

MISS PORTER

security
Original held by
Miss Porter. Copy
made 12 Oct 82
TSJ 15/20/82

Report on fire at Chequers on 2 September 1982

We discussed this report from Miss Thomas about the fire in the Communication Frame Room at Chequers on 2 September. I was on leave myself at the time, but you told me that Miss Thomas had kept you informed by telephone of the occurrence.

We agreed that everyone seems to have acted very properly and efficiently and it seems unnecessary to comment further on the report. A copy has of course gone to the Secretary and Local Agent of the Trust, and no doubt may be mentioned at the next meeting of the Trustees. I will, therefore, want to take these papers with me to the meeting.

We considered whether the Prime Minister (now in the Far East) and Mr Butler should be shown this report. You told me that Miss Thomas had decided not to mention it to the Prime Minister, and I think that at this juncture there is no point in doing so. There was no conflagration as such at Chequers, and this ranks more as overheating of failed equipment than as a "fire" - though the consequences could have been much more serious.

The report can therefore be placed on the record, and reference to it may be necessary if questions of replacing or extending the equipment arise at some stage. The Secretary of the Trustees will doubtless be pursuing insurance claims.

JK

20 September 1982

Report on a Fire in the Communication Frame Room at Chequers

At 1030hrs on Thursday 2nd September 1982

Introduction

1. The dining room, which is over the Communications Frame Room, is normally cleaned on Thursdays' after the staff tea-break. On this day, two Stewardess's went into the room and reported a "strange smell" to F Sgt Townsend who examined the room and concluded that the smell was coming from the Council road work in progress near by. A large Tarring machine was in use.

2. Cleaning commenced, but the smell got worse, and the staff reported again to the F.S.. She then noticed a smoke presence in the room, and could see nothing to cause this, but suddenly thought of the frame room under the floor, and immediately summonsed the Treasury Security person on duty to unlock the Frame Room door to which she accompanied him. On opening the door, the room was full of smoke, but no sign of flames. It was not possible to see what was causing the smoke. ~~As per~~ ^{As per} Fire Instructions, they closed the door immediately and left the Basement to take "fire action".

Action Taken

3. Before they reached the ground floor, the fire bells started ringing. I was in my office, and immediately went to check the Chubb Fire Panel to see where the fire was indicated. I met the F.S on the way, and she called out "FIRE IN THE FRAME ROOM". I dialed 999 for the Fire Service, she evacuated all persons in the house and took a Roll Call. The Security man informed The Bothy by radio and proceeded to unlock all doors to and within the house for access of fire crews and evacuation of house contents if necessary.

4. The house staff ~~is~~ evacuated, started to prepare outside fire Hydrants, and unlock gates to the front Court Yard. I remained in the area of the dining room with the nearest water hose in readiness in case of flames coming through the floor. I could see and smell smoke coming up between the floor boards, and decided it was still safe to evacuate all the dining room contents, and called for help of the workmen outside and the gardeners. All furniture and paintings were safely removed with-

a few minutes to the Rose Garden Terrace, where the Police took charge of the safe custody until safe to bring back into the house. We did not attempt to move the large carpet, as this would have helped to deaden the flames if they came through the floor.

Emergency Services

5. One of The Bothy Police Team reported to me within a few minutes of the Fire Alarm being raised. His presence was comforting, and he stayed with me as near as possible to the basement access and dining room. He confirmed that all access roads to Chequers were controlled and that Thames Valley were providing more police 'cover'.

6. Two fire engines and crews arrived 11 minutes after raising the alarm. One other arrived in 12 minutes. Also at that time a fire officer, not in fire fighting clothing, made himself known to me as Asst Sub-Officer Richards. He was satisfied with the action taken.

7. The first fire crew went to the Basement Frame Room suitably dressed to fight a smoke fire. They found a smouldering metal component on the British Telecom frame, it was assumed to be an electrical wiring fire within the component. This had burned so badly as to nearly fall off the frame. The fire was extinguished by use of special extinguisher sited near by to deal with such a fire. The second fire crew stood by with the house fire hose (water), but it was not necessary to use water.

