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 simultaneity 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 superintendence 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, is 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 fury 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 Charitable.

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 Collumpton, 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 Collumpton. 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))
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, Bradhnich 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 engine soon followed from Exeter; and we had also the assistance of the West of England engine from Tiverton, and the parish engine from Bradhnich. 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.

I have omitted some paragraphs copied from the Western Luminary and added the subheadings.
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. Those 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 more 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 destroyed 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: 146 dwelling houses burnt to the ground, and including outbuildings. That figure was adopted by the ‘Exeter Flying Post’ in its headline. The ‘Western Times’ 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 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 uninformed: 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 refers to ‘the vicar and an eye witness (the vicar had good business reasons for doing so) and learnt about the damage on his premises and the anecdote about the three rabbits with the fire 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 Shoemaker.’ The 1841 Census confirms that John Walters, aged 50, Shoemaker, lived just there. William Budd, aged 60, Baker lived on the right, tithe no. 2344: 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.

Murray Foster’s account was written in 1910, 71 years after the fire. As usual he quotes no authority. His standard source, his uncle John Walters, his manuscript ‘Materials for History of Cullompton (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 may be that he has been influenced by his belief that the fire was carried on by winds from the south or south west. 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 the town. Indeed it seems unlikely that it could 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 refers to ‘the vicar and an eye witness (the vicar had good business reasons for doing so) and learnt about the damage on his premises and the anecdote about the three rabbits with the fire 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.

How did the fire start?

In a small street, near New Street (Western Luminary). 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 uninformed: 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 refers to ‘the vicar and an eye witness (the vicar had good business reasons for doing so) and learnt about the damage on his premises and the anecdote about the three rabbits with the fire 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.

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**Occupiers:**
- John Gibbs
- George Hornsey
- unoccupied
- Job Way, jun.
- James Prigge
- George Down
- William Mills
- Henry Manning
- Henry Down
- John Taylor
- William Bazley
- Richard Cross
- George Trump
- Daniel Bishop Sellwood
- Rev. Joseph Gatley
- Rev. William Sykes
- Richard Baker
- James Quick
- James Ingleton
- John Bell
- unoccupied
- Richard Rice
- William Warren
- William Gibbs
- John Palmer
- Richard Baker
- Henry & Robert Brooks
- Richard King
- William Teed
- Richard Brookland
- Thomas Wescombe
- Joseph Frost
- George Bidgood
- George Westlake
- George Godfrey
- John Pope
- Thomas Arscott
- William Broom
- John Oddy
- Henry Hill
- Philip Perham
- William Plumpton
- William Litherley
- George Bidgood
- Thomas Williams
- Henry Elworthy
- Philip Taylor
- John Elworthy
- Elizabeth Pearcey
- James Woodley
- John Rowe
- John Row.
- John Clarke
- William Drake
- James Fouraker
- Richard Mortimore
- Daniel Chambers
- William Upcott
- Joseph Davey
- Thomas Cross
- Anne Brice
- Solomon Cotereill
- Jane Cartew
- John Webber
- Elizabeth Middle
- Thomas Luxton
- John Wyatt
- Robert Skinner
- Thomas Davey
- Robert Wills
- John Johnstone
- John Bath
- Frederick Leigh
- Rev. Joseph Gatley
- Rev. William Sykes
- William Searle
- William Toogood
- Samuel Mitchell
- Richard Frost
- James Nichols, jun.
- Henry Matthews
- William Pidgeon
- Grace Sellwood
- Tristram Charles Hine
- Francis Poole
- Sarah Monkton
- William Hodges (Half Moon)
- John Wescott
- John Frost, jun.
- Henry Surridge
- Thomas Gee
- Henry Goodhind
- Agnes Wescome
- Edward Manley Leigh
- Matthew Lee Yeates
- Sarah Burnard
- William Burnard
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 1830.

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<th>NAMES.</th>
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<th>NAMES.</th>
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Thomas Bidgood do. ................... 0 14 0
Joseph Frost do. ....................... 2 6 0
Joseph Cross do. ....................... 0 12 0
Sam'l. Fouracres for Shuttles .... 1 3 11
John Bell for repairing Looms ...... 0 8 3
Williams for Work and Labor ...... 1 3 0
Williams do. ............................. 35 9 10
Joseph Cross do. ....................... 7 5 1
Mitchell for Scissors and Wire .... 1 18 4
Jarman for Work and Labour ....... 6 10 9
Mr. Upton for Skeys, Harnesses, &c., prov. by Mr. Climp- man and Messrs. Mortinford & Co. for the Sufferers . 24 6 0
Rawe for Counterpane, &c. for the Sweep ........... 0 11 6
Howard for Bed, &c. do. ............ 1 0 0
Voisey for Combs ...................... 0 10 6
Rowe for Printing ...................... 3 12 0
Davey for Rope for Sweep's Bed ... 0 2 6
Western for Iron Work .............. 0 10 6
Hewett do. .............................. 0 12 6
Hill for Provisions for Sweep .... 2 15 0
Voisey for Stationery, &c. ....... 1 1 10
Latimer for Printing ................. 8 19 0
Dewdney do. ............................ 9 7 10
Besley do. ................................ 10 13 6
Trewman do. ............................. 9 19 2
Woolmer do. ............................. 13 19 6
Mr. Whitter for Postages, carriage of Parcels, expenses of journey to Exeter & Taunting, & other incidental expenses . 10 10 0
Mr. Moor for Messengers, &c. ...... 1 14 5
Mr. Upton for Blankets ......... 126 1 4
Mr. Upton do. ........................... 48 15
Advertisements to return thanks to the Public . 4 12 0
Advertisements in Bristol ....... 3 4 0
Invested in the Savings Bank, Exeter . 109 12 6
Expense of Advertising .......... 1 15 0

