

# Electricity and Lighting

From the turn of the century until the 1930s Brisbane Valley streets were lit by acetylene. Electricity supplies to the Valley came from three sources – Ipswich Electric Supply Company to Lowood and Esk, the Nestle condense milk factory to Toogoolawah, and from Brisbane to the Stanley River dam and Somerset.

Street lights were installed in Esk in 1905. Lit by Johnny Monson, the lamplighter, after October 1911, they served the town until electricity was switched on in October 1935. In November 1911 six Kitson lights on concrete bases were installed at a cost of £91 at the bridge, railway crossings, and four street intersections. Johnny Monson was appointed caretaker at an annual rate of £35. Lighting in private houses was by candlelight, kerosine lamps, and 'German flicking fat lamps.' The only household to have electric light was that of Lars Andersen who connected electricity to his house from his sawmill in July 1917.<sup>1</sup>

Efforts towards an electricity supply for Esk were first made in 1925 when an Electric Light Committee of Division 2 members of Council investigated a proposal by private enterprise. That came to naught. When the Esk Co-operative Dairy Association was rebuilding their butter factory in 1926 the directors offered to devise a scheme to supply Esk town with electricity. However they found it would not pay and nothing more was done until 1930.<sup>2</sup>

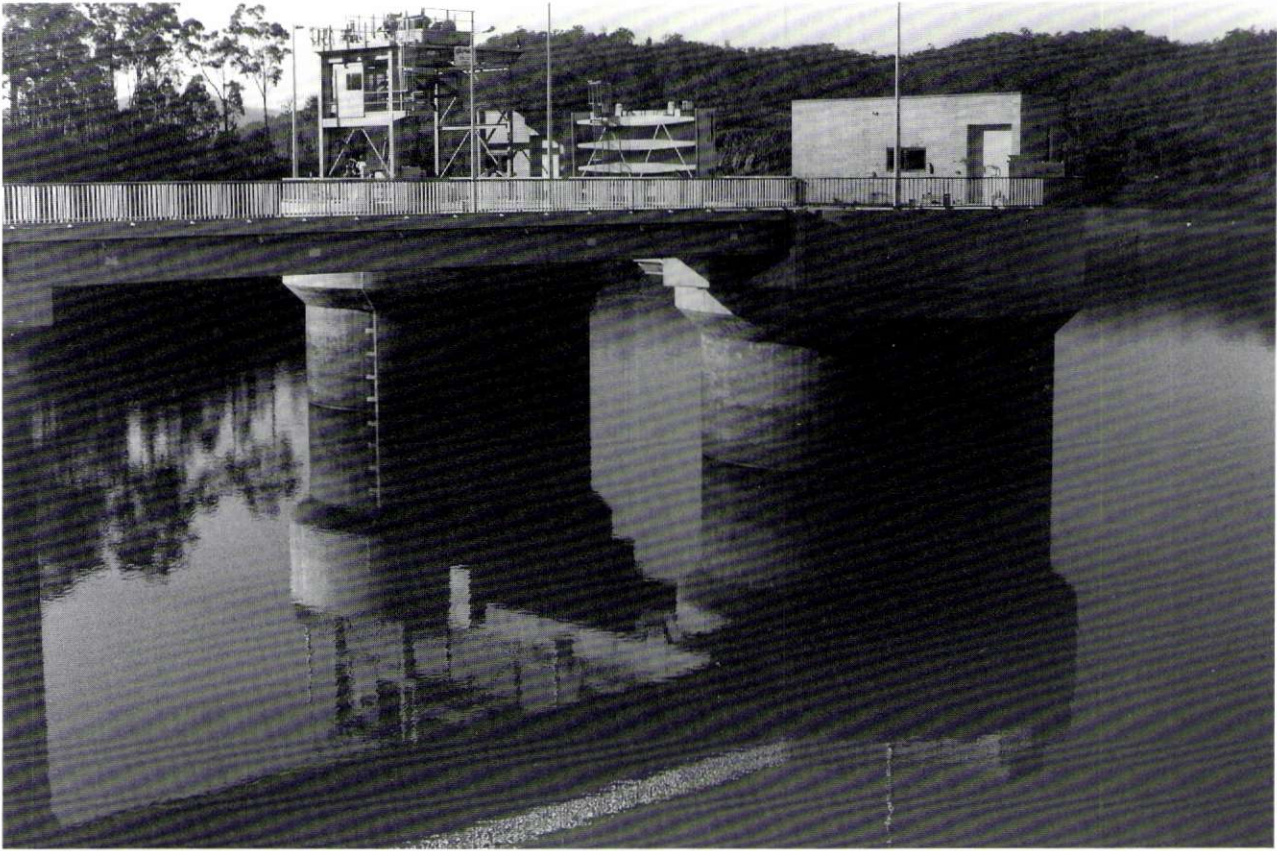
Meanwhile, in 1932, Lowood town was supplied with electricity from Ipswich by the Ipswich Electric Light Company. That company, managed by Miss McGee, was keen to extend their lines west and north into the shires of Laidley, Rosewood, Tarampa and Esk. In October 1929 they applied for a Distributing Order from the state government for those shires under *The Electric Light and Power Act of 1896* and it was approved by Order-in-Council on 27 February 1930. However it was two years before Council approached the Ipswich Electric Light Company for electric lighting of Esk and also Toogoolawah which had its own system of electric power from Nestle's condensed milk factory. The closure of the factory for economic reasons in 1931 and the necessary renegotiation of the electricity agreement evidently stimulated the Shire Council to approach the Ipswich Electric Light Company

