

GRANTON HISTORY GROUP

GRANTON GAS WORKS

By David King, Secretary, Granton History Group



Drawing of gasholders at Granton.
Artist Ian Lutton

Granton History Group is an informal group that researches and records the history of Granton, Trinity and Wardie. Our area of study is north of Ferry road, from Silverknowes in the west to Starbank Park in the east.

We meet each month, usually on the third Tuesday of the month at 7:30 p.m. in the Starbank Inn, Lavenderbank Road, Edinburgh (beside Starbank Park).

Details of meetings are on our website, or you can phone for information.

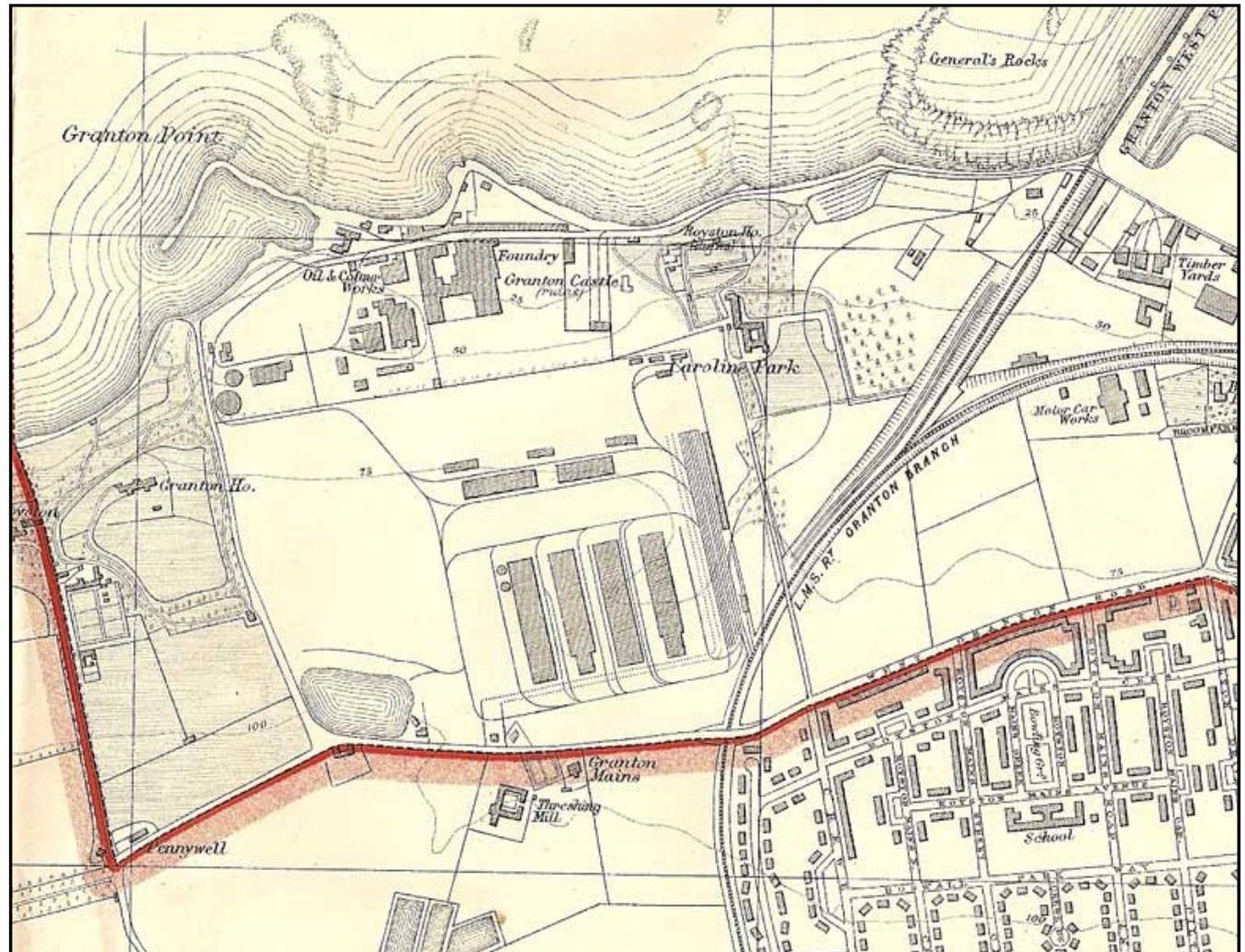
You can find more information about Granton on our website:

www.grantonhistory.org

If you would like to contact us, please email:

info@grantonhistory.org,

or telephone 0131-467 1684.



