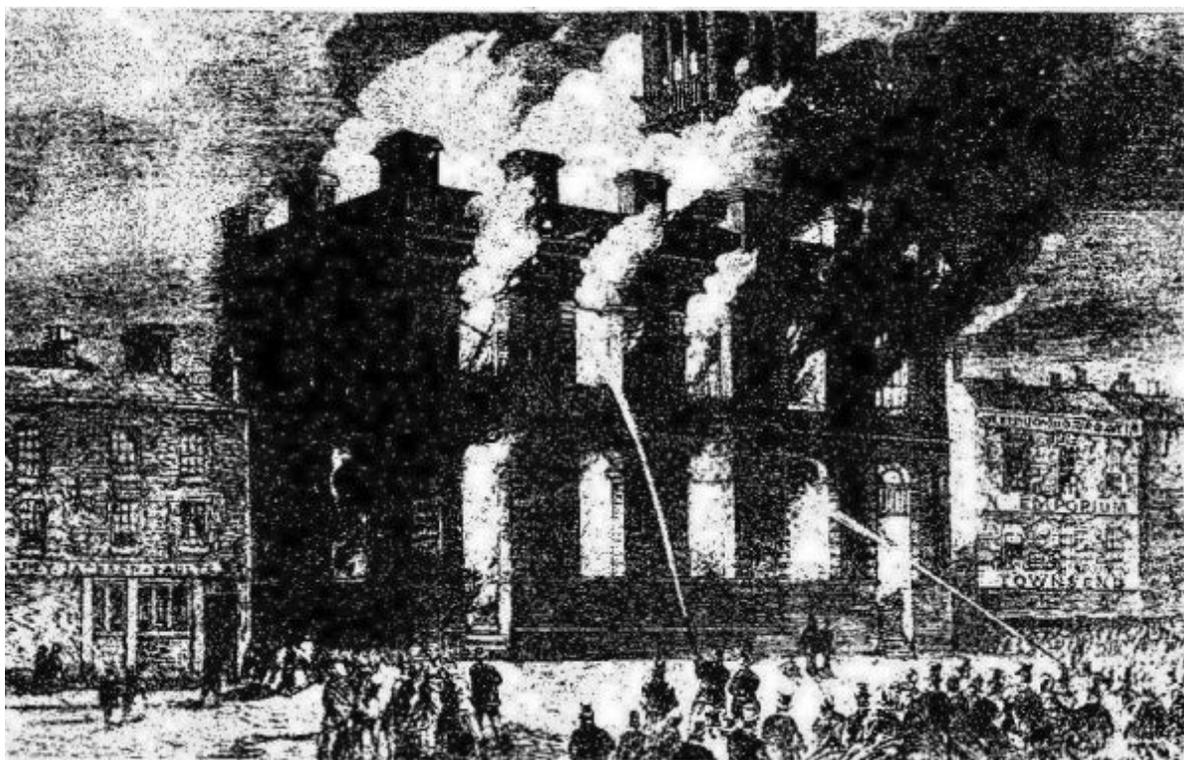


The Destruction of the Surrey Theatre by Fire

Saturday, 2.30 a.m.

The SURREY THEATRE, Sheffield with its splendid Museum collection of paintings, curiosities and work of art; its concert rooms, promenades, Thespian hall, has been totally destroyed by fire.

The fire was discovered this morning about two o'clock. The engine had just returned from a small fire in Burgess-street, when their services were called for in Westbar. Short had been the interval between the discovery and the warning given to the Fire Brigades, sufficient space of time had elapsed to allow the serious character of the fire to develop itself.



Wending our way down to the scene, we found the sky illuminated, and the reflection of the flames flung over the adjacent houses.

At such an hour in the morning, when the streets were almost free of pedestrians, the quietude prevailing was most marked during the progress of so great a calamity. The catastrophe at that period could hardly be estimated. The building, as our readers are aware, fronts Westbar, and is flanked on the one side by Hicks-lane, surrounded in the rear by Spring-street, and the other side of the vast pile of buildings form a great portion of Workhouse-lane.

