



A King Canute, Saxon  
Coin, struck at the  
Cricklade Mint – now  
part of Copenhagen's  
Royal Collection.

# CRICKLADE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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## NEWSLETTER SUMMER 2015

### Forthcoming Events

Unless otherwise stated all Talks are held at the Town Hall Annex; doors open at 7.00pm, Refreshments served at 7.15 and the talk will start at 7.30pm

**3<sup>rd</sup> June - Evening Walk** leaving the museum at 7.15 – Calcutt Street to Hatchets and Abingdon Court Farm, Refreshments in the museum afterwards.

**13<sup>th</sup> June - Book Sale 10-12** at the Club at Cricklade

**17<sup>th</sup> June – Avebury Stones,**  
Speaker: Chris Penny

**22<sup>nd</sup> July Swindon in WW1** Speaker: Dr Mike Pringle

**23<sup>rd</sup> August Annual Walk:** starts at 2.00pm. Start to be decided, please check the posters and newsletters. Finishes at the museum for refreshments

**25<sup>th</sup> August Museum Cleaning at 10am.** Please come and help.

### Archive Audit

The Archive Audit takes place at 10am until 12 on the first Tuesday of every month. If you are interested in getting hands on with the archive, please do come and join us: Any member can join this team, training will be given or you can just call in and see what we are doing

### Museum Refurbishment

The museum will re-open on the 6<sup>th</sup> June following the installation of the new lighting and redecoration. Our thanks go to Clive Wilce for all his hard work co-ordinating and project managing this complex project.

The town has now given the go ahead for us to install gas in the museum, enabling us to proceed with our plans to install gas central heating. The gas supply will be installed starting on the 4<sup>th</sup> June and the central heating installation will commence in the middle of June.

Once this work is completed the committee plan on taking the time to concentrate on the running of the museum. The refurbishment of the outside toilet will be considered in the autumn of 2016.

### Interior of museum 27<sup>th</sup> May 2015



### Cricklade Gasworks

The key to the start of the gas industry was in 1792 when William Murdoch (1754-1839) lit his house at Redruth, Cornwall, with gas produced from heating coal. In 1796 Murdoch returned to the Soho Foundry at Birmingham to develop gas lighting commercially, and the first commercial plants were installed in 1805. Over the next few years Murdoch and his assistant, Samuel Clegg (1781-1861) installed individual gas plants at industrial and commercial premises. Frederick Winsor (1763-1830) was the key player behind the creation of the first gas utility, the London based [Gas Light and Coke Company](#), incorporated by royal charter in April 1812 to become and the first gas company in the world to commence operations.

In 1840, £37.1s. was raised by public subscription for gas street lighting in Cricklade, and in 1843 the feoffees of the Wayland Estates accepted a tender to erect street lamps. By 1859 a gas company had been established in the town. The gasworks were built on the south side of the present Gas Lane – renamed after the

gasworks – opposite Hall Close field (now North Wall).

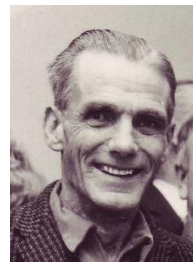
All Cricklade's streets were lit by gas well into the twentieth century, and Stan Woolford is remembered as the town's lamplighter in the 1930s and 40s. In the 1920s, Cricklade's Dr. Lewarne advocated a walk for children down to the gasworks to inhale the fumes as a cure for whooping cough, catarrh, or for any persistent cough! The gasworks, however, provided more than just gas to the townspeople during those austere times since creosote and tar were also useful by-products, and a barrel full of coke could be purchased from the gasworks for sixpence. The tar, used for road repairs or for private use, was contained in a large brick-built receptacle below ground. Between the wars a Mr Cookson was the gasworks manager living in a purpose-built house on the site with his family.

After the war, Mr Stanley Knight of Swindon, with his wife Florence and five young daughters, arrived in Cricklade to manage the Cricklade gasworks. Born in 1909, Stanley had been apprenticed to the Old Swindon Gas Company at the age of fourteen. He married in 1928 and remained in Swindon working in the gas industry until his move to Cricklade in 1946.

A description of the Cricklade gasworks at this time is given by Stanley's daughter, Millie, who at thirteen was thrilled with the big yards to play in at the gasworks site. There were only three cottages in Gas Lane then, plus Harry Giles' workshop, the stables that Mokey Gee ran, and a single bungalow opposite the plant. At the gasworks itself, the retort house was where the coal was kept and the furnace for heating it, and the boiler house beside it was for cooling the gas before it went into the holder. The Knight family lived in Gas House built at the end of a long garden which ran behind a high fence on the south side of Gas Lane all the way from the holder to the west corner of the lane. In those days the house had gas mantles mounted on all the walls for lighting, gas fires for heating and cooking, and no electricity. The house is bigger now, but at that time there was a lounge, kitchen, front room, three bedrooms, and an office where Florence manned the switchboard, dealing with calls about gas leaks and jammed meters. Stanley not only supplied Purton and Cricklade with gas by managing both gas holders, but also went around the area doing repairs with the help of two local men, Viv Wilks

and Goff Brooks. One of his hardest duties in the winter was to keep the holder from freezing by chipping off all the ice by hand, working all night if necessary. The gas in the holder had to be kept at a certain pressure and temperature to operate properly so if he'd let it freeze there would be no gas supply for anyone. This was especially hard during two really cold winters in 1947 and 1962. In 1948 the Gas Industry was nationalised and reorganised into twelve area boards, and by the 1950s local gas was produced at Swindon by the South Western Gas Board, with Cricklade, Purton and Wootton Bassett used as distribution and holder stations. A tin works operated on the site of the gasworks in the 1970s when the plant became redundant with the introduction of natural gas, and the holder was eventually dismantled.

Stanley Knight was a clever and energetic man, who loved his rose garden and built two caravans and a boat in the Gas House garden for the family's use. He retired aged 63 in 1972 and died seven years later.

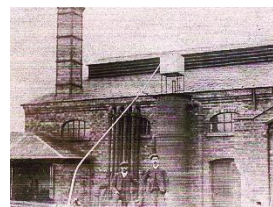


Stanley Knight



Above, right: Millie and Florence in the Gas House garden beside the holder.

Below: Cricklade Gasworks c1860, and as the Knights knew the building in 1946.



*From research by Marion Parsons for Cricklade Revealed books.*

**Pam Debenham**  
**27<sup>th</sup> May 2015**



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