

Not forgetting the Pigs

Monday October 11th 1976

Time 1726

This was a distressing incident; to me it always was when animals were involved. It was a major fire and a rescue job combined with the risk of agro chemicals. And for a time a water shortage hampered our efforts. The call was to "West End Farm Haynes, Farm Buildings on Fire." The call was timed at 1727, we were called at 1728 from home by our radios and we were mobile at 1730, Sub Officer Simpson was the Officer in charge, we were manning the water tender ladder with a crew of six. As we left the fire station and turned onto the trunk road (A 6) we required no directions, we could see the fire with a great plume of smoke on the hill some six miles away. We could hear on our Radio other appliances being mobilized from Amptill. Our arrival time was booked at 1739, Station Officer Jones of Amptill arrived at the same time, and Leading Fireman Fox booked in just ahead of us at 1737.

I was ordered to help with the evacuation of pigs from a large building on fire whilst others were employed with getting water jets to work on the on the burning area. Assistance messages were sent immediately, first, "water carrier required," followed "make pumps four," and at 1744 "make pumps six." At 1752 a further assistance message was sent by A.D.O Hall "make L4P's two."

As I entered this burning building filled with smoke and fire, I knew this was going to be a traumatic and a protracted incident. There was noise, mixed smells of burning timber, straw, hay, and pigs squealing. Some pigs were being burnt alive and the smell of chemicals was present. The farmer quickly explained to me how best to move the pigs to safety. He gave me a small wooden door, "move them out slowly, but keep this door between yourself and the pigs, this will protect you." Three other firemen were with me. We carried his instructions out exactly and we were moving about six pigs out of the pens at a time, unfortunately some ran back into the fire. I guess they were distressed and confused. Whilst all this was happening some of the pigs that were badly burnt and suffering were shot by the farmer to put them out of their misery and pain. The noise of the pigs was everywhere, some were fighting; pigs are territorial and they were protecting their area. Two drowned in a slurry pond next to the building. And at this time the fire was moving in our direction. We kept at it and continued with our task and managed to move a considerable number of pigs. Eventually we were ordered to leave the building as it was in danger of collapse and the concern of farm chemicals and fumes were present.

My next task was to help with fire fighting operations manning hose and branches; our big problem was water supplies. A request had been made at 1759 to the water authority to increase water pressure in the area. At 1815 an informative message was sent to control from A.D.O. Hall. "A range of farm buildings approximately 70 square meters containing a large number of pigs, a quantity of farm machinery, hay and straw, three quarters well alight, six jets in use."

At 1823 suddenly the water pressure increased and immediately Fm. Les Goddard was thrown by the pressure of the water onto his back and injured, an ambulance was requested to attend the fire ground. At the same time a message was sent, "Fire surrounded." This was an important message, and now we were beating the fire.

The last important message was sent at 1843, this was the stop message, although many further informative messages and requests would be sent the stop message, meant that we could deal with the fire with the number of personal and appliances we had at the scene. Amongst the many messages sent was a request for propane lighting, relief crews were ordered, the electricity board were requested to attend.

I spent the rest of the evening fire fighting and eventually apart from smoldering and the occasional burst of flame the fire had died down, however other relief crews would have to spend the entire night and part of the next day in attendance damping down. The good news was that refreshments had been ordered for 50 fire-fighters and our crew were soon served, we were most grateful.

As I was initially near what were thought to be toxic fumes in the early stages of the fire I would be required to attend hospital for a check up although I felt fine. At 2150 I was taken to hospital to be examined by the medics, pleased to say I was declared fit. A total of 13 fireman attended South Wing Hospital, Fm. Les Goddard was detained as was Fm. Paul Barnes.



Photograph
[Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)

hundred were saved. It is believed that rats were responsible for the outbreak of the fire by gnawing through the electricity cables trying to get to a water gully nearby. Baled straw was above the pigs thus the fire spread very quickly. A tank containing diesel fuel got so hot at one time it was boiling. The farm belonged to the Davies brothers and is still owned by the same family today.

Thirty plus years on I paid a visit to the farm, it was pleasing to be able to meet up with Mr. Randolph Davies the farmer and Mr. Andy Kirchen the pig man, and they were both at the farm on that tragic night. Mr. Davies kindly thanked me for the efforts and work we had put in that night.