



CULLOMPTON & District WEEKLY NEWS

Special
Edition

Edited by David Pugsley

Monday 8th July, 1839

Price 50p

DREADFUL FIRE AT CULLOMPTON

New Street fire

Yesterday, between 12 and 1 o'clock, just before the congregation were about to leave church, an alarm of fire was raised in Cullompton, and flames were seen issuing from a chimney in a small street, near New Street. The fire, when first discovered, was slight, and had timely aid been afforded, there is little doubt it would have been extinguished without much further mischief; but before any measures could be taken, the sparks from the burning chimney had communicated themselves to the roof, which was of thatch, and in an instant was in full blaze. The fire then rapidly extended itself to New Street, and from thence ran with fearful violence to the houses and cottages contiguous

Sparks blown by wind

Measures were taken to check it, and the local engines were soon on the spot, but the wind blowing briskly from the North West carried the sparks to a great distance, by which the flames broke out simultaneously in various quarters of the town, to the consternation of the inhabitants and those engaged in extinguishing them.

Exeter fire engines

An express was immediately sent to Exeter for assistance, and the fire engine of the West of England Fire Brigade under the superintendance of Mr. G.W. Cumming, was the first to arrive at Cullompton, followed very shortly afterwards by the West Middlesex and Sun engines. At the moment of their arrival, the scene that presented itself was truly awful. From New Street the flames had communicated on both sides of the road until they reached the Town Green, from whence they had extended, more or less, all over the town.

Valuable properties near White Hart

Houses in the neighbourhood of the White Hart were observed on fire, at a distance of full a quarter of a mile from the spot where the flames first broke out. In this neighbourhood, between the above Inn and the Red Lion, the property is very valuable, and the exertions of the West Middlesex engine were directed to its preservation. The West of England tried to cut off the communications between New Street and the Green, which was done effectually though with the greatest labour, the men having to work in narrow streets with the fire blazing on both sides of them, by which the heat was intense. The Sun was also occupied in the very centre of the flames.

150 houses burnt

By the joint exertions of these and the local engines, a good supply of water having been obtained, by degrees the fire was got under control, but not before no less than 150 houses were burnt to the ground, and property to a great extent damaged or destroyed. It was not till a late hour last night that the fire was extinguished, and the engines played upon the smoking ruins all night until 5 o'clock this morning.

Two thirds destroyed

As may be supposed, the town of Cullompton presents a most melancholy appearance after this truly awful fire. Hundreds of poor families have we fear lost their all. Whole streets have been burnt down: in fact nearly two thirds of the town may be said to be destroyed. Near the White Hart the destruction of valuable property is very great. A great number of houses contiguous to the Bank are total wrecks, but that building, as we believe, uninjured.

Chimney sweep seriously injured

It is some consolation however, to be able to close this sad narrative without recording the loss of any life. One poor fellow, a sweep, was seriously injured by the fall of a partition on his back, but he is not dead and hopes are entertained of his recovery. We had heard of no other casualty.

Calamitous Fire at Cullompton

On Sunday the 7th instant, a fire broke out at Cullompton, in this County, which raged with great violence for several hours, and consumed upwards of 100 houses, and reduced to the utmost distress the inmates of nearly the whole of those houses.

Perhaps the Public have seldom been appealed to in a case in which distress was more extensively felt by a similar visitation; not only were many hundred persons deprived of houses, furniture and clothes, but the greater number of them lost even the very means of exercising their calling, the following morning finding them without looms or tools to recommence their labours.

The inhabitants of Cullompton have assembled and formed Committees for various purposes, but as the cases of distress are numerous and the amount of suffering afflicting to an extent almost beyond description, the Public are invited, nay, urgently implored, to contribute by subscription to the alleviation of such a mass of human misfortune and suffering.

Steps are also taking to communicate with Bankers in London, and in the country, for receiving subscriptions.

The Committee do not doubt the undeviating readiness of those important bodies, to co-operate in extending information of the calamity, and receiving the Contributions of the Benevolent and Charitable.

Signed by the request of the Inhabitants of Cullompton, at a Public Meeting held the 9th day of July 1839.

Wm. Sykes, Chairman,

Subscriptions will be received by Tristram Walrond Whitter, Esq., Treasurer at the Bank at Cullompton, and all the Banks at Exeter.

(Reprinted repeatedly in all Exeter newspapers, July 1839)

West of England first

Notwithstanding that the West Middlesex people forcibly took possession of a pair of post horses ordered expressly by the West of England, the latter engine passed its competitor in great style on the road 5 miles this side of Cullompton, and in doing so the men gave three hearty cheers. It is to be regretted that the West Middlesex people acted in this way, as the engine from the West of England was thereby prevented from being sooner at the fire; and it is probable that some property which has been destroyed might thus have been spared. The West Middlesex broke down on the road.

£15,000 damage

LATEST PARTICULARS Since the above was written, we understand it has been ascertained that 145 dwelling houses are burnt to the ground, and in addition to that number, including out-houses, barns etc, upwards of 170 buildings have been totally destroyed. It is impossible to calculate the amount of loss; when it is considered that not only the buildings, but also a great deal of furniture and stock-in-trade in them must have been burnt, scarcely £100 for each building will be sufficient to cover it, and that will make a total loss of somewhere about £15,000. We fear however, it will be found to be much greater.

Died

July 8, after a severe illness, Mr. James Monkton, a respectable and much esteemed inhabitant of Cullompton. He was taken from his chamber, where he lay in a dying state, on Sunday during the awful fire; a burning flake, wafted from the lower part of the town, having fallen on premises near the house in which the unfortunate sufferer was expiring.

(Exeter and Plymouth Gazette, 13 July 1839 (3a))

The tithe map shows the Monktons at no. 2511, where Mr. and Mrs. Brian Maltwood now live.

Sweep dead

We are informed that the respectable inhabitants in the town vied with each other in their exertions to save the furniture of the poor from the burning cottages, many of whom were in a state of most deplorable distress and anguish. It is truly fortunate that this awful calamity did not occur by night, or the loss of life might have been great. The hopes expressed above for the recovery of the sweep, who was injured by a fall of a partition, have we regret to say not been realised. The poor fellow expired this morning.

Desolation

Business is quite at a standstill in the town: and the scene of desolation is truly distressing, no object presenting itself to the eye in every direction but blackened rafters, dismantled buildings, and ruins still smoking.

(Western Luminary, 8th July 1839 (3d))

This is the first report of the fire, based on information from Capt. Cumming when he returned to Exeter with the West of England fire brigade the following morning. I have divided the paragraphs and added the subheadings, but otherwise this is the original text.

*The Red Lion: now Clark's Motors showroom
Valuable property near the White Hart — see tithe map,
2504, Henry Matthews, plumber, painter and glazier
2505, William Pidgeon, grocer, baker, confectioner and corn dealer*

*2508, Grace Sellwood: the Sellwood family were tanners
2509, Tristram Charles Hine, surgeon
2510, Francis Poole, solicitor
2511, Sarah Monkton, draper and tea dealer*

Destructive fire at Cullompton (From our Correspondent)

A most destructive fire broke out in this town, at half past twelve at noon on Sunday last. It commenced in the Exeter road, in the lower part of the town, and from a strong wind prevailing at the time the burning flakes were carried all over the place; in fact there was scarcely a house on which the fire did not fall, and this too with such calamitous result, that several houses in different parts of the town were burning at the same time, while the heat was so excessive that people could not remove their furniture and goods. Indeed, so rapid and destructive was the progress of the flames that in half an hour from the commencement of the fire, it was raging in five different places, and the scene of distress that presented itself beggars description, everyone feeling their property to be insecure, and wherever possible each family and person seeking by removal to preserve their own.

Eight fire engines

While this also was passing, expresses also were despatched to Exeter, Tiverton, Bradninch and the neighbouring towns, intreating assistance, which was as promptly afforded as the nature of the circumstances would admit, the West of England engine, from Exeter, reaching this town in less than an hour, having quitted some time after the West Middlesex double engine, the wheel of the latter having unfortunately come off no less than four times on the journey, they, however, completed the distance of the 12 miles with great despatch being only one hour and 55 minutes from the time of despatching the express! The Sun Fire Office engine soon followed from Exeter; and we had also the assistance of the West of England engine from Tiverton, and the parish engine from Bradninch. There were, likewise, our own three engines, and plenty of water, but the Cullompton engines were not in good repair. To the Exeter firemen the greatest credit is due, as but for them and their intrepid exertions, it is more than probable the whole town would have been destroyed.

