

DESTRUCTIVE FIRE AT KNAPP MILL

Dec. 10 1898

On Friday night last (as we reported in our Saturday morning edition last week) there was a disastrous fire at Knapp mill, the whole of the mill and machinery being destroyed, as well as the roof and some part of the dwelling house adjoining. The whole damage is estimated at over £8,000. The machinery, which was of a modern type, and comparatively new, is valued at £2,000, but is covered by insurance in the Sun office, as is also the building and dwelling house, damaged to the extent of some £600 or £700. The property belongs to Mr. J. Mills, J.P. The premises were leased by Mr. Joseph J. Wheelhouse, who was carrying on a large business, and being just now exceptionally busy, the mill was stocked with flour, offals, oats, maize, &c. It was completely full, and work was being carried on almost continuously to cope with press of work. The loss of stock is valued at £600, covered by insurance in the Royal office, and the damage to furniture by removal and breakage is set down at about £100, and is also met by an insurance claim. Mr. Wheelhouse has only been resident here just under two years, coming hither from Amersham, Bucks. He has a family of two children, the elder of whom is about four years of age. These children were taken from their beds on the outbreak of the fire, and kindly sheltered at the cottage of Mr. Squires, the railway signalman, where Mr. and Mrs. Wheelhouse also temporarily found a home.

The origin of the fire is unknown, but is generally surmised to have originated by friction. The outbreak was observed by Mr. Wheelhouse himself as he was returning home just after eight o'clock, and, favoured lay a strong wind, the flames quickly spread. In a very short time, the whole of the mill premises was one mass of flame, and the fire was spreading into the roof and bedrooms of the dwelling house. A number of people soon arrived on the spot, and assisted the police in removing the furniture out of the house. The Fire Brigade (under Captain Burry) and the Artillerymen (Under Sergt.-Major Pinder) got to work with their engines, and in the course of an hour or so the throw of water had subdued the fire, and the firemen had thus practically saved the burning of the dwelling house, though the roof and bedrooms were greatly damaged. By-and-by, in response to a telephonic message came the Boscombe manual (under Foreman Francis), and the Bournemouth steamer (under Captain Worth), but their services were not requisitioned, though the firemen lent kindly assistance. The Stanpit coastguardmen (under Chief-officer Wakem) also arrived, and lent aid.

Mr. Charles Burry, captain of the Christchurch Fire Brigade, sends us the following official report of the fire:—

"Received a call at 8.30 on Friday, 2nd Dec., from P.C. Puckett. At the same time P.S. Luck drew Sub-captain Pearce's attention to the glare from off the old bridge. Brigade was called at once. I was called from the choir practice

room at the Priory Church. On arriving at the Fire station, I found the sub-captain had dispatched the hose cart by the police, and had followed with the manual. On arriving at the fire I found the mill hopelessly involved. In my opinion, it must have been burning for some considerable time. The brigade had two jets on from manual endeavouring to save the dwelling house. Some time after, the Artillery with their manual and hose-reel, arrived. I had them put on at the back of the premises to assist in saving the house. The fire was under control, when the Boscombe manual arrived, quickly followed by steamer. It not being necessary they did not get to work. Some of the men assisted us for a time. At 12 o'clock the Artillery retired. At 1.30 a stop was called, fearing no extension, and knowing the dangerous state of the old walls it was considered better to cool them down by day-light. This was done the next day, and a dangerous wall pulled down. I estimate the damage at £3,400. In my opinion there are two things to account for the fire: friction from overheated machinery, or combustion from the dust of flour. Once alight the matchboarding protecting the machinery would soon envelope the whole. The police, the artillery, and the coastguard, with a number of willing working men, greatly assisted us. I would thank any private individual not to telephone for any brigade at any future time. I think we are in the beat position to judge if assistance is required."



Photo from the Red House Museum collection.