Granton Gas Works in the 1930s. This map for some reason does not show the gasholders...

Granton Harbour is at the top right of the map—part of the West Breakwater is visible. Features between the Gas Works and the shoreline include A B Fleming's Oil and Colour Works, a foundry, the ruins of Granton Castle, Royston House and Caroline Park House. It is still standing and has recently been restored. The former Madelvic Motor Car Works is also shown.

The 'LMS Ry Granton Branch' was the former Caledonian Railway line. The line curving to the right and off the map served Granton Goods Station and connected with the North British Railway (by then LNER) via a short stretch of line that crossed West Harbour Road. Houses, then quite new, at East Pilton are on the lower right hand part of the map. The area west of the railway is still undeveloped.

Please turn over for more details...

GRANTON GAS WORKS

BACKGROUND

For centuries, lighting in buildings depended on candles and later on lamps using liquid fuels such as whale oil, and later paraffin. By the 1820s gas was being used. Gas works were established by private companies:

- New Street, Edinburgh, 1819, Edinburgh Gas Light Company;
- Baltic Street, Leith, 1823, Edinburgh & Leith Gas Company;
- Tanfield, Canonmills, 1824, Edinburgh Oil Gas Company (taken over 1829 by Edinburgh Gas Light Company).

In 1889 the two major local authorities, Edinburgh and Leith, formed the Edinburgh & Leith Corporations Gas Commissioners (ELCGC). They bought out the private companies and made, distributed and supplied gas to Edinburgh, Leith and surrounding areas.

The two remaining works at New Street and Baltic Street were old and on confined sites. New Street was updated to some extent in the 1890s but new works were clearly needed.

THE NEW WORKS

In 1897 a new engineer was appointed to the ELCGC, Walter Ralph Herring. He got agreement to building a new Gas Works. The site was bought from the Duke of Buccleuch for £124,000 and had rail access from both the Caledonian Railway and the North British railway, and also was close to Granton Harbour, so that the risk of supplies of coal being interrupted was minimal. Gas production required a large quantity of coal. By 1926, for example, 200,000 tons a year were being used.



The new works were carefully planned and capable of future expansion. At the time, although electricity was available, gas consumption was increasing substantially.

The full design was in fact never built. It included eight gasholders, but only one was built initially, the one that is still there.

The main entrance was on West Granton Road, where the entrance still exists, beside the new Edinburgh's Telford College building.



The buildings were mainly of brick, with stone features. Two main buildings stood at right angles to West Granton Road.

The one to the west was a store for coal, and also housed some of the plant. The one to the east was the Retort House where the gas was made. The process involved heating coal in fireclay chambers to obtain the gas which was then cleaned of impurities. What remained was coke which was taken out and sold.

By products were processed to make sulphate of ammonia, sold as an agricultural fertiliser, and tar. These were processed in the Products Works at the north west of the main works, near West Shore Road.

The works were opened on 27 February 1903 although gas production had started on 21 October 1902.

The works incorporated modern methods of production including plant to tip the contents of railway wagons straight onto conveyor belts, weighing machines to ensure that the right quantity of coal was fed into the retorts and hydraulically operated chutes for charging the retorts.

GAS DISTRIBUTION

Granton was well away from the main areas where gas was used. A 48" gas main was laid below the streets to Canonmills, where there was a Gas Station with further gasholders. Gas was pumped under pressure from Granton. Further mains took gas to other Gas Stations at various locations in Edinburgh, Leith and Portobello.

ACCESS

The Gas Works included a passenger station for workers travelling from a distance, which still exists. Standard gauge railways around the site allowed coal deliveries, and a narrow gauge railway was used to transport ash etc.

DEVELOPMENT

Two more gasholders were built, one in 1930 and one in 1960.



These have now been demolished. Other additions were also made. Gas production stopped in 1987 and following that some of the

buildings were demolished. The works were used to store natural gas from the 1960s, but finally closed on 2001.

New offices for Scottish Gas have been built on part of the site, and the rest is being redeveloped as part of the Granton Waterfront project.

PHOTOGRAPHS

- 1: Former Caledonian Railway seen from West Granton Road. The line into the works branched off to the left here.
- 2: Former entrance with Telford College building.
- 3: Gas Works in the 1980s (?) from West Shore Road showing all three gasholders (courtesy A Tulloch)