

HARK! THE FIRE BELLS ARE CLANGING --
THE KINGS CLIFFE FIRE BRIGADE
By Canon John Bryan © 7th May 2002

Take a walk down Hall Yard, from the Cross, and on to the lane which leads to the old watermill, and you will pass a small building which projects out of the Rectory front lawn. This building bears a stone plaque in its lane-side wall which reads "ERECTED BY SUBSCRIPTION 1831". Rarely is it read by those who pass by; today it means little or nothing to them. But there was a time when it was regarded by Cliffe people as a building of note for the simple reason that it housed the village fire-engine, and had done so from 1831 onwards.

In the days when nearly all cottage and barn roofs were of thatch, so that fire spread quickly from roof to roof, and when the speediest means of haulage was by horse, the urgent need was for summoning and organising help as quickly as possible. No telephones to raise the alarm! But there were the bells of your parish church, so you ran to the home of the Church Sexton - located of necessity somewhere near the church - and he then raced to the church, up the belfry stairs into the ringing chamber and proceeded to handle the adjacent ropes of two bells and "clang" them as fast as he could. "Hark! The fire-bells are clanging" said those who heard them. Hopefully the appointed firemen heard them also, if by day rallied from their workplaces in turner's shop or smithy or field. The farmer whose job it was to provide two horses to haul the engine rushed to collect and harness his animals, lead them down to Hall Yard, where the chief engineer would have drawn the engine out of the building, the team of men-pumpers would mount their positions, and away they would race. But it all took time, and the engine probably didn't get all that quickly to the scene of the fire, whether it was in cottage, or barn, or harvest field. And this was the only means the village had of dealing with the menace of fire before the days of telephones, motor vehicles, water-mains or mechanised pumps!

We ask "When did King's Cliffe first have a fire-engine, and how was fire-fighting organised?" Unfortunately the records which must have been kept have disappeared, as have the records of other village organisations, sad to relate. We have to read the local news-papers to glean answers to these questions. But did that engine-house in Hall Yard house Cliffe's first engine, and is there any significance attached to the date 1831 inscribed on the plaque there? And what happened to the fire-engine itself at the end of its days of usefulness? We see it there in that photograph of 1896, standing in Hall Yard, the firemen and others making a fine show. What became of that sturdy engine in the end? We turn to the columns of the Stamford Mercury and the Peterborough Advertiser. The date 1831 on the engine-house is significant because it is the year after the widespread "Captain Swing" riots which occurred in the course of 1830 in the southern and some midland counties. These were massive protests by agricultural labourers against, first, the introduction by farmers of threshing-machines which displaced their winter-time employment of flail-threshing; second, against the extremely poor wages paid to farmworkers in those counties, averages of 7 to 8 shillings a week.

It became usual for the rioters to send threatening letters to farmers signed "Captain Swing", hence the appellation of "Swing Riots". These disturbances spread as far north as Huntingdonshire and the Oundle district of Northamptonshire: as a Justice of the Peace, Archdeacon Bonney (Rector of King's Cliffe 1810 - 1862) was more than once called upon to deal with them. Small wonder, then, that in the Stamford Mercury of 4th February 1831 there appeared this report: "Nearly £100 has been subscribed by the inhabitants of Cliffe for the purchase of a fire engine. The watching system is still pursued there." The alarms of 1830 have prompted the inhabitants of King's Cliffe (doubtless encouraged by the Archdeacon Rector) to provide themselves in 1831 with a fire-engine and an engine-house.

Stamford Mercury: 24 Feb. 1832

"KING'S CLIFFE. On Thursday evening the 16th inst. a fire was discovered in a large stable and barn occupied by Mr. R. Holmes, of the Cross Keys Inn, which raged with great fury: the Cliffe engine was soon on the spot, and also one from Blatherwycke; and the Revd. Dr. Bonney, Stafford O'Brien, Esq., and the inhabitants generally rendered every assistance to check the flames, but it was not possible to prevent the destruction of the building, which was thatched, and had hay and straw in it: the active parties, however, fortunately succeeded in saving a bean hovel and piggery, the property of Mr. B. Howes, though situated not more than a yard from the fire."

