

THE WORLINGWORTH PARISH FIRE ENGINE

By NICOLAS CRIBB, *late Rector*

In 1760 John Major of Worlingworth Hall gave to his parish a Fire Engine and recorded upon it 'The gift of John Major Esq. to ye Parish of Worlingworth 1760'. This engine remains in the Church.

John Major of Worlingworth Hall and Thornham Hall was High Sheriff of Suffolk in 1754, an Elder Brother of Trinity House, M.P. for Scarborough in 1761, created a Baronet in 1765, died in London 1781 aged 82 and is buried in the chancel of Worlingworth Church. He had issue only two daughters, Ann who married John Henniker of Newton Hall, Dunmow, who succeeded to the baronetcy under a special remainder and was created first Lord Henniker in 1800; and Elizabeth who married the second Duke of Chandos.

This Engine (Plate XXIV) consists of a lead lined box 35 inches long, 20 inches wide, 19 inches deep; mounted on wooden block wheels, iron rimmed. The front pair 11 inches in diameter, the rear pair 12 inches. This box contains two pumps, designed to give a continuous flow of water under pressure into a copper cylinder to which the hose and nozzle is attached. The pumps are worked by horizontal handles either side, employing two men or women at each handle. Water could be sucked up by the action of the pumps themselves through a hose lowered into nearby water, or else the box was filled by hand by the chain bucket method. There is a turn-cock so that either method can be used without interruption to the action of the pumps. The box has, before the pumps, a vertical screen to prevent weed etc. fouling the pumps from water so poured in. There are two lengths of leather hose, copper rivetted, of twenty feet each; also a copper and brass tapering nozzle 46 inches long, the jet end being less than 1/2 inch in diameter. This lengthy nozzle must have been extremely useful amongst burning thatch, into which it could be plunged without fear.

Mr. Munro Cautley writes:¹

. . . in the belfry also are the remains of the old fire manual engine inscribed 'The gift of John Major Esq. to ye Parish of Worlingworth 1760'. Also another piece of board belonging to the same inscribed 'Newthorn & Regg . . . Cloth Fair London Feast'.

In 1953 this Engine was removed from the second floor of the belfry, cleaned, and pieced together. It now stands, fully restored and in

¹ *Suffolk Churches*, 1937, p. 353.

working order, at the West end of the Nave. It was exhibited in the Suffolk Show at Benacre Park in 1955. The piece of board noticed by Mr. Cautley, after being cleaned, is now correctly deciphered as 'Newsham & Ragg. Cloth Fair. London. Fecit'.

Richard Newsham, died 1743, has a column in *D.N.B.* This states that he was at first a pearl-button maker but turned his talents to the improvement of fire engines, for which he had patents in 1721 and 1725. His engines, because of the special arrangement of the pumps, ejected water in a continuous stream. Previously the 'squirting engines' had ejected water in intermittent squirts only on the up-stroke of the pump. This improvement enabled lengths of hose to be attached to the engine, thus allowing the fire-fighters to approach the blaze, nozzle in hand, with some degree of mobility.

The new design of the cylinder and nozzle also helped a thin jet of water to be thrown with penetrating force to a considerable height. The engines were designedly narrow so as to enter passages or doorways in working order. It was in the back gardens of town properties that the only water supply was available, mainly wells. Tradesmen lived over their shops or business premises, and often the only access to the rear garden was by a narrow passage. Moreover it was in the rear of the premises, inhabited by the family, that fires most often occurred. The pump-staves at the sides allowed the two ends to be free of encumbrances so that helpers could pour water into the box without interrupting the pumpers. Newsham so successfully demonstrated his engine before the King at St. James's that one of the largest size was at once ordered for the Palace.

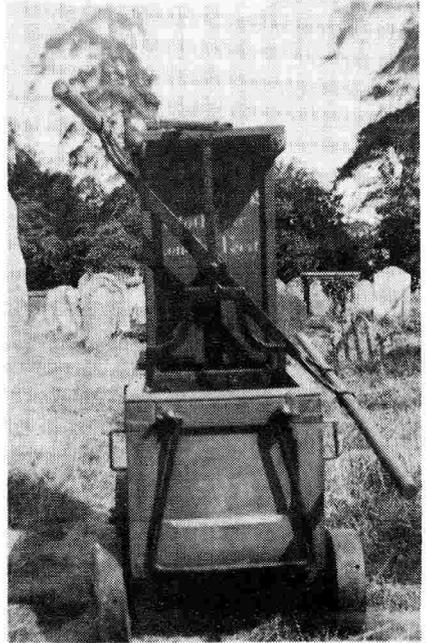
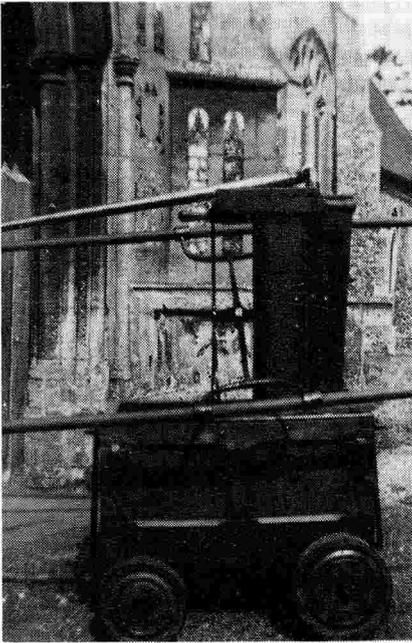
Newsham distributed his own illustrated broadsheets, one of which is in the Guildhall Library ² and is reproduced on Plate XXV, by kind permission of the Librarian. He advertised in the *Daily Post*, the *Daily Journal* and the *London Evening Post*. The *Daily Journal* of 7 April 1726 carries a report of a demonstration given by his engines, when a jet of water was played upon the grasshopper of the Royal Exchange, which in Newsham's own words 'is upwards of 55 yards high, and this in the presence of many thousand spectators'.

