

Cambridge Gas Works

Prior to the mid-1820s there were no streetlights in Cambridge so gas pioneer, John Grafton was employed by the Cambridge Improvement Commissioners to light the streets with gas made from burning coal in vessels called 'retorts'. The coal was brought to Cambridge by river using boats called 'lighters' from Kings Lynn. Grafton's company was taken over by the Cambridge University and Town Gas Light Co. in 1834 which had a contract until 1868. As the time came nearer, a new company called the Cambridge Consumers Gas Company offered to supply gas at a much cheaper price and was awarded the contract. The old company did not accept the decision which led to a legal battle during the 1860s. Due to a failure in coordination, both companies lit the oil lamps one night which resulted in some of them being smashed by a group of men. The contract with the old company was reinstated and they continued to produce gas until the gas industry was nationalised in 1949. The plant was no longer required in the 1970s when natural gas was first brought to Cambridge and it was finally demolished in 2000 to be replaced by Tesco's and the Riverside flats. The Gas Works was affected by both of the World Wars and the names of the honourable 22 men who died in the conflicts are recorded on a memorial which faces onto Newmarket Road opposite Tesco's. The dead include Urban Chapman who was a lamplighter and 19 year old Stanley Wilkinson from Garden Walk who died in WW1 and 20 year old Leonard East from Cherry Hinton in WW2. During the wars, women replaced men as stokers at the gas works.



[War memorial to gas workers 1914-1918](#)

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