

BARKWAY LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

The Reading Room, 12 High Street, Barkway, Hertfordshire, SG8 8EE
www.barkwayhistory.com

Barkway Ravaged by Fire

In the year 1748 on August 18th, part of Barkway was ravaged by a fire. A total of nineteen households submitted claims for lost household contents to local relevant charities.

Existing records show that those making claims were probably tenants, and so not seeking compensation for loss of a dwelling.

All of the applicants list in great detail their total losses. There are many entries which one would expect – tables, chairs, linen, kitchen equipment, beds and bedding, but also most households list beer, some list hay, and wheat sacks. Also mentioned are warming pans, pot hooks, spinning wheel, and gowns and petticoats to list but a few.

A total loss claim of £534 3s and 4d is provided. A factor of one hundred in monetary equivalence gives a modern-day value of over £50,000.

One interesting claimant, particularly in view of the diary item last month describing the White Horse, lists John Guiver's claim on behalf of the White Horse ale house. For various reasons this cannot be referring to number 82 but must mean a later transfer of name. This is not historically unusual. He covers in great detail not only a description of items lost, but also where the losses occurred, viz. outside brew house, cellar, two garrets, besides his ground floor rooms.

There was a fire in the 1500s, but this one in 1748 was a major disaster in the life of the village and would have required an urgent rebuilding programme. The fire presumably spread from one wooden and possibly thatched house to a neighbour and so on. There have been other fires over the years, but nothing of this scale.