

COMMITTEE REPORT

BY THE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE: 22nd June 2022

Ward: Abbey

Address: Gas Works Social Club, Gas Works Road, Reading

Proposal: To add the Gas Works Social Club to List of Locally-Important Buildings and Structures

RECOMMENDATION

That Gas Works Social Club, Gas Works Road, Reading be added to the List of Locally-Important Buildings and Structures.

1. PURPOSE AND SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To report on a proposal to add Gas Works Social Club, Reading to the List of Locally-Important Buildings and Structures.
- 1.2 Appendices:
 - Appendix 1: Location map
 - Appendix 2: Relevant photos and images
 - Appendix 3: Proposed Local List text
 - Appendix 4: Nomination form

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Reading Borough Council maintains a List of Locally-Important Buildings and Structures ('the Local List'). Its purpose is to recognise the buildings and structures which do not meet the criteria for national listing but, are nonetheless significant to the heritage of the local area. It was agreed by Planning Applications Committee on 2nd December 2020 that decisions on additions to the Local List should be made at PAC.
- 2.2 A nomination was received on 17th January 2022, to add Gas Works Social Club, Gas Works Road, Reading to the Local List. Consultations have been carried out in accordance with the agreed process, and this report sets out the recommended action.
- 2.3 Gas Works Social Club comprises a small group of buildings of different ages but, all are from within the period 1840-1913. They are located on the northern edge of Gas Works Road, next to the Kennet and Avon Canal. It was the distribution and services part of the Gasworks.
- 2.4 The nomination form, received for the building and illustrations in Annexure 3, identifies the significance of the building as follows:

“ The buildings on the site are of different ages but all are from within the period 1840-1913.

On the northern edge of the site by the side of the Kennet the ground floor of the social club dates from approximately the third quarter of the nineteenth century. The original purpose and the use is not known.

A plan of 1892 marks it as containing an engine house, boiler house and a pump room as part of the gas works site which included an old and an in-use retort house. It was briefly, in the early 1890s, in use as a showroom where appliances for hire were displayed before the showroom moved to town centre premises and, by 1905, the corner of Friar Street and Cross Street.

In 1895 it was an industrial building. It was extended in 1912 and by then was already in use as a workmen’s club (ref iv and vii). The different ages can be seen in the fabric of the building when seen from the opposite bank of the Kennet. There is a detailed description of the works to be carried out and the materials to be used by the builder Francis Newberry in a tender to Reading Gas Company dated August 1912. The Gas Governor house was according to the lintel over the door built in 1903 (image 12). The date of the wall in front of the site with gateposts is currently unknown but it would seem likely that it dates from c. 1900 at the latest. The design of the top of the gatepost is intriguing and we considered whether it might be gas related but were unconvinced. The left hand gate post has been demolished since 2017.

What can be seen from the 3 maps (Figs 1 to 4), is that a building existed on the site of the social club by 1877. The Goad map of 1895 indicates that this was a one storey building of the same shape as in 1877 marked ‘Eng.’ on the left and ‘pump’ and ‘tank over’ on the right. The dark square in the building is probably a chimney. By 1929 most of the building is two storeys as now and it was being used as a workmen’s club. A one storey governor house is on the north side of Gas Works Road.

3. RESULTS OF CONSULTATION

3.1 The following were consulted on the proposed addition to the Local List:

- Landowner
- Abbey ward councillors;
- Reading Conservation Area Advisory Committee;
- Reading Civic Society;
- Kennet and Brunel Community Association and Newtown GLOBE (local community groups).

3.2 A response was received from Reading Civic Society.

3.3 Reading Civic Society

Support the proposal to add to the Local List in hope that a good use may be found.

- 3.4 Reading Conservation Area Advisory Committee made the initial nomination and therefore did not make any comment on the proposal for local listing.

4. ASSESSMENT

- 4.0.1 The proposal to add a building or structure to the Local List should be considered against the criteria in Appendix 2 of the Reading Borough Local Plan (adopted 2019).

4.1 Exclusions

- 4.1.1 The Local Plan specifies that a building should not be considered for the Local List where it is already part of a conservation area, scheduled monument or subject to an Article 4 direction relating to historic or architectural interest. Gas Works Social Club is not within any of these existing designations and can therefore be considered against the other criteria.

4.2 General principles

- 4.2.1 The buildings on the site date from within the period 1840-1913 and therefore need to be considered against the following general principle:

b. 1840 - 1913: Any building, structure or group of buildings that is/are of clearly-defined significance in the local context and where elements that contribute to its/their heritage significance remain substantially complete.

- 4.2.2 The ground floor of the social club dates from approximately the third quarter of the nineteenth century. A plan of 1892 marks it as containing an engine house, boiler house and a pump room as part of the gas works site which included an old and an in-use retort house. It was briefly, in the early 1890s, in use as a showroom where appliances for hire were displayed before the showroom moved to town centre premises and, by 1905, the corner of Friar Street and Cross Street. In 1895 it was an industrial building. It was extended in 1912 and by then was already in use as a workmen's club.

