

# FIRST AUSTRALIAN CITY TO SUPPLY POWER AS A PUBLIC UTILITY

LAUNCESTON was the first place in Australia to have its streets lit by electric light and to use electricity as a public utility.

THIS was achieved by harnessing the waters of the South Esk River and the installation of a generating station at Duck Reach.

At the time of the first municipal government in Launceston the settlement was lit by gas.

The Government had provided a few street lamps in the 1830's but the first effective illumination came in 1844, when a man named Benjamin Byrons manufactured gas and used it to light his Angel Inn.

Gradual improvement in lighting preceded the formation of the Launceston Gas Co. in 1858 and on April 5, 1860, gas was used for full scale lighting of the streets.

"The Examiner" announced the new lighting with this paragraph:

"On Thursday evening the streets of Launceston were for the first time partly illuminated by gas and although the roads and footpaths were muddy, yet many persons, including several ladies, turned out for the sake of seeing the 'new light.'

"Many of the shops and public-houses were brilliantly illuminated and the great staircase and large hall of the Mechanics' Institute were also lighted up. The gas was very pure and the lights gave general satisfaction."

## Gas in Houses

By June, 1860, gas was becoming a popular illuminant for houses, 238 being supplied at the rate of 25/- per 1000 cubic feet.

For 35 years the Launceston Gas Co. controlled the lighting of Launceston streets.

In 1887, however, the city fathers, again showing amazing foresight, secured the water rights to the South Esk by Act of Parliament.

On July 1, 1889, the council advertised that it was prepared to receive offers for the lighting of the town by electricity.

## First Plan

Negotiations were conducted with several people and various schemes for the harnessing of the South Esk were put forward.

Eventually a scheme developed by the City Surveyor (Cr. C. St. John David) was adopted.

The scheme called for the driving of a tunnel from a bend of the river below Duck Reach through the hill for half a mile and the placing of a generating station near the river bank below the tunnel mouth.

The tunnel was driven from both ends at a contract price of £10,872 and the entire scheme, providing 1650 h.p., was completed in 1895.

On December 10 that year the streets were first lit by electricity.

The arc lamps for lighting the main streets were five feet high and weighed 48lb. each. For the suburbs

200 incandescent lamps of 50 candlepower were allotted.

## Public Utility

Extension of the lighting system to private homes then began.

Launceston was the first city in Australia to supply electricity as a public utility with a hydraulic plant.

Numerous small plants supplied one building or possibly neighbouring premises, but Launceston was the first to supply electricity throughout the 24 hours as a public utility.

By 1899 the demand was so great that the plant had to be extended by the provision of two additional sets of machinery.

Motive power then came

into the proposition and in 1904 the three-phase system was adopted and the old machinery replaced.

## Was Acquired

Over the years the equipment was gradually increased until it reached a capacity of 2600 h.p.

Launceston first received power from the Hydro Electric Commission on January 1, 1923.

The Duck Reach station was extensively damaged by the great flood of 1929.

In 1944 the H.E.C. compulsorily acquired the City Council's hydro undertakings and since then has supplied the city's requirements, the Duck Reach station being used as an auxiliary.

# POWER HOUSE STILL USED AS AN AUXILIARY PLANT

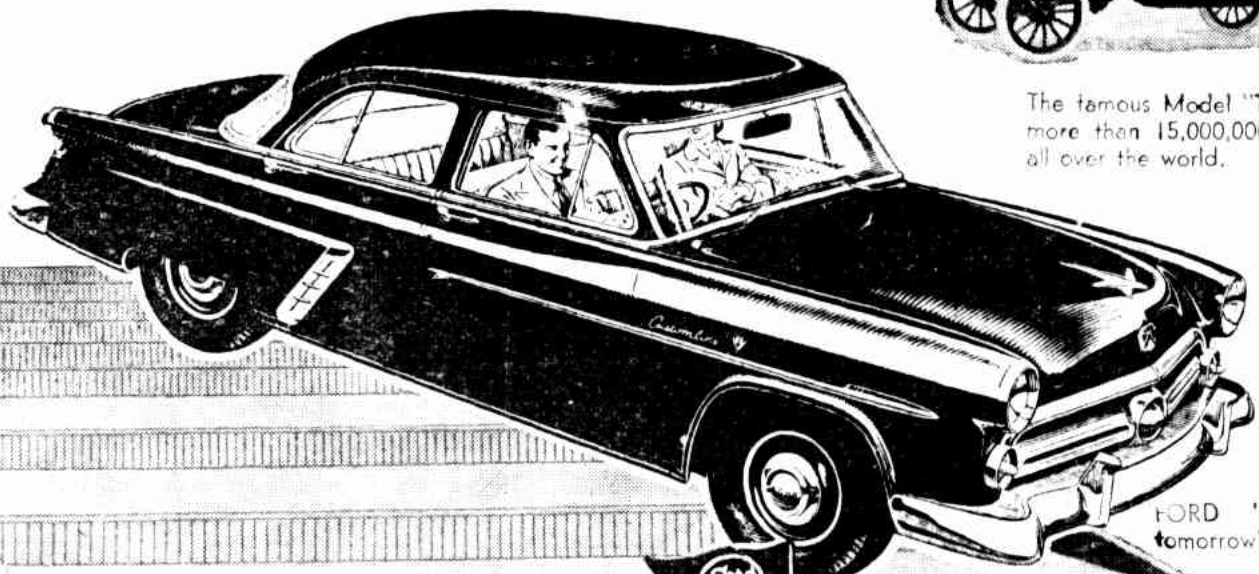


An old picture of the Duck Reach power station which supplied Launceston with power from 1895, and is now an auxiliary plant.

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# HAD ONLY FOUR TOWN CLERKS

THE LAUNCESTON City Council has had only four Town Clerks in its 100 years.

THE first Town Clerk was Mr. James Henry, who held the office from 1853 till 1872.

Mr. Charles Rocher followed and was key man on the council staff from 1872 to 1919.

From 1924 till 1949 Mr. F. C. Crawford, Launceston, had the dual position of

Town Clerk and City Treasurer.

Since Mr. Crawford's retirement Mr. C. S. Staubi has been Town Clerk.

The office of City Treasurer became a separate one on Mr. Crawford's retirement. It is now occupied by Mr. B. J. Edwards.



Mr. James Henry



Mr. Charles Rocher



Mr. F. C. Crawford



Mr. C. S. Staubi

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