

SESSIONS COTTAGE

Just to the south of the church on the west side of Selsey High Street is a long low building with walls of stone rubble (Mixon rock) with brick dressing and quoins and a thatched roof. It probably dates back to the early 17th century, but was extended to the north in 1728 and since then has been much modernised. The brick doorway in front of the north part is inscribed 'P.H. 1728'. This charming building used to be known as the Old Farmhouse but today it is called Sessions Cottage as the Lord of the Manor used to hold his court sessions there. It retains many period features including beams and panelling. Stable Cottage was built in the 18th century and was once the stable block for this court house. It has wooden panelling to all four walls of the dining room, taken from the original looseboxes. Another unusual feature is the thatched and timber granary in the garden dating from the same period, which rests on steddle stones to raise it above damp and vermin.

Taken from "A History of Selsey" by Frances Mee.

the articles below are published at the request of an eyewitness and the Fire Service

Eyewitness Report

The fire brigade was called by David Green Autos just before 3.00 pm, requesting the fire service to attend a fire in the garden at the rear of 24 High Street, Selsey. They were asked to come to the Landerry Industrial Estate where access to the rear garden is obtained and where the fire was situated. Some 10 minutes later a further 999 call was made to find out why the fire engine, only a few 100 metres away, still had not arrived.

The Controller said that there was no crew available in Selsey and that engines from Littlehampton and Petworth were on their way! No mention was made of Chichester. 15 minutes into the fire, the fire was still confined to the rear of 25 High Street. The car parked a few feet from the fire had not started to burn at this stage. Explosions started and the fire spread. The police were also called but no police arrived until at least half an hour after the first 999 call. It was extremely difficult to keep the area free from the public. Many of whom would not leave the area when requested and many motorists insisted in trying to get through to the High Street in their cars despite all efforts by members of the public to try to control the situation. It was chaos!

Two firemen who happened to be in the town at the time apparently saw the smoke and went to the fire station, made ready the fire engine and waited for the rest of the crew to turn up. When they realised that no more crew were coming they then shut down the main fire tender and attended the fire with the landrover. The firemen did their best but by the time they arrived the fire was burning well but they still tried to fight it with the equipment they had. They were very brave. Unfortunately by the time the fire tenders started to arrive the whole area was burning and sadly Sessions Cottage has gone. Our thoughts are with the owners of Sessions Cottage who have lost their home.

Why did the crew not turn up? Did their beepers go off after the first 999 call or was it the second 999 call? Did HG Control send the call? Selsey fire crew have always answered a fire call, why not this time? Did HG respond to the fact that it was reported clearly that thatched cottages were in close proximity to the fire together with approximately 40 motor vehicles? Why did the fire tenders not come to the rear access of No 24 where the fire was and as requested? Was it the congestion on the road that caused the delay? Why did the police not respond? Again was it the congestion on the road? Why did it take so long? **The people of Selsey need to know.**

name and address supplied

Fire & Rescue Services Report

West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service received the first call to a domestic garage at 15.12 hrs. In response to this, fire fighters from Selsey and Chichester were mobilised. As a result of further numerous calls and an indication that a thatched property was alight, an additional four fire appliances were mobilised plus a bulk water carrier from surrounding fire stations. On arrival crews were

faced with a well-developed fire spreading throughout the thatched property and garage/workshop in the adjoining property.

Chichester's officer in charge of the appliance increased the attendance to 6 fire appliances, as he was doing so cylinders exploded in the workshop showering debris over a wide area, including appliances and crews. With two major fires in progress, and



photos submitted by the Fire Service

surrounding properties to protect which included three further thatches, persons reported, cylinders exploding, High street blocked, heavy smoke billowing across Wellington gardens, and evacuation of surrounding properties needed.

The fire was declared a Major incident. A total of 15 appliances and specialist vehicles attended this incident, from all over West Sussex and Hampshire.

The blaze was brought under control at 18.00 hrs using 6 main jets, ground monitors and breathing apparatus. Throughout the incident many crews were involved in a salvage operation as well as controlling the fires.

Although many items were removed, the crews had to quickly evacuate from the premises after one of the chimneys suddenly collapsed, sending debris down into the front garden narrowly