

KIRKHAM, HULETT & CHANDLER Ltd.
141 Palace Chambers, Bridge Street, Westminster, London S.W., England
by Errol Chandler

Kirkham, Hulett & Chandler Limited was established some years prior to 1879 before being formally registered on 7th October 1879 to:

‘take over the business of the same name as patentees of apparatus, machines etc., used in the manufacture or purification of gas’.

The manufacture of coal gas for use as a fuel began in the late 1790’s.

The first commercial gas utility company was the London Gas Light and Coke Company, incorporated by royal charter in 1812. This was the first of many such enterprises that by the 1820’s had spread to most of Europe and America.

Until the mid-1860’s gas was used primarily for lighting and it was towards the end of that century that gas became a major source of energy for heating and cooking and was being used to create steam to drive industrial machinery.

The gas production industry was faced with growing public concern about the environmental impact it was having as a result of the residues and vapours that were released as the coal gas was being manufactured.

In 1847 laws were passed in the United Kingdom that forced the gas producers to investigate technologies and machines to clean (or scrub) the gas in order to remove noxious by-products such as sulphur, ammonia and various heavy hydrocarbons.

Many legal actions were brought before the courts and in 80% of them the gas manufacturers were ordered, in every sense of the word to, ‘clean up their act’.

A noted court judgement of the time included the following statement:

“I have been rather astonished to hear the effects of gas works treated as nothing....every man, in these days, must have sufficient experience, to enable him to come to the conclusion, that, whether a nuisance or not, a gas manufactory is a very disagreeable thing. Nobody can doubt that the volatile products which arise from the distillation of coal are extremely offensive. It is quite contrary to common experience to say they are not so every man knows it”.

Under siege by the authorities and with public anger mounting the industry knew it had to act quickly to prevent harsher legislation.

The cost of the impact on the environment had thus far been almost zero. That was all to change.

A number of innovative processes were invented to accomplish this 'scrubbing' process and engineers in England and Europe came up with all sorts of processes.

'Retorts' and 'Condensers' in various configurations were tried and tested.

Shortly after 1870 Kirkham, Hulett & Chandler invented machines which they called the 'Standard Washer Scrubber' and the 'Standard Condenser'.

Wonderfully large and imposing machines that reflected the best of Victorian engineering, these devices became very well-known and were installed in many locations in the United Kingdom and Europe, as well as in North and South America.

The sales literature of the time lists various sites where they installed the machines..... sites as far apart as Sheffield and Budapest.....Guernsey and Copenhagen Coventry and Sao Paulo Gloucester and Bremen.

Pretty exotic locations in what would have been distant foreign lands.

The logistics involved in selling the technology and assessing the site.... then building the machines in the UK, shipping them out to the location and then installing them and training locals to operate them, must have been challenging.

All that in a time when transport and communications were, by the standards of today, very difficult indeed.

Staff from the UK would have had to base themselves in the foreign destinations for months or even years.....it was not like today when an engineer can fly back and forth and communicate by telephone, email and fax.

This logistical nightmare would have played a major role in the childhood and adolescence of my father, Clement Leslie Chandler.

I believe it directly shaped his character and prepared him for an extraordinary life. A life that, until this research was undertaken, was unknown to his children.

With the help of family, friends and the many very helpful people I met on the internet I have begun to piece together an account of his life. Thank you!

I hope it will be ready for distribution in the first quarter of 2013.....the problem is that just as I reach a conclusion a new fact emerges that requires investigation, and which may then need to be included in the narrative.

19 November 2012