Hicks-lane, Spring-street, and Workhouse-lane are but narrow thoroughfares, the two first named being densely packed with dwelling-houses, whose division from the burning pile was but a few feet in width. The silence of the hour, broken only by the crackling embers, was disturbed by the police force rousing from the tranquillity of sleep the inmates of all the surrounding dwellings. Engines came at a hard gallop to the scene, plugs were opened, and hose affixed in a few minutes. In the meantime the scene on every hand grows more animated and exciting.

The half-dressed inmates rush from their homes; weeping wives and distressed husbands are in search of each other or of their children, and when it is found they are safe, attention is turned to save, if possible, some of the, it may be, scanty stock of household furniture.

The streets are now thoroughly alive; and the police find it difficult to guard the thoroughfares from officious non-official people. The fire, which appeared to have commenced with the stage, had now made progress half-way up the building, that is to say towards Westbar; and such was its glare of its light that it illuminated all the surrounding streets with a brilliancy most fearful to contemplate. The wind, a gentle breeze, was blowing from the west; therefore the danger to the houses in Workhouse-lane was not so great as to those in Hicks-lane. Two engines took post in the latter, and passing their hose in the narrow passages, sought to check the fire spreading from the theatre to the buildings in Spring-street; the other endeavoured to prevent its ravages spreading towards its front; a third engine with two jets was playing upon the shops in Westbar, cooling them and extinguishing the embers, which now at intervals shot up into the air, like rockets, and then spreading out like, but far more dangerous than, a piece of artificial fireworks falling upon the surrounding houses. A fourth engine was posted at the top of Workhouse-lane, and sent a fierce volume of water on that side of the building.

2.45 a.m.

The fire now has an irresistible hold upon the building. From end to end, and from side to side, the flames are roaring from every window, and forcing their way through apertures of their own construction. The building is one dense body of fire. Columns of smoke, dense as from a newly-charged furnace, are rolling upward and through these the raging fire bursts again and again with terrific and appalling effect. The flames are playing along the iron rafters and wrapping the great tower in its ravaging embrace, whilst in front from the splendid windows which adorned the building, broad, searching sheets of fire are rushing upward. In Workhouse-lane, the aspect is but little less appalling. Here are or were a number of old buildings belonging to and forming part of the theatre. Through these the fire has forced its way, and by reason of their age the walls of the buildings show signs of being unable to withstand the ordeal of the fire. Again and again a few bricks are displaced and as the fire continues to operate with unabated fury upon them, great pieces fall out. But at the time of the writer leaving the scene of disaster the rickety old frameworks are still standing.

The police are in attendance in full force; the engines are in full play, and hopes are entertained that the calamity may be confined to the theatre.

The building, of which Mr Youdan was the sole proprietor, was built in 1851, at which time it was used for the purposes of singing and dancing. A museum and a picture gallery were afterwards added, and subsequently in 1855, the establishment was enlarged to the proportions of a first-class theatre. It has frequently, since that period, been further enlarged, and last summer was re-opened with great *éclat* the entire construction of the interior eliciting encomiums of the thousands who entered its walls. It was in the Surrey Theatre that Mr. Roebuck met his constituents' after his visit to Austria, when he was taunted with being "feted in gilded saloons," and to which the hon. Member retaliated, while admiring the beauty of the edifice, with the remark, "Am I not in a gilded saloon now." It may be mentioned also, in passing that the splendid museum contained amongst its thousands of treasures, a marble bust of the hon. Member, which the town failed to purchase by subscription; and was in this theatre, too, that the Social Science Association expected to hold their principal meeting this year, the proprietor having generously offered the use of his property for the occasion.

It is stated that the building, with its contents, including the elaborate fittings and scenery, the museum, picture galleries, &c, has cost the proprietor from £20,000 to £80,000. The theatre we understand was insured in the Liverpool and London Fire Office for £12,000.

We shall continue to issue additional particulars during the day.