

Fire in Llangeitho

'Fire! Fire!' A woman's voice was heard to shout frantically. Instantly, men, women and children were all up and out of their beds, staring out of the windows at the smoke that was seeping from every nook and cranny of the General Store.

Workmen struggled on with their boots, while their wives rushed to organize buckets. Hopefully, the family were out by now. It wouldn't take long for that fire to get going. There was a fierce wind tonight and once a fire had the wind to fan it along, the whole store would burn to a crisp.

However, as the villagers frantically organised fire fighting equipment, the Lloyd-Jones family, sound asleep in their beds, were blissfully ignorant that their family home and livelihood was just about to go up in smoke. The flames spread rapidly through the house, in the pretty little Welsh village of Llangeitho. Smoke curled its way up the stairs to the bedrooms where the Lloyd-Jones continued to sleep. Two boys, Martyn, aged ten, and Vincent, nearly eight, gently snored, curled up under their covers.

Martyn half woke. His throat was a bit sore and his eyes were stinging. 'Bit of a stink, Vincent,' he groaned to his brother, as the powerful smell of the smoke wafted into their small bedroom. Vincent nodded.

The two boys pulled the sheets over their heads and went back to sleep. Neither of them had twigged what the smell was and as they fell back to sleep, they fell back into danger. The pungent smell which had briefly woken Martyn, was that of the fumes of the now raging fire. The heat was so intense, that downstairs their father's gold sovereigns were melted together in the sheer heat of the flames. Their father Henry, a man with a wonderful walrus moustache, was asleep nearby. As he was the village shopkeeper, it was his general store that was now ablaze. And it was his general store, that the local families were now desperately trying to save.

'Surely they can't be sleeping through this lot?' someone yelled.

'Well, it wouldn't surprise me if that Henry Lloyd-Jones slept through a herd of elephants charging through Llangeitho! Wake up man! Your lives are in danger! Get out now while you can!' The local milliner banged his fists in desperation on the door, for Henry was a heavy sleeper. Smoke was coming out everywhere and people were beginning to cough as the fumes attacked their lungs.

'Wake up Mr. Lloyd-Jones! Wake up or you'll all die!'

It was one o'clock in the morning of 20th January, 1910 and it was bitterly cold. Other villagers, affected by the fire, had escaped long since, but Mr. Lloyd-Jones and his two sons were still inside.

Three men, wearing just their long night-shirts, were shivering out in the road, having already escaped.

Mrs. Magdalen Lloyd-Jones, a local farmer's daughter, and Harold, the eldest boy, were ushered away by friends and neighbours to safety, having eventually made it out of the burning store alive. Slowly, Henry emerged. His face was as white as a sheet, as he stared at what was his whole life going up in flames.

'Fire! The shop!' His voice was hoarse and he could hardly get the words out. Then he realized, 'The boys, my sons. They are still inside.'

He had to rescue the boys. Braving the smoke and flames, he rushed back into the burning store and found his way through the flames and the smoke to Martyn and Vincent's bedroom. Coughing and spluttering, he pulled the blankets off the two sleepy boys. They were already beginning to suffer the effects of smoke inhalation.

With one heave he pulled both of the boys out of their beds. Holding Vincent in one arm and Martyn in the other he made his way to the window. Quickly, he placed Vincent down by the window and after a brief struggle with the latch he let the fresh air into the bedroom.

Both Vincent and Martyn gulped in the clean, fresh air. Quickly, Henry hurled Martyn out of the window, into safety and into the arms of a man waiting below in the street, Vincent soon followed.

A friend rushed to the scene with a ladder. Henry and little Vincent clambered down, just in time. The fresh air, let in by the open window, was refanning the flames and giving new life to the already blazing

inferno. The three of them were rescued, alive, though the shop was an absolute ruin. Neighbours rushed to help the brave father get his children away from the awful sight of their home being burnt to the ground. Comforting arms patted the ex-Llangeitho store owner on the back and sympathetic eyes looked into his, expressing sympathy at his loss, but also relief that this time it hadn't been their homes.

The following morning, as the ashes cooled and the cold light of day showed the family just what a narrow escape they'd had, they searched for items they might be able to rescue or salvage.

The melted sovereigns – which were virtually useless and a cracked and discoloured mug were all that was left of the Llangeitho general store. Apart from the clothes they stood up in, the Lloyd-Jones family had absolutely nothing to call their own. The fire, for this closely-knit family, was a financial disaster. But on the other hand, they had experienced a mighty deliverance. God had been watching over them that night. They had all escaped with their lives.

Martyn, the little boy rescued that stormy January night, would speak of his experiences many years later.

'Somehow things at Llangeitho were never the same after the fire. Although we built a new home, and started living in it within the year, things were different. Certainly, as a building, the new house was a great improvement on our former home, but there was something missing, and more than anything the feeling

of home was lacking. I felt as if I were in a strange house and that living there was a temporary matter.'

It was a big trauma for a young child, and one that stayed with him for the rest of his life.

If the milliner's fists had not been loud enough, or if Henry had not been brave enough to rescue his sons, Martyn and his younger brother would not have lived. Nor would you be reading this book! Because I am Martyn's grandson, his daughter's son, and the author of the biography you are looking at today. God had preserved Martyn's life and done so for a great purpose. For the ten-year-old, saved that cold January night, was to go on to have a career that influenced millions of people all over the world. Indeed, Martyn Lloyd-Jones continues to influence people many years after his death, aged eighty-one, seventy-one years after the fire of Llangeitho.