

Fire on the Duke of Norfolk's Farm at Wardsend Two Soldiers Arrested

A fire of very serious proportions broke out at Wardsend on the Wardsend Farm, occupied by Mr. Joseph Edward Oxspring, and a large amount of damage was done.

The outbreak occurred in what is known as a Dutch barn, an enormous shed open at the sides, which was used for storing produce. This was situated about 300 yards from the homestead, and under it was nearly all this year's crops. There were six stacks in all, one each of oats, wheat, barley straw, old hay, and hay, and one of barley and oats. These would weigh about 15 tons, and Mr. Oxspring estimates them to be worth £750. When people on the farm retired to bed all appeared safe, and Police-constable Dyer, of the West Riding Force, when making his round at two o'clock did not see anything wrong. About 2.30 Mrs. Anyan, wife of one of the farm hands, noticed a glare from the direction of the barn, and at once awakened her husband. He hurried out, and seeing the barn a mass of flames at once went to inform his employer. Just about the same time Police-constable Tankard, another West Riding officer, saw the flames, and met two privates of the Dublin Fusiliers, now stationed at the barracks, coming from the premises. He was very suspicious of them, and at his request they returned to the fire with him. A messenger was despatched to the Langsett Road Police Station, and a telephonic message was sent to the Fire Brigade Station. Superintendent Pound being soon on the alert. In the meantime Inspector Knight and several West Riding constables, and a number of workmen from the Wardsend Rolling Mills, came to give assistance, but their efforts were of but little avail. The hand-reel from the Langsett Road Police Station was also brought up, but not before the Fire Brigade had got to work. There was a plentiful supply of water, but the fire was too far advanced to be mastered, and several hours afterwards nothing remained but a few charred and tottering uprights and a smouldering mass of produce. A stack of excellent old hay, worth about £200, was in considerable danger, but the wind, which was steady, kept in a different direction, and the workers were able to save it from destruction. The barn, which was built of wood three years ago by the landlord, the Duke of Norfolk, was worth £100, thus making the total damage £850. Both his Grace and Mr. Oxspring were insured in the Alliance. The strange part of the affair is that the fire can hardly be said to be unexpected, such an event having been looked upon as very probable. The farm premises are rather near to the Barracks, and being solitary have for many years been the favourite rendezvous of the soldiers stationed there, and girls with little or no reputation. Every effort has been made to put a stop to this practice, but in vain, and only a short time ago thirteen persons were caught when sleeping in the barn. The police have watched the place carefully, and it has been a constant source of worry to them, but prosecuting the delinquents did not seem to cause any diminution in the number of visitors among whom it has become known as "Maggy Murphy's Home" - a reminiscence of a well-known song. With regard to the two Fusiliers who were stopped by Tankard, they were taken to the Hillsborough Police Station, where they were detained. Inquiries were made and the movements of the two men were found to be so suspicious as to justify their being detained on a charge of causing the fire.

PRISONERS BEFORE THE MAGISTRATES

At the Sheffield West Riding Court at noon today, before Mr. Charles Gould, Q.C., and Mr. W. A. Milner, the two soldiers whose names are Edward Neil and Francis Kane, were charged with wilfully ceasing the fire.

Inspector Bielby briefly explained the details of the fire to the Bench. He said that when Inspector Knight arrived from Hillsborough he asked the two prisoners what they were doing there, Kane replied, "We're on police duty, looking for absentees." When asked for their passes. Kane said they were not necessary. The inspector was not at all satisfied and with Sergeant McCrone and Police-constable Marshall took the men to the Hillsborough Police Station. The farm premises had for years been the resort of soldiers and loose characters, and was known among the former as "Maggy Murphy's Home." As the prisoners were being conveyed to the station, Kane turned to Sergeant -McCrone, and said, "It's time the place was burned down," and then commenced to sing the song of "Maggy Murphy's Home." When the men were charged, Kane, said, "I am satisfied with the charge; it's quite right," but Neil made no reply.

Inspector Knight gave evidence bearing out this statement. He made inquiries about the prisoners, and found they broke out of barracks on -Monday. Police-constable Tankard said that at 2.35 he was on Penistone road and saw the fire. Immediately after he met the prisoners coming from that direction, and only about 300 yards, away from the barn. He stopped them, and Kane said, "There's a fire yonder. Is there any houses there?" Witness replied in the negative, and Kane remarked that if they had not met he was going to the Barracks to tell them there. When asked whether they had been at the fire Kane answered "No: we have been standing about five minutes on the road watching the fire," and added that they were seeking some of their men He took the two men back to the fire.

Police-constable Dyer spoke to the place being safe at two o'clock, when he visited it.

Superintendent Bielby said he should be able to produce a city constable who saw; the prisoners going in the direction of the farm at 1.50.

Kane, who again acted as spokesman, said they denied any knowledge of the fire. They only knew about it a very short time before Meeting Tankard. Prisoners were remanded for a week.

A girl named Elizabeth Morris, who was caught in the barn on Saturday last, was sentenced to a month's imprisonment.