Pit covers and other things under foot

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Pit covers and other things under foot

Abstract
Utilities like electricity, water, gas, sewerage, communications and others are essential in any community. Camden has acquired the utilities as time has progressed over the past 150 years to the present. Argyle Street has a number of utilities buried beneath the street and footpaths. Their histories provide a valuable insight into the town's development and progress, particularly in the 20th century. The arrival of electricity, gas and water were part of Camden modernism and its influence on the town. Each of these utilities has transnational origins well beyond the township and illustrate the linkages between the town and wider world. For example the supply of clean drinking water in Camden was linked to an outbreak of scarlet fever in the later 19th century. Contagious diseases were a major health concern in the 19th century and were an ever present worry in daily life. Clean drinking water had an important influence on the development of public health. I was walking along Camden's Argyle Street and it struck me that utility inspection covers are a historical statement in their own right. They are an entry point for the utility service as they also provide an entry to the stories that surround the delivery of the utility. Even the different logos for utilities illustrate the changes in the history of a telco or electricity supplier. A cover might be a statement about a utility supplier that is now defunct. The utility cover are made of different material - cast iron, concrete, and others. These are all mysteries that are waiting to be solved for the curious mind. Or just for the bored and idle with nothing better to do.

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What is under your feet and totally ignored? What do you walk over everyday? What is essential in an emergency? What provides access to essential utilities? The answer lies under our feet. What is it? Give up yet?

The answer is the humble utility inspection cover.

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150 years to the present. Argyle Street has a number of utilities buried beneath the street and footpaths. Their histories provide a valuable insight into the town’s development and progress, particularly in the 20th century.

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What about the Gas Cover from Durham above?

**Durham Gas Cover**

This is an inspection cover for the gas pipes using a Durham fitting probably around 1912. The Durham drainage fitting is a cast-iron, threaded fitting, used on drainage pipes; has a shoulder such as to present a smooth, continuous interior surface. (Free Dictionary) The Durham patent system of screw-joint iron house-drainage manufactured by the Durham House Drainage Co. of York USA (1887).

The Durham cover is for the Camden gas supply which was installed in 1912 by the Camden Gas Company. The gasworks was built in Mitchell Street and made gas from coal. There were a number of gas street lights in Argyle Street which were turned on in early 1912. The Camden News reported in January 1912 that many private homes and businesses had been connected to the gas supply network and were fitted for gas lighting.

Mr Murray the gasworks manager reported that construction at the gasworks had been completed, the retort had been lit and he anticipated full supply by the end of the month. (Camden News, 4 January 1912) Throughout 1912 there an ongoing dispute between Mr Alexander, the managing director of the Camden Gas Company, and Camden Municipal Council over damage to Argyle Street while laying gas pipes and who was going to pay for it. (Camden News, 12 September 1912)

In 1946 Camden Municipal Council purchased the Camden Gas Company. The gasworks were sold to AGL in 1970. (Peter Mylrea, ‘Gas and Electricity in Camden’, Camden History March 2008.)
NRCC

What is this cover for the NRCC. Does it still exist?

NRCC Inspection Cover 2016 Argyle St Camden (I Willis)

The simple answer is no. The NRCC does not exist anymore. The NRCC was the Nepean River County Council. It was the electricity supplier for the Campbelltown, Camden and Picton area from 1954 to 1979 when it was amalgamated with Prospect County Council. This in turn became Integral Energy. Integral Energy was formed by the New South Wales Government in 1995 from the amalgamation of Illawarra Electricity and Prospect Electricity with over 807,000 customers.

NRCC office open 1956 Picton SLNSW

The Campbelltown office of the NRCC was located in Queen Street next to the Commonwealth Bank and in 1960 shifted to Cordeaux Street. By 1986 a new advisory office was opened in Lithgow Street. The council opened a new shop front at Glenquarie Shopping Centre at Macquarie Fields. There were shopfronts in Camden, Picton and other locations.

Logo Design
In October 1954 the NRCC approved a design for its official seal. Alderman P Brown suggested a logo competition and a large number of entries were received for the £25 prize. The winning design by artist Leone Rush of Lidcombe depicts electricity being extended to rural areas by a circular outline of the words "Nepean River County Council". (Camden News, Thursday 4 November 1954.)

Former NRCC employee Sharon Greene stated that, ‘It was like a small family business where everyone was happy to be there’. (Camden Advertiser, 25 May 2009)

Former office manager, Kay Kyle, said that things in the office in 1959 were pretty basic when she started in the office as a junior clerk.

