

Fire on Main street and Churchill Court

From the Ely Standard: 6th April 1951:

Considerable damage was caused by an outbreak of fire at premises in Main Street, Little Downham, on Saturday morning, two shops and living accommodation being involved.

It was at 10 a.m. that Ely Fire formation received a call to 87 Main Street, to deal with a blazing thatched roof and on arrival they found that the fire had spread to No. 91 (now Costcutters), and a second pump was summoned from Littleport.

The firemen tackled the blaze with three jets from a hydrant, but despite their efforts, both buildings were severely damaged and the occupants had to find other accommodation. The fire, first noticed by Mr Albert Saberton, the occupier of No. 87, is believed to have been caused by a chimney spark blown onto the thatch. The roof covering the whole of the involved premises was destroyed, but the fire was confined to the upper part of the buildings the chief damage downstairs being caused by water.



When it was obvious that the fire had gained a dangerous hold, neighbours came at once to the assistance of the unfortunate occupants with the result that most of the furniture and the stocks from the two shops (a tobacconist's and a general store) were removed to safety. Mr. Saberton, however, lost a number of personal belongings.

In the first building, part of which was sub-let to Mr. Frederick Gibson, tobacconist, the roof was destroyed. On the first floor the side walls collapsed and one room with its contents were severely damaged by fire and water. The remaining four rooms were damaged by water and the kitchen and the front room ceiling were also badly affected.

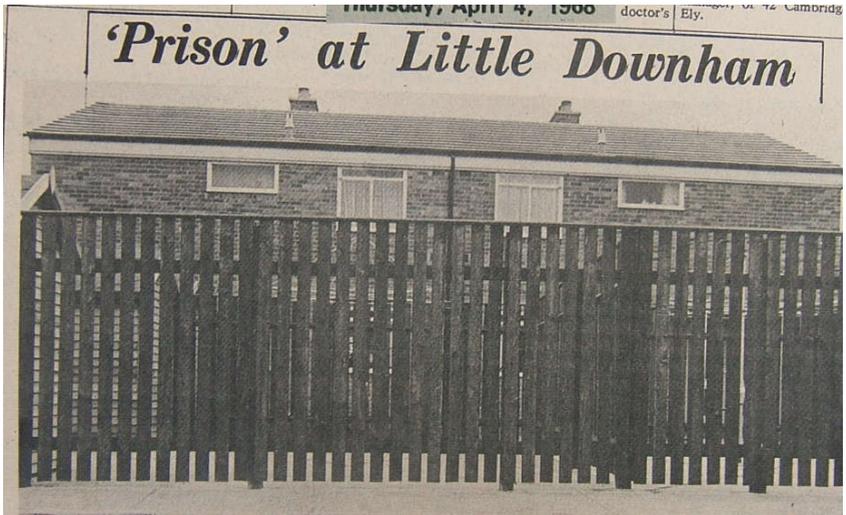
the extensive damage to No.91, a private house and general store occupied by Mrs. Sydney Wymer, might have been prevented if the thatch had not been covered by corrugated iron sheets. These had to be stripped off in order to get at the flames, which by then had crept along and gained a firm hold. The thatch and first floor were badly damaged by fire and the ground floor, including a room sub-let to Miss Betty Martin, hairdresser, was affected mainly by water.

Overhead telephone wires were brought down by the intense heat, but Post Office engineers had a service restored later the same day. The firemen were on duty until 7 p.m.



Historically, in the case of thatch fires, special long handled hooks were used to rake off burning thatch. This woodcut shows them being used in Bury St Edmunds.

The site remained derelict for several years and in the 1968 became the site for Churchill Court. This was not without its controversy as reported in the local paper.



The corrugated fence at Churchill Court, Little Downham, which has annoyed residents by rattling in the wind and even keeping awake at night a deaf lady, is to be replaced by a close boarded fence.

When complaints about the fence were aired at the annual parish meeting and reported in this paper. Miss Alice Minnie Scott said that, though deaf, she was troubled at night by the wind rattling the fence which is a flat away from her home.

Reporting at last Wednesday's meeting of the Ely Rural District Housing Committee the architect, Mr N Russell, said that maintenance work on the recently built site had yet to be completed and though notice had been given to the contractors, Law Bros (Builders) Ltd., the work had not been done.

He was authorised to give final warning to the contractors and, if the work had not been completed after 28 days, to hand over to another contractor.

Coun. R W Parson, chairman of Little Downham Parish Council, asked what action had been taken over the fence.

Mr Russell replied that in the original contract the fence was to be replaced with a brick wall. Now the work was being put out to a different contractor and the aim was to replace it with a close-boarded fence.

Robin Pearl