land for the establishment of a gasworks near the railway station. In October council was again informed the commissioners did not favour construction. Consequently, council took further action to obtain another site near the railway trucking yards and the municipal saleyards. The question of resiting the works was discussed with the Department of Local Government and that December, the principal gas engineer from the department reported 'there are no circumstances, either from an engineering or economic point of view, that would justify the expenditure involved'.¹⁰⁵

Because of the shortage of coal, the gas manager submitted a schedule of rationing to council in June 1949. Once rationing was introduced there was a 25% drop in gas consumption and in July Armidale residents were 'able legally to use rationed gas earlier in the morning and later at night'.¹⁰⁶ In order to conserve supplies, council decided in August to limit the sale of coke to people living in the municipality with the exception of educational institutions. Council announced in November 1949 its intention to lift gas restrictions once coal stocks reached 100 tons.

¹⁰⁴ *Armidale Express*, 19 January 1949, p.3.

¹⁰⁵ *Armidale Express*, 15 June 1955, p.3.

¹⁰⁶ *Armidale Express*, 6 July 1949, p.6.

During a snowstorm in August and a resultant flood which threatened the gasworks, a fire broke out in a store when sulphur ignited. This store was part of the Fire Brigade headquarters established at the works in 1889.

Concern about the gasworks was frequently expressed by council in 1949 and the Chief Gas Examiner's report was received by council in January 1950. The report recommended that council construct horizontal retorts and that a water gas plant be installed at a cost of about £100 000. Ald. Monckton was critical of the report because he had been trying for a long time to prevent filth from the gasworks running into the creek and the manager R.L. Campbell also challenged the report.

The manager informed council in March 1950 that it will be six weeks before completion of a new retort setting at Armidale gasworks will relieve the shortage of gas. In May council decided 'to investigate the whole management and working of the gasworks undertaking and recommend any improvements they consider should be made'.¹⁰⁷ The gasworks were again put out of action for a period of 16 hours when floodwaters seeped into the main gas lines and flooded the main from the retorts to the holder. Council took action to call in August to call tenders for the designing and erection of a new gas plant. The Department of Local Government's report in January 1950 had indicated there was no justification for the removal of the works to a new site. The department again informed council in September there would be no consideration 'to an application for a loan for the purpose of transferring the gasworks to a new site'.¹⁰⁸ Thus council abandoned any proposal to alter the site of the works.

The examiner was invited by council to return to Armidale but by July 1951 had not done so. A proposal prepared by the gas manager R.L. Campbell for a new carbonising plant, estimated to cost £40 000 was presented to council in August. At the same time, the Principal Gas Engineer of the Department of Local Government, Mr A.T. Brown and his assistant Mr Hubberd were in Armidale to investigate aspects of the gas undertaking. The report was tabled to council in October and comments made included: 'it would appear that carbonising operations are not being conducted to the best advantage and that maintenance of the plant is being neglected'.¹⁰⁹ Because of the capital invested in the existing plant, the department was not prepared to support the erection of new works on an alternative site. As part of flood control, the Local Government Department investigators advised a number of measures including walls on the eastern and western boundaries; elevate condensor, washer, scrubber and purifiers on concrete piers; build dwarf walls around both low pressure holders and provide pumping equipment.

¹⁰⁷ *Armidale Express*, 10 May 1950, p.3.

¹⁰⁸ *Armidale Express*, 27 September 1950, p.6.

¹⁰⁹ *Armidale Express*, 24 October 1951, p.3.

By January 1952 a filtering system to treat effluent was under construction and the manager requested the rebuilding of six retorts that had been in operation for some six years. That month a special meeting of council was held in committee on 16 January to meet with the Principal Gas Engineer of the Local Government Department and discuss improvements to the gas undertaking.

'An amendment to the Gas and Electricity Act 1952 gave councils the right to determine their gas prices'¹¹⁰ provided that the councils did not make a loss by trading cheaply.