£ 1457 17 9

Rowe, Printer, Collumpton.
The Little West arrived first

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 (6d)).

‘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 Incledon 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 Incledon, 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 £1 18s. 1d.; 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 1s. 7d.; the tithe map shows his garden, no. 2266; the Census adds his address, higher New Street; age, 40; and occupation, labourer. Henry Manning received £1 12s. 6d.; the tithe map shows his garden, no. 2348; the Census adds his address, Crow Green; age, 40; and occupation, shoemaker. Henry Hill, 50, of Pound Square, received £2 5s. 8d.; the tithe map shows his garden, no. 2346; the Census adds his address, higher New Street; age, 30; and occupation, shoemaker.

In New Street, however, the situation is not so clearcut. Henry Down received £2 14s. 4d.; the tithe map shows his garden, no. 2349; the Census adds his address, Crow Green; age, 30; and occupation, weaver. John Taylor, junr. received £1 10s. 2d.; 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. 2348; 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 £1 12s. 6d.; 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 £1 5s.; 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 the 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 18s. 1d. They must have been the same person. Humphrey Beales also appears in the ‘List of Weavers’ (1830), where he received £1 18s. 1d.; 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 £2.5. William Plumpton, 60, glazier, tithe map no. 2418, on the other side of Pound Square, received £5 0s. 8d.; John Odde or Oddly, 60, woolcomber, of Cockpit Hill, tithe map no. 2410, received 5s. 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 more uncertain. ‘The Sun was only occupied in the very commencement 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 collectiveness 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’ 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.

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 Davye, for Rope for Sweep’s Bed 2-6 Hill, for Provisions for Sweep 2-15-0 At this period a wheaver 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

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 is possible that the same person lived at the same address. 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 Cullompton 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.
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 entirely 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.

(The 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 (1886), pages 16-18. The same issue carried the following advertisement.

To the Editor of the Western Times

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

I was not a little surprised on receiving Freeman'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 be a very fine specimen of British prudence. 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 chargir can only arise from feelings of envy at our rapid progress in public favour. Their wish is to put us down, attacking me. Their chagrin can only arise from feelings of envy at our rapid progress in public favour.

(Collompton, 27 July 1839)

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, have determined to make a complaint of your gross misconduct, and assured 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 straightforward 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

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 expectations.

I remain, Gentlemen, 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.

FIREFIGHT AT WEST MIDDLESEX

We 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 freely 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.

We 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 freely 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.

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.

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

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 expectations.

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 freely relieve others, who had not the means wherewith to make good any part even of their loss.

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West Middlesex Insurance Office

This office, has, through its respectable Exeter and Cullompton agents, subscribed liberally towards the relief of the sufferers by the late melancholy fire at Cullompton. 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 (1898) page 19.

CULLUMPTON 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 there should be a court of inquiry. The subscriptions should be published, and those gentlemen who have opposed it to the uttermost. He then noticed the published and that was the end of the matter.

Mr. Mills said that he had seven pounds odd in his hands, which 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 so on to the poor sufferers.

Mr. Baker then discussed several entries on the appropriation of the fund, one of which was 'Mr. Nichols' claim for £600 allowed: a Subscriber' was probably Elias Baker.

A meeting was held in the Vestry Room

Cullompton 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. He had heard that one 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 so on to the poor sufferers.

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The West Middlesex Insurance Company

The West Middlesex Fire and Life Insurance Company was used by Dickens as the model for the Anglo-Bengaliese 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. Part of the case against the company was concerned with the West Middlesex. It was set up in October 1838 by Knowles, a smuggler and a bankrupt; Williams, solicitor and manager, a bankrupt, and his son; Huster, the physician, an insolvent; Hole, a footman, a small shopkeeper and a bankrupt, and Wilson, the porter.

The prospective offered reduced rates for fire insurance, 'being 30 per cent under the rates of any other Company of equal responsibility in the United Kingdom.' 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 1/2 in 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. The insurance in the Middlesex Bull Ring on 22 April 1839 led to a meeting in the Vestry Room.

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Monday 4th May 1839 the Cullompton band (Western Times, 23 November 1839 (3c)). On 7 March 1840 there was a fire in an outbuilding belonging to Mr. Veisy, near the Post Office, (tithe no. 2277), and it was quickly extinguished by the new West Middlesex engine (Western Times, 14 March 1840 (3a)). All these events were duly published in the Western Times, though not in the other Exeter papers. 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 hope the office will revise its judgement in this case.

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