The establishment of a County Police Force in 1840 led to the posting of a constable at Cliffe, one named Tinkler. This appointment made obsolete the ancient post of Parish Beadle, the officer who had kept "Watch and Ward". The last beadle for Cliffe was one Thomas Nicholls. Henceforward it is the Cliffe policeman who will be on the alert for robberies - and for fires !

Stamford Mercury 5th Feb. 1841

" On Thursday the 28th ult., great alarm was occasioned at King's Cliffe by a fire which broke out in the afternoon at the public-house called the Maltster's Arms, kept by Mr. Wyles. It was caused by a foul chimney, which threw large quantities of burning straw on the thatched roof of the house and set it in flames. Fortunately, from the time of the accident, there was plenty of help, and engines were promptly procured from Blatherwycke and Apethorpe, though the Cliffe engine alone proved sufficient to extinguish the conflagration. The county policeman, Tinkler, was particularly serviceable on this occasion."

Stamford Mercury 15th Nov. 1850

On Friday evening last, about 8 o'clock, an incendiary fire broke out in the farmyard of Mr. Thos. Law, of King's Cliffe. . . It originated in a stack near the churchyard wall, and speedily communicated to an adjacent hovel, which was soon in a blaze. The Cliffe fire-engine was as quickly as possible got into working order, but the conflagration was too extensive, and presented too threatening an aspect, to rely solely upon that, and messengers were sent to the nearest towns for additional aid. The people of the village assisted with praiseworthy zeal, though their efforts were of little avail until the arrival of engines from Stamford, Oundle, Apethorpe, and Blatherwycke; when a good deal of property adjoining, which it was at one time feared would be destroyed, was fortunately saved. All the corn-sheds in Mr. Law's yard, a barn containing 100 quarters of dressed and undressed wheat, and the sheds were consumed; a cottage inhabited by Charles Wyman, the workshop of John Blake, harness-maker, in which were a quantity of tools and materials for his business, and a faggot stack belonging to Wm. Sutton, labourer, were also burnt. The damage is estimated at £800. We hear that all the engines were in excellent order, and that the members of the brigades rendered efficient service."

In 1855 there was another fire in the same stackyard, the first of a number of fires in that and the following year.

Stamford Mercury 21st Sept. 1855. "KING'S CLIFFE.- Extensive Fire.-

On Wednesday morning last, between 4 and 5 o'clock, the inhabitants of this place were alarmed by the cry of "Fire" from a young man named Geo. Whitlock, who was on the road to water his horses at a place called Hall Well. It appeared that on passing the stackyard of Mr. Thos. Law he saw smoke issuing from a wheat-hovel. It was some time before the firemen arrived, and a further hindrance occurred by the want of proper attention on the part of the person receiving pay for keeping it in repair. It was consequently 5 o'clock before it could perform its duty, after having been taken to pieces by Mr. R. Royce, plumber; and the fire had by this time gained great progress, an oat stack and a barley stack being then in flames. It was found hopeless to save the former, but the loss of the whole of the barley was prevented by cutting away part of the stack. At about 6 o'clock the Apethorpe engine arrived, well manned and greatly assisted, under the direction of Mr. Jos. Chapman, to subdue the raging element. Soon afterwards the engine of Stafford O'Brien, Esq., of Blatherwycke Park, also arrived, and did great service under the management of Mr. Terry; then came an excellent engine from Oundle, but too late to be of any service; its presence, however, reflected credit upon the town it belongs to. Superintendent Martin, of the Oundle district of Northamptonshire police, was on the spot; and as there is every reason to fear this is an act of incendiarism, it is hoped the exertions of that active officer will be of avail. Suspicion rests on a certain person. Five years ago Mr. Law suffered a severe loss from a similar disaster. The diabolical act is sincerely regretted by the inhabitants, Mr. Law being much respected as a good master, a kind neighbour, and appeals in behalf of deserving charity are invariably responded to by him. The loss on this occasion is estimated at 70 qrs. of oats, 50 qrs. of wheat, 50 qrs. of barley, besides granaries and outbuildings. One sheep was burnt; and one man, named Cole, received injuries by the falling of part of the wheat hovel. Mr. Law is insured in the Farmers' Insurance Company."

