

The Star Inn

North Wilts Herald, Fri Sept 7, 1928.

Fire at Watchfield. Three Cottages Levelled to the ground. Quick Destruction.

Three cottages were gutted and practically levelled to the ground in a fire which broke out at Oxford Square, Watchfield, near Shrivenham, yesterday afternoon. It was the first outbreak of fire in the village for nearly half a century.

The houses, which were owned by Mr Thomas Adams, were occupied by Mr and Mrs Adams and the four children, Mr & Mrs Arthur Tucker and two children, and Mr & Mrs E. Harrison and two children. All the houses were built of stone, and those of Messrs Adams & Harrison had thatched roofs, while that of Mr Tucker was covered with slate.

Mr Adams told North Wilts Herald representative that about 12.30pm the chimney in Tucker's house caught fire, and a spark caught the thatch in his (Adams' house). Seeing no flames, he went out to his occupation as a haulier, but when he returned at 2.30pm he found the place well afire.

Furniture saved.

Ex-Inspector Godwin, who resides quite close to the spot, said that between 12.30 and 1pm he was standing in the square when he saw a spark from the chimney of Turner's house catch the thatch of Adams' house. Fanned by a strong wind from the westward, the flames had extended right over the roofs in less than five minutes. He was assisted in combating the outbreak by Capt. E. Roberts and Mr Godfrey.

Everything was done to try to save the premises, and with the help of the villagers nearly all the furniture was rescued. A fire extinguisher was used by Captain Roberts, but the flames were too fierce for it to be of much avail.

Although there was plenty of water at hand considerable difficulty was experienced in obtaining the services of the fire brigade. Swindon was called, but Capt. Roberts was informed that Watchfield was out of their district. Capt. W.H. Baker, however, attended personally during the afternoon to render assistance. Faringdon were also summoned but it was explained that their manual engine was out of order. The Wantage Brigade decided to attend, and, though a puncture was experienced on the way, they covered the twelve miles in just under an hour. The Brigade received valuable assistance from the villagers.

The Fate of a Cat.

Practically all the walls of the houses, which were deemed unsafe, had to be demolished by means of long props, and right through the afternoon and evening water had to be played on the smouldering embers.

Poultry shut up in the back-yards of the houses were liberated and saved, but a cat belonging to Mrs Harrison dashed into the flames and was burned to death.

The house occupied by Mr Adams was formerly used as a bakehouse, and previously was the village public-house. Although it was a bakehouse for many years and bread was cooked every day, not a single case of the thatch catching in fire ever occurred. All the houses were stated to be between 200 and 300 years old.

The chief losses suffered by the house holders were bedsteads and a few articles of furniture which the rescuers could not manage to get from the bedrooms.

Another house in Oxford Square, occupied by Mr Thomas Carter, and having a thatched roof, was only saved by being covered with sheets and having buckets of water emptied on to it. During the fire the Square resembled a flooded area.

Further information from David Adams, one of the sons of Frank George Adams, who was the Executor of his father's Will in 2010. He had possession of several documents, one of which was a conveyance explaining that the property referred to above was at one time the Beerhouse known by the name of, *'The Star Inn.'*

The property that was the Star Inn was owned by William Perrin of Middlesex and he sold it to Robert Sly in 1822. It was passed down the family line and ended up in the ownership of Adin Sly who took out some form of loan against it. He failed to make three payments so John Bligh Monck and John Simmonds, trustees for the building society at Reading, then caused the building to be sold by public auction at the Barrington Arms, Shrivenham. It was bought by John Pocock on 11th September 1873.

Wording for the property on one of the family documents reads, *'being in Watchfield in the county of Berks, some time since used as a Beerhouse and Carpenter's Shop and known by the name or sign of "The Star" with the Stable, Beerhouse, buildings, yard and ground thereunto belonging, formerly in the occupation of Adin Sly afterwards of his daughter Jane Sly.'*

The Adams family: David's father was Frank George Adams. Mum was Doreen Adams. His Grandfather was Thomas Adams and Grandmother Mabel