Principal losers

Altogether there are 100 houses destroyed, and 120 families destitute of homes, mostly poor weavers. The principal houses and property destroyed are those of Mr. Gabriel, surgeon; Mr. J. Nicholls, chemist; Mr. J. Mills, baker; Mr. J. Mills, paper manufacturer; Mr. W. Budd, baker; Mr. T. Webber, builder (whose loss, above the insurance is thought to be £400); T.W. Whitter, Esq., of the Bank, had his barn burnt, and corn, wood-ricks and property at the back part of the premises, greatly damaged. The houses were all insured; the offices which suffer — Sun, West of England, West Middlesex, Alliance, Protector, Yorkshire, the loss estimated at from £15,000 to £20,000. The cause of the fire cannot be ascertained.

Rabbits on fire

While the wood-ricks at Mr. Whitter's were burning, three rabbits with their furry coats on fire were seen to run from them. From the moment of the alarm the Agents of the different Insurance Offices were all very active. The Workhouse is open, free, to any poor people who make like to take shelter there.

Subscriptions for the poor

Tuesday afternoon 9th July A meeting has taken place today, to make arrangements for subscriptions in aid of the poor sufferers; Edwards Simcoe Drewe, Esq. of the Grange, was called to the chair, and with that good feeling and philanthropy which has always marked his character, immediately set his name down for £20. The amount collected at the meeting was from £70 to £80.

(Exeter Flying Post, 11 July 1839 (3e))

I have omitted some paragraphs copied from the Western Luminary and added the subheadings.

The principal losers:

William Gabriel, tithe map no. 2237, behind Veryards.

James Nichols, tithe map no 2499, Fore St.

John Mills, baker, High Street, just north of Thomas Webber.

John Mills, paper manufacturer, tithe map no 921, Water Leats Meadow; tithe map no 995, Mill Meadow and Garden, between Higher Mill Lane and Lower Street (Station Road); living in Exeter Street just above the end of Way's Lane (1841 Census).

William Budd, baker, Exeter Street, just below the end of New Street.

Thomas Webber, tithe map no 2226, High Street

T.W. Whitter, tithe map nos 400, 402, 403, 404, 405, 406, 408, 409, St. Andrew's Hill.

Awful fire at Cullompton (Destruction of upwards of a hundred houses)

We regret to have to record the particulars of another most calamitous fire, which occurred at Cullompton on Sunday last, and by which a large number of persons have been deprived of their homes, and reduced to much distress. Just before the congregation were about to leave church after the close of the Morning Service, an alarm of fire was raised, and flames were seen issuing from a chimney in a street near New Street.

Whole streets burnt down

The town of Cullompton has since presented a most melancholy appearance. Hundreds of poor families have lost their all. Whole streets have been burnt down: in fact, nearly two thirds of the town may be said to be destroyed. Near the Half Moon the destruction of valuable property is very great. A great number of houses contiguous to the bank are total wrecks, but that building was saved. The Vicar, with the respectable inhabitants of the town, vied with each other in their exertions to save the furniture of the poor from the burning cottages, many of whom were in a state of most deplorable distress and anguish.

(Exeter and Plymouth Gazette, 13th July 1839 (3f))

This is an extract only. Subheading added.

The Half Moon: tithe map, nos. 2512, 2513, now Labdons.

AWFUL FIRE IN CULLOMPTON

The town of Cullompton was visited on Sunday last by a frightful occurrence, which however familiar the inhabitants have unfortunately been for a series of years past with events of that nature, has never been exceeded in extent of calamity within its boundaries. The alarm was given just as the congregation were about to leave the Church, at which time flames were observed issuing from the roof of a thatched tenement on the western side of the principal street in the lower part of the town, which communicated with desolating activity to the contiguous habitations, most of which, being also thatched, were, owing to the influence of a brisk westerly wind, consumed with fearful rapidity. The fire then extended across the principal street where it occasioned the destruction of a great number of shops and dwellings—the unfortunate inhabitants of which were glad to escape without being able to save, in many instances, even the least portion of their goods or property. The flames then reverted to the opposite side of the street, and soon reduced to ashes a long line of cottages and houses, many of the latter being occupied by respectable individuals.

(Devonshire Chronicle, 15 July 1839 (3d))

THE GREAT FIRE OF CULLOMPTON

The Exeter Newspapers

There was no local newspaper in Cullompton in 1839. The Tiverton Gazette was not founded until 1858, and its coverage of Cullompton was very thin until the 1880's. For contemporary accounts of events in Cullompton we must therefore look at the Exeter newspapers. There were five: Dewdney's 'Western Luminary' (Monday), Besley's 'Devonshire Chronicle' (Monday), Trewman's 'Exeter Flying Post' (Thursday), Woolmer's 'Exeter and Plymouth Gazette' (Saturday) and Latimer's 'Western Times' (Saturday). They were all far more biased politically than today's local newspapers. The 'Western Luminary' devoted half a column to the great fire in its issue of 8th July 1839 and six and a half columns to the Grand Conservative Dinner at Cullompton on 23rd September. The 'Western Times' was outspokenly Liberal: 'The Tories are going to dine their serfs in a field at Cullompton in the course of a few days' (17 August 1839). The 'Western Times' and the 'Exeter and Plymouth Gazette' had the biggest circulation.

The papers very rarely sent reporters to Cullompton. For an exception see 'Old Cullompton' part 2, page 8. There were five coaches a day each way; or the reporter could ride. The railway between Exeter and Cullompton was not opened until 1 May 1844. The papers therefore depended heavily on local correspondents. Coverage was therefore very uneven. Local correspondents were sometimes biased, and their reports were limited to the information that was available to them. It is sometimes possible to tell from a report who the correspondent was and therefore how reliable the report was.

How bad was the fire?

All accounts agree that this was a calamitous fire. Estimates of the number of houses affected vary. The first estimate, reported by the 'Western Luminary' on the authority of Captain Cumming of the West of England fire brigade, was 'no less than 150 houses burnt to the ground.' 'The Latest Particulars' in the same issue are more precise: 145 dwelling houses burnt to the ground, and including outhouses, barns, etc., upwards of 170 buildings totally destroyed. The appeal launched by Vicar Sykes on 9 July simply says 'upwards of 100 houses', and that figure was adopted by the 'Exeter Flying Post' and by the 'Exeter and Plymouth Gazette' in its headline. The 'Western Times' says 143 houses destroyed and about 200 families homeless. This report was written by T.W. Whitter, the bank manager, a reliable source, and 143 may be taken as the final figure. I can find no authority or justification for the figure of 264 given by Murray Foster and Watkins Grubb. 'The List of Persons Remunerated' contains 233 names, and 264 may be an estimate of families affected, rather than of buildings destroyed.

'Whole streets have been burnt down: in fact nearly two thirds of the town may be said to be destroyed' (Western Luminary, copied by Exeter and Plymouth Gazette). Murray Foster suggests that the fire was confined to the west half of the town (Crow Green, New Street, Tiverton Lane, the west side of the Higher Bull Ring). Watkins Grubb restricts it even further: the lower half of the town (Crow Green, New Street). In neither case could it have destroyed 264 houses. In fact, we know from the newspaper reports that it went much wider: White Hart, Half Moon, Red Lion. 'The List of Persons Remunerated,' taken with the 1839 tithe map and the 1841 census suggests that it was much wider even than that. In addition, there were eight fire engines involved (seven, after the small Cullompton engine was burnt in New Street). They were not working with the West of England near the Green, or with the West Middlesex in Fore Street. They must have been scattered all round the town.

Where did the fire start?

'In a small street, near New Street' (Western Luminary)
'In Exeter Road, in the lower part of the town' (Exeter Flying Post)
'In a back street, near New Street' (Exeter Flying Post)
'In a street near New Street' (Exeter and Plymouth Gazette)
'In a small house in Exeter Street, opposite New Street, occupied by John Walters, a Shoe Maker' (Western Times.)
'In a thatched tenement on the western side of the principal street in the lower part of the town' (Devonshire Chronicle)
'At the Boot Inn, kept by William Walters, just opposite the end of New Street' (Murray T. Foster, History of Cullompton, p.14)
There was similar disagreement about the wind.
'Blowing briskly from the N.W.' (Western Luminary, Exeter Flying Post).
'A strong southerly wind' (Western Times.)
'A brisk westerly wind' (Devonshire Chronicle)
'A very strong south wind' (Murray Foster.)

It would not be surprising after such a catastrophic fire if no one was quite sure where it started and if different people held different views.

The 'Western Luminary' account, which was copied by the other two newspapers was based on information supplied by Captain Cummings and the West of England fire brigade when they returned to Exeter on Monday morning after the fire. They arrived in Cullompton two hours after the fire broke out and were obviously too busy to check the rather vague information they were given about where the fire started.