That disaster was sufficient to move the leading lights of Cliffe into action, and in the Stamford Mercury of 28th Sept. 1855 we read:

" KING'S CLIFFE.- A watch committee has been appointed here by a preliminary meeting of the inhabitants, to devise the best means of carrying out the future arrangement of the fire engine, &c.

It is proposed to have extra suction pipes, engine tools; and hats or caps for the use of the firemen, who are to number 20, and practise monthly under the able arrangement of Messrs. Royce and Saddington, assisted by a brigade composed of farmers and tradesmen. This important change has been long called for, and it is hope it may be carried out with the zeal that has thus commenced so desirable an alteration. "

In that report we may discern, surely, a re-modeling of the brigade and the institution of drill patterns, etc. Later we shall read a reference to this decision taken in 1855.

But while the police were active in seeking the incendiary responsible for the Law fire, there was yet another fire on the 20th September, this time at the Park Street premises of Isaac Dixon, wood-turner, when the upper part of his house was destroyed. Prompt action on the part of the firemen and neighbours saved the property from total destruction. On 30th September there was yet another fire, this time a hay stack belonging to John Wade, baker, situated in Cliffe Parks. Ten tons of good hay were lost. Consequently the farmers of Cliffe, and others, decided to employ a London detective to trace the suspected arsonists, and when in November 1855 the county policeman was withdrawn from the village by the County Authority, there was a wave of protest, as we read in the Mercury of 23rd November: "On the present occasion petty robberies and other offences are being daily and nightly committed, and the fact also that two incendiary fires have lately taken place here proves this not a fit time to leave the place unprotected."

Just how vulnerable this village was in those days, with its many thatched cottages and barns, as may be seen in some early photographs, is to be discerned from this telling report in the Stamford Mercury of 18th April 1856:-

"KING'S CLIFFE – At half-past one o'clock on Tuesday afternoon a fire broke out in the (Park Street) wood-yard of Mr Hy Weatherington, timber merchant. From the strong wind that was blowing at the time from the north-east, and the immediate neighbourhood consisting principally of thatched houses and premises, great fears were entertained for the safety of that portion of the town. The excellent parish engine was early on the spot, with a staff of men in a most efficient state of discipline. All set to work without loss of time, and their well-directed efforts succeeded in confining the conflagration to the workshop, notwithstanding adjacent property was in the most imminent peril, particularly the premises of Mr Charles Stokes, wheelwright, whose wood ignited. Great credit is also due to the numerous females who again rendered valuable aid in extinguishing the fire, the origin of which is a mystery. The building was insured, but that precaution had not been taken with regard to the contents destroyed." These premises of Charles Stokes' wheel-wrighting business were a prominent feature of Park Street for years to come, subsequently taken over by Mr F. Portess.

On the 1st February 1858 Stafford O'Brien, the Squire of Blatherwycke, gave the firemen and brigade of King's Cliffe a hearty supper at the Cross Keys Inn, as an acknowledgment of the good work they had recently done in suppressing a fire in that gentleman's stackyard. I am inclined to think that this supper became the precedent for the February Fire Brigade suppers which in after years were the high spot of Cliffe's social round. We will take a look at them in due course.

Stamford Mercury, 11th Jan. 1861:

"Fire – Between 7 and 8 o'clock on Thursday night the 3rd inst., a fire broke out in the (Park Street) warehouse of Mr Wm. Wade, chemist, of King's Cliffe. Mr Wade was engaged at home writing, when he was alarmed by a person knocking at this door exclaiming that his shop was on fire. The alarm bells were immediately rung, and the engine and plenty of ready assistance were soon on the spot, and by great exertion the fire was speedily subdued, but not before all in the warehouse was consumed or spoilt: many of the fixtures and articles in the shop were saved. The building and stock were insured. The cause of the fire, whether from an accident or spontaneous combustion, is unknown. The dwelling-house is detached from the shop and warehouse."

