

Farmhouse & Cottages Destroyed by Fire 1901



Thatched Cottages in East Knoyle c1950

An alarming fire broke out in this parish on Friday shortly after mid-day, which resulted in the destruction of a farm house in the occupation of Mr J C Neal, farmer and builder, and two cottages occupied by David Fletcher and Alfred Street and their families.

It appears that the fire was caused by a spark from the chimney of the farmhouse which fell on the thatched roof. Mr Neal, who was at work in the garden, saw the spark fall and before he could procure a ladder to get upon the roof, the thatch was all in flames. There was a strong wind blowing at the time and the flames spread with terrific rapidity. An alarm was raised and a number of willing helpers were quickly on the spot.

The East Knoyle and the Mere Fire Brigades were summoned, and were promptly on the scene of the fire, but before they arrived, the three houses were in flames. The people who rushed to the spot succeeded in getting most of the furniture out of the houses, but from the first it was seen that there was no hope of saving the houses from total destruction. In a very short space of time the buildings were all one mass of flame and the roofs, one after another, fell in with a tremendous crack.

The firemen wisely directed their efforts to check the spread of the conflagration, but for a long time it looked as though half the houses in the village, which are covered with thatched roofs, would be destroyed. Fortunately, the three houses which were in flames were divided from the next thatched building by two tiled roof houses and this assisted the firemen in their work of checking the spread of the flames. The house which was in most danger was one occupied by William Snook, a bricklayer. As soon as the danger of the situation was realised, the thatched roof was covered with wet bags and carpets and the thatch was saturated with water. There was also the great danger of Mr F Tuck's shop, which is on the opposite side of the road, being ignited. The shutters and window frames were burned, and water had to be thrown upon the tiled roof.

The firemen were handicapped in their work by not having a good supply of water. The Knoyle Brigade, under Captain Mallett, were on the spot first with their manual. They commenced to play upon the flames from a well at the back of Mr Snook's house, but the well was soon pumped dry. When the Mere Brigade arrived, under Captain Humby, water was pumped by the use of the manual engines of both Brigades from an ornamental pond in the grounds at Knoyle House, more than half a mile away from the scene of the fire. From this source a fairly good supply of water was obtained, but the fire was not got under until after six o'clock and up to a later hour in the evening the Brigades were pumping water upon the smouldering debris.

The members of the Fire Brigades worked splendidly and among the volunteers who rendered valuable aid were Mr Garrett, Mr M Nesbeck, Mr F Tuck, Mr Shephard, Mr J Snook, Mr T Bath, Mr A Street, Mr Page, the Rev W A Taylor (curate), the Rev Lionel Milford and the Misses Milford. Mr Miles, agent for the Hon Percy Wyndham, to whom the property belongs, was indefatigable in his efforts, and PCC Coggins was speedily on the spot and worked hard all the afternoon. The property was fully insured but not the tenants' furniture.

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