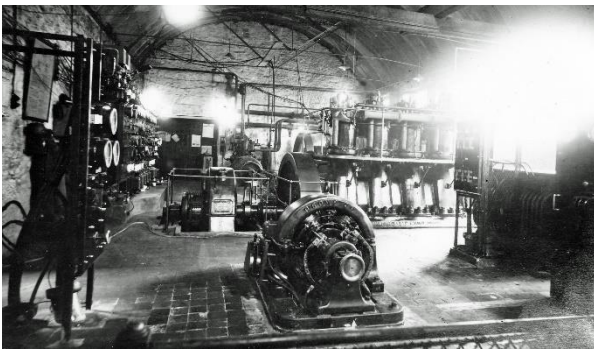


St Austell Undertaking

The St Austell Undertaking is interesting because it was one of the first public electricity supplies established in the South West; to be precise it was the second in 1887 after Taunton the year previously. This story was first put together by someone unknown to us into a Power Point presentation which David Cousins found in our Archives. That person (may be the late John Heath) who had been through the minute books, where there was little technical detail. This has now been added from Garcke's Manuals.

As stated above St. Austell Undertaking was the second public electricity supply to be established in the South West in 1887 one year behind Taunton in 1886, both private undertakings. Mr J Veale, an electrician, managed to get an Electric Lighting Order, since the local authority were complacent. J Veale & Co. was therefore formed by St. Austell Electric Light Order 1884 under the 1882 Act, for 21 years initially. The supply commenced in 1886/87 with a DC 3 wire 210/110volts system.



**1. North Street Generating Station
1887**

St. Austell Generating Station was installed in a building in North Street, St. Austell. Initially there were two loco boilers with 80 hp compound engines, one Burrell and one Fowler, driving three dynamos by belts and shafting. At night-time the supply reverted to batteries. Mr Veale had been advised by two consulting engineers, Mr Latimer Clark and Mr Gisbert Kapp. The latter gentleman was an Austrian, who had settled in the UK firstly working for Crompton's and then setting up a

consulting business in London. He later became the first Professor of Engineering at Birmingham University and a building was named after him there in 1972.

By 1900 it was realised that a larger outfit was required and other gentlemen got involved to form the St. Austell & District Electric Light & Power Co. Ltd., to take over the undertaking of J. Veale & Co. The supply closed down for 12 months and recommenced on 16th December 1904. It is recorded that the system consisted of 3 - Burrell & Fowler compound engines driving Allen & Kapp dynamos a 2 wire DC output. A Mr GD Handley had then been appointed Chairman.

By 1907 they were being more ambitious installing more plant with 2 - 85 BHP Premier Gas engines directly coupled to Mackie dynamos, capacity 100kW. By 1915 Additional plant installed at St. Austell comprised: National Gas 23kW Gardner - 50kW Mirrlees diesel 132kW. A new Chairman was named as EW Oakley with directors Mr. J. W. Drew and Mr. G. E. S. Oakley. In 1918/19 additional plant was added of 1 - 42 BHP Gas engine.

During the 1920's efforts were made to attract loads, extol the advantages of electric cooking, heating etc., but there was no success with the GWR until 1938, as it seems surprising that GWR were able to generate more economically themselves at their Fowey Docks facilities.

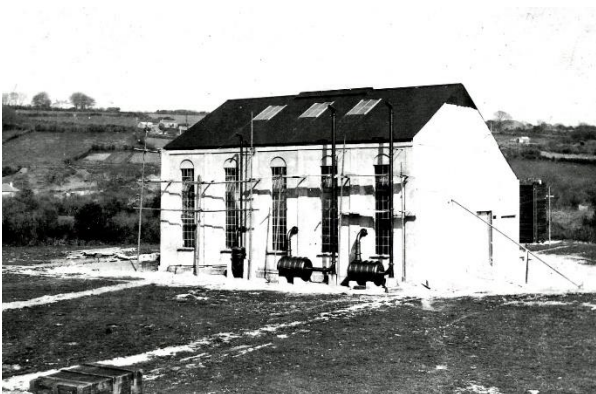


2. St. Austell Stand at the Royal Cornwall Show 1920

However, they did considerable publicity as shown by their stand at the Royal Cornwall Show in 1920 as shown above.