The administration of the brigade rested with a committee, though it is not apparent how the committee was appointed. The record books of the brigade would have thrown light on this, but alas ! all such have disappeared in the passage of time. But we learn something from a report given in the Mercury of 15th Jan. 1864 :

"KING'S CLIFFE.- At the general meeting of the fire brigade committee, held on Tuesday last, it was resolved to introduce gas into the engine-house, to be ready in case of severe frost, for preventing the

working parts of the engine becoming frozen. The necessity of having extra lengths of hose and a second feeding engine was discussed. The accounts for the past year were audited and ordered to be paid. Canvassers were chosen to wait upon the inhabitants for subscriptions for the present year, which no doubt will be liberally met in a matter where the lives and property of all are concerned. The annual fire brigade supper took place on Tuesday evening last, at the Red Lion Inn. Ample justice was done to a substantial spread. This has become one of the most pleasant annual meetings now held in Cliffe. The brigade and firemen (the latter principally tradesmen), to the number of 30, were present. "

In the 1860s and 1870s there was a fair amount of rebuilding of the cottages in the village, or at least of re-shaping them and the substitution of blue or Collyweston slates for the old thatch. But there were still house fires, and, as we learn from the Mercury of 29th July 1864, stack and crew-yard fires :
" KING'S CLIFFE.- At about 10 o'clock on Sunday morning last a fire broke out on the premises occupied by Mrs. Loweth, Wheel Inn. On hearing the alarm bells rung there were soon congregated a large body of the inhabitants, who worked zealously for two hours, when the fire was got under, it being kept confined to a straw stack, which was destroyed. Contiguous to this stack were the farm-yard and thatched buildings of Mr. Thos. Cunnington and Mr. Wm. Wadwell, which, by protection with tarpaulings, sacks, &c., were saved from destruction. "

A report in the Mercury of 13th Jan. 1865 is informative on the management of the brigade:-
"KING'S CLIFFE.- The annual meeting of the Watch and Fire Brigade Committee was held on Tuesday evening last, at Mr. C. Dixon's Red Lion Inn; Mr. T. Law in the chair. Several important additions to the management department were discussed; also the number of the brigade increased. The most important business transacted, however, was for the purchase of a new feeding engine, to supply the one now used. The amount of subscriptions to the same was named, and although more is required yet, the committee are in a position to order one, trusting that the amount promised by the different fire-offices and individuals will be early received, and that other friends may be found to assist in gaining for the parish this most requisite addition to the safety of life and property. "

With the advent of the steam-engine in farm-work there came a new danger: fire from sparks!
Stamford Mercury 27th May 1881:

"KING'S CLIFFE.- On Saturday last Mr. Thos. Cunnington had a narrow escape of having his stacks and farm premises burnt down. He was threshing wheat on that and the two previous days with a steam threshing machine, and it is supposed a spark from the engine ignited a heap of pulse lying near a large straw stack. Fortunately there was plenty of water and assistance at hand, so that the flames were quickly subdued. The fire was approaching the straw stack, and had that become ignited the fire engine would have been almost powerless, as everything was dry. "

In the same edition of the Mercury there appeared this Public Notice:

" To the GENERAL PUBLIC of KING'S CLIFFE

MR. T. CUNNINGTON, farmer, begs to offer his sincere thanks to those friends who were so prompt and kind in assisting to extinguish the FIRE upon his premises on Saturday, May 21st which was caused by sparks falling from the threshing machine and which might have proved very serious. King's Cliffe, May 24th, 1881 "

The stack-yard here referred to as Mr Thomas Cunnington's property is in West Street, (the house now number 66).

Stamford Mercury 18th July 1890

" KING'S CLIFFE.- FIRE.- About two a.m. on Saturday the houses of Mr. Ventross Green and Miss Hercocks were found to be on fire. The houses (which adjoined) had both thatched roofs. The fire engine and plenty of assistance soon arrived, and an abundant supply of water was forthcoming, but as the fire must have been burning some time before the flames burst through the roofs, it was seen to be impossible to save any portion of the houses where the fire was discovered. The efforts of the firemen were therefore concentrated upon saving the adjoining houses, and that portion of Miss Hercocks' house was entirely burnt out, only the walls remaining. Mr. Green's turning shop, a detached building, was saved, but all his finished goods, carving tools, and most of his furniture was burnt. It is believed that Miss Hercocks' house and furniture were insured, but in Mr. Green's case there was only a small insurance on the house."