directly. However the company could not extend supply to Esk and Toogoolawah immediately because of heavy capital commitment; but they were prepared to consider it after the Lockyer programme was completed.<sup>3</sup>

The Esk Shire Council adopted the Standard Electric Light and Power By Laws in February 1932 in preparation for the supply to Lowood. The installation work had been done in 1931 and the power was switched on on 2 March 1932. There had been electric street lights in Lowood since May 1926, supplied by the Ipswich Electric Light Company. The acetylene Kitson street lights had been installed originally in 1913. When the new street lights were turned on in 1932 the old ones were sent over to Esk for use. There were ten new street lights, one of 200 candle power at the railway crossing and nine of 100 candle power. Assistant Shire Clerk, V. Gagen, was collector and reader of electric light meters for many years.<sup>4</sup>

When Lowood farmers were also using electricity for irrigation Esk still did not have electricity in the town and Esk was the last of the three main towns in the shire to obtain electricity. In 1933 the council had to guarantee revenue of £3,200 per year before the company would extend the electricity. The Ipswich Electric Light Company constructed the transmission line from Lowood to Esk in 1935 and the electricity was switched on in October 1935. The old acetylene lights and their stands were removed and the Esk School of Arts also sold its acetylene light plant in 1936. The Council installed twenty-two lights in side streets and five 200 candle power street lights in Ipswich Street at a cost of £180. However it was not until late 1936 that electric light was available at the Esk and Toogoolawah railway stations.<sup>5</sup>

During the second War a mercury vapour lamp was installed at the corner of Ipswich and Highland Streets. The power of Esk street lights was not increased until 1954 when the wattage was increased from 75 to 200 watts. In January 1945 the council applied to the military authorities to have the street lights returned to their prewar candle power. In January 1963 electrician foreman, Colin Podmore, and leading hand, Harry Brennan, began the change-over to modern fluorescent lamps, including the conversion of five concrete standards erected in the garden strip in Ipswich Street which



Splityard Creek Dam Control Structure for Wivenhoe Power Station. 1987.

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had tungsten lamps. In 1970 the street lights were further modernized.<sup>6</sup>

Toogoolawah's electricity supply was a totally different proposition, being a local supply. The Toogoolawah Amateur Gardening and Progress Association decided at its 1922 Annual General Meeting to advocate an electricity supply. It took five years to achieve. The committee approached the European directors of the Nestle company in 1924 to assess a proposal for generating electricity at their Toogoolawah condensory. Shire engineer Hill also reported on the proposal, establishing that a loan of £2,500 would be needed and that current would be supplied to customers at 1.5d. per unit. A public meeting was convened in Toogoolawah in Alexandra Hall by the Shire Council in October 1924 to hear the Nestle company's proposal to supply the electricity at 10d. per unit to customers and the Council was to provide the mains and do the installation. The town of Toogoolawah was to be declared a benefited areas and guarantee to use £500 worth of electricity per year. The company was to be allowed to increase the unit charges and if necessary the Institute of Engineers in Brisbane would be an arbiter.<sup>7</sup>

In February 1926 the council obtained a loan of £4,500 at 6.5 per cent for twenty years from the

Australian Mutual Provident Society for the project. Nestle and Anglo Swiss Condensed Milk Company Limited acted as bulk supplier. An oil station, three phase, fifty cycle generator produced 415 volts. There were initially 129 consumers and lighting charges gazetted on 23 December 1926 were 1s.6d. per unit with 25 per cent discount and power was 9d. to consumers, and 8d. per unit to the Council. Consumers considered the charges very high and there were continual complaints. The engine was a cross compound type with drop double beat valves and cylinders of eleven and nineteen inches with a stoke of thirty inches. At 180 horsepower and with 150 pounds per square inch steam pressure it ran at 110 revolutions per minute. The engine had been purchased eight years before, second hand from New South Wales and had not been used at Toogoolawah before. W.D. Thompson, engineer at the condensory, had overhauled the engine for the electricity supply, which was also installed in the condensory. The Toogoolawah electricity supply was switched on on 20 June 1927 by Mrs Smith, the wife of the Esk Shire Council Chairman.<sup>8</sup>

Teskes, sawmillers, were particularly vocal about the unit costs. Charges were reduced to 6d. per unit in February 1928 and that was still

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considered prohibitive. Negotiations resulted in the Council taking over the payment of the maintenance electrician, T.R.O. Watson. The condensory continued to supply electricity even after it closed in 1930 and H. Searle was caretaker. The Nestle company really wanted to sell the electricity installation to the Shire Council in 1935 for £1,000. The Council would not be pressured into it and sought a report from Albert Axon, Brisbane engineer. He recommended against the purchase and suggested that the Council tap into the Ipswich Electric Light Company's Brisbane Valley system.

