

## A MARCH THUNDERSTORM

### *Narrow escape at West Grinstead*

The thunderstorm which passed over Horsham and district soon after four o'clock on Monday (11<sup>th</sup> March, 1912) afternoon seems to have had West Grinstead at its centre, judging by the experiences of several persons at Griffin's Farm (in the occupation of Mr. John Boniface), Park Lane.

Walter Johnson, a young farm hand, was returning to his work, and was in the act of getting over a fence, when a remarkable flash of lightning occurred. Those employed in the adjacent farm buildings heard Johnson call out and, on going to him, discovered him hanging over the fence in an unconscious condition. He was promptly removed to a barn close by, and Dr. S. J. O. Dickins, of Cowfold, sent for. At about eight o'clock in the evening Father Measures, of Our Lady of Consolation Catholic Church in Park Lane, arranged for the removal of Johnson, who was a single man, to his home on an ambulance. He did not fully recover consciousness till Wednesday, and then made good progress towards recovery.

It appears that where Johnson was getting over the fence he was right in the way of a single telegraph wire connected up with the West Grinstead Post Office, and when his mates found him the snapped telegraph wire was tangled around him. The flash had fused the wire immediately above his head, burning it right through and snapping it. In fact, the wire must have been almost red hot for a distance of 22 yards, as the electricity had entirely denuded that portion of its temper and finish. Where the snap occurred, the burn was very distinctly evident. At the neighbouring pole, one of the insulators had the top cut off, while another insulator was smashed and scattered in all directions, pieces being found twenty yards distant.

Those near the spot at the time state that the lightning seemed to strike the wire like a ball of fire, and then parted in all directions. Mr. W. Coppard, of 72, Park-street, Horsham, who was mending his cycle within about twenty yards of the wire, spoke of the flash as a distinctly unnerving experience. Such a flash has never been known in the district, and it was deemed probable that, but for the wire, the neighbouring farm buildings and hayricks might have been destroyed. A cowman was engaged in milking at the time, and the flash caused the cow to jump, the man being knocked over and the milk spilt, while the horses in the stable were much scared.

Herbie Whitmore

Adapted from: The West Sussex County Times Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> March, 1912.