The prominence of Thomas James Law, of Hall Farm, in the affairs of the fire brigade will have been noticed. He had, in fact, been a prime mover in the establishment of the brigade in 1831, and served as its treasurer from then until his death in July 1898. Needless to say, he was always prominent at the annual fire brigade suppers.

What might have been a disaster for Cliffe, particularly in respect of employment, was a fire in George Miles timber-yard, Park Street, Wednesday 7th March 1899, reported in the Peterborough Advertiser of the 11th :- " FIRE - Mr. Miles' saw-mill has had a very narrow escape of being burned down. In the early part of Wednesday morning, about 3 o'clock, Mr. Hy. Dixon, who resides at a villa on Stamford road, saw a light in Mr. Miles' saw-mill, and thinking something was wrong, he got up and went and called Mr. Wm. Dixon, who is in the employ of Mr. Miles. By the time they got to the mill a lot of wood, a saw bench and leather belting were well alight. Fortunately there was plenty of water at hand and it was quickly put out, or in a very short time, as the structure is made of wood, it would all have been burned down. This would have been a great loss to Mr. Miles, and also to men who would have been thrown out of work. "

1899 was a year of fires for Cliffe. On the afternoon of Wednesday the 23rd of September the pig styes and out buildings of Mr. John Little at the top of the Red Lion yard, Park Street, were set on fire by sparks from the chimney. Everything was very dry and a straw stack and buildings of Mr Walker on Backway were in acute danger. Fortunately help from Mr. Miles' wood-yard had the fire speedily extinguished. Three days later a stack in the yard of Mr. John House was found to be on fire.

John House's house and yard were "Rosary Farm" at the far end of Park Street. The fire of 26th September arose from a heated hay-stack, dangerously close to several corn stacks. It was eventually overcome with the invaluable help of Mr. Lawrence-Law, of Hall Farm, who found horses, men and water carts to deal with the stack.

The report of yet another fire in John House's stackyard was given in the Peterborough Advertiser of 8th October 1904 and this time there was a strong suspicion of arson. This report is of special interest by reason of the names given of firemen and helpers. Here are extracts from a long and detailed account:

" A disastrous fire, which did damage estimated at £500, occurred on the premises of Mr. John House, farmer, King's Cliffe at a late hour on Wednesday night. Three stacks of straw, two wheat and one barley, were totally destroyed, representing the fruits of 58 acres. Besides them a wooden shed, with thatched roof, used as a milk shed, was reduced to ashes. It was shortly after ten o'clock, when the inhabitants, or most of them, were leaving the Conservative meeting, that the cry of "Fire" was raised. A crowd immediately gathered at the scene of the outbreak. There was a high west wind blowing at the time, and this served to fan the conflagration. It was immediately apparent that there was no hope of saving the stacks that were already alight, and the willing helpers who had assembled turned their attention to the saving of the one remaining wheat stack, and the adjacent farm buildings. Mr. Miles wood-yard on the opposite side of the road was also in great danger, as sparks carried by the wind were continually falling on to the stacks of wood.

Mr. H. E. Dixon, secretary to the Volunteer Fire Brigade committee, who was one of the first on the scene, alarmed Mr. and Mrs. House, who had retired to rest, and obtained from them permission to summon the Fire Brigade. The engine arrived about twenty minutes later, but the men were hampered by the inadequate supply of water. It was found necessary to employ Mr. Jeffery's and Mr. House's water carts in fetching water from the river, and the latter vehicles could not be used for some time, as the horses had to be brought from a field a mile and a half off..... On their arrival the Brigade set to work in two companies of ten men, each in turn relieving the other..... The fire men worked gallantly for nine hours..... The glare of the fire could be seen for miles around, and several people hastened to the scene from adjoining villages, their numbers including four police officers. Had the wind been in any other direction than the west, Mr. House's residence must inevitably have been destroyed, and the fire in all probability communicated to the major portion of the village..... It is strongly believed in some quarters that the fire is the work of an incendiary..... The members of the Fire Brigade present were: Messrs. J. T. Dixon (sub-capt.), J. T. Bailey (sub-engineer), Firemen J. V. Green, S. Blake, H. Sharpe, A. Robins, R. Little, A. Bailey, W. C. Dixon, A. Eudall, H. Green, W. Turner, W. Palmer, R. Dixon, W. Bailey, H. Dixon, T. Sauntson, C. Green, T. Dolby, R. Pell, B. Skinner, R. Carrington; and Messrs. J. Chapman, H. Bailey, L. Dixon, W. Coleman, T. F. Richardson, R. Brown, J. L. Blake, J. A. Ellis and H. E. Dixon (secretary) the Brigade Committee.

