



The Beverley Barge Preservation Society

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BILL'S BLOG 3

THE STORY OF STAGGERING CHARLIE

The Beverley Corporation Gas House, which was situated just off Becksides, produced and provided all of Beverley with gas for cooking and lighting from the early 1800s up to 1960 when North Sea Gas came on stream.

The gas was produced from burning gas coal brought by barge from all over the West and South Yorkshire Coal Fields. It was discharged on Crane Hill into horse and carts and transported through the large arch which still remains to this day, and burnt in large furnaces which produced Gas, Coal Tar, Cinders and Coke.

Residents from all over Beverley would walk with barrows, old prams, bicycles and any form of wheeled transport they had down to Becksides and to the Gas House where a bag of coal or cinders could be purchased for 11d (roughly 5p) on receipt of a docket from the office outside. I have seen queues from the Gas House right down onto Becksides with people waiting to buy just one bag of fuel.

When it was your turn you would walk into the Gas House through the big arch into clouds of steam and a Gas House worker with a large curved fork would fill you a bag of coke, coal or cinders and off you would go home. I knew one of the workers (his name was Jimmy Gray) who lived near to the Gas Works at the watermill which was known as England Springs.

Some local men scraped a living out of delivering coal, coke and cinders using barrows and delivering all over Beverley.

One such man was Charlie Greensides and I admired him for his strength and stamina as he would pull a cart loaded with up to seven large sacks of coal and, despite him having a disability, would go back and forwards all day long delivering with his heavy loaded cart to houses all over the town, up hill and down dale.

He became known as Staggering Charlie because of his difficulty in walking. Whenever he was seen without his cart he would be unable to walk in a straight line. It might have been the Olde Ale from the many Olde Ale Houses on Becksides; who knows, one thing for sure is his like will never be seen again following the invention of the internal combustion engine.