She said:

‘We had no cash registers or adding machines, we hand wrote receipts and added the figures in our head for daily takings. That was a good skill to have. Eventually we received an old adding machine from Picton, but one day it added incorrectly so I wouldn’t use it again.’

Former linesman Joe Hanger recalls working for the NRCC. He said,

‘In 1954 we were transferred to Nepean River County Council. They wanted linesmen and I went on the line crew and eventually worked my way up and got a pole inspectors job going around creosoting the poles. Eventually I got my own crew, mainly pole dressing. There were 7-8 in the crew. I was then made a foreman in about 1978.’

Working in the outdoor crews could be dangerous as Joe Hanger recalls.
‘In July 1974 I fell from a 40ft pole while doing work near The Oaks. We had to check out why a back feed to The Oaks was loosing voltage. We were looking for crook joints. The pole is still out there, near a bend just before the straight road into The Oaks. We had opened the air break switch behind us and the airbreak switch ahead, we forgot that the transformer was on the other side of the open point. I checked the pole and Neville Brown had gone along to the next pole to open the next section. I was standing on the low voltage cross arm and grabbed one of the wires and was struck by the electricity. Luckily my weight caused me to fall away. I ended up falling about 25 feet and just another pole lying on the ground. If I had the belt on it may have been a different matter. I had a broken leg, broken rib and a great big black eye. I was very lucky.’


### Friends of the Nepean River Country Council

Past organisations like the Nepean River County Council have staunch supporters. If you are one of them join the [Friends of NRCC](http://www.nepeanrivercountyCouncil.com.au/nrccstories.html).

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**The telco inspection lid**

This inspection lid is for the telco which was the Postmaster-General Department of the Australian Government.
The telco had a rich history related to communications in Australia starting in 1810 with the provision of the first postal service. In 1810 Governor Macquarie appointed Australia's first postmaster Isaac Nicholls and the colonial government of New South Wales Government the first regular postal services including rates of postage. The new Sydney General Post Office was opened in George Street in 1874.

The first telephone service was established in Melbourne in 1879.

On Federation in 1901 the new Commonwealth Government took control of all colonial postal services. The Commonwealth Minister responsible for the Postmaster-General’s Department looked after telephone, telegraph and postal services across Australia. The Postmaster-General Department was responsible for international short wave services in the 1920s and the Australian Broadcast Commission in the 1930s.

The Postmaster-General Department was broken up in 1975 with the postal service moving to Australia Postal Commission (trading at Australia Post), and telecommunications became the responsibility of Australian Telecommunications Commission trading at Telecom Australia. Telecom Australia was corporatised in 1989, renamed Telstra Australia in 1993, and partially privatised in 1999.

In 1992 the Overseas Telecommunications Commission (est 1946) was merged with the Telecom Australia.
The MWS&DB is the Metropolitan Water Sewerage and Drainage Board, today known as Sydney Water. Originally the Board of Water Supply and Sewerage from 1888 to 1892. The MWS&BD operated under that name from 1925 to 1987, and before that it was known as Metropolitan Board of Water Supply and Sewerage between 1892 and 1925. After 1987 it was known as the Water Board (1987-1994), then it became Sydney Water Corp Ltd (1995-1999) with Ltd dropped in 1999.

Deks G (Gas)
Deks was established in Australia by Mr George Cupit in 1947 and remained a family business until it became part of the Skellerup Group in 2003. Deks have a presence in 28 countries. They supply plumbing fittings including flashings, fittings or flanges for over 100 years. (http://www.deks.com.au/about/)

**Malco W (Water)**

Malco Industries reported in the Sydney Morning Herald in 1951 that the company incorporated three separate businesses involved in heavy industrial activities on its site at Marrickville. There were three divisions (1) Malleable Castings founded in 1915 and was claimed to be one of Australia’s leading producers of iron castings. (2) EW Fittings incorporated in 1925 and made cast iron pipe fittings for water, gas, steam and oil. (3) Link
Belt Co Pty set up in 1949 and industrial transmission equipment. (Sydney Morning Herald (NSW : 1842 – 1954), Friday 6 April 1951, page 6)

Rovwood SV

Havestock Cover

Havestock is a business which has made pit lids since 1980s. Havestock is now part of the global EJ Group and designs, manufactures and distributes man-hole covers, pit covers and other infrastructure access covers and grates. (http://www.hygrade.net.nz/product-category/by-brand/by-brand-havestock/)