

## Church Lighting History



St Michael's Church would have been originally lit by candles and oil lamps. Old postcards of the interior of St Michael's Church, published by Frith, show that in 1903 the church main aisle was lit by a low hanging chandelier with a few lights on the pillars.

[https://www.francisfrith.com/brent-knoll/brent-knoll-church-interior-1903\\_50125](https://www.francisfrith.com/brent-knoll/brent-knoll-church-interior-1903_50125).

By 1913, another postcard shows the central lighting and pillar lights had been replaced by half a dozen tall three branched lighting poles in the middle of some of the pews. The evidence for the existence of these lights can be found as round holes in the middle of some of the prayer book ledges in the enclosed pews. These lighting stands were called torchieres.

What powered these lights? Surprisingly, evidence for the power source for these lights comes from the Minutes of the Managers of Brent Knoll School, in October 1919, chaired by the Rev, Gardiner. The answer is acetylene gas! The Vicar (Rev R T Gardiner Chair) invited Mr Tyler of Highbridge to give a quote for installation of an acetylene generator at the school. The vicar also reported interviewing Mr G Barnstaple who made three suggestions which included a proposal linking the school lighting system to the church acetylene generator. This proposal was accepted.

**Brent Knoll School Minutes 14th Nov 1919** Lighting- Mr Barnstable had completed the work of connecting the church lighting system to the school, and that as far as could be ascertained, no leakage of gas existed between the service pipe and the school. The service pipe was the property of the church up to the point where it entered the school meter. Mr Barnstable's bill had been paid anonymously. The charge for the use of the light was agreed at 2d per foot and 2d per hour or fraction of an hour per burner used.

An advertisement for an ACME gas Sunlight generator describes the lighting as the nearest artificial approach to daylight. "The light is a beautiful soft quality and of high illuminating power. It can be attached to any house with ordinary iron gas pipes. The generator works automatically dropping 1 lb of carbide in 400 lbs of water making only 5 cubic feet of gas at any one time, thus ensuring safety and economy". There is a current example of a building lit by acetylene gas in the National Trust House of Argory in Ireland. An excellent history of acetylene lighting is published at <https://nt.global.ssl.fastly.net/documents/the-argory---historic-lighting.pdf>

It is probable the church generator was in the current boiler house/toilet and there is evidence of a small pipe running the length of the church and exiting the northern wall of the vestry (now cut!) which may have been the pipe that led to the school. Later Minutes of the school record that electric light was installed in the spring of 1929, so it is possible that electric lighting was installed in the church about the same time.

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