

**SOME HISTORY SURROUNDING THE PRIVATE
FIRE ENGINE OWNED BY SIR GEORGE
HOWLAND WILLOUGHBY BEAUMONT, 8th
BARONET OF STOUGHTON WHOSE SEAT WAS
AT COLEORTON HALL**



SIR GEORGE BY OCTAVIUS OAKLEY

BY SAMUEL T STEWART - AUGUST 2024

PART 1 - Sir George Beaumont, 8th baronet of Stoughton (b.1799, d.1845) who held the lordship of the manor of Coleorton from 1827 to 1845, had his own private horse drawn fire engine for which there are two reports of it being called upon to try and quell fires outside of the Coleorton area. These follow later. However, one assumes that he obtained his own private fire engine as a result of the following:-

In 1834 the prospectus for "THE LEICESTERSHIRE FIRE INSURANCE COMPANY" was issued, with a Capital of £200,000 in Four Thousand Shares of £50 Each. The patrons were "The Right Honourable the Earl Howe" and "Sir George H.W. Beaumont Bart."

PROSPECTUS

The importance of insurance against loss by Fire, and the increasing anxiety of the Public on the subject, are too well known to need either argument or comment. In making a selection from amongst the many invaluable institutions for this purpose, it is believed that individuals are materially actuated by their personal knowledge of the parties who are interested in the Society, which both receives a benefit from them, and guarantees one to them in return. It has therefore been thought, that if an Association of this kind were formed in the County of Leicester, it would not only obtain a fair, and even a large share, of the Insurances now daily effected in the County, but would be the means of leading many, who, from apathy or various causes might otherwise not be induced, to avail themselves of the security thus provided.

It is proposed to establish a company, to be called "THE LEICESTERSHIRE FIRE INSURANCE COMPANY" which shall have for its object the granting policies of insurance, from loss by Fire, in any part of Great Britain, though it is not disguised that the support mainly looked for in this instance is the County of Leicester and the adjacent districts.

The capital proposed is £200,000 to be raised, in Four Thousand Shares of £50 each. no individual will be allowed to hold more than thirty in number, thus affording to the Subscribers mutually, as well as to the Public generally, the vast security of numerical strength. It is, however, considered that a subscription of £5 per share producing £20,000 will be amply sufficient to commence the business of the company ; and it is confidently believed that there will be no occasion to make a further call at any time on the shareholders. In all events, it will not be done until the necessity for it arises. The money thus subscribed will be invested in the funds, or upon real Security at the discretion of a Committee of Directors this appointed by the shareholders at large; and it is declared that the income to be derived from it will be sufficient to pay all the expenses of the Society, while the principal will form an ample guarantee for such payments, as the profits of the undertaking may not cover. these profits may be difficult, nay, it may be said, impossible, to reduce to a nice and accurate calculation ; but we have all to look around and observe the immense number of insurances now existing in the County of Leicester alone, and the vast sums of money which must be paid for them - the quantities of Buildings, Goods, Farming Stock, and Property of every description remaining uninsured, and the infrequency happily in this county of very destructive fires - and then ask ourselves whether it is possible that such an Institution as that contemplated, and under efficient management, can fail of obtaining such a share of the personage as will afford a most handsome remuneration to the proprietors. By way of illustration, it may be observed that if only the sum of £1,000 a year is paid in premiums, it will return a revenue of £5 percent, but it cannot be supposed that so small assume as this will be received even in the first year, and how far it may progress when the subsidence of the public bestowed at first spontaneously, as no doubt it will be, upon persons of

rank, character and wealth, in their immediate neighbourhood shall have become matured by time, and strengthened by the sense of reciprocal obligation, no one can calculate.

