

The Magic of Electricity .

The big day had finally arrived, we were going to have electric light, and two power points one in the living room, posh people in the parish would refer to it as the parlour, and the "back kitchen" always referred to thus both by posh households and we ordinary folk alike. I've often puzzled why "back" surely kitchen would have sufficed. However that was how it was, and our Mrs Buckets (we had quite a few in Scholes, believe it or not) and we less mortals called the room. I must confess that I still use the term back kitchen occasionally, much to the amusement of my grandchildren. "You can take the lad out of Scholes but you can't take Scholes out of the lad!" I hear you say . How true, I found such peculiarities endearing and still do. I loved my childhood and wouldn't change a jot, not for the world.

We knew for several weeks that the magic of electricity was coming to our street, my Mam had the money saved to be connected for quite a while, but a number of homes had to agree to make it cost effective for the contractor, 8 seems to stick in my mind, whatever the number we now had enough homes willing to cough up make the dream come true. No more going for gas mantles (made from a very fine gossamer) so fragile that you had to carry them back from the shop as carefully as you would a baby. The weekly chore of taking the accumulator (battery) to be charged, this was the contraption that powered the wireless in gas powered households, would also be a thing of the past.

On the day the contractors were due to perform the miracle, I did everything in my power to wangle a day off school, sore throat, diarrhoea, earache, nothing worked. I must admit I was never really enamoured with school in any case, but today of all days I felt I ought to have been allowed a day off, to be present for the big "switch on" My Mother (Mam) didn't think along the same lines and reasoned or tried to reason with me that I would be in "in the way", and whilst I vehemently disagreed with her logic, in retrospect, as always she was quite right . The last thing a tradesman wants is a child asking "What's that for?" or "What are you doing now?" Whilst he will say to the Mother, through gritted teeth, "if he doesn't ask he'll never learn" really he's thinking "get this kid out of here and let me get on with the job", or some less polite sentiment. The day seemed everlasting as I fantasied about life after gas, so to speak, I would be able to have an electric train set, my clockwork one could be given to someone less fortunate, a child living in a home without electricity ,it's strange how you can become so snooty so soon after being connected to the National Grid, I pity those who find themselves in such unfortunate circumstances, unlike our good selves, or so I assumed until home time. 4 o'clock finally arrives I run home with one thought "I want to be the first to trip the switch" Disappointment of all disappointments, the workmen are still in our house, the work won't be completed so the connection won't be until tomorrow, worse still the gas fittings have been removed so we would have to manage with candles for that night, good job we hadn't given the battery wireless away in anticipation me thinks. The disappointment is compounded when I realise that some of the adjoining properties have been connected and have electric lights burning brightly one of the houses hasn't even drawn the curtains, show offs! Never mind it'll be our turn tomorrow and we will have glass light shades bought from Adams Stores, they been sitting in the cupboard for months awaiting the big day, one for the living room the other for front bedroom, the back bedroom and "back" kitchen will have to go naked until funds allow.

Younger readers will be amazed that things so mundane would need to be saved for, credit was almost unheard of in those far off days. Credit Cards would have been frowned on even if they had existed. The following day the workmen are in our house before I reluctantly leave for school, my Mam warning me not "mither" them, an instruction I obey, apart from getting a promise from the foreman that we would be "on " by the time I came home. The day passed as slowly as the previous day, then home to find that we were truly connected, all 4 lights burning as the workmen

completed final tests. My Mam had bribed the men to put on the afore mentioned light shades. I really thought we were very posh, electric lights, with shades and a tile fireplace, fitted only a few months before, such luxury, such decadence! This new found affluence would be made more obvious a few weeks later when my Mam acquired a contraption that fitted to the bedroom light allowing the light to be controlled without needing to leave the bed, (known by one and all as a (Lazy Betty) now that was true opulence. The back bedroom had no such innovation but I was more than happy to jump out of bed to use the switch to give the kind light that came with electricity. Gaslight had the unnerving effect of making everyone and everything look a sickly green colour. Soon we were the proud owners of an electric wireless, my sister would spend hours trying to get Radio Luxembourg which she did intermittently, depending on atmospherics I imagine. My Auntie became a devotee of The Archers my favourite was Journey into Space. Much later a television set would take pride of place, now that was magic personified, but that's a story for another day!