



The Mill and Fire Engine © image courtesy of Paul Williams, local archivist

Property News - Fire Bishopstone 1852

Alarming and Destructive Fire

On Friday night last between one and two o'clock, one of the most alarming and disastrous fires that has taken place in the neighbourhood for many years, broke out at Ildstone in Berkshire, on the borders of Wilts, near Bishopstone. The fire originated in the rick yard of Mr. Edward Miles, who has only occupied the farm about six weeks.

It was discovered by Mr. Warman's shepherd, and before he could arouse Mr. Miles the whole of the stacks and outbuildings were in flames. The wind at the time was blowing fresh from the east, carrying away large flakes of fire, which fell in the farm premises of Mr. Lawrence, setting fire to his cow houses, wagon house and skilling, and speedily destroyed them.

At this time no less than eight cottages were on fire, six of which were entirely destroyed, together with their contents; in fact, such was the fury of the devouring element that some of the poor cottagers had only time to escape with their lives, and some of the labourers who had that night received their wages and had placed their pockets under the pillows had not time to secure their little earnings. In one case fire was actually falling on the bed.

The fire engine from Bishopstone was soon on the spot, and was placed between the dwelling house of Mr. Miles and the blazing buildings, and a good supply of water being near, it was instrumental in saving the house from destruction. Great damage was, however, caused to the furniture from hasty removal.

Another engine, the property of Lord Craven, was sent for, and was placed at the lower end of the village, thereby preventing the flames from extending further.

The worst part of the story remains to be told. The sacrifice of the livestock was dreadful: - No less than four horses, four cows, three calves, seven pigs, besides a large quantity of poultry were burnt to death. One horse and a cow escaped from the yard, and were afterwards found:- the horse was dreadfully burnt all down one side, the cow was a still worse spectacle, its eyes being literally burnt out of its head, every particle of hair was scorched from its body, and the bones were completely charred. Mr. Hayes, the superintendent of police from Swindon, who was on the spot, ordered the poor animal to be immediately killed. We regret to add that Mr Miles was uninsured. The cottages, which belonged to Lord Craven were also uninsured.

It is but justice to the Wilts constabulary to say that within an incredibly short space of time, no less than ten constables of the Swindon division were assisting at the fire, some of them coming a distance of

fourteen miles, and their active conduct throughout was most praiseworthy. The labourers also exerted themselves to the utmost and rendered very effectual assistance in preventing the flames from extending further into the village. The scene of desolation presents a lamentable sight, and the poor animals which were burnt are a horrid spectacle.

Mr. and Mrs. Warman. Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence, as well as the clergyman of the parish (adds our correspondent) showed the most unbounded kindness and hospitality to the sufferers. The Messrs. Brown, Mr Humphrey, and all neighbouring farmers, were present early with all their labourers, as well as during the whole of Saturday, each most effectually directing his own men; indeed, the conduct of all, under the circumstances was beyond all praise.

The fire was no doubt caused willfully. - A tramp who, on being refused alms the day previous in the village, had been heard to utter threats, was taken into custody, but it was proved that he slept at Lambourne on that night, and was consequently discharged.

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