

“And then the lighting of the lamps”¹

– Lighting Kildwick, 1892 to 1919

Introduction

The “Lighting and Watching” Act of 1833 allowed groups of property owners to form committees and organise local street lighting. (It also allowed for the creation of local police forces (the “watching” part of the Act’s title.) These committees were then empowered to levy a rate on other householders to pay for the lighting (or policemen)².

This Act, together with the opening of the Kildwick Parish Gas Company in 1878³, provided the people of Kildwick with both the means and legal framework for lighting the village.

The Kildwick Lighting and Watching Committee

The Lighting and Watching Act was adopted by a meeting of Kildwick ratepayers held on 9th November 1892⁶. This meeting discussed whether it was a good thing and how much it would cost:

As to the cost of lamps, Mr. Pickles said that the lamps fixed complete would be about 54s per lamp (£2.70) and bracket lamps would, he thought, cost about 12s less (£2.10). The cost per lamp per annum for gas would be from 13s to 14s (65 to 70p). A long discussion as to the number of lamps, distances apart, places of erection, etc., ensued, but was finally left to the inspectors (committee members) to use their discretion.

The discussion on the adoption of the Act may have been prompted by the extension of mains gas supply, by the Kildwick Parish Gas Company, along Station Road, from the railway bridge to the river. In September 1892 the Craven Herald had reported⁷:

Three gas lamps and pillars are about to be erected by the ratepayers of Glusburn parish on that part of the road which forms part of their township. The remaining portion, which lies in Kildwick township, will require three more. It is hoped that the ratepayers of Kildwick will not hesitate to complete so great a boon to foot passengers on this road during the winter months.

The first meeting of the Kildwick Watching and Lighting Committee took place on the 16th November.

It elected officers, set the amount of money to be raised for the coming year from the village at £30, and confirmed that meetings would take place every month. In fact, after an initial flurry of activity, meetings were held very irregularly; often just annually to confirm the election of officers.

Presumably the committee then approached the Gas Company to supply gas to the lamps, as the sole piece of business at the next meeting was to accept the Company’s tender.

The lamp-posts were purchased from John Barrett Eastburn Foundry, Crosshills; and this name can still be seen on some of the original posts that still exist in the village (see Appendix for locations).

Initially there may have been as few as three gas lamps erected in the village. A pencil written note in the Committee's minute book lists:

- Lamp at Mr. P. Baldwin's corner (possibly in Farnhill, at the corner of Newby Road and Back Mary Street ?)
- ditto at top Corner of ch[urch] yard
- Lamp at Bridge

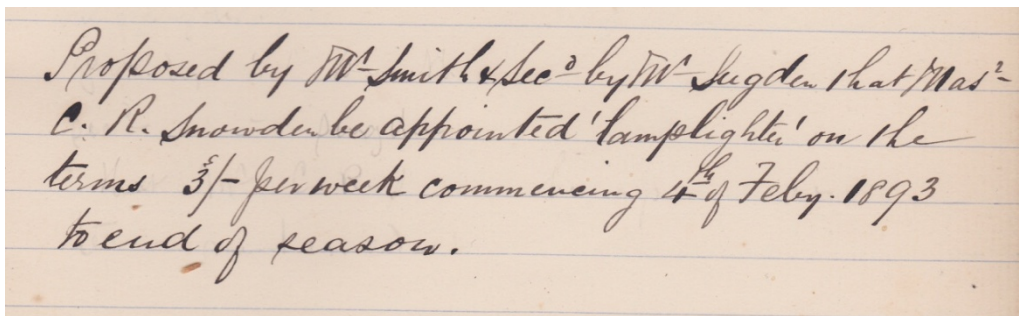
Note: The "bridge" is probably Parson's Bridge.



Figure 1: One of the original Kildwick street-lamps. This one, on Parson's Bridge, is still in operation – converted to use electricity.

In January 1893 the Committee decided that they would erect a lamp adjacent to Barrett's Bridge and sought the permission of the Canal Company, as the best place to position the lamp was on land owned by them. This permission seems not to have been granted and an alternative location was used.

So, by February 1893 the Committee had lamps and gas to power them with. All that was required was someone to go around and light the lamps as it got dark and extinguish them when it got light. They appointed the 14 year-old Cecil Snowden, at the princely sum of three shillings (15p) per week.



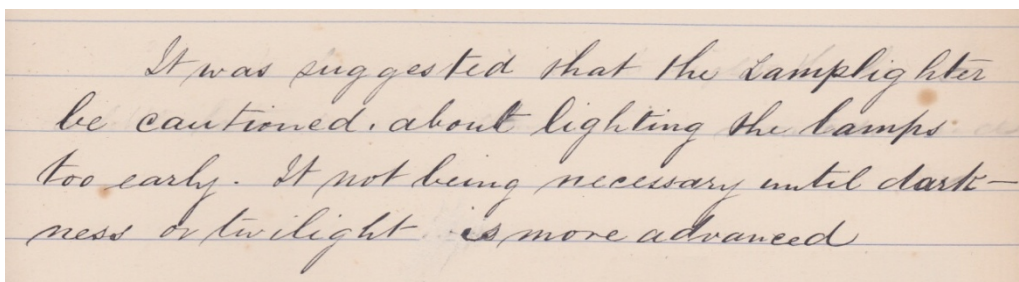
Proposed by W. Smith & Sec^y by W. Sugden that Mas^r C. R. Snowden be appointed 'Lamp-lighter' on the terms 3/- per week commencing 4th of Feby. 1893 to end of season.