- 4.2.3 The original layout of the industrial buildings has been retained. The 19th / early 20th century structures show an important development of the provision of gas services to Reading itself. It is therefore considered that the buildings fulfil the criteria for the period of 1840-1913.

4.3 Significance

- 4.3.1 To be added to the Local List, a building or structure must fulfil at least one of the defined significance criteria, which fall into two categories - historic interest and architectural interest. These are assessed below.

Historic Interest

a. Historical Association

i. The building or structure has a well authenticated historical association with a notable person(s) or event.

ii. The building or structure has a prolonged and direct association with figures or events of local interest.

- 4.3.2 The nominated site is significant as a physical reminder of the facilities associated with the provision of gas supply and would have served the adjacent Huntley & Palmers biscuit factory, its employees and the general community of Reading.
- 4.3.3 The remaining buildings of site have a clear connection with figures and events of local interest.
- 4.3.4 John Okey-Taylor (1825-1918), chair of the Reading Gas Company was an important local figure. A 1905 press report on the opening of the new offices and showrooms at the corner of Friar Street and Cross Street listed among his many achievements. There are more details in Annexure 4, of his exploits. He was “... *one of Reading’s most notable men of the present day. He has been intimately associated with the public life of the town in years gone by and is one of the few remaining of our citizens who link the present municipal and public institutions of the town with the past*”

b. Social Importance

The building or structure has played an influential role in the development of an area or the life of one of Reading’s communities. Such buildings/structures may include places of worship, schools, community buildings, places of employment, public houses and memorials which formed a focal point or played a key social role.

- 4.3.4 The Gas Works Social Club comprises the remnants of the gas works in this location, which was a significant place of employment.

c. Industrial Importance

The building or structure clearly relates to traditional or historic industrial processes or important businesses or the products of such industrial processes or businesses in the history of Reading or are intact industrial structures, for example bridges.

- 4.3.5 The 1903 Governor House supported the Reading Gas Company’s distribution gas mains. A governor regulates and reduces gas pressure between the gas production plant and the consumer network. The building contained a gas distributing cylinder and three governors for Reading town centre and western district, the eastern district and Caversham. The group of buildings therefore clearly fulfils this criterion.

Architectural Interest

a. Sense of place

- i. The building or structure is representative of a style that is characteristic of Reading.*

- 4.3.6 It is considered that buildings on the site fulfils this criterion, as examples of late 19th and early 20th century industrial architecture, a time at which Reading was significantly expanding as a result of its industrial development.

b. Innovation and virtuosity

- i. The building or structure has a noteworthy quality of workmanship and materials.*

ii. The building or structure is the work of a notable local/national architect/engineer/builder.

- 4.3.7 The architect for the Governor House could be Willcocks & Greenaway as their name is on a plan that highlights the building although the description of the records only mentions offices. Willcocks & Greenaway were in partnership between 1919-1931. Willcocks was the architect for Arthur Hill baths (1911) and with Greenaway worked on the restoration of Watlington House (1929/31). However, there is not sufficient certainty around this to demonstrate compliance with the criterion.

iii. The building or structure shows innovation in materials, technique, architectural style or engineering.

- 4.3.8 It is not considered that Gas Works Social Club fulfils this criterion.

c. Group value

i. The buildings/structures form a group which as a whole has a unified architectural or historic value to the local area.

- 4.3.9 The two buildings on the site together with the boundary walls form an identifiable industrial group linked with the bridge over the Kennet (image 4). Together with the gasworks bridge constructed 20 years earlier to access the new gas works, down river at King's Mead, they are the only physical remain of gas production in Reading. The last gas holder has now been dismantled so that the site can be developed for housing.

4.4 Conclusion of assessment

- 4.4.1 The Gas Works Social Club qualifies for addition to the Local List because it:
- Is not within a conservation area, scheduled monument or area subject to an Article 4 direction relating to historic or architectural interest;
 - Dates from between 1840 and 1913 and the elements that contribute to a high level of significance in the local context remain substantially complete.
 - Contributes to the heritage of the Borough in terms of its historical association;
 - Contributes to the heritage of the Borough in terms of its social importance;
 - Contributes to the heritage of the Borough in terms of its industrial importance;
 - Contributes to the heritage of the Borough in terms of its sense of place; and
 - Contributes to the heritage of the Borough in terms of its group value.
- 4.4.2 A description of the significance of the building for inclusion in the Local List is included in Appendix 3.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Local listing of buildings and structures, where it leads to the retention of those buildings or structures, can help to address the climate emergency by negating the need for demolition and new development, which are processes that use significant amounts of energy and result in emissions. Kings Road Garden provides an area of green space and landscaping within a high-density urban environment and therefore contributes strongly to the environment of the area.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 It is not expected that there will be any significant adverse impacts on specific groups due to race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age or religious belief as a result of the recommendations of this report.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

