Dear All

My name is Kayt Button. I am undertaking PhD research at the University of East Anglia, looking at the development of the National Grid, from its introduction in discrete towns and cities by entrepreneurial individuals through to the huge infrastructure that supplies our electricity today.

One of the areas I would like to investigate is the effect this had on individual people, families and communities. For example Godalming in Surrey was the first place in Britain to have street lighting powered by electricity. In a letter written to his local paper in 1953 a Mr George S. Tanner recalls his memories as a 12 year old boy;

*“The lamps were much as they are now but slipped into two brass slides like an inverted letter U. In those days we boys often had magnets to play with and the similarity intrigued me, so one day in our showroom when no one was about I took a needle to see if the electricity would act as a magnet and held it across the base of these two slides. The needle vanished and on my finger and thumb were deep white hollows where the needle had been. It had instantly fused. This was never done again as you can imagine.”*

He goes on to recall;

*“The wires were not insulated then. The dynamos were at Pullman’s Mill and the river gave the power so the wires were brought overhead from there along the bottom of the Vicarage garden. At that time the wooden bridge was out of repair. The present brick bridge (which I remember being built) had taken its use and so it had decayed and become fenced in with a closed fence and the wires were carried along overhead of this, not very high up. There was opposition as you can guess to anything new and the story goes that two men with their cargo of beer came along one night and one lifted the other up to tear the wires down. But when he grasped them the current imprisoned both.”*

And another story of the letter;

*“The story goes that old Mr Bridger who at one time was Mayor (or several times so) had shares in the Gas Company. He, it is said, liked his liquid nourishment. The arc standard by the Market House was loose and one night he was ‘out to get one back’ for the Gas Company and so embraced it and shook it and was heard muttering, “B- b- b- ‘lectric light!””*

He finishes his letter by saying;

*“I do not suppose all this has much value for your information, but now on the edge of 86 I feel that these little memories should be passed on.”*

And that is where I would like your help. It is important to understand what happened in areas and individual premises where electricity was introduced. Other stories I have heard include a man found bouncing on his bed whilst trying to blow the electric light out and children being bathed in milk pasteurising containers because they were electrically heated but the farmer didn’t trust electricity enough to have it in the house.

Understanding how electricity was both perceived and received by people is important not just for posterity and historical records but also to develop ways of integrating new technologies into everyday life and to understand how better to disseminate information regarding their introduction, use and potential.

I would be very grateful if anyone has any stories or memories they would share with me. They can remain anonymous or if they wish can have their name associated with their comments in any published articles (in which case could they add their name, and place of residence as they would wish to have it published).

Thank you for time and for any help you can offer. My contact details are at the bottom of the page.

Kindest regards

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