In 1935 the Nestle company decided to end the agreement from 20 June 1937. A private enterprise supply could not continue to co-exist beside the Brisbane City Council and Ipswich Electric Light Company supplies. The Ipswich company was supplying Cressbrook, Mt Beppo, Murrumba, Moombra and Glen Esk districts and Esk in 1936. The Esk Shire Council bought the Toogoolawah electricity plant from the Nestle company from 29 February 1936. The Toogoolawah Benefitted Area for street lighting was abolished and the AMP loan paid out. At 9.40am on Saturday, 29 February 1936 the electric light system supplied by the Ipswich Electric Light Company was switched on, with minimum charges of 7s. 6d. per month.<sup>9</sup>

The decision about the provision of electricity to the Stanley River Dam was a political one. The amount at stake was the £30,000 for electricity supply during construction. In May 1935 the Brisbane City Council won the support of the Queensland Cabinet over the Ipswich Electric Light Company. This involved the construction of a transmission line from Sub-station No.2, Stafford Road, Kedron, to Stanley River Dam site via Petrie, Caboolture, Woodford, and Kilcoy. This decision was clearly embodied in *The City of Brisbane (Stanley River Dam) Electricity Supply Act of 1935*, because the Brisbane City Council was committing £1 million to the construction costs. Esk Shire Council did not support this plan at the Royal Commission in 1936. Construction of the transmission line proceeded expeditiously and power was switched on at 3.30pm on Monday, 23 March 1936. The transmission line was acquired by the City Electric Light Company in 1937, but

the 3.5 MW hydro-electric power station built at the dam continued to be operated by the Brisbane City Council.<sup>10</sup>

Coominya and Fernvale obtained electricity in 1935 and Linville after the War. The shire is part of South East Queensland Electricity Board's western district with headquarters at Gatton and extends north to Linville and the range. In the early 1970s the Irrigation and Water Supply Commission installed the lights at Atkinson's Dam.<sup>11</sup>

The advent of the Wivenhoe Dam and Splityard Creek Hydro Power Station altered the composition of the regional board. However one of the most topical issues is the difficulty for new subdivision residents, 'blockies', in meeting the cost of electricity connections to their properties and many residents have reverted to kerosene refrigerators and gas lights — turning full circle in fifty years.<sup>12</sup>

## ENDNOTES

1. QT 13 July 1905, 20 July 1911 p2, 6 October 1911 and 24 November 1911 p2; ESKM 25 July 1917 p345.
2. ESKM 8 July 1925 p708, 3 November 1926 p169, 9 February 1927 pp236-237 and 11 May 1927 p307; ECM 9 April 1927 p161.
3. QGG Vol CXXXIV No 53 pp755-779 [3 March 1930]; Queensland Electricity Commission file N/133 Box 666/683; ESKM 10 February 1932 and 13 April 1932 p671.
4. QGG 4 June 1932; QEC file N/35/1 Box 606/835; QT 5 March 1932; ER 5 July 1934; LWDM 15 September 1913 p161 and 13 October 1913 p167; ESKM 10 February 1926 p32 and 10 February 1932 p621.
5. ESKM 5 July 1933 p. 164 and 13 November 1935 p. 697; ER 11 January 1936 and 7 November 1936.
6. SEA News August 1963; ER 12 September 1943; ESKM 12 May 1954 p1399, 16 July 1970 p9246 and 17 January 1945 p508.
7. QT 2 December 1922 p13, 11 October 1924 p10; QEC File N35/1 Box 606/835; ESKM 12 December 1923 p457, 11 June 1924 p545, 13 November 1924 p606, 21 January 1925 p632 and 8 April 1925 p666.
8. QEC file N35/2 Box 666/835; QGG Vol CXXVII No 213 pp2,793-2,815 (23 December 1926); ESKM 22 December 1926 p212 and 8 June 1927 pp331-332; QT 18 August 1926; N.G. Coleman, 'Early Settlement of Toogoolawah' *op.cit.*
9. QEC file N/133 Box 666/683; ESKM 10 September 1930 pp296-297, 10 December 1930 p369, 13 March 1935 p508, 7 August 1935 p676, 29 January 1936, 11 March 1936, 22 April 1936 and 11 May 1936; QPP 1939 Vol 2 p1,438; ER 5 September 1936; BVA 4 March 1936.
10. QEC files N/133 Box 666/683 and N/172 Box 666/870; ER 28 March 1936.
11. SEA News April 1963 p6; ESKM 24 September 1970 p9,275.
12. ESKM 10 February 1977 p 108.026.