The account in the 'Exeter Flying Post' was sent in by someone in Cullompton, 'our correspondent.' He appears to have been the local agent of one of the Insurance Companies. Who else would say that 'from the moment of the alarm the Agents of the different Insurance Officers were all very active.' He has an eye for details which might have escaped the uninitiated: not just the Tiverton and Bradninch engines, but the West of England engine from Tiverton and the parish engine from Bradninch. And he is very precise about the delay between sending the message to Exeter and the arrival of the West of England in Cullompton. I think 'our Correspondent' was Thomas Mitchell, of the Post Office, local agent of the Alliance Fire and Life Assurance Company. He had not been to church, nor had he been down to the lower end of the town himself. Indeed he gives no details about the progress of the fire. But he is quite precise about the six principal sufferers. Perhaps they were insured with him. He presumably visited Whitter at the Bank (he would have had good business reasons for doing so) and learnt about the damage on his premises and the anecdote about the three rabbits with the fur on fire. It was presumably from Whitter that he learnt that the fire started in the Exeter Road, in the lower part of the town.

'The Western Times' account was probably written by Whitter himself, who was a frequent contributor. He had been to church that Sunday morning (he was to be Vicar's Warden in 1841-42). After the service he went straight down to New Street. And his information is quite precise: the fire began in 'a small house in Exeter Street, opposite New Street, occupied by John Walters, a Shoe Maker.' The 1841 Census confirms that John Walters, aged 50, Shoe maker, lived just there. William Budd, aged 60, baker lived on the west side of Exeter Street just below the New Street turning (census) and owned the first house on the left in New Street itself (tithe no. 2327) where his tenant, Henry Blackmore, received £1-18-6 remuneration for fire damage. William Budd was one of the principal losers from the fire. And John Mills, aged 60, papermaker, lived further down on the east side of Exeter Street (census). He was another of the principal losers from the fire and received £20 remuneration from the Fire Appeal (and perhaps some insurance payments as well?) In the 'List of Persons Remunerated' there are 21 claimants from Exeter Street and Exeter Road, including John Brock, the Gatekeeper, who received £10. Clearly this was one of the areas most affected by the fire. It may have been where it began. Whitter had to return to the higher part of the town to protect his own property on St. Andrew's Hill, where a considerable amount of damage was done. On Monday he met Mitchell and they exchanged information, and on Tuesday he was able to report that the Appeal of which he was treasurer, had raised £160. This is the fullest account, giving the names of those concerned. It seems to be well informed. Where it can be checked, it is accurate. The arguments in its favour are stronger than for any other view.

Murray Foster's account was written in 1910, 71 years after the fire. As usual he quotes no authority. His standard source, his uncle James Murray Foster's manuscript 'Materials for a history of Columpton (1868) says nothing about the fire, but includes it in his table of dates for 1838, corrected in Murray's handwriting to 1839. There is no printed source from which he could have derived his information. It must therefore have come from oral tradition. There was a William Walters in New Street, but he was a Shoemaker aged 25, and he lived in the third house on the left, tithe no. 2325: he received £4-10-0 remuneration for fire damage. There was a William Cummings aged 55, Innkeeper, living at the far end of New Street on the right, tithe no. 2314: he received £25-11-0 (the fifth highest payment out of 233 claimants). There is no doubt that this area was devastated by the fire, but it is difficult to be confident in the accuracy of Murray Foster's account.

I still have doubts. All the properties at the far end of Crow Green suffered from the fire. If it began at any of the other suggested places the wind could not have carried it to that part of Crow Green. But if it started there the wind could easily have carried it all over the rest of town. Indeed a spark from here could easily have carried the fire to John Walters' house in Exeter Street. The fact is that probably we shall never know.

Tithe Map 1839

Town Centre Occupiers

400	Tristram Walrond Whitter	2245		2338	John Gibbs	2445	Thomas Cross
402-409	Tristram Walrond Whitter	2244	William Facey	2340	George Hornsey	2446	Ann Brice
732	William Upcott (Orchard)		William Colman	2341	unoccupied	2447	Ann Brice
733	Frances Sydenham	2249	William Luxton	2343	John Way, jun.	2448	Solomon Coterell
	William Pike	2250	John Baker	2344		2450	Jane Carthew
734	William Upcott (Shortlands)	2254	Priscilla Drake	2345	James Prigge	2452	John Webber
	William Upcott	2258	John Williams	2346	George Down	2459	Elizabeth Middle
735	William Upcott	2259	James Woolley	2347	William Mills	2460	Thomas Luxton
736	Samuel Goodhind	2260	Thomas Arnoll	2348	Henry Manning	2462	John Wyatt
737	D.B. Sellwood (Tan Yard Field)	2261	William Upcott	2349	Henry Down	2463	Robert Skinner
	D.B. Sellwood	2265	George Baker	2351	John Taylor		Thomas Davey
	(Dry Field)	2266	John Land		William Bazley	2464	Robert Wills
	D.B. Sellwood	2267		2354	Richard Cross	2466	John Johnstone
	(Brook Meadow)	2268	William East		William Pannell	2468	John Bath
	Tristram Walrond Whitter	2269	William Howe		George Trump	2469	
925	Tristram Walrond Whitter	2271	Joanna Hole	2355	Daniel Bishop Sellwood	2470	Frederick Leigh
972	William Upcott, jun.	2273	Thomas Woolland	2356	Richard Cross	2471	Frederick Leigh
973	William Upcott, jun.	2276	Thomas Mitchell	2357	George Trump	2472	Rev. Joseph Gattley
975	Daniel Chambers	2277	Henry Voisey		Mary Whitley	2476	Rev. William Sykes
977	Richard Ireland	2278	Joseph Rawe	2358	William Prigg	2477	William Searle
977ab	William Melhuish	2279	Joseph Rawe	2359	James Quick	2478	William Toogood
987	Frederick Leigh	2280	Thomas Marshall	2360	James Ingleton	2484	Samuel Mitchell
987a	Sarah Taylor	2281	James Bennett	2364	John Bell	2490	Richard Frost
988	Rev. William Sykes	2282	Henry Doble	2367-8	unoccupied	2499	James Nichols, jun.
989	Rev. William Sykes	2283	Richard Rice	2369	Richard Rice	2504	Henry Matthews
990	James Bowerman	2285	John Harwood	2372	William Warren	2505	William Pidgeon
991	William Hodges	2286	John Moggridge	2373	George Gibbons	2508	Grace Sellwood
993	John Pidgeon	2288	John Gillham	2374	John Palmer	2509	Tristram Charles Hine
994	Christopher Norman	2291	Edward Gillham	2375	Richard Baker	2510	Francis Poole
995	John Mills	2294	John Ireland	2376	Henry & Robert Brooks	2511	Sarah Monkton
2206	William Brice	2295-7	unoccupied	2377	Richard King	2512-3	William Hodges (Half Moon)
2207	William Maunder	2298	John Pratt	2391	William Teed		
2208		2301	John Pratt	2392		2514	John Wescott
2209	Jemima Case	2302	William Elworthy	2394	Richard Brookland	2515	John Frost, jun.
	Thomas Milford	2303	John Pratt	2395	Thomas Wescombe	2516-7	Henry Surridge
	James Wright	2304	John Pratt	2397	Joseph Frost	2518	Thomas Gee
2210	Philip Canniford	2305	Abraham Hammett	2399	George Bidgood	2520	Henry Goodhind
2211	Thomas East	2306	John Flood	2407	George Westlake	2521	Agnes Wescombe
2213	Thomas Lee	2307	William Greenslade	2408	George Godfrey	2522	Edward Manley Leigh
2215	John Toogood	2308	John Woolley	2410	John Pope	2523	Matthew Lee Yeates
2216	Thomas Williams	2309	John Hill		Thomas Arscott	2530	Sarah Burnard
2217	William Goodhind	2310	John Elliott		William Broom	2531	William Burnard
2218	Richard Harvey	2311	Abraham Hammett		John Oddy		
2219	Samuel Fowler	2312	James Hewitt	2414	Henry Hill		
2221	Gideon Baston	2313	unoccupied	2417	Philip Perham		
2222	Harriet Anning	2314	William Commins	2418	William Plumpton		
2223	Mary Brown	2316	James Barker	2419	William Litherley		
2224	Ann Minson	2317	George Woolley		George Bidgood		
2226	Thomas Webber	2318	William Baker	2420	Thomas Williams		
2227	Charles Justice	2319	John Wyatt	2423	Henry Elworthy		
2227a	Philip Moor	2320	Henry Budd	2424	Philip Taylor		
2227b	Elizabeth Bilbie	2321	Humphrey Veales	2425	John Elworthy		
2228	Widow Wyatt	2322	Thomas Turner	2428	Elizabeth Pearcey		
2229	John Wolland		James Sanders	2429			
2230	Thomas Symes	2323	John Elworthy	2430	James Woodley		
2233	Thomas Hewitt		Scipio Luxton	2432	John Rowe		
2235	John Samuel Upcott	2324	William Ward	2433	John Rowe		
2236	Richard Westron	2325	William Walters	2434	John Clarke		
2237	William Gabriel	2326	Samuel Way	2435	William Drake		
2238	Elizabeth Bilbie		Edward Blackmore	2436	James Fouraker		
2239	Frances Sydenham	2327	Henry Blackmore	2437	Richard Mortimore		
	William Pike	2334	William Searle	2438			
			William Howe	2439			
2240			John Snow	2440	Daniel Chambers		
2241	Alfred Harvey	2336	John Taylor	2441	William Upcott		
2242	John Baker	2337	Joseph Way	2443	Joseph Davey		
2243	Joseph Foster	2337a					

