Bright Sparks

The first public electricity supply for both street lighting and domestic use was installed in Godalming, Surrey in 1881. The ‘Electric Lighting Act 1882’ allowed persons, companies or local authorities to set up electricity supply systems. Although the provision of electricity in Godalming was not altogether successful, the experience did not seem to deter people. Nottingham began to use electric street illuminations in the late nineteenth century (there had been gas street lighting for many years) and in 1901 the first electric trams started running.

By the nationalisation of Britain’s electricity industry in 1948, there were over 600 electric power companies. Manuscripts & Special Collections holds the records of twelve pre-nationalisation power companies that were absorbed into the East Midlands Electricity Board upon nationalisation. The records date from 1887 but are, unfortunately, incomplete. The economic instability of the earliest electricity companies followed by the industry’s nationalisation and privatisation means that record survival is fragmented. Nonetheless, they are extremely significant in charting the beginnings of something that today we take for granted and upon which our modern society is completely dependent.

Business archives held at the University of Nottingham include the local heritage of lace-making, hosiery and textiles, and there is an excellent collection of water and drainage related records. More information on all of our business collections, as well as resources explaining how to understand and use historical financial and business records can be found on the website of Manuscripts and Special Collections: www.nottingham.ac.uk/mss.
Photos of Staythorpe Power Station: No 1 Turbine running on test viewed from the Charge Engineer’s Office, and Aerial View, 1950

These photographs are taken from an album showing the construction of the coal-fired Staythorpe ‘A’ Power Station, operational from 1950 to 1983. It was built on the side of the River Trent between Southwell and Newark. These are two of 50 photographs in an album documenting its planning, construction and the beginning of operations at the plant, taken between 1946 and 1950. (Ref: MS 835/1)
Share Transfer Form; 1928

This is a legal document to record details of transfer of share(s) from one shareholder to another. In this case, the Electrical Finance & Securities Company Limited bought 40,000 shares in the Boston and District Electric Supply Company Limited in 1928. (Ref: BEB 7)
Minute book, Midland Electric Light and Power Company Limited; 1887

Minute books are central to any business archive. They record all the major events in a company’s history, from operational activity, shareholder transactions, legislative changes and staffing. This is the earliest document relating to electricity supply in the Midlands in our collections, and it is taken from the Directors’ minutes. The origins of the Company are not known, but its 67th annual general meeting was held in 1948, suggesting a start date of about 1881. (Ref: BEX1)
Extract from the Minute Book of the Oakham Gas and Electricity Company Limited; 1927

Old meets new! Electricity may have been the future, but until 1927 the Oakham Gas and Electricity Company Limited still used horse-drawn transport. The horse’s declining health prompted them to invest in a second-hand car. The company originated in 1840 when the gas works were erected in Oakham, Rutland. An Act of Parliament of 1923 permitted the company to supply electricity and its name changed to the Oakham Gas and Electricity Company Limited. (Ref: BEO)
Plan of the East Midlands Electricity Board Macclesfield district; mid 20th century

The East Midlands Electricity Board began operating on 1 January 1948 following the nationalisation of the electricity industry under the Electricity Act 1947. The area controlled by the board covered Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, Rutland and parts of Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Derbyshire, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, Peterborough, Staffordshire and Warwickshire. The headquarters for the board was at Mapperley Hall near Nottingham. (Ref: BEE 4/5)
Certificate of Incorporation; 1923

A Certificate of Incorporation is a legal document proving the formation and legal existence of a company, in this case, the Boston & District Electric Supply Company Limited. The offices of the company were in Dolphin Lane, Boston, Lincolnshire. Besco, as it was known, supplied electricity to homes and street lights in Boston; the main street of the town was lit electrically for the first time in August 1924. (Ref: BEB 6/1)