

THE ROUNDHAY AND DISTRICT ELECTRIC LIGHTING COMPANY LIMITED

© by Geoff Hall

INTRODUCTION

On 9th August 1901 an Act of Parliament confirmed the granting by the Board of Trade of a "Provisional Order for Electric Supply for Roundhay". This was the result of the enterprise shown by a group of leading local merchants and gentlemen desirous of availing themselves of the benefits of the new Electric Light in their homes whilst at the same time, hopefully, earning a good return on their investments.

The Roundhay and District Electric Lighting Company Limited which developed from this initiative had a short but successful life until it was taken over by Leeds Corporation in 1914. This is an account of the origins of the Company and the area it was to supply.

At the turn of the century Roundhay was a township forming, together with Seacroft, an unusual local government unit entitled Leeds Rural District¹. Thus Leeds officially had no jurisdiction within the township despite owning a large area by its purchase in 1872 of Roundhay Park and much of the adjacent land. In addition to owning the park, Leeds Corporation had, by 1891, opened the first electric tramway in Europe from Sheepscar to Horse Shoe Corner, Oakwood, and by 1897 an improved system ran from Leeds to Canal Gardens. At this time there were relatively few houses in the township and most of these were very substantial villas and private estates.

BRINGING THE ELECTRIC LIGHT

The lighting of homes by electricity had only become practicable from about 1890, for example the first lighting in Leeds was 1893 by the Yorkshire-House to House Company, Harrogate, which was in some respects similar to Roundhay, having a number of large houses with extensive grounds on supply before 1900.

A group of seven gentlemen had come together with a proposal to bring the benefits of electric light to Roundhay in 1900 and produced a Memorandum of Association² of The Roundhay and District Electric Lighting Co Ltd as a requirement to obtaining permission to set up this Company. The first objective specified for the Company was:- "To carry on within the District of the Rural District Council of Leeds (Roundhay and Seacroft) and elsewhere in the neighbourhood, the business of an Electric Light Company in all its branches,"

This document was extremely ambitious in providing for a very wide range of activities including overseas trading, presumably to ensure that no restrictions could be applied if the concern was to prove exceptionally successful.

Following publication of the Memorandum, application was made to the Board of Trade for a Provisional Order, which was confirmed by Act of Parliament, 9th August, 1901. A Company Prospectus³ was issued dated 30th July, 1902, this advertised for sale 1,200 Ordinary Shares of £10 each.

¹ G.C. Dickinson, Old Ordnance Survey Maps 1906. The Godfrey Edition.

² West Yorkshire Archives Service, {Emsley 34}

³ Ibid.

The Directors were :-

William Penrose Green, Towerhurst, Roundhay, near Leeds (Chairman).
(Chairman of Messrs Thomas Green & Sons, Limited).

Mathew Kitchen, Eller Close, Roundhay, near Leeds, Tanner and Currier
(Chairman and Managing Director of Messrs Kitchen & Co. Ltd., Leeds)

John Edmund Whiting, Glenside, Roundhay, Leeds, Warehouseman
(of Messrs Hotham and Whiting of Leeds)

Arthur Greenhow Lupton, Springwood, Roundhay, Leeds, Merchant
(of Messrs Wm Lupton & Co., Leeds)

The Bankers were BECKETT & CO., LEEDS

the Solicitors NELSON, EDDISONS & LUPTON*, 34 Albion Street, LEEDS

the Engineers Messrs SHEPHERD & WATNEY, Greek Street, LEEDS

the Auditors H. W. & J. BLACKBURN, 2 East Parade, LEEDS

the Secretary GEO A PEARSON, Clerk with above Solicitors.

The authorised capital was £20,000.

*Charles Lupton was one of the original seven proposers.

The supporting information to the prospectus makes it clear that the Provisional Order from the Board of Trade gave the right of supply throughout the Township of Roundhay. The issue of capital was to be for the purpose of obtaining a site for and erecting an Electricity Supply Station and laying down mains. Then followed an Engineers Feasibility Report by Mr. T.S. Watney, MIEE, MIMechE. His report quotes the number of, and gross rentals of the houses in the district as shown below:-

Number of Houses with Rental				
Year	Over £100	£51 to £100	£26 to £50	£25 & under
1899	27	40	126	147
1901	29	65	155	154

"These figures speak for themselves and I consider that an immediate and substantial demand for current is assured with every prospect of a steady increase"

Mr. Watney then continued by recommending the adoption of a Low Tension system. He drew attention to the relatively low cost of cable laying in the unpaved streets as compared with Leeds and fixing on a size of cable which would be adequate to obviate the need for digging up the streets again for many years to come. Technical discussion on load and finances was couched in terms of 8 cp lamps, that is 8 candle power, about 40 watts in present terms. He talked in terms of 8,000 lamps in the longer term, so the connected load would have been around 32kW (in the annual report for 1912 the number of 8cp lamps connected was quoted as 14,773 still only 56kW).

In order to advise on financial matters Mr Watney drew comparison with consumption figures for Leeds and Harrogate where each lamp connected had an average consumption of 21 units and 18 units per annum respectively. A charge of 6d per unit was being suggested at a generating and distributing cost of just over 2d a unit. His estimate for the total annual consumption was 128,000 units ! Total installation cost for station, cables and accessories was estimated at £17,000. When the figures discussed for takeover some ten years later are compared with these estimates Mr Watney is shown to have been remarkably accurate.