Figure 2: You're hired ! Cecil Snowden gets the job as Kildwick's first lamp-lighter

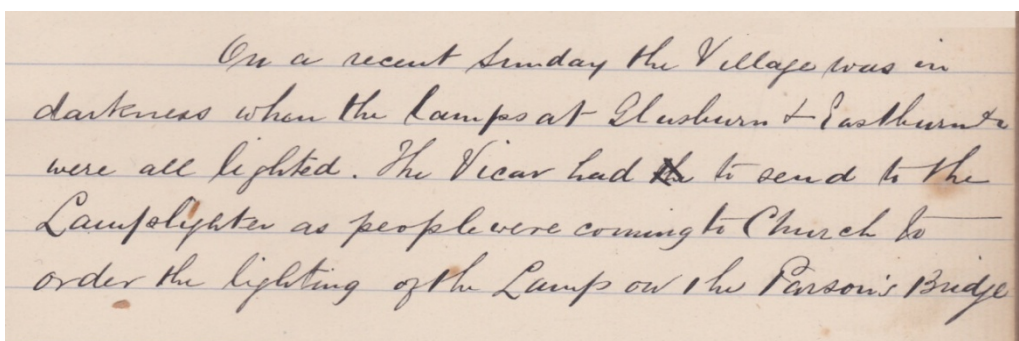
Although he was to remain lamp-lighter for just a few years, this was the start of Cecil's remarkable period of service to the village, which lasted almost up until his death in 1951. He would serve as a member of the Lighting Committee, as a member of Kildwick Parish Meeting, and as Kildwick's representative on Skipton Rural District Council⁴.

Because street lighting was a novel idea at this time, the Committee were largely deciding how things should work as they went along. For example, lamps were not lit all year round and every year the Committee would have to decide on the date on which lamps would start to be lit.

They initially allowed the lamp-lighter to use his discretion as to when on a night the lamps should be lit – or even whether they should be lit at all if there was a full moon. Perhaps not surprisingly this led to some inconsistencies and it appears that in November 1893 young Cecil was taken to task for lighting the lamps too early, only to be criticised again – for leaving it too late – the month after.



It was suggested that the Lamp-lighter be cautioned about lighting the lamps too early. It not being necessary until darkness or twilight is more advanced



On a recent Sunday the Village was in darkness when the Lamps at Glushburn & Eastburn were all lighted. The Vicar had to send to the Lamp-lighter as people were coming to Church to order the lighting of the Lamp on the Parson's Bridge

Figure 3: Who'd be a lamp-lighter ? Cecil Snowden fails to please all of the people all of the time. Extracts from the Kildwick Lighting and Watching Committee minutes of November 1893 (upper) and December 1893 (lower)

Eventually things settled down and the annual levy, which had risen to £24 for 1897, was reduced and set at £18 for all the years 1905 to 1912, except one.

At a meeting held shortly after the outbreak of WW1, on 25th September 1914, the rate for the coming year was set at just £15 and Seth Tillotson was re-appointed as lamp-lighter for the village at five shillings (25p) per week.

The village goes “dark” (1916 to 1919)

Unlike during the second world war there was no national “blackout” during WW1. However, from early in 1916 there was a local, legally-enforced, ordinance implemented throughout the Skipton area, prohibiting the display of unnecessary lights⁵.

At a meeting of the Kildwick Lighting Committee on 15th February 1916 it was decided to cease lighting the village with immediate effect, although an exception was made for the lamp adjacent to Barrett’s bridge. It was subsequently decided not to levy a rate for lighting for the years 1917 or 1918: the village would remain “dark”.

However as 1917 progressed, the risk of Zeppelin attacks diminished and from October 8th of that year lamps were lit at:

- Barrett’s bridge (all night)
- Church steps
- River bridge (one lamp only)
- Kirkgate

Similar restrictions were enforced during the 1918 lighting season but, at a meeting held in the School on 16th September 1919, it was decided that **all** the lamps in the village would be lit. The “dark” days of the war were over.

Appendix – Where were the early Kildwick lamps ?

Sadly nowhere in the minute book of the Kildwick Lighting Committee is there a list of where the street lamps were located.

The map shown on the following page is of approximately the same period as the early activities of the Committee (1888 – 1913). It shows where lamps are believed to have been positioned, or where a proposal to site a lamp was made, and the earliest date at which they are mentioned in the minutes.