A LIST OF PERSONS

WHO HAVE BEEN REMUNERATED FOR THE LOSSES THEY SUSTAINED IN CONSEQUENCE OF THE

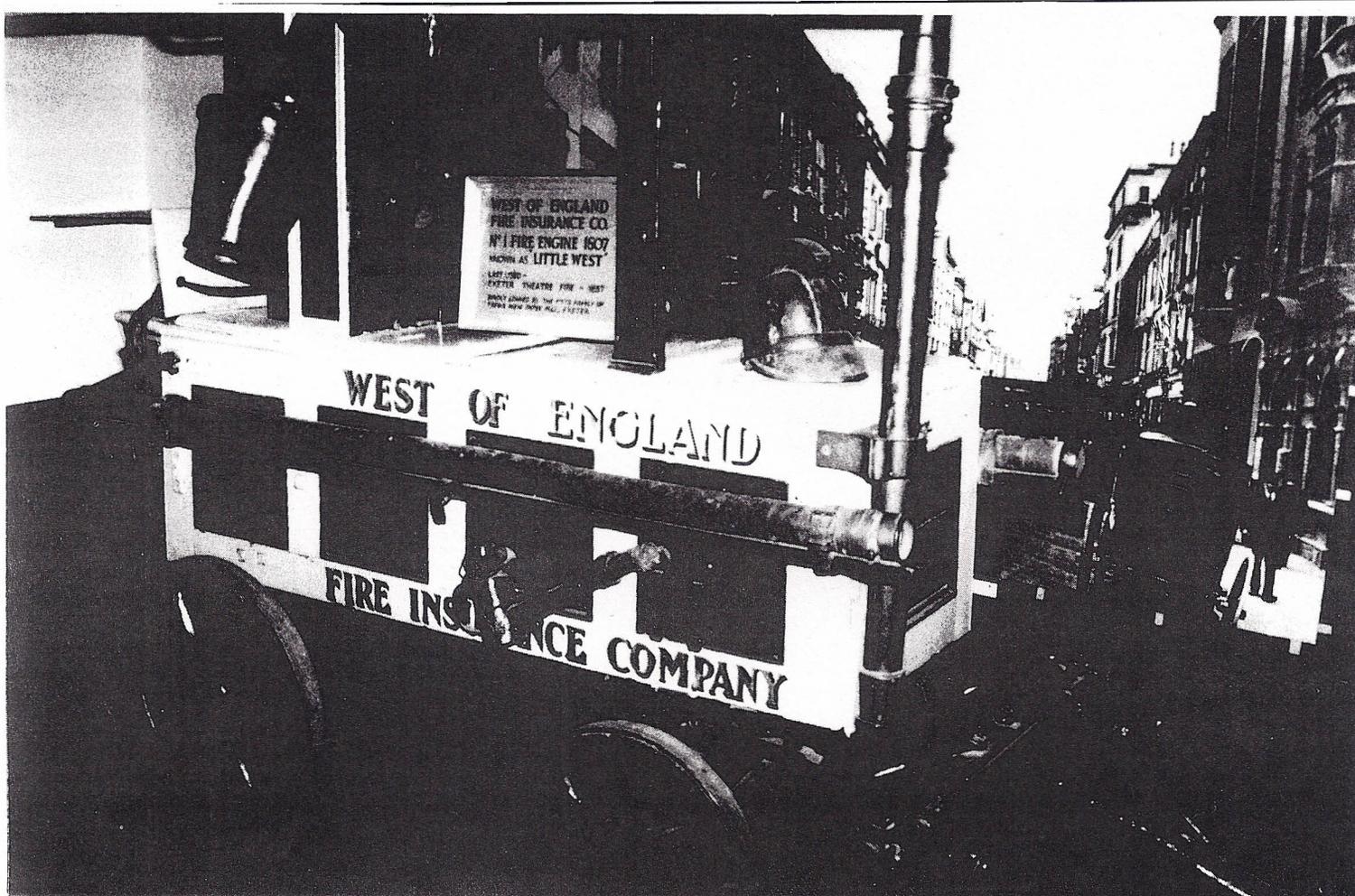
CALAMITOUS FIRE AT COLLUMPTON

ON SUNDAY THE 7th DAY OF JULY 1839.

NAMES.	£.	s.	d.	NAMES.	£.	s.	d.
Beales, Humphrey	1	18	1	Ward, William	0	8	6
Baker, George	0	15	6	Ware, John	2	15	6
Bidgood, George	0	3	6	Willey, Thomas	1	5	0
Blackmore, Edward	2	11	0	Willey, Mary	1	0	0
Blackmore, Henry	1	18	6	Willey, Thomas	0	19	2
Blackmore, John	0	6	6	Way, Richard	4	15	6
Blackmore, John jun.	2	15	10	Wodge, Philip	1	15	3
Bevans, John	2	1	3	Maunder, Harriet	0	3	6
Bridgman, Mary	0	14	0	Knight, George	0	1	6
Berry, Henry	2	11	0	Dawton, John	10	4	0
Budd, Henry	4	13	6	Payne, William	0	6	3
Bussell, Margaret	3	6	2	Haven, Thomas	0	0	3
Cock, Theophilus	1	17	0	Down, George	5	0	0
Coombe, Robert	1	7	0	Torrington, Ann	2	0	0
Crosse, John	1	13	6	Brice, William	0	7	0
Haywood, John	3	5	0	Dyer, Abraham	0	7	6
Croft, John	0	6	0	Ellicott, William	0	12	0
Dodge, John	0	6	0	Gibbs, John	0	5	0
Down, Henry	2	14	4	Grant, Thomas	0	4	0
Elliott, John	1	0	0	Frost, Silas	2	0	6
Eveleigh, James	1	9	6	Howe, William	0	19	0
Eveleigh, John	0	9	0	Land, John	1	1	7
Farrant, William	1	4	3	Maun, Mary	1	11	0
Forse, Priscilla	0	17	0	Mann, Thomas	8	12	0
Galpin, Susanna	1	2	3	Trump, George	0	5	6
Galpin, John	1	16	0	Veals, Mary Ann	3	1	6
Galpin, Thomas	0	8	0	Voisey, Henry	0	4	0
Gutheridge, John	0	6	6	Way, Joseph	0	5	9
Hill, John	2	15	10	Casling, Henry	0	5	6
Hodge, William	0	18	0	Searle, William	0	9	6
Hornsey, Joseph	1	18	0	Hull, Ann	3	17	0
Incedon, Richard	2	15	8	Way, William jun	0	3	6
Incedon, William	2	2	3	Eveleigh, Margaret	4	0	0
Keen, Henry	1	3	8	Gratland, Robert	3	0	0
Langham, Francis	1	9	0	Thomas, Betty	0	3	0
Lock, John	1	13	9	Pring, Sarah	0	3	6
Lock, Thomas	0	17	8	Hornsey, Ann	0	5	6
Lock, Thomas jun	3	7	4	Casling, Agness	0	2	0
Lyddon, Elizabeth	0	17	0	Beer, William	0	15	8
Manley, James	1	13	6	Bidgood, Thomas	0	10	0
Mann, Francis	2	19	6	Taylor, Mary	0	4	5
Matthews, Mary	1	0	0	Tozer, Catherine	9	19	6
Manning, Henry	0	12	6	Searle, Sarah	6	0	6
Luxton, Daniel	3	6	0	Goss, John	8	12	7
Maunder, Henry	0	8	0	Luxton, Thomas	5	11	6
Mills, Joseph	0	11	0	Melhuish, Agness	5	11	6
Mills, William	0	13	6	Dyer, James	5	14	0
Parrot, George	3	2	6	Taylor, John	5	6	0
Pine, William	3	2	6	Rowland, Robert	10	0	0
Prigg, James	0	11	8	Tozer, John	10	1	0
Quick, Jane	4	0	6	Torrington, Henry	6	3	0
Sanders, James	1	3	5	Westacott, William	9	0	0
Searle, William	2	16	6	Westacott, John	10	0	0
Mugford, James	3	11	6	Poole, William	11	6	6
Squire, John	0	18	10	Mitchell, James	17	18	2
Tucker, John	0	15	1	Brock, John	10	0	0
Tucker, Nicholas	1	4	3	Dalton, William	22	14	0
Tucker, Ann	1	11	8	Dodge, Maria	1	5	0
Taylor, John	2	3	9	James, William	8	0	6
Torrington, Joseph	1	6	0	Norman, Thomas	12	0	0
Taylor, John jun	1	10	2	Allen, Thomas	3	9	0
Taylor, Elizabeth	0	15	10	White, Charles	10	0	0
Taylor, Elizabeth	0	16	0	Merchant, Julianna	11	8	0
Upcott, Sarah	2	0	9	Merchant, Mary	1	18	0
Way, James	0	3	3	Tuckett, John	2	3	6
White, Thomas	2	8	6	Facey, Henry	0	17	9
Way, Samuel	5	7	0	Elworthy, John	0	6	0
Way, William	0	7	2	Jenkins, Mary Ann	0	6	0
Walters, William	4	10	0	Bidgood, Sarah	0	19	1
Woolley, John	0	15	4	Voisey, Mary Ann	0	17	3
Ward, William jun.	1	14	6	Way, John	0	5	0