An enquiry on gas tariffs conducted by G.W. Hunt (Inspector of Local Government Accounts), A.T. Brown (Principal Gas Engineer) and Deputy Mayor Ken Jones was held in Armidale in May 1952. Following the inquiry, council adopted new tariffs in June as approved by the Minister for Local Government. By September the gasworks was in debt to the extent of £10 000 because of the trading loss in four of the past five years. That month the report from the Department of Local Government was discussed by council. In answer to a question concerning a new site, the department replied 'from an engineering point of view there are no circumstances that would justify the expenditure involved'¹¹¹ but a town planning scheme would have to consider the determination.

The manager of the gasworks presented a proposal for the expenditure of £4750 in January 1954 to provide gas services to the new Teacher's College Hostel for men students and for seventeen Housing Commission homes in South Armidale. Repairs to the gasworks cottage were carried out in February at a cost of £100 and in March £130 was set aside from the gasworks general fund for construction of a showroom.

The *Armidale Express*, 15 February 1954 appealed for the modernising of the gasworks and stated 'there is hope that the newly-elected gas committee will display more courage and vision than its predecessors showed'. Aware of the need for improvements, the mayor and vice-chairman of the gas committee, Ald. French met the Minister on 1 April to discuss matters relating to the rehabilitation of the gas works. That month the mayor was authorised by council to apply for a mechanised gas plant. The Local Government's Chief Gas Engineer A.T. Brown arrived in Armidale on Wednesday 5 May to check 'on the use of Muswellbrook coal and on the advisability of installing (a) mechanical gas making plant'.¹¹² Following his special report, the manager of the gasworks R.L. Campbell was suspended by council under Section 99 of the Local Government Act. Campbell appealed and asked for an inquiry and the Town Clerk, W.H. Quin told council 'it had no alternative but to apply for an

¹¹⁰ Larcombe, *The Advancement of Local Government in New South Wales 1906 to the Present. A History of Local Government in New South Wales, Vol. 3*, p.434.

¹¹¹ *Armidale Express*, 10 September 1952, p.7.

¹¹² *Armidale Express*, 5 May 1954, p.2.

inquiry'.¹¹³ Already in November 1953, council had called upon the gas manager to repay an amount due as a result of overpayment in 1952.

Following a four day hearing of Campbell's appeal against his suspension, J.A. Harris presented a fourteen page report in September 1954. Harris instructed council to pay Campbell his salary during the suspension period. A critical aspect of the report was the conclusion 'I am of the opinion that his suspension by Armidale City Council was justified'.¹¹⁴

Council finally decided in March 1955 to build new gasworks at an estimated cost of £60 000 and in June residents from the vicinity of the gasworks petitioned council urging construction of the gasworks near the railway station. Engineer P.C. Smith replied erection of the new gasworks near the railway station 'would cost another £4,000 a year, for 20 years'¹¹⁵ and council re-affirmed its decision not to move. Based on an optimistic forecast of growth in consumption, a contract for a complete modernisation of the gasworks was let to Norman J. Hurl and Company (Victoria) in May and work started on 1 July. After letting the contract, council added the extra work of new foundations for the third retort bench, substantial repairs to the gas holders, installation of a new weigh-bridge, new equipment to the high pressure system and the purchase of new machinery. Thus the £68 000 project was officially opened on Saturday 1 June 1956 when Alderman Davis Hughes M.L.A. set 'in motion the overhead coke conveyor on behalf of the Minister of Local Government'.¹¹⁶

By 1956 gas was manufactured by the coal fired plant alone and capacity was 320 000 cubic feet daily. Over a period of five years from 1951 the number of consumers had remained stable: February 1951 1059; August 1954 1019 and January 1956 1053.

Lawns and a large number of trees were planted at the gasworks in January 1958. Concern was expressed in the press about the gasworks finances in June and the trading account of the gas works for the first six months of the year showed a deficit of £2350 making 'the total deficit for the past 18 months £4354'.¹¹⁷ In August council announced the price of gas was to go up approximately 10%. Following a two day enquiry by Chief Gas Engineer J. Hines, the report stated 'the Armidale gas undertaking is operating at practically maximum efficiency and economy: it is one of the best in the state'.¹¹⁸ He recommended the establishment of a more central and modern gas display centre in Armidale. In 1958 a third

¹¹³ *Armidale Express*, 16 June 1954, p.3.