From the above statement it will be apparent that the amounts accruing to the shareholders in return for the capital subscribed must be ample, and may be incalculably great. But the advantages resulting to the Public, from the success of this institution will, it is confidently hoped be no less a proportion. The general utility and benefit to individuals afforded by such Societies are too obvious to be now decanted upon. With regard to the present project, suffice it to say, that the moderate sense of the establishment, combined with various other circumstances which give to a local company an advantage for use on a more extended scale, will enable the Proposers to compete in the Terms they offer to the Assured Assay Office, of whatever wealth, and however long established in the United Kingdom; while the business of the company being conducted by a Committee of resident Directors will, it is hoped, form a sufficient guarantee for the fidelity of their engagements, and the promptitude and care with which all claims upon them will be met and discharged. In point of law also, every precaution will be taken by means of a Deed of Settlement framed with the strictest provisions, as well as by an Act of Parliament, to find the most perfect security in these respects both to the shareholders mutually and to the Public.

It would be premature, at the present period, to enter into a minute detail of the Rates of Assurance and other terms it is proposed to offer to the public. These will be finally determined upon and published by the committee after the complete formation of the Society. That there is one advantage not possessed by any of the other Fire Offices doing business in the county, the want of which has been most severely felt, and which is part of the present scheme, to provide namely, **an adequate supply of Fire Engines**, with a proper number of firemen, kept in readiness to act upon any emergency at a moment's notice. It is intended for this purpose to establish a Station House at Leicester upon the principle adopted by the London Offices, with a Fireman on duty day and night, and to make such an arrangement with Proprietors of Post Houses as will ensure the rapid conveyance of Fire Engines to any point they may be wanted. Nor is it intended to confine these precautions to the town of Leicester, but to make provisions for every other Market Town, from its neighbourhood, within a reasonable circle, the amount of insurances shall be such they may fairly call upon the company to incur that expense. The importance of such a department, promptly and efficiently managed, need not be urged, particularly if the dreadful spirit of Incendiarism should unhappily extend itself to this county, which, though hitherto exempt upon its fatal influences may not at all times continue so. It only remains to be stated that the application for shares may be made to the Bankers (Messrs. Clarke and Philips), Leicester, and Lutterworth, or to the Solicitors, Secretary, or Surveyors at Leicester, to Messrs. Inkersole and Goddards, at Market Harborough, Messrs. Fishers, Hammond and Mammatt, at Ashby de la Zouch, Messrs. Neale and Johnson, Architects at Melton Mowbray, and such places as shall be hereafter announced, and further particulars may be obtained on application to the Solicitors or Secretary.

A deposit of £1 per share will be paid on subscribing, and the remaining £4 which will be required to complete the first, and it is hoped, only call, will not be asked for until the Company are ready to commence business.

The addition of a Life Insurance Department to this scheme has been contemplated, with the prospect of success and advantage equal to that at least of the Fire Department, but it is proposed that the arrangements for that purpose shall be left open until the appointment of the Committee of Shareholders to be then determined upon by them.

February 1834.

Phoenix House, located at the bottom of New Walk, is the oldest surviving fire station in Leicester. It was built in 1842 for the Leicestershire Fire Insurance Company. It was designed by William Flint in the Greek Revival style of architecture, complete with fluted Ionic columns flanking a central entrance. The Leicestershire company was established in 1834 and bought out by the Sun Fire Insurance in 1843, who based their fire brigade at the building .

In the late 17th century the 18th century and early 19th century, fire insurance companies employed their own firemen. Customers needed to have metal "fire marks" fixed on the walls of their houses to show the name of their insurance company. Firemen would do nothing to help if your house was on fire unless you had a fire mark showing you were a customer of *their* company.



THE "LEICESTERSHIRE FIRE INSURANCE COMPANY" METAL MARK

The first report of Sir George Beaumont's fire engine being called into use, featured in the Leicester Chronicle - Saturday 10th December 1836 and is transcribed below:-

EXTENSIVE FIRE FROM ACCIDENT

On Thursday evening, the 1st inst., Mr. Meeson's extensive Tape-Mill adjoining the Union Inn, at Measham, between Tamworth and Ashby de la Zouch, was discovered to be on fire. The Ashby and Moira engines, and also Sir George Beaumont's from Coleorton Hall were brought to the spot as quickly as possible ; but not withstanding the vigorous efforts of Sir George and his servants, and the inhabitants of the neighbourhood generally, the large mill was entirely consumed, with all its valuable machinery. In all probability, however, the adjoining steam-flour-mill was saved by the engines. It is supposed that the fire had its origin in the snuff of a candle having been incautiously blown among some cotton, at the time the work people were about to leave the mill for tea. The flames burst forth shortly after five o'clock. The damage is estimated at upwards of £10,000 ; and more than ninety hands are deprived of present employment by the calamity.