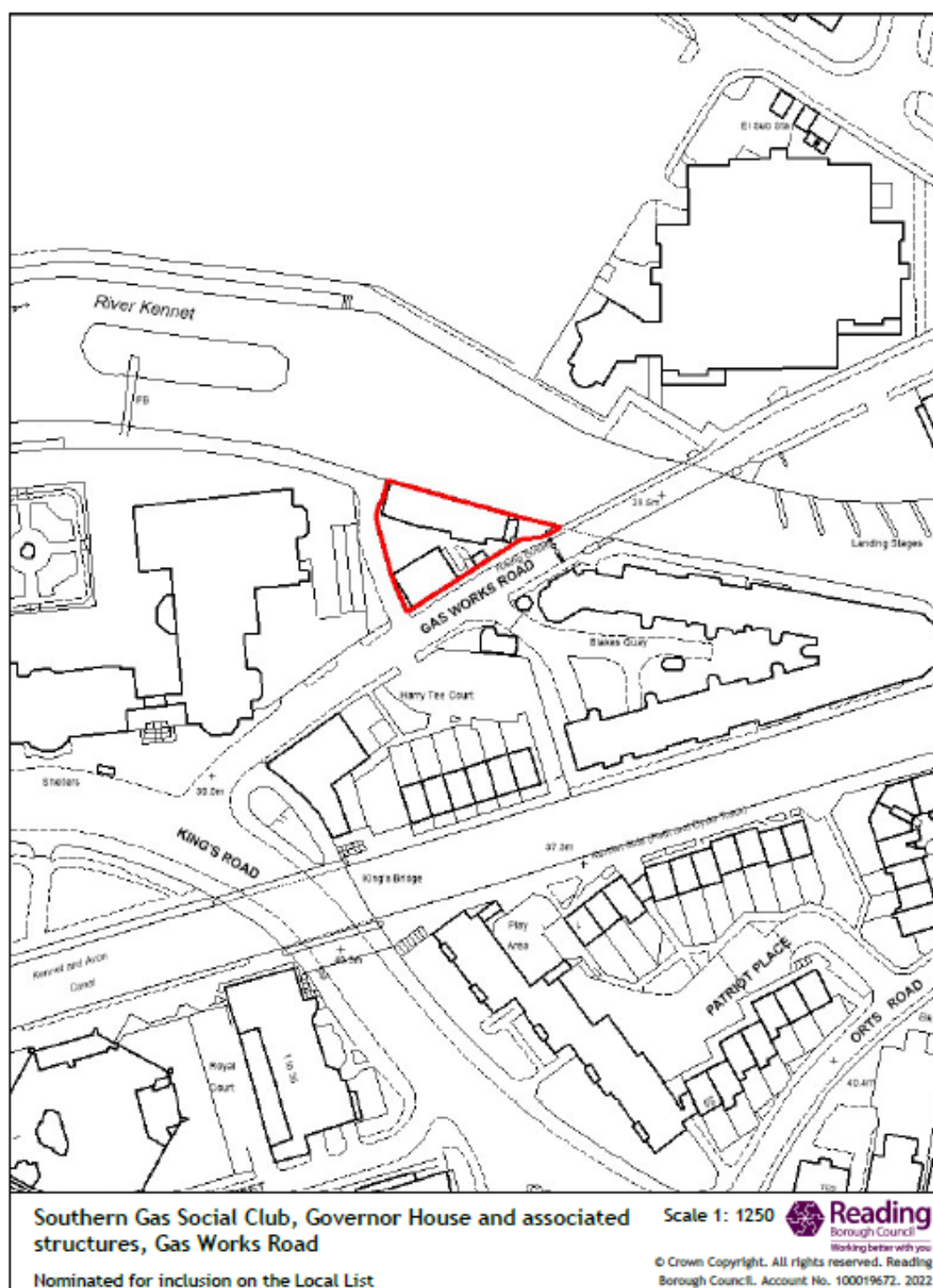
- 8.1 Addition to the Local List is not a statutory process, and there are no legal implications of the recommendations of this report.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Consideration of this nomination and any resulting amendments to the Local List will be accommodated within existing budgets.

Bruce Edgar, Conservation and Urban Design Officer

APPENDIX 1: LOCATION PLAN



LIST OF LOCALLY IMPORTANT BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES

APPENDIX 2: RELEVANT PHOTOGRAPHS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 1: Extract from OS map surveyed 1877 (National Library of Scotland).
The site is outside the Huntley and Palmer, Biscuit factory.

