

Great Conflagration in Sheffield

Six Large Shops Guttled

Damage Quarter of a Million

Narrow Escapes

The largest fire that has occurred in Sheffield for many years took place early this morning, completely destroying the large establishment of Messrs. G. H. Hovey and Sons, drapers and house furnishers, Angel street, and Castle street, and also the premises of Messrs Dunn and Co., hatters; Mr. Abraham Altham, tea merchant, and Messrs. Hodgson and Richards, provision merchants, all in Castle street, and Mr. Horner, picture dealer, Angel street, and doing immense: damage to the shops and other premises of Mr. Chappell, boot and shoe dealer, Castle street ; Messrs. B. Wake and Co., solicitors, Castle street, and Messrs. Tasker, Sons, and Co., Angel street.

The fire was first discovered at five minutes to four. Police-constable (197) Hoole was going down Angel street, when he fancied he smelt fire. Looking into Messrs. Hovey's establishment, he could see that the inner portion of the premises were in flames. He lost no time in raising an alarm, and in having the Fire Brigade telephoned for. The first and most important task was to awaken and save the 50 or 60 assistants who were sleeping in the place. Numbers of policemen were quickly on the spot, and whistles were blown, doors were knocked at, and the officers made good use of their lungs for this purpose. In a few minutes they had great satisfaction of finding that their efforts had been successful. The young ladies and male assistants came-down the building and made their way out by the side door into Angel street. A look round showed that one young man was missing. This young fellow's name was Cole, and evidently he had not been as easily wakened as the rest. The police lost no time in getting the fire escape on the scene, and knowing that the bedrooms were on the highest storey, they ran the apparatus up to the top of the building. In a few minutes Cole appeared at one of the windows, and amid the greatest excitement amongst the assistants and those assembled on the scene, he eventually got down into the escape and slid down into the street below. It was indeed fortunate that of the many assistants none were injured. I was, however, a rude awakening for them, and all had made good their escape in their night-clothes, throwing over themselves the first cloak or rug they could get bold of. All their belongings have been destroyed.

By this time the fire had got good hold of premises. Where the blaze commenced is not known, but it is evident that it was either on the ground floor or in the basement. In the latter part of the building were linoleums, blankets, bedsteads, and other reserve stock, and it was here that Messrs. Hovey had arranged their fancy Christmas fair. On the ground floor were what are really known as the shops; the carpet and furnishing departments were in Angel street; drapery at the front of the building, opposite Snig hill; and mantles and millinery in Castle street. Above, on the first floor was a large stock of cabinet furniture, some of it exceedingly valuable. The assistants' dining and sitting rooms were on the second floor, and also the living and sleeping apartments of the caretaker and housekeeper. It was on the storey that the assistants slept.

For miles the flames could be seen at this time. The inflammable nature of much of the stock had proved excellent fuel for the fire and it spread with alarming rapidity. At five

o'clock the top portion of the building fronting to Angel street fell with a great crash. Large numbers of people were about at this time, and it was wonderful that none were injured. Police-constable (215) Hoggard had a narrow escape. He was playing on the burning mass when it fell, and many large pieces of masonry dropped close at his feet. The falling of this portion of the building gave an idea to the onlookers of the extent that the fire had then reached, and it was at once apparent that the whole premises had been gutted. From this moment crash followed crash in rapid succession; heavy girders fell with a loud dull thud; while glass and light walls were heard falling on every side of the building. For a long time the central portion of the front of the building was kept standing by a long massive iron girder, but eventually this had to give way. The heat bent the girder and with a tremendous noise the whole of the front of the premises came down. Other portions fell after and by eight o'clock the place was one mass of ruins.