Those who so willingly assisted with buckets, etc., in carrying the water, and in generally helping were: Messrs. C. Fawkes, S. Wooding, C. Pollard, sen., J. Scotney, W. Bird, J. Kerfoot, S. Smith, H. Scotney, J. Bellamy, C. Pollard jun., E. Dolby, R. Smith, J. Roberts, J. Giddens, sen. and jun., W. Stanger, J. Elliott, A. Hakes, J. Sharpe, F. Rate, J. Brittain, - Genever, R. Smith, W. Dixon, T. Green, E. Brittain, H. Gimber, C. Compton, F. Culpin, A. Stapleton, W. Gimber, T. Compton, J. Compton, H. Wooding, D. Kirby, J. Lattimore, R. Langley, - Jeffries, A. Hawkes, W. Brittain, C. Kirby, J.T. Kirby, A. Giddens, and Mrs. Pettifer, Miss F. Gore, and Mrs. G. Smith.

THE ANNUAL FIRE BRIGADE SUPPER

The Fire Brigade Supper was, as we have observed, the most prominent occasion in the social round of King's Cliffe in later Victorian times, and indeed up until 1914 ; this in a village which took pride in lavish suppers for every organisation, for men that is ! The Cliffe correspondent for the Peterborough Advertiser never failed to give a full account of the lengthy proceedings as the annual January "turn" came around. These reports usually give the names of the firemen and committee of each year; the speeches are given at length, but these were usually taken as opportunity for flattery ! Occasionally a visiting guest speaker, blessed with a detached view of affairs, would speak of the changes in fire-fighting and brigade organisation which were coming to pass. Remarkable also are the sing-alongs in which these men amused themselves "after the cloth was drawn." Every social occasion in "old King's Cliffe" was marked by the singing of the old songs; each singing man was called upon for his speciality. I confess that I am at a loss as to which account to present at this stage; each has its own worth. So I will take selections from three of the best (as I conceive).

The Brigade Supper of 13th January, 1897:- " This annual supper was held at the Cross keys Hotel on Tuesday evening. The fire brigade has a committee of management of eleven gentlemen and tradesmen, and twenty firemen, of whom there were only a few absent. Mr. George Miles occupied the chair, and Mr. W. Dainty the vice-chair. They were joined by the Revd. J. N. B. Woodroffe (Rector), Doctor Lewis, H. W. Gist, Esq., sen., H. W. Gist, Esq., jun., Mr. Morley, Mr. C. Lawrence, Mr. R. Wright, Mr. T. Walker, Messrs. J. L. Blake and F. Blake, C. Sharpe, J. Wakelin, J. Chapman, J. E. Ellis, J. Nicholls, W. Goodwin, F. Portess, W. Coupland, Captain Knight, Mr. Vesey, Mr. O. Leayton (of Oundle Fire Brigade), Mr. Markham (Oundle), Mr Reedman (Nassington), Mr. Blunt (Blatherwycke), Mr. R. Johnson and Mr. Seizin (Apethorpe). In all 65 sat down, being the largest number that has assembled for years. Mr. and Mrs. Fane were highly complimented for the excellent manner in which they had catered. After the cloth was drawn, the usual loyal and patriotic toasts were proposed and duly honoured, and the following songs were sung:- "Wait for the turn of the tide ", Mr. J. Nicholls; " For the sake of the little ones at home ", Mr. F. Blake; "Sailing merrily home", Mr. B. Markham; "Dear old pals", Mr. H. Bailey; " Sailing ", Captain Knight; "Peter Piper picked a peck of peppercorns", Mr. W. Reedman. At this stage of the proceedings Mr. Morley said that it would give him great pleasure, as this was the first occasion on which he had met members of the Fire Brigade, to stand a dozen bottles of champagne. This announcement was received with acclamation all round. Recitation, "Joe Ford", Mr. O. Leayton; "The Hallelujah Band", Sub-Engineer Vesey; " Our Jack's come home today", Mr. J. L. Blake; "England is England still", Mr. C. Compton. The healths of the Chairman and Treasurer (T. J. Law, Esq.), who was unavoidably absent, and the Vice-Chairman (Mr. W. Dainty), were accorded musical honours. "The new photographie ", Mr. J. Ellis; "The king's own", Mr. F. Edgson. Captain Knight, in reply to his health, suggested the better equipment of the Fire Brigade, and strongly advocated a uniform. "The village blacksmith", Mr. J. J. Bailey. The Revd. J. N. B. Woodroffe, in reply to "The Bishop and Clergy of all denominations", made some well-timed remarks, and said he was pleased this opportunity was afforded him to come amongst them; he looked upon it as a kind introduction to all present although he hoped shortly to be able to visit them at their own homes. "Hearts of Oak", Mr. A. Eudall; recitation "The grand dinner party", Mr. O. Leayton; "I likes a drop of good beer", Mr. Vesey; "Wouldn't you like to go", Mr. J. A. Ellis; "Boys of the old school", Mr. H. Bailey; "She had a dark and rolling eye", Mr. H. W. Gist; The health of the Chairman (Mr. George Miles) was accorded musical honours. "The death of Nelson", Mr. C. Compton. The health of the pianist (Mr. J. J. Bailey) and the Host and Hostess brought the toast list to an end. At 11 o'clock, Mr. Fane having obtained an hour's extension for the occasion, the singing of the National Anthem, "Rule Britannia", "Auld Lang Syne" and "We won't go home till morning", brought the proceedings to a close. "