¹¹⁴ *Armidale Express*, 20 September 1954, p.3.

¹¹⁵ *Armidale Express*, 15 June 1955, p.3.

¹¹⁶ *Armidale Express*, 1 June 1956, p.1

¹¹⁷ *Armidale Express*, 16 August 1958, p.2.

¹¹⁸ *Armidale Express*, 17 October 1958, p.19.

batch of retorts was added and additional plant was installed in 1959 involving improvements to the reticulation system.

A special report by manager P.C. Smith recommended improvements, modifications and additional equipment estimated to cost more than £10 000 in September 1960. Early in 1961 production increased to 33.33 million cubic feet per annum and in winter the production rose to 61.47 million cubic feet; that is, a 100% increase on the 1953 figure of 30.43 million cubic feet. In June 1961 the manager was authorised to investigate possibilities of increasing the gas plant capacity. Sales and installation of appliances increased to £16 683.

Two old gas lights were installed at the gasworks entrance in February 1961. In June the manager of the works was authorised by council to investigate possibilities of increasing the gas plant capacity. The December the annual report of the manager showed that in 1961 gas sales increased by 10% and the sale of appliances by 18%. The report also showed that a new well ensured an independent supply of water to the works.

The installation of the new P3 catalytic plant in 1963, a French invention developed by the Germans, produced gas from a by-product of the distillation of petroleum and could be used in conjunction with normal Armidale plant producing gas from coal. The installation, the first of its kind in the Southern Hemisphere, led to a great deal of interest. The Local Government Association of N.S.W. delegated to the Australian Gas Light Company of Sydney arrangements for conducting an intensive course in gas manufacture, distribution and administration in Armidale from 18 to 20 March 1963. An all day convention organised by the N.S.W. Institute of Gas Engineers was held on the following day and the Hon. P.D. Hills, M.L.A., Minister for Local Government and Highways officially opened the gas plant additions at a cost of £34 000 on Friday 22 March 1963. Thus the capacity of the plant was increased to 520 000 cubic feet.

In April 1963 the manager reported on the successful operation of the new P3 plant and by September the Town Clerk, R.A. Browne revealed that the 'gas work's fund had been changed from a £4500 deficit to a £6000 surplus in nine years'¹¹⁹ and that £10 000 had been set aside for plant renewal. In his 1963 annual report, the Manager P.C. Smith said the gasworks may soon have to be extended again because 'manufacturing capacity at the works were only just keeping ahead of demand'.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ *Armidale Express*, 2 October 1963, p.10.

¹²⁰ *Armidale Express*, 3 January 1964, p.6.

The price of gas rose for the first time in eight years in 1967 and followed reductions in the gas tariff in 1961 and 1964. Council estimated 'its income from sales of gas will be \$180,055 ... compared with an expected \$151,795'¹²¹ in 1966.

In 1965 council took action to undertake further works at the gasworks. Tenders for a reforming plant, estimated to cost between £30 000 and £40 000 and increase capacity from 200 000 to 300 000 cubic feet closed on 1 July 1965. The contract was let to Melbourne firm Norman J. Hurl and Co. (Vic) Pty Ltd. and council received a £30 000 loan to cover progress payments to the contractors in January 1966. The £70 000 plant to make gas out of oil was opened on Friday 1 April 1966 by the Minister for Local Government, Mr Morton.

Following complaints about pollution in the creek area near the gasworks, council revealed that in the three year period prior to April 1966 council spent \$6 000 'to prevent pollution of Dumaresq Creek'.¹²²

Council advertised gas services and in September a sales campaign took place. An exhibition home in Erskine street was opened in October 1967 and over 3000 people visited the home. Action was taken in 1968 to also increase high pressure storage at the gasworks. Council purchased six almost new tanks at about £30 000 from the Katoomba gasworks and they were installed by August. The total capacity of 90 000 cubic feet almost doubled the storage of the works.