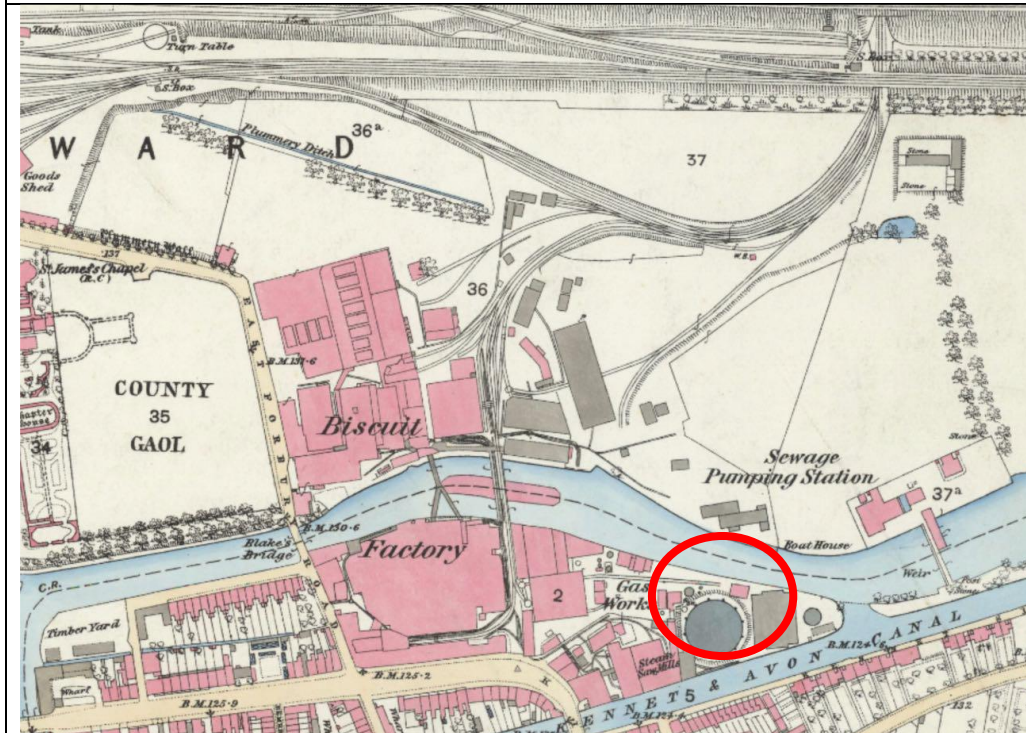


Fig. 2: Extract from Goad insurance map 1895 (Reading borough Libraries)

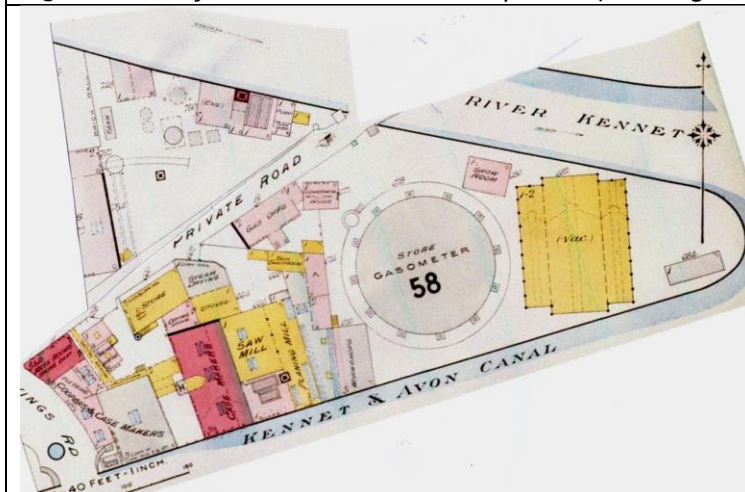


Fig. 3: Plaque over the door of the Gas Governor House (2018)
(Jo Alexander-Jones)



Fig. 4: Extract from Goad insurance map 1929 (Reading Borough Libraries).

