

## Fires in the 1850s

by Jane Anne Jewell

*Jane Anne Jewell, née King, was born in 1826, the granddaughter of John King the shipbuilder after whom King Street is named. Mrs Jewell, former headmistress at St James' School, lived in Emsworth all her life and died in 1931 aged 105. Her recollections of life in the village were written down in 1898 and further information was added in 1925. Her notebooks are held in the Museum. It is a wonderful archive. Here is just one extract.*

A fire broke out very late one night on the west side of Queen Street in a house used as a small school and a china shop. The alarm spread to King Street to our house where we had a very old lady ill in bed. The maid hearing the alarm looked out of the window and saw the fire and the vine on the wall towards Queen Street scorching in the heat. She hurried to her mistress and was told to go and fetch her lover, a fisherman, who lived in a cottage lower down the street.

Two lady friends from Tower Street arrived in a mysterious vehicle from the Black Dog called a 'Sociable'. This was a tiny omnibus with about three seats on either side and a little door with steps to let down at the back, also a small round seat in the front for the driver and windows that did not open. Such was the haste of the ladies to come to their friends' assistance that they came in their dressing gowns and without their wigs. The 'Sociable' stayed in the street all night to take away the sick woman if the house should become in danger. The daughter of the house – of mature age – slept peacefully till it was all over and she was called by the maid in the morning.



Opposite the burning house in Queen Street was the printers and it was feared that the stores of varnish would catch fire. Next door lay a dead man in a lead coffin and the coffin was in danger of melting from the heat, so the little hand engine supplied with relays of buckets played alternatively on both sides of the street. The maid's lover went into the burning house but was fetched out as the on-lookers saw the walls were falling in. The little hand engine was not very effective and no long ladder was available, so a little child, sent from Chichester to school, was burned to death.

A[nother] fire in the shipyard in King Street destroyed much of the goods prepared for the Navy. Fires in Emsworth have been extremely rare – apparently it was no easy matter to burn down even an old wooden cottage despite the dangers of tallow candles being carelessly carried, wooden partitions and dark oak cupboards [often being] close to the living room grates.