In March 1969 manager R.J. Shepherd informed council that major extensions and modernisation of the gas works would be needed before the winter of 1971. Twelve months later in March 1970, he again informed council that the coal fired plant built more than 15 years ago would have to be replaced and by July, a number of retort beds had collapsed through age and others were collapsing. In October a contract was awarded to Gas Plant Equipment Pty. Ltd. for the building of a Tempetred Liquified Gas Plant at a cost of \$75 000.

In 1970 the gas department extended its mains another two miles into Beardy Street and P.G. Love Avenue to service thirty Housing Commission homes. The Council of the City of Armidale, *A.R. Bluett Memorial 1970 Award Entry* showed at that time the total length of low pressure/high pressure mains was 56 miles. A gas showroom was built a cost of \$9000 and a new compressor was purchased to supplement the existing compressors in keeping up the supply of gas to the university and the city.

Another \$97 000 was spent to covert all gas appliances in the city to accommodate the new propane gas and the changeover was completed on 22 July 1971 by the contractor Liquefied Petroleum Gas Pty. With its recently completed T.L.P. plant in and demand for gas, council ceased production of town gas and commenced the supply of natural gas in 1972. The supply of bottled L.P. gas to

¹²¹ *Armidale Express*, 2 December 1966, p.14.

¹²² *Armidale Express*, 6 April 1966, p.7.

the outlying district including Guyra, Walcha and Uralla was also commenced. The installation of gas heaters, stoves and hot water systems at the new Guyra High School in 1970 increased consumption of propane gas.

By February 1972 the large brick building which used to house the coal-fired gas plant was still available for leasing as a factory.

In November 1974 council announced a considerable increase in charges for consumers from 1 January 1975 'to cover the largest deficit in the history of Armidale City Council's trading fund'.¹²³

In 1977 it was predicted that there would be a production of 115 million cubic feet at the T.L.P. Plant and some 173 tonnes of propane to be supplied to country clients. That May there was a gas conference for the Local Government Gas Advisory Committee and the Australian Gas Association. Twelve years later in April 1989, Armidale again hosted the 28th Gas Conference which was officially opened by the Hon Neil Pickard, MP, Minister for Minerals and Energy.

In 1987 City Gas reduced tariffs by 6% with the promise of no increases in 1988 or 1989. That year the Elgas Company was created to provide services and in 1988 the company employed 14 staff with an annual turnover in excess of \$2 million. During 1988 the gas exhibition home on the City Estate in Centennial Close was completed, an office manager was employed and the gas sale records were computerised. As part of its promotion, two gas lamps were installed in the redeveloped mall in June and lit by Mayor Rosemary Leitch on 24 October 1988. One hundred and three years earlier, gas lamps were lit for the first time on 24 October 1883.

The gas centre showroom renovations costing \$76 000 were opened by Mayor Joe Harrold on 21 October 1988. Completed by the builder Joe Lankester and supervised by the health and building surveyor, the renovations included a new staff amenities block, the expansion of the showroom by incorporating the store area with new shelving, new carpet, painting, new furniture and exterior landscaping.

By 1988 council had also purchased adjoining land costing \$46 000 for the development of a City Gas Park and public parking facilities. This area was completed in February and March 1989. The Australian Gas Light Consultancy was commissioned in 1988 to evaluate the reticulated mains system by field inspection and testing, and provide recommendations to improve the operation of the distribution system. The survey identified areas where improvements could be made to the mains system and council embarked on a program of expenditure of \$300 000 over the next three years.

¹²³ *Armidale Express*, 27 November 1974, p.1.

The company allocated \$43 000 for marketing and promotion in 1988 including gas lamps in the Mall (\$20 000); the Sportsground Kiosk (\$8000); a video (\$8000); sponsorship of the Bicentennial International Cycle Criterium and Australia Day activities and Trade Displays.

To celebrate 100 years of gas the Hon N. Greiner, Premier of N.S.W. attended a gaslight Dinner and Music Hall held on 25 August 1990. Two gaslamps, installed as part of the refurbishment of the town hall were officially lit by the Premier and the Mayor, Ald. Rosemary Leitch.