Action after Fire Extinguished

8. I visited the frame room and identified the equipment to be ^{com}Telecom, and sent for the Aylesbury ~~Telecom~~ engineer. The Fire crew remained in attendance in the frame room until the engineer came and removed the offending component out of the building. I asked that it should be kept for inspection by Mr Leslie Wright, the Officer at The Cabinet Office to whom I am responsible to report such matters.

9. The duration of the fire crews at Chequers was kept to a minimum. Two were discharged when the fire was extinguished, the third after the component was removed from the house.

10. I then reported the mal-function of the Chubb Fire (Smoke) detector to Mr Brinded the DOE(PSA) High Wycombe, who are responsible for the Installation and Servicing Contract of this equipment. He visited within 30 minutes and called in Chubb Fire Engineer, who confirmed that the Smoke Detecor nearest the fire did not activate at all. There is another smoke detector in the Frame room, but is rather shielded by other equipment in the room, and possibly was activated by the air intake on opening the door. Chubb report attached. A new smoke detector was installed ^{on} ~~same~~ day.

Damage caused by the Fire

11. The Telecom component taken away, has not yet been returned or re-newed, but I understand not urgent. Our Consulting Electrical Engineers, Oscar Faber & Partners have inspected the electric wiring to the equipment, ^{socket} which is Chequers Trust responsibility, and report that there is no fault in that. So any expence to Chequers Trust is ruled out in this respect.

12. The dining room contents are safely re-installed with no loss or damage.

13. Due to the unpleasant and persistant smell of smoke and Chemical fumes to the two pairs of lined and inter-lined curtains, and the two large carpets in the dining room, after airing failed, they have been dry cleaned at the cost of £132.48. Receipt attached. I await advice on whose Insurance this should be charges. ie: Chequers Trust, Chubb Fire or British Telecom,

14. No personal injuries, other than minor effect from smoke fumes to no lasting effect.

General Remarks

14. It is commendable that the two girls acted as they did on discovery of 'smells' in their work area. I have thanked them .

15. The house management staff and 'House Security' took good and correct action quickly. I have thanked them!

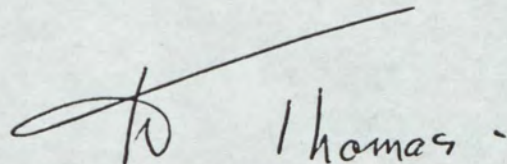
16. The Police support was quick and helpful, as well as being comforting! Not yet thanked.

17. Fire Service was quick to react and efficient in their duties. Not yet thanked.

18. DOE High Wycombe and Oxford Area British Telecom. engineer and the Senior Engineer were quick to help.

19. It is surprising that a Chubb smoke Detector in such an important area should not activate with so much smoke. I can confirm that the contract maintenance visits are always on time. However, in conversation with the Chubb Fire engineer, who carries out the maintenance, I was surprised to hear that all detectors are not checked on each visit.

20. I have noted in our Fire Drill that Mains Electricity is to be turned off if possible to reach the area in future. On this occasion it would have been wrong to re enter the Basement to unlock that door without smoke clothing protection. There is emergency lighting in the Basement.



V E Thomas, Curator, Chequers.
Report completed 13th September 82

Distribution

Secretary and Local agent, Chequers Trust.

✓ Miss Joan Porter, 10 Downing Street.

Mr Leslie Wright, Cabinet Office.

File at Chequers.

Please note:

The original report ^{copy attch.} has been sent to Mr Brinded, DOE(PSA),
High Wycombe also the bill for this visit of £79 52..

V E Thomas, Curator, Chequer

INCIDENT REPORT (over-leaf) reads:-

"Checked Smoke Detector in Frame Room after fire alarm having NOT responded to smoke caused by unit smouldering . Smoke was detected by staff, and action taken before any alarm signal."

Engineers Report

" Isolator system ~~meter check~~ detectors in Frame room and adjacent Switch Room .. Found detector in the Frame Room close to point of fire did not respond. Replaced Detector. Having checked it with meater. Gas check all Basement Detectors back to NIO Re-enstate system to normal.

3.9.82 1230hrs."

Materials used

1 DIMKIV Detector 39/94060

Signed Mr K R Childs
