

Six Examples of Service Cover Plates in 'Stratford'

HISTORY UNDERFOOT in 'STRATFORD - UPON - AVON'

Public Utilities have made great use of cast iron gratings, covers and manholes, so that today the streets of our towns and villages are paved with history. You don't need special skills to read this history for many state their origin whilst others can be identified by the similarity of pattern and shape with others. Although such items of street furniture were installed in the early 19th. century it is unlikely that you would find easily identifiable items from such an early date but in our older towns and cities it is usually possible to find a continuous succession of manholes etc. from the late 19th. century to the present time.

The most useful way of identifying, and thus dating, these castings is by reading the legend for most will identify either the manufacturer or the undertaking that provided the service. There are, however, several other aids to dating but these must all be used with caution. The first is the cumulative effect of decades of passing traffic gradually wearing the pattern so that in extreme cases little or nothing is left. This is however not an infallible guide for a well worn manhole in a heavily trafficked road may be newer than a well preserved item in a nearby side street. Another clue is the quality of the casting, and particularly the regularity and sharpness of the pattern and lettering, for this certainly improved in the 20th. century. A final caution - manholes are mobile - thus examples of Leamington Corporation Manholes can be found in Warwick and Stratford upon Avon has at least one North Thames Gas Board gas valve cover plate.

THE STRATFORD GAS COMPANY

The Stratford Gas Company (SGC) opened its first works in 1834. These were in Chapel Lane on a site which is now occupied by the Union Club. These works caused much nuisance to the town and under the threat of legal action the works were moved to a new site close by 'One Elm Bridge' in 1837. In 1880 the town successfully opposed the renewal of the gas company's licence and all the assets were transferred to the 'The Stratford Corporation Gas Department' (SCGD). Later the works were enlarged and came to be known as 'Timothy's Bridge Gas Works' whilst the area supplied from Stratford was also much enlarged by absorption of the previously independent gas undertaking in Snitterfield. The Stratford Corporation Gas Department continued to supply gas to Stratford until the gas industry was nationalised in 1949. Under public ownership Stratford was at first part of the West Midlands Gas Board (WMGB), then of West Midlands Gas (WMG) and finally of British Gas before being returned to private ownership in 1988.

The Timothy Bridge Gas Works, which had been much modified and extended since 1837, was closed in 1962/3 when gas was brought in from Leamington Spa. Excepting a few minor buildings and the gasholders at the Timothy Bridge Site nothing remains of either of Stratford's two 19C Gas Works and the only visible evidence of the original gas company, or the corporation gas department, to be seen about the town are some gas valve cover plates. Many of these are now so worn that they can only be identified by their similarity to others which have retained their original identification. Two types have been found as illustrated in figures 1 and 2. The first, showing the letters 'S G C', was almost certainly the property of the Stratford Gas Company and thus dates not later than 1880. The second, showing the



Fig.1 0 Inches 3

The Stratford Gas Co.
Ex. Old Town Croft
(Opposite College Street)



Fig.2 0 Inches 3

The Stratford Corporation Gas Dept.
Ex. No.15, Warwick Road.

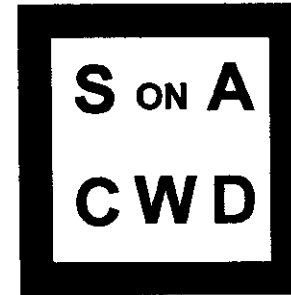


Fig.3 0 Inches 2

The Corporation Water Dept.
Ex. Church House Hotel, Warwick Road.

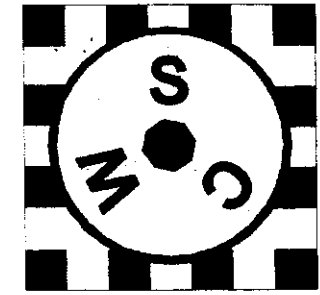


Fig.4 0 Inches 2

Stratford Corporation Water.
Ex. Opp. White Swan Hotel, Wood Street.

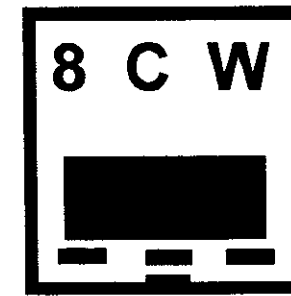


Fig.5 0 Inches 3

Stratford Corporation Water
Mistakenly Reading 8CW.
Ex. Lloyds Bank, Bridge Street.

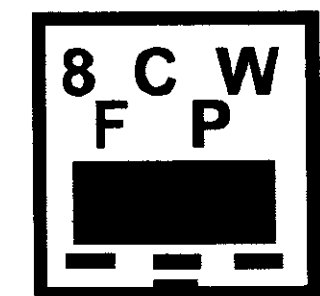


Fig.6 0 Inches 3

A Stratford Corporation Fire Plug Mistakenly
Reading 8CW.
Ex. Opp. White Swan Hotel, Wood Street.