

## VILLAGE ECHOES

Established in 1868, the Goudhurst Gas Works was situated on the outskirts of the village in North Road and was originally owned by L.C. Lawson & Company Limited of Cranbrook.

Following an agreement to sell, the works passed to Mr Charles Archer of Kingston upon Thames. He was a merchant and a trustee of the Kent County Gas Light & Coke Company Limited. This company had been formed by a notorious promoter named Eaton who had taken over several similar small companies. A subscription list was opened on 15<sup>th</sup> May 1906 seeking £50,000 divided into 6,000 6% preference shares and 4,000 ordinary shares at £5 each. When, in November of the same year, 23 of the shareholders went to court to get their money back, it was judged that, although not fraudulent, the prospectus had been artfully worded and the court awarded them their money back plus 4%. The company immediately went into liquidation and was put up for auction by the Official Receiver, the auction being carried out by Brackett & Sons in the Swan Hotel, Tunbridge Wells on Friday 25<sup>th</sup> October 1907. Unfortunately Bracketts no longer have any records from that period so it is not known who purchased it.

It is clear that the gas works reverted to its original name, Goudhurst Gas Works, and was owned by the Goudhurst builders, Davis & Leaney, in 1918. They may have owned it earlier, as a Mr Henry Saunders is reported to have started there in 1916. He ran the works single-handed until the early 1930s. A London man who came to do seasonal work on a local farm took over. Known as 'Gassy' Fisher\* (real name: Arthur) he often let the village run out of gas, including one Christmas day when many villagers' Christmas dinners were ruined. It was not unusual to find a shovel propped up by the gate with "gone to dinner" chalked on it.

The gas works was in a bad way structurally and the equipment worn out by the time the last man worked there. He was Jack Saunders (son of Henry), and when he was called up for military service in 1940 the then owner, Mr Hyde from Cranbrook, finally closed the gas works.

For a short time, the site was used as a landfill site for the village rubbish until it was purchased by Mr Joseph Penfold of Cranbrook who applied for permission to build a house there. For some reason the house was never built, but finally a bungalow was built there in 1968.

\*A 45 second clip of Arthur Fisher at work in 1938 can be viewed on the Pathe News website. <http://www.britishpathe.com> (enter Goudhurst in the search box).

Local History Society