The Brigade Supper of 13th January. 1903:- " One of the events of the year at King's Cliffe is the annual dinner of the local Fire Brigade, and this year's meeting on Tuesday, was as great a success

as its predecessors. The well-known hostelry of "The Cross Keys" presented an animated appearance at seven o'clock, when dinner was served in the commodious room belonging to the Inn..... Those present were Mr. G. Miles (Chairman of the Fire Brigade Committee and Captain of the Brigade), Capt. H. Knight (Oundle Brigade), Mr. J. T. Bailey (sub-captain), Messrs. R. Brown, L. Dixon, H. Bailey, J. Chapman, W. Coleman (members of the Fire Brigade Committee), Mr. H. L. Dixon (secretary), Mr. J. T. Dixon (sub-engineer), Messrs. J. Green, S. Blake, A. Robins, H. Sharp, R. Little jun., A. Bailey, W. Dixon, A. Eudall, H. Green, W. Palmer, T. Dolby, W. Bailey, H. Dixon, T. Sauntson, C. Green, R. Dixon, R. Pell, R. Skinner, J. J. Little, A. Pettifer (members of the King's Cliffe Fire Brigade); Messrs. Dean, G. H. Priestley, A. Hull, H. W. Gist, G. Frisby, B. Skinner, F. Edgson, F. Portess, W. Turner, E. Bollans, J. Giddings, - Wilson, A. Hawkes, W. Holmes Dalrymple, H. Lukeman. Mr. E. J. Hawkes, engineer of the King's Cliffe brigade, was unable to be present owing to illness, but was represented by his son, Mr. A. Hawkes."

The Host and Hostess, Mr. and Mrs. Tom Fryer Richardson had provided "a splendid repast", after which the cloth was drawn and the company got down to toasts, speeches and, of course, songs. Mr. H. L. Dixon proposed the toast of "The worthy Chairman and Captain of the Fire Brigade", who was, of course, Mr. George Miles, to which he made suitable reply and was cheered with what Cliffe used to call "musical honours" ,i.e. "For he's a jolly good fellow". It was the speech made by Captain Knight of the Oundle Brigade, in reply to the toast of his Brigade, which threw out some remarks as to the future of local fire brigades. " In speaking of the fire service, Captain Knight said things had gone ahead since the days when he first joined, and with new appliances firemen were now better able to cope with the serious conflagrations which would have been impossible some few years back. In regard to the supporting of brigades, he thought the time would soon come when each individual would give his share through the rates - he knew some didn't like the word - towards the proper maintenance of fire brigades and proper appliances for extinguishing fires when they occurred. (Hear, hear). Manual engines were getting beyond the work, and he hoped the time was not far distant when there would be a district centre with a steam engine, and thus enable them to do their work with greater ease and to better advantage. In that district they had 39 brigades affiliated to the National Fire Brigade Union, and as the secretary he would warmly welcome the King's Cliffe Brigade to join. In it they had uniformity of uniform, drill, and appliances, and when they had their various meetings it enabled them to exchange ideas and get to know each other's ways." Mr. John Tom Bailey (grocer and postmaster at the Cross for nearly forty years), was acclaimed for his 40 years service in the Brigade.

