

November the 5th came early to Ford

Just before 5pm on Friday 31 st October with the light fading, the residents in Merrifield Road Ford whose properties backed on to Old Sarum Airfield became aware of 2 fires that had been lit close to the bottom of their gardens. In March of this year, some 70 plus Thuja trees, which had been growing on the airfield's land very close to the fences and garden sheds, had been cut down. After several months, the trunks and main branches from these trees had been removed. However, the remainder of the smaller branches had been piled up into two heaps some 3 metres high and 14 metres across, very close to the residents' boundaries. It was these that had been set on fire.

The fires, which were no more than 17 meters (or less than a cricket pitch length) from the fences and sheds and were in a field that had in excess of 40 cattle roaming in it, were soon raging with flames reaching the height of the nearby houses. The news of the fires was carried on page 2 of the following week's Salisbury Journal and a photograph within the article showed the individuals who lit the fires driving off. The photograph above taken a few minutes earlier, and soon after the fires were first seen by the amazed residents, shows the individuals admiring their handiwork with some of the cattle in the background. While nobody witnessed the actual lighting of the fires, an employee of Old Sarum Airfield Ltd, who is in the photograph, admitted to very concerned neighbours that they had set fire to what they called brushwood. The employee further stated that there had been no need to advise the residents of the nearby properties in Merrifield Road of the Airfield's plans to set light to the brushwood.



A passer-by called the Fire Brigade who were quickly on the scene as was the farmer whose cattle were in the field. The Police also attended and, of course, concerned residents gathered to confirm that their properties were safe. The Fire Brigade soon realised that the wall one of one of the nearby wooden sheds was getting warm immediately hosed it down and also dampened down the general area. The firemen were also concerned initially about the electric fence as this was still live because the farmer hadn't been advised. One of the firemen expressed the view that the whole thing appeared a little malicious given how close it was to the boundaries. There was no doubt that the Fire Brigade thought it was irresponsible to light such large fire so close to the adjoining properties and then drive off. As a spokesman of the Fire Service said "Bonfires can get of control very easily so we always urge people to site them well away from buildings, fences, sheds etc. You should always stay with a bonfire to make sure it remains safe". The size and intensity of the fires ensured that 4-5ft flames could still to be seen at 11pm that night and embers were still glowing the following morning at 6am.

When interviewed by the Journal, an employee from Old Sarum Airfield Ltd said it was "ludicrous" to suggest the fires were dangerous. He said "There was nothing wrong at all with the two fires". This was clearly not the view of the residents, the farmer and the Fire Service!

A Concerned Resident of Ford (name withheld)