

evolved the mighty edifice of a civilisation which half a century later was to lead and dazzle the whole world.

Stockport in 1822 was then, as now, close built and irregular. In some parts it was very steep and precipitous, with an ascent from the North which rendered it difficult of access. It was a town of narrow streets and narrow lanes—there was no great Wellington Road; that road, which is now the pride of the town, and forms a wonderful artery into it, was not built until 1826. The only method of approach to the Market Place from any point except the south was by means of one of the steep brows leading from the Hillgate and the Underbanks—(St. Peter's Gate Bridge was not built until 45 years later). A writer glancing backward to about this time, speaks of the town when Wellington Bridge, St. Thomas's Church, the old National School, the Infirmary, Spring Bank Mill or Wellington Road, had no existence at all—“Smoothing down the great brows and quagmires, when in all that part of the town westward through Edgeley, scarcely a single brick had yet rudely encroached on the dominions of Flora. Spring Bank was the place to go birdnesting in, and Lord Street was a deep rural lane with two or three springs of water running out at wooden spouts, from which the women of the neighbourhood carried home their daily supplies in brown pitchers.” At a distance, we are told by an old writer, “the houses on the hill seemed (in 1822) piled upon those in the valley, the base of the one ranging with the roofs of the other. The surrounding scenery was, however, bold and beautifully picturesque, the prospect on every side being rich in wood and water. The Tame and the Goyt could be seen winding their way through the valley at the east of the town to their confluence a little below Portwood Bridge, where their united streams take the name of the Mersey—the ancient boundary of the Saxon Kingdoms of Mercia and Northumbria, and the continually expanding division line between Lancashire and Cheshire till it is lost in the Irish Sea. The town stretches along the south bank of the river in the form of a large amphitheatre; and the manufactories, rising in tiers above each other, when lighted with the brilliant gaseous vapour of modern discovery, present in the evenings of the winter months a towering illumination of imposing grandeur, of which it is difficult to convey an adequate idea.”

Gas, as is indicated in this old description, had only just been introduced into the mills, and for public lighting. Prior to this a few flickering oil lamps placed at intervals in the streets were all that was available to light the passer-by in his nocturnal perambulations. The mills were before this lighted with oil lamps; lanterns were useful articles in those days, and it was no uncommon thing to see parties going to and from their work, the foremost person carrying a lantern. A number of local gentlemen formed a company just before the end of 1821, a works in Millgate was purchased, mains were laid in the streets, and on Christmas Eve, 1821, Stockport, or rather a small portion of it in and around the Market Place, was first lighted with gas.

The water supply was chiefly procured by the old parts of the town from open springs rising in Barn Fields (the land right and left in a south-westerly direction and extending over the area now occupied by Spring Bank Mill, Lord Street, up to Sandy Brow and the Town Hall). These springs were collected into a reservoir behind St. Peter's Church, and “from thence carried by pipes to different parts of the town, as well as into the houses on the rocks in the Market Place.” There were also pumps and wells from which the inhabitants obtained water. But notwithstanding all this, people had to pay for the water being carried to their houses, which was troublesome and inconvenient.