Cottage blaze was arson, says owner

The Welsh-speaking owner of an isolated cottage near Aberystwyth destroyed by fire early yesterday is convinced it was an arson attack, although the police are keeping an open mind on the cause.

Mr Mel Evans, a 26-year-old single man, bought the single-storey, timber-framed cottage near Penhryncoch recently to live there in the future.

He lives with his parents in the village, helping to run the family coach and taxi firm with his father, and had just started doing up the asbestos-clad, two-bedroom cottage which is about one-and-a-half miles outside the village on the Salern road.

"I had just moved in some furniture that had been left to me because I was looking for somewhere to store it, and I had also used up a few pots of paint to keep the timber in trim," he said. "I was planning on putting in the plumbing because it has no running water."

Mr Evans denied he intended to use the cottage as a holiday home this summer. "I was getting it ready to rent out to students from next year and I would have lived there myself later," he said.

Asked what he thought about the cause of the fire, he said, "I can't think of anything else but arson. There were no matches in there and as far as I can say there was nothing that could have caused the fire. I am very upset and sick about the whole thing."

Mr Evans pointed out that Welsh was his first language and that everyone in the village knew he had bought the cottage.

A neighbouring farmer raised the alarm just after 3am. Two fire tenders arrived from Aberystwyth and one was used to ferry water from the village, but the building was already badly damaged when they arrived.

Detectives from Aberystwyth investigating the cause were unable to say whether arson was involved. They are keeping an open mind against this fire was an accident."

Mr Evans said the fire was "very disappointing" as he was planning to move in on the holiday season. "I had been looking forward to this for a while," he said.

Mr Evans said he was "very upset" about the fire and was planning to stay away from the cottage for a while. "I don't know what I'm going to do," he said. "I'm very upset and I don't know what I'm going to do."

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