THE LIGHTS GO ON

The generating station was built on a site on the south side of Wetherby Road facing the dam of Waterloo Lake. It was a very simple affair consisting of an engine (gas?) driven dynamo and a battery to provide a direct current supply. The laying of cables to the houses commenced at the same time as the building work so that as soon as the generation was available, supply to the first customers could commence.

By 1903 Kelly's Directory listed the generating station and continued to do so until 1914. The 1903 Trades Directory listed the Roundhay and District Electric Light Co. Ltd. with a Registered Office at 34, Albion Street. The Secretary for 1903 was still G. A. Pearson but by 1912 he had been replaced by W. Smith.

No further information is available until the publication of the Directors Report and Accounts⁴ for the year ending 31st December 1913. The same four Directors were in command as at the foundation. The number of 8cp lamps connected had risen in the year from 14,070 to 14,773, a 5% growth with further applications for current being received. Revenue for the year left a net profit of £307-14-9d which, with the £102-18-8 brought forward from the previous year, made a credit of £410-13-6. A 2% dividend was recommended for the 814 Ordinary Shares and 5% for the Capital paid up in respect of the 425 Preference Shares.

The Company would seem to have successfully achieved its aims and enjoyed a decade of steady expansion as the township of Roundhay changed into a suburb of Leeds, with houses filling the former farmland to the west and south of the public park.

TAKEOVER

The City of Leeds Corporation was slow to appreciate the impact that electricity was to have, and it was the Leeds House to House Company that pioneered its use in the city centre. However once the Corporation realised how important electricity was to be in the future, they began negotiating to take over the undertaking and this they completed in 1898. From this time the Leeds Corporation Electricity Department (LCED) grew rapidly and the distribution network spread throughout the borough.

⁴ West Yorkshire Archives Service (Emsley 34).

The year 1912 saw Leeds expand to take into its boundary the townships of Roundhay, Seacroft, Shadwell and part of Cross Gates. This immediately gave rise to discussions between the Corporation and the Directors of the Roundhay Company regarding future electricity supply. These were amicable, and agreement in principle seems to have been reached very quickly. It is more than likely that the Directors of the Roundhay Company realised that the rate of growth would soon outstrip their ability to meet the demand unless very large sums were invested in re-equipping the generating station and distribution system.

As early as 1912 the financial terms for takeover were specified with a Resolution of the Directors preferring a rapid takeover by 31, December 1912 as opposed to the alternative proposed by Leeds of 30, June 1914.

In fact the Corporation proposal was adopted.

"by 30.6.1914, at a cost of £18,000 with the Corporation taking responsibility for finding any capital expenditure after present date beyond such as may be necessary to maintain machinery and cables in good working order."

In 1914 an Act of Parliament, 4&5 Geo 5, Electric Lighting Orders Confirmation (No 2) Act, included a schedule entitled Leeds Electric Lighting (Extension) Roundhay, that listed the highways supplied by the Roundhay Company as authorised in 1901. These were:- Park Lane, Stanley Drive, West Park Place and Road, Park Villas, Ingledew Drive and Crescent, North Park Avenue and Road, Lidgett Park Road, Wedgewood Grove and Drive, Avenue Victoria, Connaught Road*, Mansion Lane, Oakwood Avenue and Drive, Park Avenue, Elmet Avenue, Belle Vue Avenue, West Avenue and Oakwood Grove.

* Connaught Road was prepared for development across what is now known as the Soldiers Fields but was never proceeded with. The drainage manholes exist to this day and the road formation is clearly visible.

In anticipation of takeover the LCED Manager was authorised to lay cables to unspecified customers in the Roundhay area at a meeting of the Tramways and Electricity (Electricity) Sub Committee held on 15, December 1913.

The Roundhay and District Electric Light Company Ltd ceased to operate from 1914, thereafter all responsibilities passed to the Corporation. This included the outstanding debt collection for electricity used before takeover. Some interesting correspondence remains on this subject in the West Yorkshire Archives including absconding former householders and disputes over accuracy of metering!

REMNANTS

In the 85 years since the Roundhay and District Electric Lighting Company was wound up, the District has grown out of all recognition. The Corporation provided an excellent system with high voltage distribution, first at 2,000 volts, and later at 6,600 volts to many substations where transformation to 200 volts for domestic customers was effected. One of these substations was located in the former generating station in Wetherby Road and was utilised to give a supply to the boiler for the outdoor swimming pool which was built across the road below the Waterloo Lake in Roundhay Park. The generating station stood idle, once Leeds had extended their supply to cover the district until 1918. The Corporation then applied to

convert the building into a villa, which on completion, was named "Wayside". This became the home of C. Nelson Hefford, the LCED Engineer and Manager who held this position for twenty five years until his death in service in 1938. The house still stands but has lost its name and appears to have been converted into flats but retains its form as modified in 1918. The mansions in which the merchant venturers who started the company lived, have suffered similar changes, but some remain in North Lane as flats with their once extensive grounds occupied by modern housing. In 1948 Leeds lost its electricity supply responsibilities when nationalisation took these to the YEB. The high voltage cables and most of the substations continue in service but with distribution now at 11,000 volts and 240 volts for domestic customers. Demand and consumption is no longer related to 8cp lamps but in megawatts and megawatt-hour.



The old electricity station on the Wetherby Road, now a private residence.