E. W. Oakley was appointed as Managing Director from 1st July 1925. Capt. J. F. Vickerman was appointed as a director, (represented the interests of Bonvilles Court Coal Co. Ltd.), for the supply of coal from South Wales. By 1926 demand had increased such that expansion was necessary, including a change to AC working.

In the late 1920's new prospective load from the China Clay industry north-east of St. Austell demanded a new generating station to be built. A site was acquired at Pontsmill near St. Blazey.

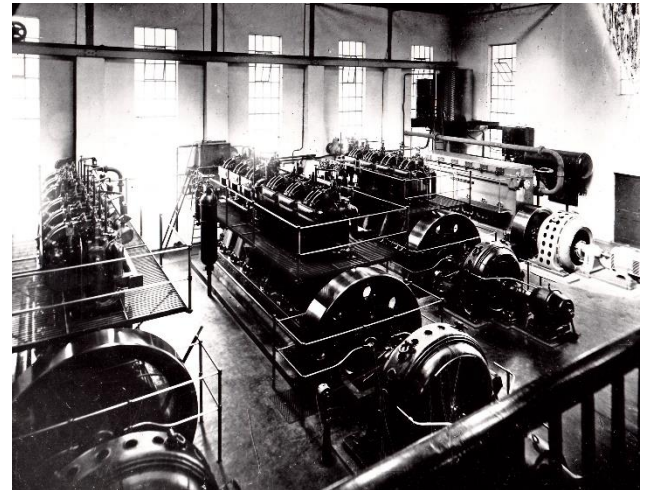


3. The new Pontsmill Power Station 1927

The new building was erected with 3 x Mirrlees diesels coupled to Crompton alternators installed initially. Later in 1931/32 x 200kW + 1 x 132kW (532kW) Crossley diesel with Crompton 300kW alternator were added (832kW) This latter engine seems to have given trouble for a number of years after it was installed. In 1934 a National diesel with

a Newton 225 kW alternator was added (1057kW) This brought the station up to its final installed capacity 1189kW.

At St. Austell by 1927 there was only one set Mirrlees diesel + 132kW dynamo and rotary converter installed around this time. An 11kV line was installed to Fowey with Fowey Hotel connected 17th December 1928. A DC to AC change-over scheme was drawn up for St. Austell, which was completed by 1935.



4. Pontsmill Power Station in the 1930's

From 1936 a bulk supply was taken from Fraddon via Trerice and Pontsmill was reduced to emergency and "peak lopping" running. Additional plant was considered as late as 1938, but savings over Grid supply was considered not worthwhile. At St Austell, moving the Mirrlees diesel to Pontsmill was considered, but proved to be uneconomic, and was sold for £1300 in 1940.

The decade ended in minor turmoil with Mr J. F. Drew disposing of his shares to S. W. Cooper and E. W. Oakley. During 1929 the directors become displeased with Chief Engineer W. F. Stamp, particularly as far as local administration was concerned and asked for his resignation. In 1930 he was replaced by Mr. C. Culmer Hodges from Dawlish. Mr. G. E. S. Oakley resigned sometime during late Summer 1929, on health grounds. However, another Oakley was appointed as a director, he was Arthur Gerald Tatton Oakley (Son of E.W.O.).

Mevagissey inhabitants, living so close to St. Austell, had looked on in wonderment at the electric lights in the adjacent town and therefore were keen to get Mr Veale to do the same for them. It was therefore not surprising that the Vestry Lighting Committee considered lighting there in 1896. The Mevagissey Electric Light Company Ltd was set-up, a non-statutory undertaking and Mr Veale was asked to install the necessary equipment in a building on the West Quay. This included a 25kw Crompton dynamo, 30 hp Davey Paxman steam engine and an Epstein battery (300 ampere-hour). Mr Veale ran the DC station for three years. Coal was delivered by boat, which could be moored near-by. Consumers were being charged 6d a unit, but eventually in 1906 the Company went into liquidation.

In 1907 a new company the Mevagissey Electric Supply Co. Ltd., was registered, which struggled on for the next twenty-five years until in 1931 the St. Austell directors decided to bid for a take-over of the company's undertaking. Initially this was not considered until in 1933 when Mr EW Oakley offered £2,000 for the undertaking. The plant then consisted of two crude oil engines on a vertical 25kw dynamo and a horizontal 15kW dynamo – total 40kW and a battery. The Council then decided to obtain an electric lighting order (ELO) in 1933 to safeguard the undertaking as a statutory undertaking.