Desagulier in his *Experimental Philosophy*, 1744, wrote of Newsham's inventions. In the *London Magazine* in 1752 it was stated that Newsham gave 'a nobler present to his country than if he had added provinces to Great Britain'.

Newsham's son left the business to his own widow and his cousin George Ragg, and from 1744 to 1765 the firm is listed as Newsham and Ragg in the *London Directory*. Cloth Fair still exists as a street in Smithfield, behind St. Bartholomew's Church.

² Broad-sides, II, 130.

PLATE XXIV



Worlingworth Fire Engine



Richard Newtham, of Cloth-Fair, London, Engineer,



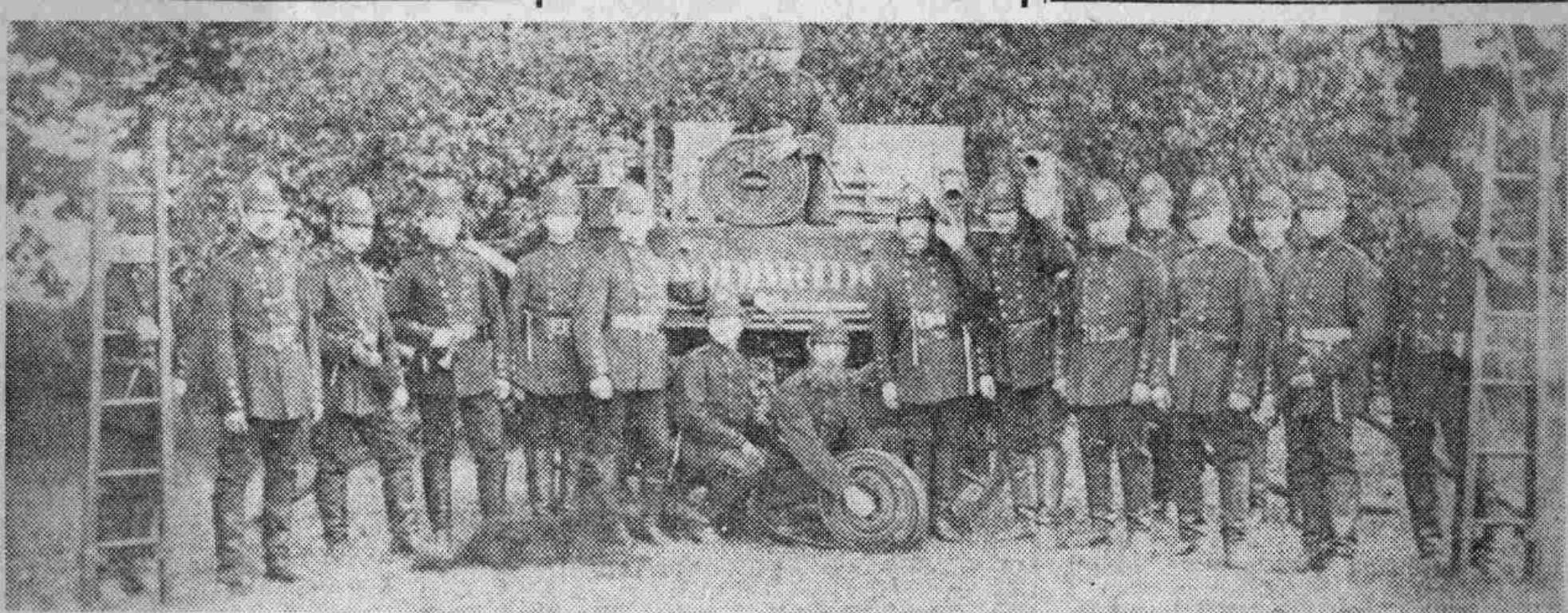
AKES the most useful and convenient Engines for quenching FIRES, which carry a constant Stream with great Force, and yet, at Pleasure, will water Gardens like small Rain. All impartial Men of Art and Industry will allow this, and the most Prejudic'd cease objecting,

