

John Spence: Oil Wick and Safety Lamp

by *Dave Johnson*

While there were a multitude of both oilwick and safety lamp manufacturers, few manufactured both types of lamps, an exception was John Spence of Scotland.

Shown here is an early Davy Style all brass (except for the 4 steel posts) safety lamp with an external fuel filler with a knurled threaded cap and a sloped font. This 9" tall lamp is stamped: J. SPENCE AIRDRIE. Airdrie is located about 11 miles east of Glasgow Scotland nearest the Clyde Basin Coalfield and in close proximity to the other two main nineteenth century Scottish Coalfields, the Ayreshire and Fifeshire Coalfields, also close to some nineteenth century iron mining operations.



The all brass oilwick cap lamp pictured here is stamped: JOHN SPENCE & SONS AIRDRIE & COATBRIDGE. Coatbridge is located just east of Glasgow between Airdrie and Glasgow. This oilwick measures 2 1/4" tall to the top of its slightly domed machine thread screw lid. The lid is cast brass and totally machined. The 1 3/4" base is also machined rather than stamped or formed like most oilwick bases. The machined threads are a separate piece soldered into the top of the font. The brass sheet stock used to form the font is heavier than usually seen in oilwicks. This lamp weighs more than twice what the average similarly sized lamp would weigh, it was obviously built to last. Both lamps are high quality pieces showing excellent workmanship.

John Spence was one of many Scottish oilwick manufacturers, others include, but are not limited to, Thomas Hall at Irvine, Forsythe & Caldwell at Kilmarnock, J. Melville at Lochgelly and D.B. Rankin at Airdrie. At some time in the future I intend to do articles on more Scottish oilwicks.