The factories described above and which appear in the following Auction were originally built adjacent to the Union Inn by Joseph Wilkes in the 1780s as part of his industrial empire. Only the Corn Mill survived, and set in the wall of this was a commemorative tablet marking the attempt by Sir George Beaumont's private fire

brigade to save the two mills. When the corn mill was purchased by a Mr. Blake in 1906, it was converted into living accommodation and the top storey removed and the original Beaumont commemorative tablet re-installed in the front wall of the house which still survives as living accommodation but became subsequently known as "The Priory".



JOSEPH WILKES 1733 -1805

The following, which is of historical interest appeared in the Leicester Journal on Friday October 30th 1835 some 13 months before the above described fire took place. Only relevant extracts with reference to the Tape Mill, Cotton Mill & Corn Mill are transcribed :-

**IMPORTANT SALE OF LAND, HOUSES, FACTORIES, MINERALS &c
AT MEASHAM AND OAKTHORPE, Derbyshire,
(FREE FROM AUCTION DUTY)
TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION, BY B. CHEATLE**

At the Union Inn, in Measham, in the county of Derby, on Monday, the 16th day of November next, at Three o'clock in the Afternoon, in the following or such other Lots as the Vendors may fix upon at the time of sale, and subject to conditions to be produced ;

The Undermentioned Valuable FREEHOLD AND TITHE - FREE ESTATE, comprising Two very extensive FACTORIES formerly used for the Spinning of Cotton, with various Buildings, Cottages, &c., and 150 Acres, 3 Roods, and 3 Perches of very superior Meadow and Pasture land, in the following Lots : -

LOT 10 -

22 Edward Meeson, - House, consisting of two parlours, kitchen, pantries, and seven sleeping rooms, with gig house, stable, yards, garden, &c.

23 Ditto - The Tape Factory, formerly used as a Cotton Mill, consisting of three spinning rooms, 58 by 33, store rooms, making up rooms, workshops, and every other convenience for carrying on an extensive trade, with engine house, and twelve horse Bolton and Watts' Engine, two circular boilers, with driving shafts, drums, &c. Also a Corn Mill in full work, comprising two pair of stones, dressing and smutting machines, granaries and store rooms, miller's cottage, counting house, &c., including the area in the front of the Mill.

LOT 18 -

49 Edward Meeson - House consisting of dining and drawing room, entrance hall, kitchen, butler's and other pantries, with seven sleeping rooms, coach house, stables and other extensive buildings, Tape Factory, five storey's high 72 by 27, formerly used as a Cotton Mill with water closet to each room, smith's, turner's and carpenter's shops attached, 30 horse Bolton and Watts Steam Engine, two boilers driving shafts and drums, Engine House 30 by 32, with drying room over the same, a giving out room and storage rooms, 29 by 15, together with yards, ponds, orchard, garden &c.

The purchase of this lot will have the option of taking the machinery

The above extensive factories are now worked by a highly respected tenant as Tape Factories, attached to which are Smith's, Turner's, and Carpenter's Shops, two steam engines by Bolton and Watt, of 30 and 12 Horse Power, two excellent Boilers, Driving Shafts and Drums, with a commodious and genteel Residence adjoining to each Factory. Attached is a Corn Mill driven by Steam Power, consisting of two pairs of stones, dressing and smutting Machines complete.

The Hotel called the Union Inn, consists of three spacious parlours, tap room, cooking and other kitchens, and pantries on the ground floor, dining room, 39 feet by 16, and eleven excellent sleeping rooms ; detached brew house, and stabling for 34 horses. There are nearly 40 other houses and Cottages in the town of Measham, near to the Factories, several of which are well adapted for the trade ; and others for the residence of mechanics and labourers.

There are several beds or seams of Coal under the Estate, together with a very excellent seam of building land.

