



The Rick Yard, Castle Farm c1910

Large rick yards such as this may have been convenient when it came to threshing time, but needed good insurance against fire. This yard contains more than 35 ricks. A large fire broke out here in 1928 when Charles Measures was tenant, and caused considerable damage (BT 18 April 1928 – see below). Allegedly, a boy playing truant was playing with matches. Subsequently, an aerial photograph shows that the stacks were widely distributed around the farm, the insurers having realised the high level of risk.

EB94 (*Richard Campion*)



Thatching ricks at Park Farm, Bletsoe, c1920

The ricks were built on platforms supported by 'mushroom head' pillars in order to keep out vermin and prevent the base of the stack being damaged by groundwater.

EB117 (*Bedfordshire Archives Z50-18-30*)

FIRE AT BLETSOE CASTLE FARM.

A serious fire occurred at Bletsoe Castle Farm on Wednesday. About 2.45 p.m. a man working in a field opposite the farm noticed that a straw stack was on fire at the rear of the main buildings of the farm. He raised an alarm immediately, and men rushed to the scene. Mr. Atfield, the foreman, informed Mrs. Measures, who immediately telephoned for the Bedford and Rushden Brigades.

The Bedford Brigade received the call at 2.50 p.m., and turned out under Second Officer Grice. On arrival at approximately 3.20, they discovered that four stacks, together with a considerable section of the farm buildings, were well alight. An ample supply of water was available from a large pond near by, and the brigade at once got to work on the buildings, as the fire, driven by the wind, was rapidly approaching the main section of the farm and the house. For the time being it was therefore essential to neglect the stacks and to endeavour to protect the farm property, and in this the brigade were successful.

About 3.30 p.m. the Rushden Fire Brigade arrived and at the request of Second Officer Grice they concentrated their efforts upon the fire in the stacks and were able to prevent any further spread in this direction.

Before the arrival of the brigades many helpers had concentrated on the removal of the live stock from the buildings. This was successfully accomplished in the face of great difficulties. Horses were turned loose and cows, calves, and pigs were removed. Several calves and pigs had to be carried out bodily, and a Hereford bull, which got rather wild, gave some trouble. No live stock was lost.

One of the buildings involved was a large poultry house, from which the farm people had fortunately been able to release the birds, although a considerable number of eggs and nesting apparatus was destroyed, as was also a considerable amount of machinery housed in some of the other buildings. One large loft which was destroyed had up to a few days previously been stacked with valuable straw, but fortunately this had been removed. The Rushden Brigade were able to leave at about 7.30 p.m. and the Bedford Brigade, after having made all secure, returned to Bedford at 11.30 p.m.

The property, of which Lord St. John is the landlord, was insured. Mr. Charles Measures, the tenant, who was away from home, returned just as the fire had been got in hand.

The fire is believed to have been caused by a boy playing with matches. He was being kept away from school because of ill-health. We are informed that the damage is estimated at £600.