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"The Paradox of Smokeless Fuels: Gas, Coke and the Environment in Britain, 1813–1949"

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Thorsheim, Peter, "The Paradox of Smokeless Fuels: Gas, Coke and the Environment in Britain, 1813–1949." *Environment and History* 8, no. 4 (Nov., 2002): 381–401. doi:10.3197/096734002129342701 . The contemporary world faces a toxic legacy: environmental contamination caused by past industrial activities. In Britain, a large proportion of the soil and groundwater pollution that occurred during the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century came from gasworks and coke plants. Paradoxically, many people long viewed them as the answer to the country's pollution problems. Smoke-abatement activists and industry officials argued that gas and coke could be burned without producing the large quantities of particulates and volatile organic compounds that emanated from coal fires. Yet promoters of these 'smokeless fuels' failed to recognise that they did not eliminate environmental problems, but instead shifted them from sites of consumption to those of production. Air pollution declined in many places, but it grew worse in those containing gasworks and coke plants. In addition to displacing pollution geographically, the manufacture of gas and coke displaced it chronologically by creating hazards that would long endure. Today, decades after they ceased production, many of the places where gasworks and coke plants once stood remain contaminated by toxic by-products. All rights reserved. © 2002 The White Horse Press

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