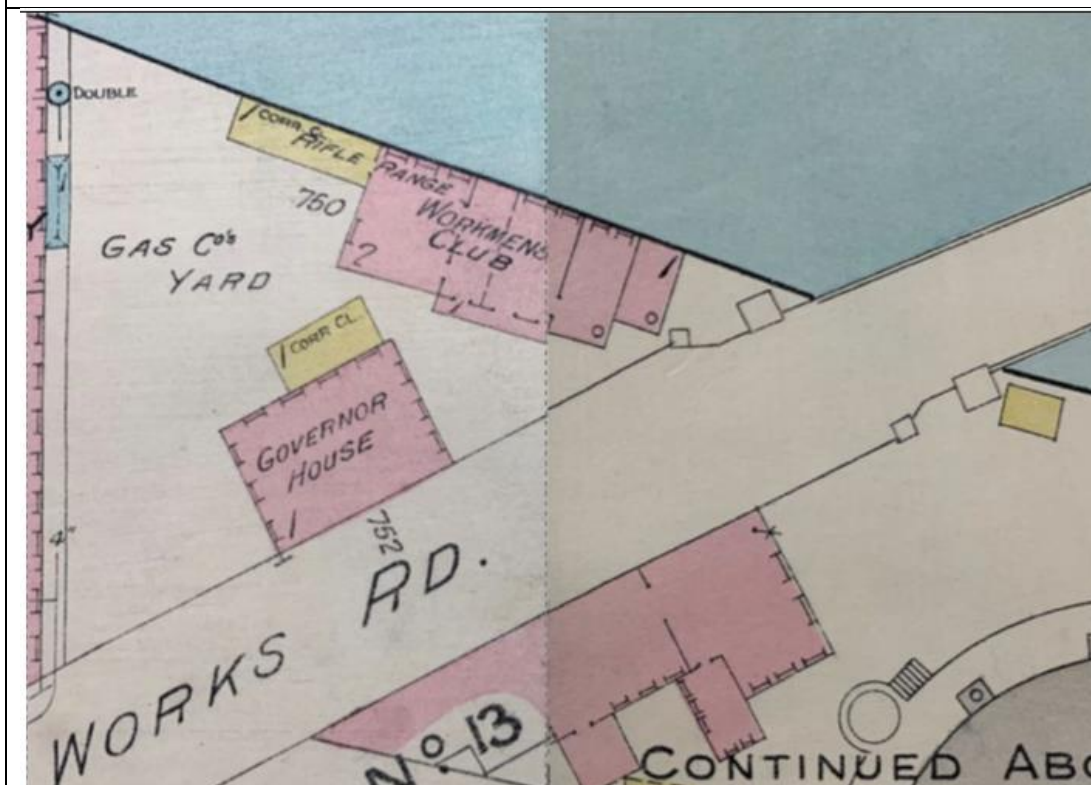


Fig. 5: Inside the Governor House showing district governors and valves.
From Reading Gas Company: A Retrospective - Douglas H Helps (1912)

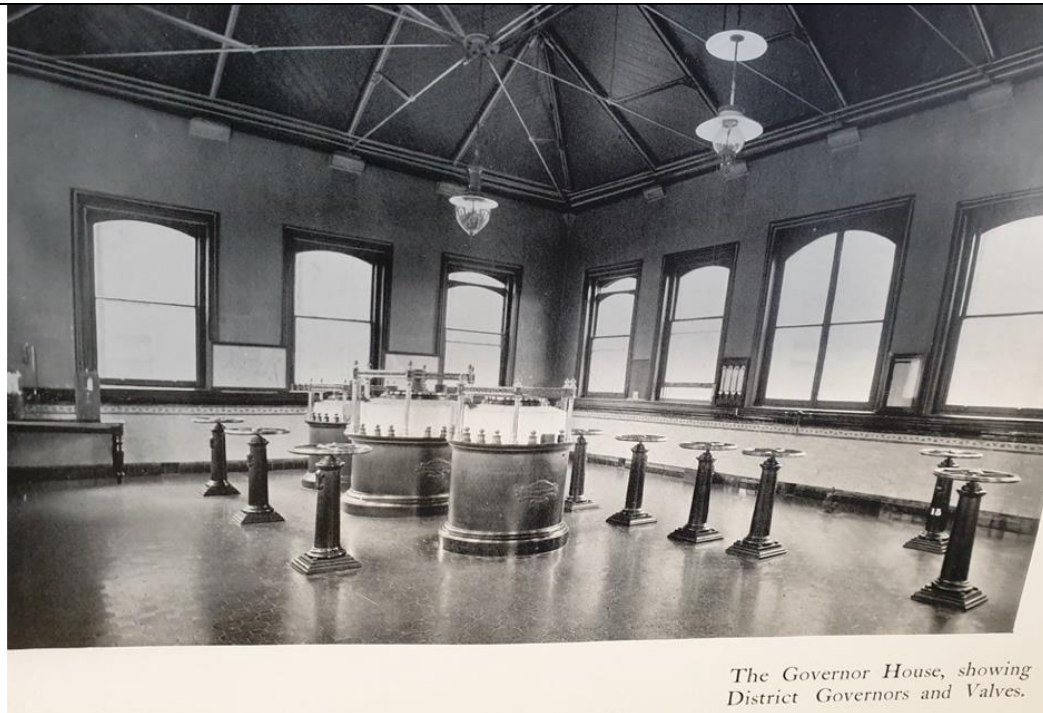


Fig. 6: Southern Gas Social Club, view across, Kennet Canal Bridge, from the east.
(RBC - April 2022.)



Fig. 7: Southern Gas Social Club, view of the site towards the west down Gas Works Road.
(RBC - April 2022.)



Fig. 8: Southern Gas Social Club, on the left of Gas Works Road.
Apart from the Huntley & Palmer Building (on the right), it is the last remaining 19th century buildings in the area, along the Kennet Canal.
(RBC - April 2022.)



Fig. 9: Southern Gas Social Club, on the left.
(RBC - April 2022.)

