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EAST MEON

Historic cottages are gutted by thatch fire

BY JON WALKER
jon.walker@jpress.co.uk
01730 232605

TWO EAST Meon couples were indoors on Good Friday, unaware that a raging fire that would destroy their homes was igniting above their heads.

Sharron and Mike Aldridge live in Brook Cottages, and next to them in the semi-detached 300-year-old thatched terrace live James Murphy and wife Joanna.

Between the Aldridges and the Izaak Walton pub is Hockley Cottage, into which Andy and Sara Jameson moved about a year ago after over seeing extensive renovations.

Neighbour Helen Lymbery lives the other side of the pub, and was one of the first to realise something was wrong at about 6.45pm on Good Friday.

The palliative care nurse said: "I was talking to a friend when James and Joanna and Mike and Sharron arrived about the same time, said hello, and went into their homes."

Helen was then invited for a drink in the pub after giving her grateful friend some eggs from her chickens.

Inside customers were relaxing into the Easter weekend, or having a drink before

collecting the pub's Friday speciality – takeaway fish and chips. But when the bar door opened, Helen and others noticed a faint burning smell.

She said: "I went outside and saw a glowing patch of thatch with flames about two to three feet high, I rushed back inside and grabbed a mobile phone off the bar and called the fire brigade."

At the same time she ran along the terrace of cottages, banging on the doors to alert those living inside.

The Murphys and Aldridges took what they could and left. The Jamesons, away on an Easter break, returned immediately after hearing the shocking news by phone.

But even though 130 fire-fighters battled through the night to put out the fire in the cottages, one registered an historic treasure by Hampshire County Council, they were left gutted.

Fortunately no one was injured, a fire brigade spokesman said. Tragically, the Aldridges endured a similar fire in January 2009, although the houses either side were saved that time.

It is likely restoring the three Grade II listed cottages to their former beauty could cost more than £2m in total.

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One of the thatched cottages on fire in East Meon on Good Friday. Picture courtesy of ITV Meridian.

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