NAMES.	£.	s.	d.	NAMES.	£.	s.	d.
Wyatt, John	1	6	6	Lock, John	0	8	4
Flood, Samuel	7	12	8	Lowman, John	0	4	0
Rice, James	0	7	0	Frost, John	0	5	6
Fear, Elizabeth	0	9	0	M'Claren, John	0	4	0
Rowe, William	2	0	0	Way, William	0	2	6
Gore, John	1	12	5	Westacott, John jun	0	4	0
Snow, John	0	3	0	Casling, Henry	0	5	0
Bidgood, George	4	14	6	Taylor, George	0	3	0
Searle, Thomas	0	14	0	Capell, William	1	0	0
Benham, John	9	4	0	Savery, Maria	0	12	6
Paris, Elizabeth	0	4	2	Galpin, William	0	2	6
Hawkins, Robert	0	10	0	Rutley, William	0	2	6
Serle, James	2	10	0	Parker, Sarah	0	5	0
Grenslade, William	5	2	0	Pope, John	0	6	0
Leat, John	0	8	0	Incedon, William	5	0	0
Didd, Daniel	0	5	0	Leat, James	0	12	6
Palmer, Robert	24	3	0	Gillham, John	0	16	3
Cummings, William	25	11	0	Nichols, James Sen.	140	0	0
Ireland, John	9	0	0	Bone, Widow (?)	0	3	6
Quick, James	3	10	6	Caseman, Mary (?)	0	1	6
Symes, Thomas	1	5	6	Moor, George	1	17	.
Baker, John	0	5	0	Baker, William's Son	15	0	.
Shiles, Thomas	15	0	6	Incedon, William	10	0	.
Saunders, John	0	9	7	Selby, William	0	10	.
Flood, John	5	4	3	Paid Jos. Torrington for Loom	2	0	.
Harvey, John	0	9	4	Thomas Bidgood do.	0	14	.
Hornsey, George	0	15	6	Joseph Frost do.	2	6	.
Busson, Sarah	2	18	0	Joseph Cross do.	0	12	.
Hornsey, Richard	1	10	0	Saml. Fouracres for Shuttles	1	3	11
Cross, Sarah	0	6	6	John Bell for repairing Looms	0	8	3
Stark, John	8	1	1	Williams for Work and Labor	1	3	.
Webber, William	0	11	8	Williams do.	35	9	10
Burge, Thomas (Ex. Officer)	20	0	0	Joseph Cross do.	7	5	1
Hodge, William	0	5	0	Mitchell for Scissors and Wire	1	18	4
Bazley, Elizabeth	0	5	0	Jarman for Work and Labour	6	19	9
Morie, Ann	0	4	2	Mr. Upcott for Sleys, Harness-			
Wyatt, Christopher	3	5	0	es, &c. provided by Mr. Chap-			
Fouracres, Ann	0	6	10	man and Messrs. Mortimore			
Forse, Robert	0	9	3	& Co. for the Sufferers	24	6	0
Baker, William	0	5	0	Rawe for Counterpane, &c. for			
Cross, Sarah	0	18	6	the Sweep	0	11	6
Brice, Mary	1	14	0	Howard for Bed, &c. do.	1	0	.
Williams, Thomas	1	5	0	Voisey for Combs	0	10	6
Webber, Thomas	90	0	0	Rowe for Printing	3	12	.
Goodhind, Richard	8	17	6	Davey for Rope for Sweep's			
Dodge, John	0	10	0	Bea	0	2	6
Luxton, William	1	0	0	Western for Iron Work	0	16	11
Staddon, Anna Maria	1	0	0	Hewett do.	0	12	6
Voisey, John	1	9	3	Hill for Provisions for Sweep	2	15	.
Mills, John (Paper Maker)	20	0	0	Voisey for Stationery, &c.	1	1	10
Brice, William	0	5	0	Latimer for Printing	8	19	.
Evans, William	0	9	0	Dewdney do.	9	7	10
Hill, Richard	0	6	0	Besley do.	10	13	6
Leat, John	0	10	0	Trewman do.	9	19	2
Odde, John	0	5	0	Woolmer do.	13	19	6
Pratt, Thomas	0	10	0	Mr. Whitter for Postages, car-			
Goodhind, William	1	10	0	riage of Parcels, expenses of			
Teed, William	1	0	0	journey to Exeter & Taunton,			
* Bussell, Marg. & John Tucker	40	0	0	& other incidental expenses	10	10	.
Tozer, Thomas	0	5	.	Mr. Moor for Messengers, &c.	1	14	5
Rowe, James	20	0	0	Mr. Upcott for Blankets	126	1	4
Plumpton, William	6	0	8	Mr. Upcott do.	48	15	.
Saul, Sarah	4	5	0	Advertisements to return thanks			
Hill, Henry	25	0	0	to the Public	4	12	.
Poole, John	5	4	9	Advertisements in Bristol	3	4	6
Webber, John	7	17	6	Invested in the Savings Bank,			
Pannell, Henry	1	0	0	Exeter	109	12	6
Pike, William	2	10	0	Expense of Advertising	1	15	.
* Marg. Bussell & John Tucker	18	0	0				

£1457 17 9



The Little West arrived first

Photo: Douglas Perkins

The List of Persons Remunerated

Lists of subscribers to the appeal launched by Vicar Sykes on 9 July were published during July and August 1839. Sykes thanked them on 24 August and added: 'The Committee will not fail to publish their account of the application of the funds as soon as that account can be made up.' The accounts were published in December 1839, and a second annual account in December 1840, but names of the recipients were not given. As a result of agitation encouraged by the *Western Times* a stormy and inconclusive meeting was held in the vestry room on 6 February 1841 (see *Western Times*, 13 February 1841 (3d)).

'The List of Persons Remunerated' is undated but it seems to have been a consequence of that meeting. It was not published in the Exeter newspapers but as a separate document. There is a copy in Tiverton Museum. The first column on the list is more or less in alphabetical order, but thereafter there is no attempt at rational organisation. Presumably it reproduces the order in which payments were made, or at least decided, according to the Fire Committee's minute book.

That makes the list much more difficult to use. Some names appear two or three times. Thus William Inledon appears three times, but it is not clear whether there were two or three people of that name, or whether one man claimed three times. In the 1841 Census I have only found one William Inledon, living in Tiverton Lane. Even where we know that there were two people and two payments (George Bidgood, Sarah Cross, William Hodge, John Lock, William Searle, John Taylor, William Way, Thomas Willey), we do not know which payment was made to which person. Hence we cannot always tell at which address the fire caused the greater damage. If the list had been put into alphabetical order these repetitions would have been noticed and some means of distinguishing them could have been used, as happened in the 'List of Weavers' (1830).

On the other hand the list sometimes shows clearly that the fire damaged a particular house or area. Thus George Baker received 16/6; the tithe map shows his garden, no 2265; the Census adds his address, Higher New Street; age, 60; and occupation, labourer. John Land received £1-1-7; the tithe map shows his garden, no. 2266; the Census adds his address, Higher New Street; age, 40; and occupation, woolcomber. They were neighbours; and we can be sure that the fire went up Higher New Street. That confirms and makes more precise the information in the newspaper accounts.