when they see how completely the whole Contrivance is adapted to the Use intended. He hath play'd these Engines before His MAJESTY and the Nobility at St. James's, with so general an Approbation, that the largest was instantly order'd to be left for the Use of the Royal Palace aforesaid: And as a farther Encouragement, (to prevent others from making the like Sort, or any Imitation thereof) His MAJESTY has since been graciously pleas'd to grant him His Second Letters Patent, for the better securing his Property in this, and several other Inventions for raising Water from any Depth, to any Height requir'd. The largest Size will go through any Passage one Yard wide, in compleat working Order, without taking off, or putting on, any Thing; which is not to be parallel'd by any other Sort whatsoever: One Man can quickly and easily move

about the largest Size in as little Compass of Ground as it takes up to stand in, and it is work'd by Hands and Feet, or by Hands only. Those by Suction feed themselves from a Canal, Pond, or Well, &c. or out of their own Cisterns, as Opportunity offers: They are far less liable to Disorder, much more durable than any extant, and play off large Quantities of Water, at the Distances under-mention'd, either from the Engine, or a Leather Pipe, or Pipes, of any Length requir'd; (the Screws all fitting each other) This the **cumbersome Squirting-Engines**, which take up four times the Room, cannot perform; nor do they throw one 4th Part of their Water on the Fire, at the like Distances, but lose it by the Way; neither can they use a Leather-Pipe with them to much Advantage, whatever Necessity may call for. The Four largest Sizes go upon Wheels, and the Two others are carried like a Chair. Their Performances are as follow, and their Prizes fix'd very reasonable, (tho' some may think otherwise, because his Inventions are secur'd to him by Letters Patent) he having a due Regard to the publick Good, as well as his own Profit, both in these, and divers other Inventions, for several Purposes, which he has been the Inventor of, either for the Usefulness, or Diversion of Gentlemen.

Number of Sizes.	What Quantity of Water the Cisterns hold in Gallons.	Quantity discharg'd per Minute in Gallons.	At what Number of Yards Distance.	Price without Suction.	Price with Suction.
1st.	30	30	26	18 £	20 £
2d.	36	36	28	20	23
3d.	65	65	33	30	35
4th.	90	90	39	35	43
5th.	120	120	40	45	53
6th.	170	170	40	60	70

*Maquina perfecta est, qua non praestantior ulla Mutata cernis naturam: surgit in alcum
Asservare domos, & aquas haurire profundas. | Artibus unda novis; dum flamma coe't recumbit.*



Woodbridge historian Mr. George Arnott has been given this old photograph but though he can remember helping to pump the old manual as a boy he cannot recognise any of the Woodbridge firemen. Can any reader help?

Woodbridge Reporter
Thurs. Feb. 22 1968

For a century Newsham engines were unsurpassed, the Royal Navy bought them; Fire Insurance Companies, towns, parishes, and the owners of large mansions bought them. In 1732 a large size engine was bought for Little Glemham Hall. This is now in Ipswich Corporation Museum, and sadly in need of attention. There must have been many more of Newsham's engines in Suffolk. Probably at the time John Major presented this to the Parish, he also bought engines for use at Worlingworth and Thornham Halls.

Worlingworth Churchwardens' Account Book shows: 'May 29 1761. To ye Ringers 5/- and working the Inginge 2/6. 7/6'. Thereafter on 29 May 2/6 is regularly paid for 'playing the Engine'. It was paid at the Swan Inn, and expended in liquor. (Thus: '1803 To beer for playing the Water Engine 2/6'). The verse is quoted by parishioners 'on the 29th May, the fire engine must play'. For the annual exercise the engine stood by the roadside at the West of the Church and drew water from the Rectory moat. It was reputed to have thrown a jet as high as the Tower—75 feet. Vestry Meeting 1885: Resolved 'that the sum of £3 8s. 10d. received from Mr. W. H. Preston Treasurer of the Fire Engine Fund be applied to the repairs of the same and that the Parishioners be invited to subscribe the sum of £5 to cover the extra cost of new hose (40 ft.) . . . that Mr. Samuel Collins, wheelwright, be Captain of the Fire Brigade and that the Fire Engine be taken out and exercised on the 29th May annually'. It was last used at a fire at the Swan Inn during the summer of 1927, and at the Town Farm on Guy Fawkes' night of 1927. From 1760—1927 it served the Parish well as its only protection against fire.³

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³ Sources consulted: *D.N.B.* article, 'Richard Newsham'; Karslake, 'Early London Fire Appliances' *Ant. Journ.*, vol. ix, 1929; Gamble, *Treatise on Outbreaks of Fire*, 1931; Worlingworth Parochial Records.