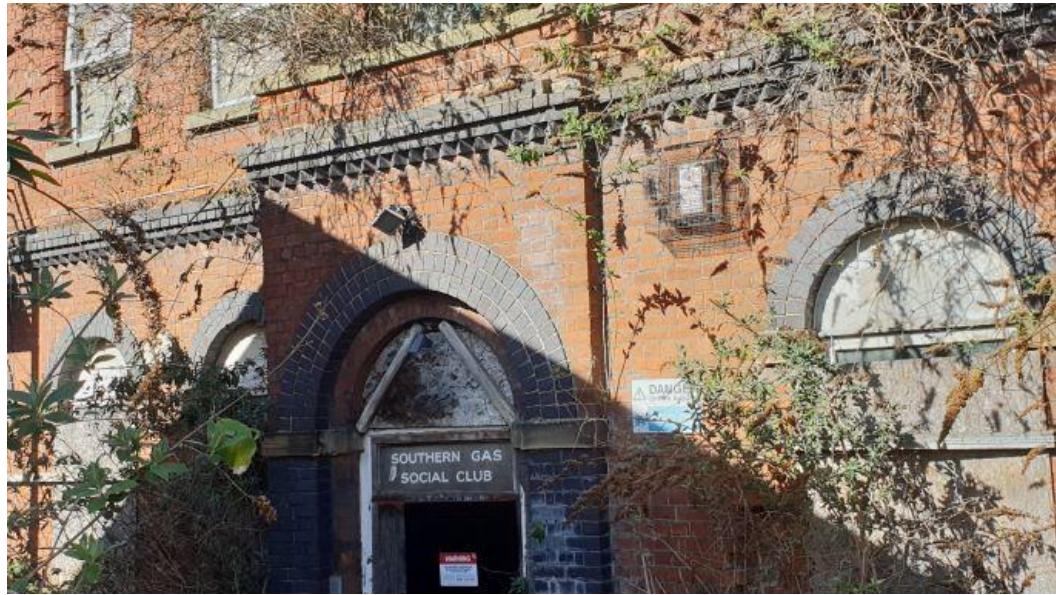


Fig. 10: Southern Gas Social Club, on the right. Governor House on the left.
(RBC - April 2022.)



Fig. 11: Gas Governor House.
(RBC - April 2022.)



APPENDIX 3: PROPOSED LOCAL LIST TEXT

Summary of Former Southern Gas Social Club, governor house and associated structures local listing nomination

The buildings on the site are of different ages but all are from within the period 1840-1913. The social club was in use until c. 1993. In 1862 the Reading Gas Light Company and the Reading Union Gas Company merged. The social club and governor house are on part of the original gas production site for the Reading Union Gas Company, between the arms of Kennet & Avon Canal next to Huntley & Palmers factory.

One of the industrial buildings on the site, dating from at least the third quarter of the nineteenth century, was converted into a social club to which in 1912 a second storey was added and other improvements made to mark the 50th anniversary of the company. The work was carried out by local builder Francis Newberry using as many recycled materials as possible e.g. slates. Arches and overhanging courses in best blue Staffordshire brick and blue brick were used to match the existing building.

The Gas Governor House, closest to Gas Works Road, was built in 1903 to replace an older building on the other side of the road. The building has a more utilitarian appearance than the social club. The walls only use one colour of red brick but hidden under the modern white cladding around parapet is a band of black moulded bricks. The lintel over the door states 'Erected 1903, J Okey Taylor, JP chairman. Douglas R Helps, Engineer'. The architects could have been Willcocks & Greenaway who were in partnership between 1919-1931. Willcocks was the architect for Arthur Hill baths (1911) and with Greenaway worked on the restoration of Watlington House (1929/31).

The two buildings on the site, the boundary walls and the bridge over the Kennet constructed to access the new gas works down river at King's Mead, are the only physical remain of gas production in Reading. The last gas holder at King's Mead has now been dismantled so that the site can be developed for housing. Other industrial heritage in the area includes the locally listed former Huntley & Palmers Social Club building and the cluster of Grade II listed buildings and structures associated with Blakes Lock Sewage Pumping Station.

APPENDIX 4: NOMINATION FORM

Address of building/structure: Southern Gas Social Club and Governor House and associated structures Gas Works Road

Postcode of building/structure: RG1 3EE

Owner of building (if known): In 1862 the Reading Gas Light Company and the Reading Union Gas Company merged. The social club and governor house are on part of the original gas production site for the Reading Union Gas Company,

Age of building: (b) 1840 - 1913: any building, structure or group of buildings that is/are substantially complete and unaltered and of definite significance

Please provide comments or further explanation of above: The buildings on the site are of different ages but all are from within the period 1840-1913, (see Figs. 1-3 for maps and keystone). On the northern edge of the site by the side of the Kennet the ground floor of the social club dates from approximately the third quarter of the nineteenth century. The original purpose and the use is not known. A plan of 1892 marks it as containing an engine house, boiler house and a pump room as part of the gas works site which included an old and an in-use retort house. It was briefly, in the early 1890s, in use as a showroom where appliances for hire were displayed before the showroom moved to town centre premises and, by 1905, the corner of Friar Street and Cross Street. In 1895 it was an industrial building. It was extended in 1912 and by then was already in use as a workmen's club.