IN ANGEL STREET

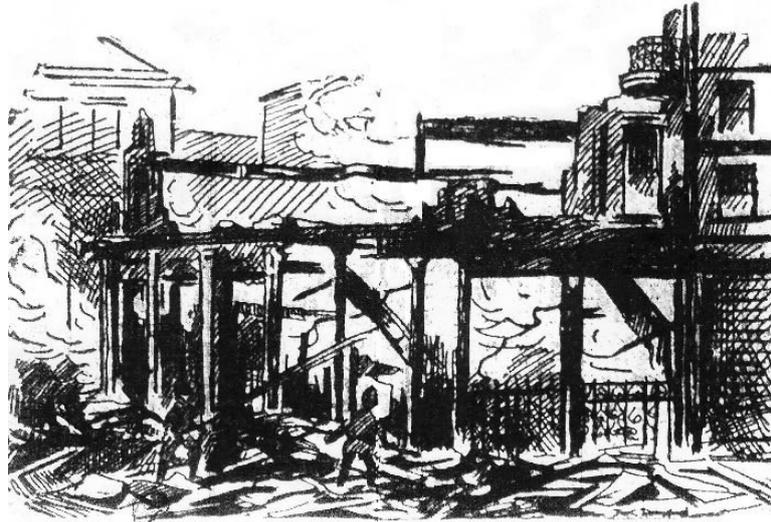
In the meantime other premises had caught fire. The wind at the moment of the outbreak was blowing direct up Snig Hill and the flames were driven straight on to the surrounding properties. By half past four the properties of Messrs. Tasker and Sons, and Co., in Angel street, of Mr. Altham, Messrs. Dunn and Co., and of Messrs. Hodgson and Richards in Castle street were all on fire. It was at this time that the inadequacy of the fire brigade apparatus was most apparent. Two steamers were at work, and the brigade were getting out of them as much as was possible but the immensity of the fire was altogether past their strength. This should be a lesson to the Corporation and should urge them into purchasing more complete and extended apparatus. But to return to the fire, and dealing with Angel street; Mr. Willem Tasker was called at half-past four, and he was on the scene within half an hour. The premises of his firm were then in flames at the rear, and Mr. Tasker set to work to save the stock. The police and civilians worked with a will, and in a brief space of time the most valuable stock had been removed to the Angel yard, where it was guarded by the police. The two shops occupied by Messrs. Fleming, Reid and Co.'s the Scotch Wool and Hosiery Stores, and by Mr. Jeremiah Robertshaw, stationer and bookseller, which stand between Messrs. Tasker's place and Messrs. Hovey's premises, were singularly not ignited, and have been very little injured. The blaze at Messrs. Tasker and Co.'s place, however, increased and eventually all the centre portion of the building was completely gutted. The firemen by strong efforts, however, managed to prevent the flames from spreading to the front shop or to the warehouses at the rear.

The heat, about five o'clock, set fire to the establishment of Mr. E. F. Horner, picture and picture frame dealer. The upper storey first became ignited, and here was stored a large quantity of frames and framing, and other light goods. They were soon in flames and in less than an hour the place was practically completely gutted. The damage to pictures and to valuable moulding is extensive. It was at five o'clock that the fire was at its height, and about this time there were fears, that the Wharncliffe Hotel, which, stands close at the rear Messrs. Tasker's premises, would become ignited. Indeed, a slight fire had taken place on the premises, a spark from the burning mass close at hand alighted on, and set fire to some paper and other loose rubbish standing in the recess of one of the basement windows. Police-constable (37) Moore and Mr. Isaac Borebank were in the passage at the time, and they noticing the light at once dashed it out with buckets of water. Sparks were flying in all directions; and there was much danger of one of the surrounding premises catching fire.

The Chief Constable wisely kept a large force of police on the spot, and the officers kept a strict watch on the property close at hand. It was seven o'clock before the flames in Angel street were, mastered.

THE SCENE IN CASTLE STREET

The premises which suffered the most were those in Castle street, and with the exception of the buildings near the Town Hall all have sustained damage. The first shop next to Hovey's was Messrs. Altham's, tea dealers, and this was in flames early. The property, being old, was as dry as tinder, and was soon in full blaze, fostering the fire that had already communicated to the next shop, that of Messrs. Dunn and Co., the hatters. Altham's shop fell early, and Dunn's premises not very long after followed suit, the large letters indicating the name of the, firm having strewn about the roadway. