

# AN EARLY GAS SUPPLY IN CHIPPING

Stonyhurst College was one of the first public buildings in England to be lit by gas, in 1811. Factory owners were soon interested in this new and relatively cheap way of stretching the working day, especially in winter, and the Ordnance Survey maps of the 1840's often show a "gasometer" alongside the larger textile mills.

The 1843 "History of Chipping", by an anonymous author but dedicated to William Evans, cotton spinner, of Kirk Mill, states that "The (Kirk) mill is lighted with gas throughout, for the making of which there is a complete and elegant apparatus adjoining the works. This is a truly admirable arrangement, and one so rare, on that scale, as to be considered almost a curiosity".

The Kirk Mill gas supply had been installed well before 1843 however:-

In January 1993 the Society received a letter from Mr Gordon Parker of Warrington asking if we had any knowledge of Evans & Walmsley's cotton spinning factory at Chipping and an accident there on 6th February 1839. Our correspondent, researching his family history, had found the following newspaper report of a "FRIGHTFUL GAS EXPLOSION" at Kirk Mill involving one of his ancestors, Henry Singleton.

THE PRESTON CHRONICLE February 9. 1839.

FRIGHTFUL GAS EXPLOSION — A serious gas explosion took place on Wednesday last, at the works of Messrs. Evans and Walmsleys, cotton spinners Chipping. The occurrence took place under the following circumstances:— Owing to the well or tank not being water tight, the engineer could not get a supply of gas sufficient for the works, when a young man named William James, who acts as superintendent of the works, accompanied by another person named Henry Singleton, proceeded to the gas holder, with the intention of connecting together the two pipes inside of the gas holder, so as to burn the gas as quickly as the retort made it. This plan they had tried before and had been successful, but owing to Singleton bringing a light to look into the gas holder at the time that William James was upon it, the gas took fire, and blew up with a tremendous report, so as to palpably shake the neighbourhood round about. When a search was made for the two unfortunate men, William James was found a few yards from the gas holder, thrown across a wall that divided the gas works yard from the brook. Singleton was thrown over the wall into the brook, and had an arm, a leg and several ribs broken. Both were severely burnt, and are lying in a very precarious state. The iron pillars that supported the gas holder are broken, and the top of one of them thrown a considerable distance upon one of the buildings. There was one pillar left standing, and the gas holder in coming down from the building, fell side way upon the top of it, and forced a hole through both. Happily all the other hands escaped uninjured, as the accident happened during their absence from the mill.

The Henry Singleton in the above account died as a result of his injuries three days after the incident on February 9th 1839.

An inquest was held at Chipping, February 12th, 1839.

Witnesses were William Thornley and Mary Singleton.

Henry Singleton was buried at St Mary's, Chipping, on February 12th 1839.