



Wishford Fire engine, kept in St Giles Church

**A village fire brigade.  
Wishford reminisces.  
Veteran who saw stocks in use.**

Wishford, one of the most picturesque hamlets in Wiltshire, lying snug in the folds of low-lying hills, is feudal in name, and can claim to be the scene of one annual festival at least which has been from time immemorial, Oak Apple Day, Wishford has survived where customs in most other villages, after hard struggles, have gone into oblivion. The hurly-burly of the Twentieth Century, indeed, seems to pass Wishford by.

**The Parish Stocks.**

Mr George Down, who celebrated his 88<sup>th</sup> birthday on Wednesday, and has lived all his life in the village, can recall other features, which are of interest. He can remember, as a child, seeing the stocks outside the Parish Church being used. He can remember two men being placed in them for eight hours on a Sunday. One had stolen cabbages from the Rector's garden; the other had been poaching. When a young man, Mr Down joined the village fire brigade, under the schoolmaster, who was captain for almost 50 years. Later when Mr Down himself became captain, he attended many fires in the district.

**A Law Action.**

The Fire engine, which still can be seen in the village, is well made. The wheels are of solid wood, and there were hoses of leather and thirty leathern buckets. This fire engine was bought in 1728, for £33 3s, the cost of carriage from London £12 7s 4d. In 1895 the Parish Council claimed the fire engine and engine as parish property. A record was found proving the fire engine to be church property, purchased and maintained out of the funds of the church. Proceedings were commenced in the High Court of Justice, Queen's Bench Division, by the Rector and churchwardens, and the defence being abandoned, judgment was entered for the plaintiffs.

In 1867 the old engine house was pulled down and in the following year a new one built, at the cost of the Pembroke family, on land belonging to the estate.

**A Famous Sieve**

Mr Down can remember the leathern buckets hanging in the church and also the famous sieve in which, as local legend has it, the seven children of Thomas Bonham were carried to church.

The fire brigade consisted of fourteen men. Every May and September practice was carried out, generally near the river at Gunville, where water was pumped over the elm tree. Sometimes the practices were at Townsend, where water was obtained from wells. From

1728 to 1849, there was no payment to the men for practice, but afterwards they were paid a shilling per practice.

Once a house at Wylde caught fire at 5 a.m., a message from Wylde to Wishford station sent Mr Down hurrying through the village, waking up the firemen. A horse was hired and the journey of six miles over rough roads took three quarters of an hour. Villagers drew water from wells, and the buckets were passed from hand to hand and the water poured into the fire-engine. The fire was finally extinguished, but many of the wells nearby were dry. The last fire he attended was at some farm buildings just outside the village some thirty years ago. For forty years Mr Down was captain of the Wishford Brigade.”

**Western Gazette 21 February 1936**