The different ages can be seen in the fabric of the building when seen from the opposite bank of the Kennet. There is a detailed description of the works to be carried out and the materials to be used by the builder Francis Newberry in a tender to Reading Gas Company dated August 1912 (ref iv). The Gas Governor house was according to the lintel over the door built in 1903 (Fig. 2). The date of the wall in front of the site with gateposts is currently unknown but it would seem likely that it dates from c. 1900 at the latest. The design of the top of the gatepost is intriguing and we considered whether it might be gas related but were unconvinced. The left hand gate post has been demolished since 2017.

The building or structure has a well authenticated historical association with a notable person(s) or event: Yes

The building or structure has a prolonged and direct association with figures or events of local interest: Yes

In 1862 the Reading Gas Light Company and the Reading Union Gas Company merged. The social club and governor house are on part of the original gas production site for the Reading Union Gas Company,

Please provide further comments or explanation: John Okey-Taylor (1825-1918), chair of the Reading Gas Company was an important local figure. A 1905 press report on the opening of the new offices and showrooms at the corner of Friar Street and Cross Street listed among his many achievements (ref v):

- “.. one of Reading's most notable men of the present day. He has been intimately associated with the public life of the town in years gone by and is one of the few remaining of our citizens who link the present municipal and public institutions of the town with the past”

- Native of Reading, born in 1825• Vice-Chairman and then Chairman of Board of Guardians. During his term of office, the workhouse on the Oxford Road was built.
- Chair of joint Committee of Corporation and the Guardians to assess provisions with respect to new Assessment Act[Poor Rate Assessment and Collection Act 1869]
- 1855 took seat on Corporation - Abbey Ward• Involved in the acquisition of the site containing Abbey Gateway and Abbey ruins for the municipality and treasurer of the acquisition fund• Supervised excavation of Abbey ruins using the spoil to create Chestnut Walk and surrounding roads using unemployed workers to give them some income.
- “..it is to him we owe the business-like manner in which accounts are presented to the Council...”
- 1862 elected Mayor of Reading
- 10 March 1863 delivered first public congratulations to Prince & Princess of Wales (Edward VII) on their marriage when they stopped at Reading Station on their way to Osborne House
- Chairman of the Waterworks Committee until 1876• Governor of Reading School, and instrumental when Mayor in reviving the school from having only 1 pupil. He, along with two others, drafted the new charitable scheme that establish new constitutions for Reading and Kendrick schools
- Involved in governorship and management of Blue Coat and Green Girls’ schools
- Life Governor of University College, Reading
- Governor of Royal Berks Hospital

The building or structure has played an influential role in the development of an area or the life of one of Readings communities: Yes

Please provide further comments or explanation: The workmen’s club later became the Southern Gas Social Club and remained in use until c1993 (ref viii).

The building or structure clearly relates to traditional or historic industrial processes or important businesses or the products of such industrial processes or businesses in the history of Reading or are intact industrial structures, for example bridges: Yes

Please provide further comments or explanation: The 1903 Governor House supported the Reading Gas Company’s distribution gas mains. A governor regulates and reduces gas pressure between the gas production plant and the consumer network (ref i & Fig. 4).

The lintel over the door states ‘Erected 1903, J Okey Taylor, JP chairman. Douglas R Helps, Engineer’ (Fig. 2). The building contained a gas distributing cylinder and three governors for Reading town centre and western district, the eastern district and Caversham. It was designed by the company’s engineer and manager Douglas Helps although the architects may have been Willcocks & Greenaway. On the northern edge of the site by the side of the Kennet is an older building with a ground floor dating from approximately the third quarter of the nineteenth century The original purpose and the use is not known. In 1895 it was an industrial building. It was extended in 1912 for use as a workmen’s club when an additional floor was added and it had: a reading room on the ground floor; on the first floor a mess room with cooking facilities, showers, baths, wash basins and lavatories with constant hot water; a games room with a rifle range (ref vi).

Background to the Reading Gas Company and the site of the buildings (refs i & ii) The Reading Gas Company was formed on 30 June 1862 as an amalgamation of the Reading Gas Light Company and the Reading Union Gas Company. J Okey Taylor was the first chairman and had been chairman of the Reading Union Gas Company. He remained chairman until his death.

The Reading Union Gas Company's original gas production site was by the Kennet & Avon canal next to Huntley & Palmers biscuit factory, whereas the Reading Gas Light Company had premises in Gas Lane, off Bridge Street. In 1880 land at King's Mead was acquired where a new gas works was built. In order to reach the new gas works, Gasworks Road and the bridge over the Kennet were constructed 1881-82.

The building or structure is representative of a style that is characteristic of Reading:
No - The building is a unique Industrial building for the distribution of Gas.