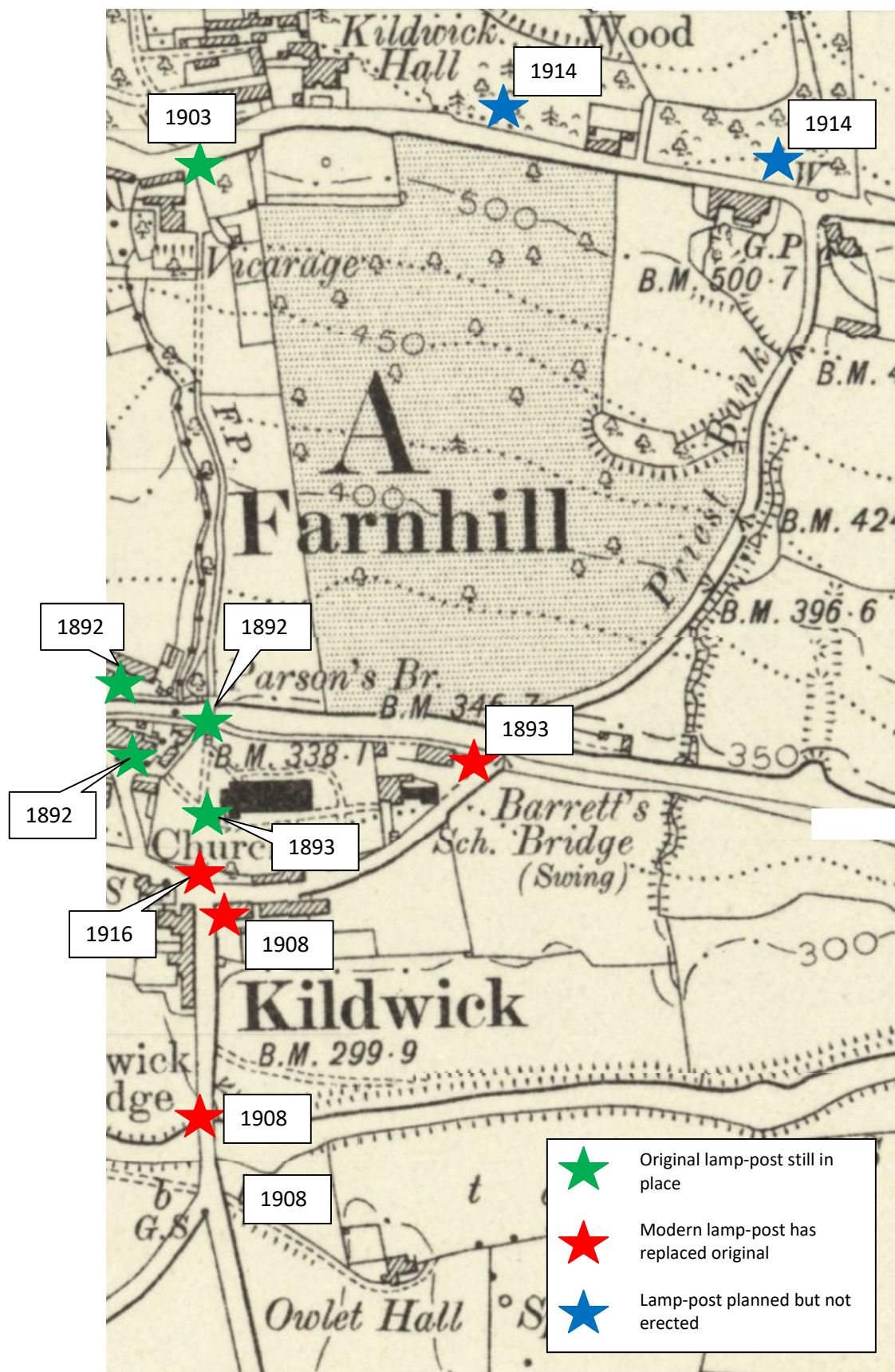


Figure 4: Locations of the early Kildwick street lamps. The dates show the first mention of a lamp in the Committee minutes – it may have been erected before that date.

One of the 1914 lamps ?

Although the lamp at the top of Priest Bank Road is labelled as planned but not erected, one must have been erected at a later date – possibly when motor traffic needed light to read the sign-post. Here are a couple of photographs.



Figure 5: Photographs of the lamp at the top of Priest Bank Road, date unknown.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Kildwick Parish Meeting for allowing us to view and use the Kildwick Lighting and Watching Committee minute book.

References

Much of the information used in this article has been obtained from the Minute Book of the Kildwick Watching and Lighting Committee. Other sources are listed below.

- 1 From section 1 of "Preludes" by T.S. Eliot. See <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/173478>
- 2 http://www.ampltd.co.uk/digital_guides/police_gazette_part_1/Short-History-of-the-Police.aspx
- 3 There is an article and slideshow about the Kildwick Parish Gas Company on the History Group website
- 4 There is a personal memoir, written by Cecil, on the History Group website
- 5 The introduction of lighting restrictions is reported in all the local newspapers of the period.
- 6 Craven Herald, 11/11/1892
- 7 Craven Herald, 23/09/1892