

LET'S BRING BACK THE HARTEST FIRE ENGINE TO THE VILLAGE by William Miller

By an extraordinary piece of luck, part of the old Hartest horse-drawn, fire engine has been found in a yard in Warwick, and I have bought it in order that it can be returned to the village as a historic exhibit.

I am one of the four sons of the recently deceased Faith Miller who lived at Curates House on Hartest Green. When my parents bought the house in 1985 they immediately found a most intricate water pump on the rear of the wooden garage, and enquiries led them to understand that the garage was well known to have been the old village fire station. The pump stood over a well from which water was extracted to fill a tank in the roof of the shed from which the engine was filled.

When mum died in April this year, my brothers and I cleared all the accumulated bric-a-brac from the outbuildings we began to find artefacts suggesting their earlier use. First of all a protective horseshoe which our research suggests might have been fitted over the hooves of the horses, which drew the engine, to protect the soft parts



from damage from cinders or fallen debris when fire fighting. Interestingly my assumption that the horses which used to draw the engine were "Shires" is probably incorrect, as an expert friend of mine says they were usually a type of horse called "Vanners" as they were lighter and quicker, but had the necessary strength.

We then noticed a number of interesting features in the right hand room of the garage. A very stout timber in the middle of the rear wall looked as

if it might've been used as a tether post for the horses when undercover. Jo Pask has a file of research on the history of the Hartest fire engine, and it contains a highly amusing story about the horses, which were often allowed loose on the green, presumably to feed on fresh grass. In the event of a fire alarm, the first problem was catching the horses, which appeared to know what they were expected to do, and did everything possible to avoid being caught for duty. One wonders how long it got for the engine to reach the fire!

Next to the stout post in the right-hand room there are a number of lockers which look as if they might have been where the fireman kept their boots and helmets. There is also a workbench in the corner which may have been used to repair the engine. Closer inspection of the engine shed will no doubt discover more artefacts relating to its previous history. Jo Pask's file contains one report that suggests that the engine may once have been kept, not in this wooden shed, but in the tall outbuilding with a chimney on the property nearest the Institute. I don't know whether this gave direct access to the road at some point before the wall was built.

Whilst clearing the buildings, I decided to try to research more about the history of the fire service in the village and I resorted to a Google research.

To my astonishment I found a photograph of a large, red box with HARTEST inscribed on its side in large, old style letters. It turned out to be an item for sale in a reclamation yard in Warwick. It rapidly became clear that it may have been part of the original Hartest engine, but it was important to make sure. Another search seemed to show that there was no other village or township in the world called Hartest. And the oval, cast iron badge on the side





gave the maker's name as TILLEY, Blackfriars Road, London who were indeed manufacturers of fire engines in the 1840s. From pictures of these early engines it became clear that the item for was the long wooden box which comprised the top half of the Hartest engine on which the driver and all the fireman sat, whilst the engine was in motion, and which had a hinged lid allowing storage of the water hoses and other equipment the crew needed. It was being sold as a storage chest to be used as a piece of furniture. But with the name of the village inscribed so vividly on its side it seemed to be the most important part of the engine and I felt that it should be rescued an attempt made to return to the village.

I immediately rang up and agreed to purchase it despite rather a steep price being demanded. I picked it up with my car and two strong friends helped me to get it out of the car and into my living room where it now

temporarily resides. It is oak built with beautiful dovetailing at the corners, and 6' 3" in length with a width of 1' 10". The raised section at one end is the driver's seat with an iron rail around it. Underneath the driver's seat is a storage box with a lid. The top of the main body of the box is hinged for access to storage. There are cast iron Tilley maker's badges on both sides towards the front end, and a cast iron support on the left side which would have held a brass, acetylene headlight. The wood is currently in good condition, but it would benefit from being kept warm and dry inside a house rather than allowed to deteriorate outside or in an unheated garage. Advice from conservationists is that the original paintwork should not be touched up.

I have managed to find a photograph of a complete 1840's Tilley engine which was sold recently at Bonhams so that we can see what the original looked like. This one was from a village called Boxford, not to be confused with Boxted. It was hand pumped by almost the whole crew of fireman, who were paid three shillings each for the first hour of pumping! This must be hard work as records show that for each of the next four hours pumping they were paid two shillings each, and then one shilling per hour after that. This was at 1931 prices! We know this from an amazing schedule of charges for the services of Hartest Fire Brigade which has survived in the archives.

Intriguingly, it appears that there may have been two horse-drawn engines at different times in Hartest. For in speaking to David Viner, the Carriage Foundation expert on the history of fire engines, he tells me that there is another Hartest engine in a collection at Snowhill Manor, the National Trust property near Broadway in the north Cotswolds. This engine, which was also horse-drawn, was made by Merryweather, and currently displays the livery of Boxted Hall, although, on closer inspection the name Hartest can be seen underneath, having been painted over. This may be the engine in a picture in Jo Pask's file. Records show that this engine was bought by Charles Wade on 27 October 1931 from DuPont and Orttewell in Sudbury for £3. Wade is a former owner of Snowhill Manor, and it is assumed that DuPont and Orttewell may have been dealers. So if the Merryweather engine was sold in 1931, this may have been the last horse-drawn engine in Hartest, the Tilley one having been an earlier one. Part of



the purpose of this article is to advertise my wish that this most important historical artefact which I have discovered, is returned to the village where it was used. Unfortunately I'm not wealthy enough to donate it to the village, and so the suggestion has been made that a village-wide fundraising appeal might be initiated to raise the £1,200 needed to pay for it. Perhaps this might be done through a crowdfunding page locally. And if this might be supported both financially and in practical terms by the Parish Council that would be marvellous. The Council might also be able to help find a place to keep it, warm and dry, such that everyone can enjoy its history. Relevant pictures about the engine can be seen with this article on the Hartest web site. For further information you can contact William Miller on w.miller70@ntlworld.com

HARTEST

Hartest Fire Brigade.

Schedule of Charges for the Services of the Brigade &c. at Fires.

	£	s.	d.
For Cleaning Engine and appliances after use within the parish -	10	6	
For the use of Engine and appliances without the Parish - - -	3	3	0
Captain's Pay, within and without the parish, 1st hour - - -	6	0	
Do. do. following 4 hours - -	4	0	
Do. do. each following hour -	2	0	
Brigade Men, each to receive pay for 1st hour, within and without the parish	3	0	
Do. do. each of next 4 hours -	2	0	
Do. do. each hour afterwards -	1	0	
Pumpers, each to receive for 1st hour -	2	0	
Do. do. each following hour -	1	0	
Men left in Charge by night -		<i>per hour</i>	1 6

Damage to Engine and Appliances to be charged for in addition.

Signed G. D. BAYNTON { Chairman of
Hartest Parish Council.

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