Please provide further comments or explanation:

The building or structure has a noteworthy quality of workmanship and materials: Yes

Please provide further comments or explanation: The workmen's club was extended in 1912 to mark the 50 years Jubilee of the gas company. A press report of the event states that at the same time the stoker's lobby was extended by Messrs Collier and Catley. In the mess room a marble commemoration slab was unveiled by Mr Okey-Taylor. Each of the 260 employees received a bonus according to the length of their service and those with more than five years also received a brochure containing a retrospect of the company written by the engineer [this was 'Reading Gas Company: A Retrospective -Douglas H Helps 1912' ref vi] (ref vii). Francis Newberry's 1912 tender for the work to extend the social club is very specific (ref iv). The slates were to be taken off the roof and any old materials were to be used again after being passed by the engineer. Two chimneys were to be built as well as WCs and urinal requiring excavations.

- external facings, old and new, were to have 'neat black weather pointing' similar to the adjacent governor house. (Figs. 8 & 9)
- All brickwork English bond
- Arches and overhanging courses in best blue Staffordshire brick and blue brick to be used wherever necessary to match the existing building
- Two new arches for a window to the bathroom
- New double swing doors
- Old slates to be used on the river side which means that these slates could be about 150 years old now.
- New Bangor Penryhn slates to be used on the road side
- Parapet wall stone coping to be re-used• Stone window sills to 11 new windows to match original
- Riverside sills to be red splayed bricks
- Internal fittings, cupboards etc described. The dentillation on the front entrance and string course between the ground and second floors matches that on the Gas Works Road bridge (Fig. 8). Douglas Helps was appointed the Reading Gas Company's Engineer and Manager in March 1903 and in October a large Governor House was erected and the old one on the opposite side of Gas Works Road was dismantled (ref vi).

- The lintel over the door states 'Erected 1903, J Okey Taylor, JP chairman. Douglas R Helps, Engineer. The building has a more utilitarian appearance than the social club. The walls only use one colour of red brick but hidden under the modern white cladding around parapet is a band of black moulded bricks. This can be seen where there is a hole in the cladding. It is not very easy to see and there may be a cornice as well. The floor and the walls below window level were tiled. An internal inspection would be required to see if any of this remains.

The building or structure is the work of a notable local or national architect/engineer/builder: See notes below.

Please provide further comments or explanation: The architect for the Governor House could be Willcocks & Greenaway as their name is on a plan that highlights the building although the description of the records only mentions offices (Appendix 2). Willcocks & Greenaway were in partnership between 1919-1931. Willcocks was the architect for Arthur Hill baths (1911) and with Greenaway worked on the restoration of Watlington House (1929/31).

The building or structure shows innovation in materials, technique, architectural style or engineering: Yes Interesting range of decorative brickwork, polychromed, dentils etc. Architectural terracotta decorative tile panelling.

Please provide further comments or explanation:

The buildings/structures form a group which as a whole has a unified architectural or historic value to the local area: Yes

Please provide further comments or explanation: The two buildings on the site together with the boundary walls form an identifiable industrial group linked with the bridge over the Kennet (image 4). Together with the gasworks bridge constructed 20 years earlier to access the new gas works, down river at King's Mead, they are the only physical remain of gas production in Reading. The last gas holder at King's Mead is (as of January 2021) in the process of being dismantled so that the site can be developed for housing.

The buildings/structures are an example of deliberate town planning from before 1947:
No

Please provide further comments or explanation:

Please upload any evidence you have assembled that help to make the case as to why the building or structure fulfils the above criteria: 1 Goad & OS maps gas works.docx, 2 Plans of gas works site.docx, 3 Images of the Social Club.docx

Please briefly describe the relevance of the evidence you have attached: Appendices 1.OS and Goad maps2. Plans of the site3. Images of the site referred to in the text and others of the buildings and location. References and Bibliography i)Berkshire Industrial Archaeology Group (BIAG) - History of Gas in Berkshire. Berkshire Industrial Archaeology Group<http://biag.org.uk/gas-in-berkshire/>ii)Additional research on the Gas Works Social Club - Jo Alexander-Jones of BIAG iii)Architects and builders - Sidney M Gold A Biographical Dictionary of Architects at Reading iv)August 1912 - Form of Tender Reading Gas Company from Francis Newberry, 292 Kings Rd Reading. Berkshire Record Office D/SG 8/1/3. According to Sidney M Gold, Francis Newberry was a builder. In 1897 there was also an architect F Newberry at 254 Kings Road in 1897.v)Reading Standard 17 June 1905vi)Reading Gas Company: A Retrospective - Douglas H Helps (1912)vii)Reading Standard 10 & 13 July 1912 (with images) - Reading Gas Company's Jubilee viii) Planning officer's report on planning application 160378 12 October 2016 and Get Reading article 'Revamp Unloved Building' 7 June 2013. viii) Planning officer's report on planning application 160378 12 October 2016 and Get Reading article 'Revamp Unloved Building' 7 June 2013

<https://www.getreading.co.uk/news/local-news/revamp-unloved-building-4253389>