Henry Down received £2-14-4; the tithe map shows his garden, no. 2349, on the south side of Crow Green; the Census adds his address, Crow Green; age, 30; and occupation, weaver. John Taylor, jnr. received £1-10-2; the tithe map shows his garden no. 2351; the Census adds his address, Crow Green; age, 30; and occupation, weaver. They were neighbours. On the other side of the

road, in the fork of the Y of Crow Green, where Appledore Close now stands, we are equally well informed. James Prigg received 11/8; the tithe map shows his garden, no. 2345; the Census adds his address, Crow Green; age, 55; and occupation, weaver. George Down received £5; the tithe map shows his garden, no. 2346; the Census adds his address, Crow Green; age, 40; and occupation, labourer. Henry Manning received 12/6; the tithe map shows his garden, no. 2348; the Census adds his address, Crow Green; age, 25; and occupation, mason. Over the road again, on the north side of Crow Green, George Hornsey received 15/6; the tithe map shows his garden, no. 2340; the Census adds his address, Crow Green; age, 30; and occupation, shoemaker. We can be sure that the whole of this end of Crow Green, on both sides of the road, was affected by the fire. Indeed it is possible that that is where it started.

We know that New Street was devastated. Fourteen claimants appear on the tithe map in New Street, and thirteen more appear in the Census with New Street addresses. In the middle of the street there were claims from every house on both sides of the street, except one: no. 2321 on the tithe map. Now the fact that he did not claim does not show that his house was not burnt. He may have been insured or had some other reason for not claiming. Or the occupier may have changed between February 1839 (tithe map) and July 1839 (the fire). But it is worth checking. The occupier of no. 2321 on the tithe map was Humphrey Veales. The first name on the 'List of Persons Remunerated' is Humphrey Beales, who received £1-18-1. They must have been the same person. Humphrey Beales also appears in the 'List of Weavers' (1830), where he received 6/-; so that presumably was his proper name. That shows one of the difficulties with our sources.

'The List of Persons Remunerated' show that the fire spread to the east side of Exeter Street (now Exeter Hill); Brook, Way's Lane, Pound Square, Duck Street (now Duke Street), Cockpit Hill, Queen Square, Lower Bullring, Church Street, Gravel Walk and Pye Corner. Here the evidence is not quite so overwhelming, and the damage was perhaps not so widespread. Henry Hill, 50, Schoolmaster, of Pound Square, tithe map no. 2414, received £25. William Plumpton, 60, glazier, tithe map no. 2418, on the other side of Pound Square, received £6-0-8. John Odde or Oddy, 50, woolcomber, of Cockpit Hill, tithe map no. 2410, received 5/-. In all some 28 claimants came from this area. This may be where the Sun fire engine was engaged 'in the very centre of the flames.'

Other claimants came from Fore Street, Tiverton Lane (7), High Street (12), Higher Street (4). This confirms the newspaper accounts. The claims from Higher Street show how far north the fire reached.

Where was the Sun fire engine?

Our information about the West of England and West Middlesex fire engines is clear and precise. The former went up New Street and towards the Green. The latter went up Fore Street to the area between the White Hart and the Red Lion. They took that information back to Exeter on the Monday morning and the papers reported it accordingly. The information about the Sun fire brigade is much vaguer. 'The Sun was also occupied in the very centre of the flames' (Western Luminary). 'The Sun engine and men belonging to it were also in a most perilous situation, being placed as it were in the very centre of the flames, but their collectedness was never lost for a moment, and their exertions were attended with great effect' (Exeter Flying Post). In the Western Times account they are left out altogether. Why are we not told where they were working? Presumably they were not working near to the other two Exeter engines or anywhere where they would be noticed by the newspapers' correspondents, Thomas Mitchell and T.W. Whitter. The information that we do have about them was probably supplied by themselves when they arrived back in Exeter on Monday morning. That means that they were unable to say where they had been. They had been working somewhere where they could not identify the street and where there was no noteworthy building, house or inn. In a town like Cullompton with one main street there are not many places they could have gone without knowing where they were. I suggest they were somewhere in the Way's Lane, Pound Square, Queen Square area. The evidence of the 'List of Persons Remunerated' the 1839 tithe map and the 1841 census suggests that that area suffered substantially from the fire. But they arrived after Whitter had left Exeter Street to go back to protect his own property. That is why they are not mentioned at all in his account in the Western Times. Thomas Mitchell had not been down to the lower end of the town at all and he did not know any important sufferer from the fire in the Pound Square area. Hence the vagueness about the Sun's activities.

The tithe map, February 1839

The tithe map was drawn specifically to show the liability for tithes. It therefore shows, and numbers, gardens rather than houses. If a house had no garden, we are not told who lived there. Fortunately all the houses in New Street had small gardens and therefore appear on the tithe map, with the names of owner and occupier; and the same is true of a large number of properties elsewhere in the town. In the 'List of Persons Remunerated' 53 claimants out of 233 appear on the tithe map. One or two may have moved in the interval between February and July, but if several people living in one area in February all suffered from the fire in July we may be sure that the fire reached that area. Sometimes we know that already (New Street); sometimes the information is new (for example Crow Green).

The Weavers

There is in the County Record Office a List of Weavers who were relieved by the Overseers on the 3 Occasions in the severe weather of January—February 1830 (P.O. 217) It contains 126 names. In the 'List of Persons Remunerated' after the 1839 fire there are at least 40 weavers (the next largest category is Labourer and Agricultural Labourer, 22) and 31 names appear in both lists. According to the Western Times, 'most of the men who were burnt out were in the employ of Mr. Upcott, woollen manufacturer.' And the Appeal by Vicar Sykes adds that 'the greater number of them lost even the very means of exercising their calling, the following morning finding them without Looms or Tools to recommence their labours.'

This was a very difficult period for weavers. In September 1840 William Upcott unsuccessfully prosecuted his employees for refusing to work for 2d. per piece: Western Times, 26 September 1840 (3e), and ensuing correspondence, 10 October (4a), 17 October (4bc), 31 October (3d). In February 1842 they went on strike against an intended reduction of wages: Western Times, 19 and 26 February 1842. Apparently 400 people went on strike, of whom 300 were weavers. 100 of them had been working at a shop at Shortlands, where Upcott supplied looms and tools and deducted 3d out of every shilling the men earned for so doing. It was alleged that Upcott intended to make the same deduction from the earnings of those who worked at home and supplied their own looms and tools, and to make a further reduction from the earnings of those who worked at the shop. A month later the Western Times reported great distress among the Cullompton weavers because of competition from Belgium; 26 March 1842.

There was some Chartist activity. On 24 May 1839 Leigh, the clerk to the magistrates wrote to the Home Secretary to report secret meetings of the Chartists and to find out how to obtain military assistance if it should be needed.

What happened to the chimney sweep?

The Western Luminary reported on Monday that 'one poor fellow, a sweep, was seriously injured by the fall of a partition on his back, but he is not dead and hopes are entertained of his recovery,' but added in its latest particulars that 'the poor fellow expired this morning.' On Thursday his life was still 'considered in a very critical state' (Exeter Flying Post) and on Saturday 'it was impossible that he could long survive' and his name was given as Rowe (Western Times). Thereafter there is silence. There is no record of his death in the five Exeter newspapers. He was not buried at St. Andrew's.

'The List of Persons Remunerated' contains several relevant entries:

Rawe, for Counterpane, etc., for the Sweep 11-6

Howard, for Bed, etc., for the Sweep 1-0-0

Davey, for Rope for Sweep's Bed 2-6

Hill, for Provisions for Sweep 2-15-0

At this period a weaver could support a wife and three children on six shillings a week, albeit with some difficulty. £2-15-0 was an enormous sum for provisions and suggests that the sweep survived for weeks or months.

The 1841 Census shows James Rowe, aged 30, Chimney Sweep, as resident at Clampitts. The 'List of Persons Remunerated' records that James Rowe was paid £20 towards the end of the distribution. That would be well over a year's income for a chimney sweep.

I conclude that the Chimney Sweep was James Rowe; that he was seriously ill for a long period but survived, perhaps with some permanent incapacity; and that he received the very substantial sum of £20 in compensation for his injuries.

The 1841 census

The Census shows everyone living in Cullompton in 1841, and gives address age and occupation. It has a reputation for unreliability. The address is by street only. House were not numbered. But in New Street the census goes down the north side and back the south side, so that it is possible to see who was living where; and the same is true in other cases, though not always. A special word needs to be said about age. In the 'List of Persons Remunerated' 172 claimants out of 233 also appear in the census: of those 96 have an age ending in 0, 60 have an age ending in 5 and 16 have other ages. Clearly people had a choice of giving their age exactly or to the nearest 5 or 10 years.

