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Disastrous Fire at Tawstock Four Cottages destroyed.

May 27th 1897.

Residents in the quiet hamlet of Harracott, Tawstock were aroused by loud cries of "Fire" during the dinner hour on Friday last the 22nd of May.

A labourer named Wicks saw smoke rising from the thatched roof of a cottage occupied by Mr T Lawrence, road contractor and Lawrence and Son, quickly ascended to the roof and brought buckets of water into requisition. Flames however broke out strongly and Lawrence was compelled to beat a retreat. Assisted by a woman named Mrs Heale, he then set about removing the furniture from the house of his father, and the adjoining house occupied by T J Gill and J Short, labourers and J Kerslake, carpenter. The occupiers principally at home at the time were females and as the fire spread with alarming rapidity, the greatest consternation prevailed.

The Raleigh Works Fire Brigade at Barnstaple was communicated with by telegraph from Chapelton Railway Station at 2.35pm, and under Captain Steele they arrived at 3.30pm. The four cottages named were beyond saving, and the same remarks applied to a carpenters shop occupied by Mr Karslake.

Two other cottages running parallel but connected by outbuildings were threatened, and to these the Brigade directed attention as well as confining the fire in the other direction.

Captain Steele was informed at the outset that the only water available was about "a cupful for each fireman," but he discovered an old well and opened it up, and after having recourse to water in it for two hours, he proceeded two fields away where in a quarry pit a bountiful supply was found.

The Brigade worked hard for several hours, and had the satisfaction of saving the two cottages which were in peril on their arrival, and of substantially lessening the seriousness of the fire at that point. Where helpers were so few during the first hour of the fire, it could hardly be expected that much furniture would be saved from the houses, and as a matter of fact, only a few things were taken from the down stairs rooms, whilst the whole of the contents of the upstairs apartments were totally destroyed.

The four cottages which belonged to Sir Henry Wrey, were insured but unfortunately none of the occupiers furniture was, and the loss to them was estimated at over £200. Mr Kerslakes' loss was very considerable in as much as in addition to his furniture a large quantity of tools and wood with which the workshop was stocked was destroyed.

One of the two houses saved happened to be unoccupied at the time, and into this Mr Lawrence subsequently moved with his family. Short, Gill and Kerslake were rendered homeless, but kind friends in the hamlet were forthcoming and at their houses they are now temporarily staying.