

# HASTINGS PIER CHARITY

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### Electricity in Hastings



Night swimming in the 1930s, (HPC067.002)



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## Electricity in Hastings

### January 13, 1882

The Council set up a committee to look into using electric light in the town. A year before, the councillors on 7 January 1881 had thrown out such a suggestion, but with electricity clearly becoming a serious rival to gas, and with the gas supply contract with the Council ending in January 1883, the many councillors and council officers with an interest in the gas company were hedging their bets by setting up the committee. Many were also involved in forming a local electric lighting company. The News of 3 February reported that the Hastings and St Leonards Electric Light Co Ltd had been set up at a “most important gathering of local gentlemen” on Tuesday 31 January. It took place in the 44a Robertson Street office of Fred Langham, prominent solicitor and clerk to the borough magistrates. The gentlemen took a large amount of the shares. They had been offered the local concession for the important Brush technology which was dominating the development of electricity supplies.

The News of 7 April 1882 published a large ‘official’ advert by the company, saying it had capital of 5,000 shares of £10, with 2,000 on sale as first issue. The chairman was Henry Moor Baker [a prominent estate agent] of 1 Verulam Place. The other directors were Joseph Catt of Saxonhurst, St Helens Road; John Reeves of Elford, Baldslow Road; Walter L Vernon of Clytha House, London Road; and James Woodhams of 50 Havelock Road. Langham was the company secretary and solicitor. The advert said: “That Electricity is the light of the immediate future is admitted on all hands. It has passed beyond the experimental and reached the practical commercial stage. Both on the Continent and in England, as well as America, it is being introduced with great rapidity and success. ... Besides producing a Light unequalled for brilliancy and beauty, these Lights leave the atmosphere pure and untainted, and their use is therefore especially desirable for private houses, being unattended with the injurious effects to health and to interior decorations which are inseparable from gas.” Initially the company would confine its operations to providing lighting, although electricity had other uses. A street electric lights cost little more than one of gas, but could cover an

area five or six times bigger, and far brighter. The directors had “secured an eligible site in the centre of the town for the purposes of their works”. 4 August 1882 the Council agreed to pay £750 to have 35 Brush lights installed by the company for a year, on a mile and half of the town’s 45 miles of streets. They would mainly be around the town centre. The work was expected to be carried out in October.

### **June 1, 1883**

The annual meeting of the Hastings Electric Light Company on the afternoon of Thursday 31 May heard that the directors had purchased on a long lease a piece of ground on the corner of Earl Street abutting the railway. Here they had erected the “very commodious and substantial premises” where the meeting was being held. Coal would be discharged directly into the works. Two 40 horsepower engines by Robey had been installed, and sufficient piping and electric wire purchased for lighting a distance of two miles. The work of laying down mains and running the wire was actively being proceeded with. An application had been made to the Board of Trade for a seven year license, and the directors had no doubt that when obtained “a contract on fair and remunerative terms will be entered into by the Corporation of Hastings, for lighting a considerable portion of the sea-front”. They hoped to have the works in operation in a few weeks. The directors were being cautious about buying and installing the final equipment because electricity was a new industry which was constantly evolving, and “no one system has come sufficiently to the front to justify them in adopting it”. Mr Hammond, of the Hammond Electric Lighting Company, gave a well-attended lecture at the Royal Concert Hall in Warrior Square on ‘Electric Light in our Homes’ on 30 April which helped explain it to the public. He illustrated his talk with many working exhibits of electric lighting, which most people had never seen before. After that talk the directors decided to buy incandescent lighting. The company had spent £7,305 of its £8,350 shares sold; it was agreed to sell a further £4,000-worth. It was hoped that the pier would adopt electric light. There were several prominent people awaiting the service, including Mr FJ Parsons, owner of the Observer and a director of the electricity company, who urgently wanted it installed at his Observer building in Claremont. [Parsons was also a director of the new Omnibus Company, which at noon that day had held its first meeting - in his Observer building!] Chairman Henry Baker was re-elected a director, as was Joseph Catt. In the evening, after the meeting, there was a display of incandescent lights inside and outside

the Earl Street building, attracting a large number of people. [The building still exists, as a carpet warehouse.]

### **November 12, 1883**

The first electric street lights in Hastings were switched on during the evening of Monday 12 November. They burnt steadily and were 'much appreciated'. This followed a Council meeting on 7 September which had agreed to experimental lighting of part of the town. This was to be the seafront, from the east end of Carlisle Parade to the west side of Warrior Square. It was to be for one year, using fifteen 2,000 candle-arc lights, from sunset to 11pm. The Council would pay £375.

### **Seafront Lights - November 15, 1889**

A special meeting of the Council discussed obtaining some premises in Rock-a-Nore for lighting the whole of the seafront by electric light.

Steve Peak, author of A Pier Without a Peer, The History of Hastings Pier and Peerless Piers and his website <http://hastingschronicle.net>

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