

FEBRUARY 18th, 1939.

BEDLAM AFIRE

END OF 400 YEARS OLD COTTAGE

Practice for A.F.S.

WATER PUMPED OVER A MILE

The picturesque but antiquated cottage which stood in grim solitude on the Garden Estate, Birchington, as a relic of the years that were, is no more.

The cottage, more affectionately known as Bedlam Cottage, was presented to the Margate Auxiliary Fire Service by the Mayor (Alderman G. B. Farrar), and on Sunday the Auxiliaries poured over 100 gallons of old oil from thatch to cellar and created the largest blaze Birchington has seen for some years.

The idea was to give nearly 100 men from Margate, Westgate-on-Sea, and Birchington practice and instruction in fire-fighting under realistic conditions. The men had had no opportunity to rehearse their parts, because, with the exception of a few, nobody received his order until half-an-hour before the fire was started.

Notice to Quit to Birds

At about 8.30 a.m. the A.F.S. members assembled at Birchington Fire Station and were given their orders by Chief Officer A. E. Twyman. He arranged for the mardon to be fired in the dilapidated garden of the cottage to give the birds inside fair "notice to quit" what was recently called by an anonymous correspondent "a bird sanctuary."

Within a few seconds the place was a roaring inferno, and immediately the auxiliary firemen set to work.

For the first twenty minutes the men fought the fire with one line of hose from a hydrant in Lincoln-gardens. Fanned by a strong wind, the fire spread to the thickly-thatched roof with amazing rapidity, and the men attacked the blaze from the leeward side of the house, receiving the most valuable practical experience they have gained since the Service was inaugurated, as well as black faces and parched throats.

Water Failure

In about 1931 Alderman Farrar bought the farmland on which this old house stood. He planned to develop the land as a huge housing estate and had plans drawn up covering the area from Kent Gardens down to the top of Brooksend Hill. The Trust now holds the plans for this venture. He even included a piece of Church land in his plans, without buying it!

Bedlam Cottage stood right in the midst of his new development, so he gave the occupants notice to quit and then, on February 13th 1939, offered the opportunity to Thanet Fire Brigades to come and practise their fire-fighting skills on the property.

The event was advertised in the local press and consequently there was a good crowd of onlookers to watch the demise of this thatched 400 year-old cottage.