



My other special early recollection is of the Boozer Pit fire (February 1933). Even if I had forgotten the details the story was told so many times it has stayed in memory and its effect was very far reaching for Homeleigh. The story then, for telling to the grandchildren.



An Old Pair of Bellows

Brian Tasker

Sometimes when you are looking around the sort of Visitor Centre that displays old-fashioned things that were used in Grandma's day, you will come across a pair of hand bellows. You will possibly find them by the fireplace because they were used to make the coal or log fire burn brighter. To look at they are shaped like a shaped wooden sandwich ending with handles at one end and a metal spout at the other. They may be decorated with strips of leather, usually red, one strip making the loop to hang them by, and with big brass studs, which in fact fasten the leather bellows part to the wood. If I see a pair, even today, I still smile to myself as I am reminded of this story from when I was a little boy.

One day, I was helping my Dad, who was digging in the front garden, when we suddenly heard the fire siren sound, and that was surprising as the nearest siren was about two miles away. Dad said "Listen, that means someone's house is on fire, I hope the fire brigade can get there quickly!" At the same time we heard a lot of shouting and people rushing about just down the road, just over our garden wall. Whatever was happening? - - Then we could see it—there was thick black smoke curling up over the thatch at the back of the cottages just next door!



There was the FIRE! What excitement! Of course, because I was only a little boy, I was bundled back indoors to the care of my big sister - my Mum happened to be in Yeovil at the time and missed it all. Dad rushed off to help the people rescue things from the cottages, and not one but two and finally three big red fire engines arrived. (For the record Crewkerne, Martock, and Yeovil.)

Firemen were rushing everywhere with hoses and trying to put out the fire. In those days our village did not have fire hydrants in the road to connect up hoses so the water had to be pumped out of tanks on the fire-engines. This only lasted a little while, then they ran out of water.

By this time, because the roofs were joined by the thatch, not one but three cottages, were all on fire and the engines just had to get more water. Where could they go? One

engine set off to a small stream about half a mile away, but the big red Yeovil engine with ladder on top decided to fill up from the pond down in our field. Off went the fire crew with their engine, squeezing through the narrow entrance to our yard, between the houses, through the yard and down the field to the pond.

Now there was always a lot of mud in our pond and Dad specially told the fire chief that he should pick up his water from the shallow end. But No! The fire chief was sure he was right picking up from the side where the engine could drive out more easily. In went the big pick up hose into the muddy end of the pond and the engine started sucking up water into its tanks. But, as it sucked up water so it sucked up mud as well and the mixture was so heavy that the big red fire engine just sank lower and lower into the soft field and there it stuck. All the revving in the world only made deep ruts in the field that were there years afterwards and the engine was still stuck fast.

Luckily, the other engines safely picked up water from the stream and came back to put the fire out. Whilst all this was going on the people from the cottages were doing all they could to rescue their furniture and belongings. They brought out chests and chairs, bedding and lamps, pots and pans, and whatever they could. There was no shortage of helpers because the news had spread through the village and all sorts of people came, some to help, and some to stare.

Dr. R. Sessions Hodge, the local doctor, who you can picture, just like Mr. Farnham the vet in "All Creatures Great and Small", well, he interrupted his rounds, not only to provide medical assistance if required, but apparently also climbed on to the thatch to direct the firemen to the seat of the fire. "Silly fool" my Dad said, "the whole lot could have fallen in!" Well, by the time the fire was eventually put out all the thatch had burnt and the cottages were open to the sky.

Now, at that time, we had a cellar that opened at the side of the house and Dad helped the people to put their things in there for safe-keeping, stacking it full from floor to ceiling. Of course those things had to stay there until the people were found other houses to live in.

And the big red fire engine was still stuck fast by our pond. They tried to pump the mixture of mud and water back out but the mud blocked the whole machine. In those days there were no breakdown vehicles to come to the rescue, -- people were looking for horses - then somebody had an idea - with all the crowd there -- a human chain ! And they did! Can you imagine the engine, the pride of the Fire Service, on the end of a tug of war rope being dragged unceremoniously up the slope from our field by an army of bodies, right through the yard, in the end back on to the road, from where it could be driven back to its fire station.

I am still meaning to look up the "Western Gazette" to find out how they reported the days events.

And the Bellows? Ah! Well, you see, when the people finally got new houses and took their furniture away from our cellar they could not pay for storage, but they did say

thank you by making my Dad a present from among the items -- *A GOOD WORKING PAIR OF BELLOWS !!!*

And the effect of the fire on our house? - it was not long before Dad decided that the tiles on the outbuildings would be a safer roof for the cottage than the thatch so off came the thatch and the tiles went on instead, but that is another story!