

# All Fired Up

All Creatures Great and Small, by Mick Ford

Article no.5

Naturally the primary role of firefighters is to extinguish fires, some of which sadly result in the loss of life.

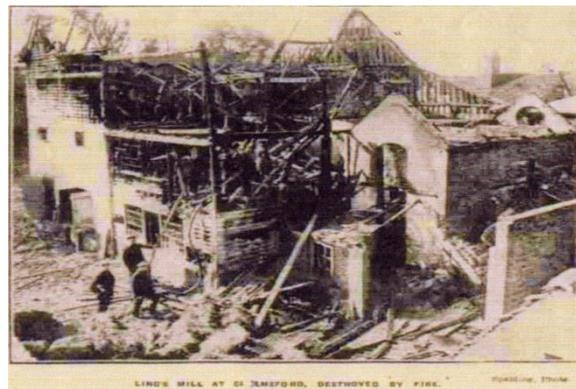
During its long history the Chelmsford Borough Fire Brigade (CBFB) extinguished many fires both within Chelmsford and elsewhere. Fortunately death by fire in Chelmsford was a rarity.

Nevertheless, fatalities relating to other living things did occur and quite regularly. Similar to the significant loss of wildlife during the 2018 field fires, birds, reptiles and other animals are often the first victims when fire strikes.

On 24 January 1935 Chief Officer Captain Whyte RFC, DCM, MM, of the CBFB distinguished himself when the Brigade was called to 88 North Avenue, Chelmsford, the residence of Mr & Mrs P.R. Halliday. Their living room was well alight and once the men had forced entry, they found a cat lying unconscious on the living room floor. The animal was taken outside and Chief Officer Whyte was able to revive it by placing a tube into its mouth from an oxygen bottle. Back on its feet the unfortunate animal had to be restrained from re-entering the blazing property. Ironically, it was strongly felt that the probable cause of the fire was the cat playing by the stove! The feline arsonist was lucky to survive the ordeal, other creatures were not so fortunate!

As early as 1921 the Hoffmann Works Fire Brigade had offered to assist the CBFB should it require assistance at large fires in the borough. On the night of 1 September 1925 this offer was brought into play at the major fire which destroyed Bishops Hall Mill, with its contents, coincidentally near the Hoffmann Works. Both the Hoffmann Works Fire Brigade and the CBFB also worked furiously to save the Mill House owned by Mr & Mrs Charles Ling and succeeded in doing so. The two brigades had a plentiful supply of water from the River Chelmer and were able to get nine powerful jets onto the blaze from two CBFB fire

engines and possibly a Hoffmann's pump. A huge crowd gathered to see the spectacle and was aghast to witness hordes of rats fleeing the conflagration, many of which were on fire only to perish before they reached the river! The damage to the property was estimated at £10,000 (£543,000 today). Firemen of the CBFB were complemented in the press for the 'fine work' they had done at this blaze. Nevertheless, it was mentioned at a subsequent Fire Brigade Committee meeting that a number of CBFB firemen felt the need to quench their thirst at the fire with the assistance of alcoholic beverages, including beer and Scotch whisky. This was certainly not the Committee's policy and the men were made aware of this in no uncertain terms!



*Bishops Hall Mill Fire, Chelmsford Chronicle, 4 September 1925*



*Bishops Hall Mill House, July 2017, Photograph © M Ford*

Concern for animals persists in the fire service to this day. My youngest daughter – an RSPCA inspector - is frequently called out by the London



*Essex County Fire & Rescue Service's animal rescue unit at a Chelmsford Fire Station open day. (N.B. The horse isn't real, it is similar but smaller to the one used at Troy!!!! Photograph © M Ford*

Fire Brigade when they are worried about animal welfare. The Essex County Fire & Rescue Service, (and many other brigades), possesses specialist equipment to assist with the animal rescues.

It is an indisputable feather in the cap of firefighters (both past and present) that they continue to care for all creatures, great and small when they are in distress.