Measham is a very desirable situation for carrying on a Manufactory, having a canal passing through it which gives water carriage to all parts, and it furnishes Coal from the neighbouring Collieries at as low a rate as any Manufacturing town in the Kingdom

As early as Pigot's Derbyshire Trade directory of 1821/23 Edward Meeson was shown as being a Tape manufacturer in Measham so he had owned / operated this business for at least 14 years

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PART 2 - The second report of Sir George Beaumont's fire engine being used to help quell a fire at Ibstock is transcribed below from the Leicester Journal - Friday 11th January 1839

DREADFUL FIRE AT IBSTOCK

On Monday, a destructive fire occurred on the premises, belonging to the Ibstock Colliery, occupied by the Companies Tenant, Mr. Jackson. It originated in a piece of ignited coal, being carried by the wind, which at the time was blowing a hurricane, from the pit bank which of necessity is constantly burning. The fire commenced in the thatch of the building nearest the shaft, and in a few minutes the barn and the stack yard, which contained the year's produce of the Farm, was enveloped in flames. - The fire broke out between five and six in the morning, and but a few minutes elapsed before the assistance of hundreds of the work people, was procured ; but though their utmost exertions were cheerfully volunteered, the wind was such as to baffle all their efforts to remove or save any portion of the contents of the stackyard. For the security of the house, which appeared to be in some danger, a messenger was despatched for the fire engine at Ashby de la Zouch, which after considerable delay arrived but was found to be in such a dilapidated a state as to be wholly incapable of throwing a drop of water. The Leicester Insurance Company's Engine had in the meantime been sent for, and arrived with four post-horses, having been little more than an hour in going 13 miles. It was now, however, only of use to prevent a recurrence of the fire which it did, by playing on the burning embers for some hours. Sir George Beaumont's engine from Coleorton, then arrived, accompanied by Sir George himself, who having been present when the Ashby engine made its useless attempt, immediately drove back to the hall, ordered out his own powerful engine and kindly placed it at the disposal of the sufferer so long as any possibility of further danger remained. During the continuance of the fire, Sir George evinced the utmost anxiety to stop the flames, accompanying the efforts of the crowd by his personal exertions and perseverance, and generously declared that his engine should be cheerfully devoted to check the progress of any fire in the neighbourhood, where its services would be available. - The house was preserved undamaged, but the loss in buildings and stacks exceeded £600. - We understand that the proprietors of the Colliery have subscribed liberally towards the heavy loss sustained by the Tenant, who we are sorry to find had not insured his property, though sometime since forewarned of the necessity to do so.

Another report which appeared in the Leicestershire Mercury - Saturday 12th January 1839 is transcribed below:-

FIRE AT IBSTOCK COLLIERY

On Monday morning last between five and six o'clock, a fire broke out on some premises belonging to the company, occupied by Mr. Jackson. It appears that a piece of ignited "clunch" was carried by the high wind from the burning "bank" to the thatch of a building nearest the shaft, and in a few minutes the barn was enveloped in flames, which quickly extended through the stack yard. Hundreds of the work people soon arrived, but the wind, which blew almost an hurricane, rendered their efforts of little avail. A messenger was dispatched to Ashby de la Zouch for the fire engine which arrived after considerable delay, but was found incapable of throwing water. Sir George Beaumont who was present immediately drove back to Coleorton hall and ordered out his own engine. In the meantime one of the "Leicestershire Insurance Company's" fire engines arrived with four post-horses, having covered 13 miles in little over an hour. It was only of use, however, to play out the embers, in

order to prevent the fire breaking out. Sir George Beaumont then returned with his engine, and greatly exerted himself, and encouraged the effects of others in extinguishing the fire ; declaring at the same time, that his engine should be at the service of any individual in the neighbourhood who might need it. The house was uninjured, but the loss in stacks and buildings was more than between £300 and £400, towards which the Ibstock Company have handed a subscription. This calamitous even should be a warning to all whose premises are not insured, the occupier in this case having neglected to take that precaution. - (If the statement respecting the Ashby Engine be correct, and we have no reason to doubt it, - the parishioners of Ashby, merit a severe censure for not having so important a machine in proper order. - *Ed. L. M.*)