The Brigade Supper of 12th January 1909:- " The firemen, their efficient officers, and a host of friends had the pleasant task on Tuesday night of extinguishing hunger and thirst, and Host Richardson and his capable wife ably catered for the fifty persons assembled at the Cross Keys. Mr. George Miles (captain) well filled the chair, the vice-chair being occupied by the energetic vice-captain Mr. J. T. Bailey, and among those present were Messrs. W. Dean, G. Dixon, T. Cleave, F. A. Jolly, G. A. Minto, J. Chapman, H. E. Dixon, A. R. Bailey, F. Portess, J. A. Ellis, L. H. Dixon, E. Patch, and J. Quincey. " There followed the customary toasts. The loyal toast proposed by the Chairman, was followed by "The Army and the Navy", proposed also by the Chairman, who expressed his regret at the (national) disbanding of the Volunteers. He coupled with this toast the one who had both raised and led the King's Cliffe troupe : Ex-Sergeant J. T. Bailey. Mr. John Ellis, the village-chemist of Park Street, gave the health of the Chairman and remarked: " Mr. Miles was ever ready to support everything in the village that was worthy of assistance, and his work for the Brigade was most praiseworthy." Mr. J. T. Bailey, vice-Chairman, gave some particulars of the Brigade's work and activities during the year. The firemen present on this august occasion were: E.J. "Teddy" Hawkes, (engineer), John Ventross Green (sub-engineer), H. Green, H. Chapman, M. Skinner, S. Carrington, T. Dolby, C. Green, W. Palmer, F. Gore, R. Dixon, W. Hakes, R. Skinner, T. Hawkes, S. Blake, T. Sauntson, R. Little, and W. Bailey. This was a somewhat long and flowery report, but I consider that it does give us some idea of the flourish with which the Brigade officers and men presented themselves in those heady Edwardian days !

To conclude, here is a report taken from the Stamford Guardian of 13th March 1902 in which we see something of the Brigade at monthly drill, of a defect remedied, and a list of the names of men of the second company shown in photograph below.

" KING'S CLIFFE.- FIRE BRIGADE.- On Thursday the officers and committee held a practice of the whole of the appliances of the brigade. There were present: - Captain G. Miles, sub-captain J. T.

Bailey; Committee: L. Dixon, T. F. Richardson, H. Bailey, and H. E. Dixon, secretary. Engineers E. J. Hawkes and J. T. Dixon. The second company was called out as follows:- Messrs. R. Pell, Hy. Dixon, W. Bailey, W. Palmer, Jas. Green, R. Skinner, T. Sauntson, T. Dolby, R. Dixon, and F. Sharpe (in place of M. Skinner, absent). The engine was in good condition, and Engineer E. J. Hawkes was complimented upon the manner in which it worked. The leather hose was in capital condition. A length of hose was found, however, to be defective in two places. A hose binder was put over the defective places and proved to be valuable in stopping the spreading of the leakage. Altogether the appliances were declared to be in a satisfactory condition."



Now, reader, whenever you walk down Hall Yard, think of the hurly-burly there would have been in the yard when the fire-bells were clanging and the firemen were hastening to get the engine out of its shed, the horses found and harnessed, Engineer Teddy Hawkes deciding on the best way of reaching the fire, running the hoses down to the river, etc.! Think also of what lies behind the date of 1831 set in the wall of the engine-shed; the tragedy of those agricultural labourers of 1830, driven to violent protest against the harshness of their lot; a tragedy which was to reach its climax in the transportation of the Tolpuddle Martyrs of Dorset in the year 1834.