The Census was taken two years after the fire. Some people will have moved in that time. That is perhaps more likely if their house has been burnt down. William Capell suffered in the fire, and in 1841 he was living in Colebrook Lane, but I do not believe that the fire reached Colebrook Lane. On the other hand there is unlikely to have been much movement. The 15 sufferers who appear on the tithe map in New Street in 1839, still lived in New Street in 1841, presumably at the same address. And if several people living in one area in 1841 had all suffered from the fire in 1839, we may be fairly certain that the fire reached that area. That is particularly important for the area around Pound Square.

5 Books on Cullompton

All edited by David Pugsley

Our Vicars

A collection of lively and irreverent anecdotes about four nineteenth century vicars, written by a prominent local atheist.

The Town on the Culm

40 ways of spelling Cullompton: a lighthearted and amusing dispute between the curate, the squire and the doctor.

Pages from the Past

A miscellany of historical items from 1610 onwards: fires, disputes, church murals and repairs, possessioning the town lake.

Old Cullompton

On bells and bell founders; organs and organists; Upcott Field, cider stealing, and much more.

Old Cullompton, part 2

Parish pump politics in the mid nineteenth century.

'You have not paid your tithes.'

'And you have not paid your rates.'

'And I will not eat your grapes.'

£1 each

Available from Lawrence's and the Card Shop

West Middlesex took horses

We are authorised by the West of England office to state 'that as soon as the alarm was given, their Engine was prepared to start, but were surprised to find that the horses which had been ordered for them had been taken possession of by the West Middlesex men, encouraged by the Agent, who was present; and notwithstanding the firemen of the West of England protested against this unfair proceeding they refused to surrender the horses. In consequence of which the West of England Engine was compelled to wait for a fresh team, and in spite of this delay, it passed the West Middlesex on the road, and was playing on the flames with great effect long before the West Middlesex arrived. The whole distance was performed by the West of England in less than an hour.

Excuses

The West Middlesex people justify themselves in this way, by saying that they should not have done so, had they not been treated in a similar manner by the West of England at the last Alphington fire. Upon an enquiry being instituted at the London Inn, this charge appears to be utterly without foundation. They complete the equivocation by asserting that they were not aware that the horses belonged to the West of England, which fifty persons present are prepared to gainsay.'

(Exeter Flying Post, 11 July 1839 (3e))

The Alphington fire: 12 April 1839. The West Middlesex were in such a hurry on that occasion that one of their firemen fell off and was run over by the fire engine and killed.

The Western Times published T. W. Whitter's account of the fire on 13 July 1839: see Pages from the Past (1986), pages 16-18. The same issue carried the following advertisement.

COLLUMPTON FIRE

To the Editor of the Western Times

Sir,—A paragraph having appeared in the Western Luminary, relative to the Collumpton Fire, containing some unjust remarks about the West Middlesex Fire Office, the editor candidly admitted that the statment emanated from the West of England Office.

I was not a little surprised on receiving Trewman's *impartial* paper on Wednesday evening, to find not only an authorised report of the mis-statement from the West of England Office, but also a report of a pretended investigation at the London Inn. The trial must certainly have been a very fine specimen of British jurisprudence. Mr. Lewis, sen., I presume sat as judge, Mr. Lewis, jun., as council (sic), the West of England clerks and firemen as witnesses, and by this tribunal our devoted selves (without any information or hearing) were tried and condemned, and the *impartial Flying Post* (the proprietor of which is a shareholder in the West of England Office) is hired to report the proceedings.

But to the facts: my engine was the first to arrive at the New London Inn, and a team of horses being brought out, they were immediately attached to my engine, and I was not aware but that these were the horses ordered by me.

But this is not the only motive of the West of England in thus attacking me. Their chagrin can only arise from feelings of envy at our rapid progress in public favour. Their wish is to put us down, and what they cannot do by fair means, they will try to do by foul.

The fact is, that at the late Alphington fire on 12th April last, they had not ordered horses at all, but having obtained possession of them, they did *forcibly* keep possession in spite of my remonstrances and of an attempt by my people to regain them.

I am, Mr. Editor, your obedient servant,
W. HAYNE

Dated, West Middlesex Fire and Life Office,
262 High Street, 11 July 1839

(Published in all five Exeter newspapers, July 1839)

I have shortened this letter by more than half.

FIRE AT CULLOMPTON

We are happy to see the subscription list in aid of the sufferers by this fire presenting so respectable an appearance; but although the amount already received is large, it is still far short of what is required to meet the losses of even the very poorer classes; the members for North Devon, it will be seen, have contributed most nobly. Great praise is due to the Rev. W. Sykes and the Committee for their indefatigable exertions in alleviating the distress of the poor sufferers, since the calamitous event.

(Western Luminary, 22 July 1839 (3b))

There was a donation of £100 from the MP's for North Devon, Sir Thomas Acland and Mr. Buck, both Conservatives.

COLLUMPTON FIRE

We are glad to perceive that the subscription list for the sufferers in this melancholy fire is going on prosperously—and we observe in the list a handsome subscription from the respectable agents of the West Middlesex Office—Messrs. Hayne and Mitchell, who conduct the affairs of that Institution with very great spirit.

(Western Times, 3 August 1839 (5d))

The handsome subscription was ten guineas.

TO MR. G. L. MITCHELL,

Agent to the West Middlesex Assurance Company, at
Cullompton

SIR

Having heard, with feelings of deep regret, a malicious and scandalous report respecting the stability of the West Middlesex Assurance Company, we, the undersigned, being sufferers by the late fire of the 7th instant, and insured by the said Company, cannot allow such statements to go forth to the world, without fully rebutting such accusations, by stating that the West Middlesex Assurance Company has most honourably and liberally paid our just and full demands within the short space of ten days from the time of the accident, without any deduction or discount, and we beg you will express our warmest thanks to the Directors for their liberality, as also to S. Thurston, Esq., the Company's Surveyor, for the gentlemanly manner he investigated our claims. At the same time we cannot permit this opportunity to pass, without acknowledging your straight forward and liberal conduct, as their Agent; and you are now at liberty to make such use as you may think proper of the above statement.

Joseph Frost, sen. Gent
Samuel Fry, Gent
George Mitchell, Brazier
Christopher Wyatt, Plasterer
George Gibbons, Butcher

Charles White, Carrier
Thomas Searle
John Way
Richard Way
William Beer
Cullompton, 24 July 1839

(Reprinted repeatedly in all Exeter newspapers, July/August 1839)

Three of the above can be located on the title map: Joseph Frost, no. 2397; George Gibbons, no. 2372; John Way, no. 2343.

Five of the above also appear on the List of Persons Remunerated:

Christopher Wyatt, £5-9-0

Charles White, £10

Thomas Searle, 14/-

Richard Way, £4-15-0

William Beer, 15/8

To the Sufferers by the Cullompton Fire, and Insured by the West Middlesex Insurance Company

Gentlemen,

I cannot but acknowledge my feelings of gratitude for the high compliment you have paid me; I assure you I am not entitled to it; I can only say that I will continue the same line of conduct by all just claims that may be brought before me, relying as I can on the services of my friend, Mr. Hayne, the zealous agent for Exeter, who, as well as myself, will feel a pride in furthering the interests of all sufferers by Fire, and I will avail myself of the first opportunity of laying your sentiments before the Board of Directors, who, I am convinced, will come forward in the same honourable manner, should any future occasion require it.

I remain, Gentlemen, your obedient servant,
G. L. Mitchell

Cullompton 27 July 1839

(Reprinted repeatedly in all Exeter newspapers, August 1839)

FIRE AT CULLOMPTON

The Committee deem it their duty gratefully to acknowledge that the Appeal to the Public on behalf of the Sufferers by the late Fire, has been answered to an extent far surpassing their utmost expectations.

They have the satisfaction of adding that they have been enabled by the large funds thus placed at their disposal to assist many, and to more fully relieve others, who had not the means wherewith to make good any part even of their loss.

The Committee believe that they have funds sufficient to give aid in such further cases as can reasonably be presented to them.

It affords the Committee the greatest pleasure to be able to express their approbation of the good conduct of the general body of applicants, who shewed an honest desire to keep their claims within, rather than to exceed, the actual amount of their losses, and to add that the sums hitherto distributed have been received with thankfulness.

There are still claims collectively to a large amount under consideration, the allowance of which, wholly or in part, demands the strict attention of the Committee.

The Committee will not fail to publish their account of the application of the funds as soon as that account can be made up.

Signed by request of the Committee,

Dated 24th August, 1839

WM. SYKES, Chairman.

(Published in all Exeter newspapers, August/September 1839)

The accounts were produced on 3 December 1839 and published in all the Exeter newspapers, but the names of the recipients were not given.

