

Extract from Lancaster Guardian December 16th 1837

### FIRE AT CATON MESSRS GREGS LOW MILL BURNT DOWN

On Sunday morning last, about three o'clock, a fire broke out in Messrs Greg's Low Mill Caton, which ended in nearly total destruction. A light was seen in the cotton room, it is said as early as eleven o'clock on Saturday night, but no suspicions seem to have been excited as to the cause. The conflagration appears to have been first discovered by a labouring man returning to Lancaster on the other side of the river, who procured a boat and crossed over, with a view of giving the alarm. Before he gained the spot, the manager of the mill, who resides in a house nearly adjoining, and whose bedroom window over-looks the building was already there, having been awakened by the glare of light. The alarm was instantly given, and the mill bell attempted to be rung, but the fire and smoke was already so great as to render this impossible.

This as we have stated, was about three o'clock and the fire, having broken out in the bottom room, burnt with such fury as to threaten the whole building with inevitable destruction. The resident member of the firm John Greg, Esq., mayor of Lancaster, was quickly on the spot, accompanied by the villagers and inhabitants of the surrounding country. Unfortunately no fire engines could yet be upon this spot, but an express had been despatched for the Lancaster engines, and in the meantime the fire appeared to gain strength and fury every minute. The cotton room being on the ground floor that wing of the mill was already one mass of flame, and, following the roof, the fire quickly spread to the south of the mill. It was evident that in the absence of an engine nothing could be done to check the progress of the flames where they already raged, and the exertions of the bystanders, under the direction of Mr Greg, was principally devoted to the north end of the building containing the steam engine and access having been gained to it buckets of water were thrown against the walls and upon the floor. Soon after four, in a time that appeared surprisingly short the rattle of the Lancashire engines at full speed was heard. By an error of judgement they were brought down the hill on the low ground to the west of the mill, and commenced playing on the north and where the steam engine was. Here, however, they laboured under a deficient supply of water, although a line was quickly formed from the engine to the mill dam, along which buckets were handed.

The appearance which the fire presented was now sublime to the extreme. The roof, which had been blazing with great fury for some time, at last fell in with a tremendous crash, carrying with it the higher portion of the walls upon which it rested. A dense volume of smoke and innumerable sparks now ascended, and the flames soon afterwards burst forth with redoubled power.

The rafters of the upper floor, already sapped by the action of the fire, and groaning under the weight of machinery were no longer able to support this additional pressure and at length gave way with a noise like thunder; the second and the first floors also gave way in a similar manner. By this time the engine was brought round to the east side of the mill, and the suction pump being placed in the dam adjoining, a plentiful supply of water was

obtained which was directed over the north end hitherto comparatively uninjured, with the best effect, and about six o'clock the flames were got under.

The north end of the mill is comparatively of recent erection and contained the steam engine, which has, we understand, received very little damage. The body of the mill is totally destroyed, the skeleton walls only remaining. The mill is of ancient date, and is said to be among the first spinning mills erected in this country. The walls appeared to be full of timber, which abounding in nitrous matter, fed greatly the power of the flames. The steam engine is divided by a thick stone wall from the rest of the mill; add to this circumstance, and to the arrival of the fire engines, is to be attributed the preservation of this part of the building.

The amount of loss sustained is variously estimated at from £12,000 to £15,000. Had the steam engine been destroyed this item would have been increased by another £1000. Mr Greg was said to have been insured beyond the full amount of the injury sustained, but this statement we hear is quite incorrect. Nothing is known as to the cause of the fire. Fears were at one time entertained that Messrs Greg's extensive mill in Lancaster would be stopped in consequence of this disastrous occurrence, the factory having being wholly dependant on the Low Mill for the supply of cotton twist. Arrangements, however, have been made to prevent this, and to lessen as much as possible the privations to which the Low Mill hands (150 in number) would have been exposed, by being thrown out of employ. Messrs Wright, of Ingelton, Yorkshire, and Messrs Gregson and Mason, Lancaster, have promptly placed their respective mills at the service of Mr Greg; and by, working double tides at the former, and carrying on a part of the process at the latter, the dreadful effects which would have ensued to the town and trade of Lancaster, by the stoppage of Messrs, Greg's large mill, will thus be obviated.

Much inconvenience will be sustained by the loss of the mill books, which, with one exception were destroyed.

The exertions of the superintendent constable Mr Wright received their meed of praise from all who witnessed them.

We have since heard that the fire was nearly out, even in the engine house, when the fire engines were taken round to the east side of the mill. They appeared in a highly efficient state, but laboured under a deficient supply of water. Nothing would exceed the alacrity displayed by the bystanders in endeavouring to check the progress of the flames. Villagers and neighbours, men and women, girls and lads formed into rows and stood for hours in the wet and cold, passing buckets of water to the engine.

Two water wheels attached to the mill were comparatively uninjured.

The smouldering ruins were visited by great crowds of persons during the day. The interior of the building presented a lamentable spectacle--stone walls, roof, and machinery lay mingled together in utter and inextricable confusion. Considerable portions of the skeleton walls gave way during Sunday and subsequently.