5. Mevagissey small generating station on the Quay

However, in 1934 Mevagissey undertaking did acquire by St Austell for £4,000 + cost of mains, with a surprising condition, “to exclude

two of the Mevagissey management, Messrs Sidney and St. John. Mr Sidney went to the Isles of Scilly and started the undertaking on St. Marys. What followed was a massive change with the plant being sold off and an 11kv mains being extended to Mevagissey. The village was then changed over to AC working in 1935.

By this time, of course, as previously mentioned a bulk supply had been taken from CEPC, by means of an 11kV dual line from Fraddon with Pontsmill placed on standby duty. With the establishment of the Central Electricity Board (CEB) under the Electricity (Supply) Act 1926, setting up the national Grid system, bulk supplies from CEB became the cheapest option, since the Grid system only obtained their electricity from selected efficient stations, the only one in Cornwall being the CEPC Hayle Power Station.

By 1936 both St Austell and Mevagissey had been changed-over from DC to AC. completion of the changeover at St. Austell had been completed and so St. Austell Generating Station was closed down on September 26th 1936.

Supply to Polruan was discussed in 1936 and again in 1940, when an arrangement with CEP Co. would have been required. It seems that nothing was done and a supply to Polruan from Fowey was not given until 1995 when the submarine cable was laid from the gardens of the Fowey Hotel.

More changes were made to the St Austell company in 1938/39, with Mr E. W. Oakley retiring on health grounds and died in late 1938. (He had been Director for 34 years and MD for 13 years). Mr A. G. T. Oakley was appointed Joint Managing Director Mr. A. G. T. Oakley became sole Managing Director and Lord Merthyr was appointed as Chairman,

In 1940 the future Home Guard (Dad's Army), Trerice LDV (Local Defence Volunteers) was formed to protect Trerice s/s and a Home Guard Company was formed for Pontsmill in 1941. English China Clays subsidiary, ECLP requested a standby supply to cover for

Drinnick Power Station supplies, in case of enemy action disabling the station. Incidentally ELCP stood for English China Loving Pochin, created by an amalgamation of three companies.



6. ECC Drinnick Power Station

This is the first mention of Drinnick Power Station in the minute books, but it seems that this station was set-up by English China Clays north-west of St. Austell in 1909 not expecting to be able to get supplies from St. Austell Station then.

The station was needed for their own private supplies for the China Clay industry and was substantially enlarged to a fully operational power station in 1936 having bought second-hand plant from a London power station.

The Electric Lighting Order for St. Austell expired in 1943 and throughout the 30's there had been an ongoing dialogue between the Company and the local authority with the L.A only willing to support an Extension Order, if tariffs were significantly lowered. The Company for their part were not willing to agree to lower tariffs while their future remained uncertain. In the event an Extension Order was granted in 1943, for two years. In 1945 the Local Authorities indicated that they wished to take over the supply as soon as possible – the Company received a two year extension to August 1947, with the Local Authorities being given the power to takeover after six months from expiry. The LA never exercised the power and the Company received a further Extension Order in 1947 for three

years, which took them through to nationalisation. What a saga!

At the EGM in December 1944, the number of Directors was increased to 7 (min. 2) with provision for appointing alternative Directors. Mr Sexton appointed Frank Christy (of Chelmsford) as his alternative while he went to Australia on business for an extended period. Lord Merthyr returned in 1946. Mr Sexton returned in May 1946 and then it was agreed to offer Frank Christy a seat on the Board.

In that year the minutes state that a former Chapel in South Street, St. Austell was purchased, with a covenant for a restriction against the premises being used for the sale of intoxicating liquors and for dancing. the Company named it "Faraday Hall". We are not sure what this was destined for because their showrooms then were at 9 Fore Street, St Austell, 4 Fore Street, Fowey and at 11 Fore Street, Mevagissey.



7. Lord Citrine at Pontsmill in 1948

In 1948 nationalisation overtook the Company and its area became South Cornwall District with its Chief Engineer, Mr. Flower becoming District Manager, under the Sub-Area Manager, Cornwall, (Mr. A. C. Owen from CEPC).

As a postscript, it is interesting to note that the Company only had four Chief Engineers in its entire existence. TW Hill 1900-1919, WF Stamp 1918-1930, C Culmer-Hodges 1930-1946 and JE Flower 1947-1948.

All photographs have been taken from our archives.