West Middlesex Insurance Office

This office, has, through its respectable Exeter and Collumpton agents, subscribed liberally towards the relief of the sufferers by the late melancholy fire at Collumpton. We are also happy to hear that all demands made by the insured have hitherto been met in the most prompt and honourable manner by the company, who are making great progress in the West of England.

(Western Times, 10 August, 1839 (3b))

Towards the end of 1840 there was some public dissatisfaction over the fact that James Nichols, sen., a wealthy retired tradesman, had received £140 from the appeal subscription: see Pages from the Past (1986) page 19.

CULLOMPTON FIRE Relief Subscription

A requisition has been sent to the Rev. W. Sykes, Chairman of the fire committee, signed by a number of the subscribers, desiring that the whole accounts should be published—in answer to which he has desired Mr. Hill to inform those who signed the requisition, that the book is at his house for inspection. Compare the following case with that of Nichols—John Tucker had the reversion in fee after the death of Margaret Bussell, an old woman, with whom he had agreed to pay a certain income for life, and took possession of several houses, which had been insured; but owing to poverty he was unable to keep up the insurance. Now this poor fellow, although the whole was destroyed, never has received a farthing, and is compelled, and does work a day labourer, while many others who are living in affluence, received by hundreds from the public subscriptions.

A SUBSCRIBER.

(Western Times 30th January 1841)

'A Subscriber' was probably Elias Baker.

A meeting was held in the Vestry Room

Collumpton Fire Subscription

Mr. Marker complained that the distribution was different to that which he believed would be made when he was induced to subscribe by Mr. Sykes and Mr. Mortimore. He asked the treasurer if there had been two funds — one for the rich, and the other for the poor, as he had intended his mite for the poor. The money, he said had been given to persons who, from their circumstances, ought not to have been recipients of the fund. He said the money of the subscribers had been misapplied — the committee had given it to the rich, and not to the poor sufferers.

Mr. Baker then scrutinised several entries on the appropriation of the fund, one of which was 'Mr. Nichols' claim for £600 allowed,' signed — 'Good, Chairman.' This had been entered as if Mr. Baker had seconded it. Mr. Baker's account of the matter was that he had attended for the purpose of enforcing the claims of some poor sufferers, and that he left before this motion was put. Had he been aware that the committee would have proposed such a sum, he would have opposed it to the uttermost. He then noticed the omission of the names and cases of small claimants, and said that he should move that a clear statement of the appropriation of the funds should be published for the information of the subscribers, which statement should contain the names of those who had received the benefits of the subscription.

Mr. Mills said that he had seven pounds odd in his hands, which had been subscribed in Kentisbere at the time. But hearing what the Committee had been doing, he withheld the money, and should now return it to the subscribers, as they had given it on his recommendation.

Some conversation arose as to the mode by which Mr. Baker's proposition should be carried out. Mr. Marker thought it would not be necessary to publish the names of the subscribers, but only the amount received, and the names of those who had received it. But it appeared that there was no fund out of which the expense of advertising could be defrayed; and Mr. Whitter said he would pay it out of his own pocket; however, nothing definitely was determined. Great dissatisfaction was expressed at the conduct of the committee, who, it appears have 'relieved' persons who ought to have insured their property, without having discharged their duty towards the poorer sufferers by the calamity. Should the allegations against the Committee be made out, those gentlemen would have done a great deal to dam up the current of public charity in the event of any future appeal on similar grounds. We give the report as we receive it, so far as regards the main facts: and if the committee have any explanation, we shall be happy to open our columns to them, provided they do not exact too much space.

(Western Times, 13 February 1841 (3d))

As a result of the meeting the List of Persons Remunerated was published and that was the end of the matter.

The West Middlesex Insurance Company

The West Middlesex Fire and Life Insurance Company was used by Dickens as the model for the Anglo-Bengalee Disinterested Loan and Life Assurance Company in 'Martin Chuzzlewit', Chapter 27. After its failure in 1840 the House of Commons set up a Committee on Joint Stock Companies which started to hear evidence on 13th May 1841 and reported in 1844: Parliamentary Papers, 1844, vol 7. Much of the evidence was concerned with the West Middlesex. It was set up in October 1836 by Knowles, a smuggler and a bankrupt; Williams, solicitor and manager, a bankrupt, and his son; Hustler, the physician, an insolvent; Hole, a footman, a small shopkeeper and a bankrupt, and Whittaker, his brother-in-law; and Wilson, the porter.

The prospectus offered reduced rates for fire insurance, 'being 30 per cent under the rates of any other Company of equal respectability in the United Kingdom;' and for transfers of fire insurances they offered discounts of 50 per cent on the first year's premium and 15 per cent on the following six years' premium. Similar inducements were offered for life insurance, and the money began to pour in, on which we are told, the directors lived like princes.

Agents were allowed 25 per cent and the company had some very good agents. Haynes and Mitchell were both able and energetic (and honest) men.

They first appear in Cullompton in May 1838. After the fire in the Bull Ring on 22 April (see Cullompton Weekly News, 27 May 1988), the company authorised Mitchell 'to remunerate the engine men with £3, and to amply reward the others who assisted in the fire. This must be considered handsome from an office which has not accepted orders for this part more than twelve months' (Western Times, 5 May 1838 (3c))

From time to time there were rumours about the company but they did not get very far because of the threat of libel actions. Indeed in the first half of 1839 libel proceedings were commenced in Glasgow, but the case never came to court. There must have been more rumours in Exeter and Cullompton in July 1839: hence the prompt settlement of all the Cullompton fire claims and the donation of ten guineas to the fire appeal fund, and the related advertisements which were published in the Exeter papers for several weeks.

On 8 November 1839 there was a fire opposite the White Hart and six houses were burnt down. The West Middlesex engine was first on the ground (Western Times, 16 November 1839 (3a)). The company provided a new first class fire engine, with special new fire escape ladders, for Mitchell for use in Cullompton and neighbourhood. It was brought into Cullompton 15 November 1839 with great pomp and ceremony, greeted by the church bells and the Cullompton band (Western Times, 23 November 1839 (3c)). On 7 March 1840 there was a fire in an outhouse belonging to Mr. Voisey, near the Post Office, (tithé no. 2277), and it was quickly extinguished by the new West Middlesex engine (Western Times, 14 March 1840 (3a)). All these events were duly publicised in the Western Times, though not in the other Exeter papers. But that was the last mention of the company in Cullompton. Meanwhile there were more rumours in Exeter. 'The insufficiency of these people to meet demands upon them became known at Exeter and the people at Exeter hesitated paying their premiums; and I have a letter here from the agent at Exeter to a person who hesitated paying his premium for having his life insured (3 March 1840)': evidence to the House of Commons committee, Parl. Pap. 1844, vol 7, p.5.

The end came in October 1840, when the following paragraph appeared in the Western Times:

'The indictment for libel at the City Sessions against the agent of the West Middlesex Insurance Office was not tried. The complainant offered no evidence, and the defendant was acquitted as a matter of course. We hope that the office will take the case of Halse (out of whose fire at Heavitree during the last winter the alleged libel arose) into consideration. The loss which this poor family sustained was somewhere about seven pounds, and surely where there is a *question* about the origin of the fire, the office ought, under the peculiar circumstances of the case, to pay the money. Halse at the time was lying ill in bed of brain fever; and few days after the fire he was sent to the Lunatic Asylum, where he remained sometime; and his wife at the time of the fire was ill a-bed, attended by the Doctor, whose certificate of the fact we published immediately after the refusal of the company to pay. We hope the office will revise its judgement in this case.'

(Western Times, 24 October 1840 (3a))

The company which had paid all claims promptly and in full in Cullompton and donated ten guineas to the fire appeal fund, now quibbles over £7 in a disputed case! Two weeks later the Western Times reported an 'ex gratia' payment of £50 by the West of England after a fire at Silverton and added: we hope that the West Middlesex Company will notice this paragraph: Western Times, 7 November 1840 (2f) The other papers remained cautiously silent.

Meanwhile Hayne had written to the manager of the company:

'Sir; I send you Latimer's paper; I beg to refer you to a paragraph therein; I think Latimer has acted very unhandsome towards us; it is quite plain to me that he is interested in other offices; Latimer shall never have an advertisement from me again, and I hope you will act the same way and not pay people to be cutting our throats: you cannot imagine the difficulties I have now attending my agency on account of those claims not being paid.

I can assure you that actions will be commenced against you if it is not immediately paid; the constant application to me for the money is very annoying to me, and, as such, I assure you I shall not be able to continue the business of the company unless I have the amount to pay them; I know not what excuse to make the parties; you have lowered yourself 100 per cent in the estimation of the public of Exeter on account of this delay:' Parl. Pap. 1844, vol.7 p.4.

Meanwhile in London the money had run out; the Directors divided up the wine in the cellar under their head office, and left for France.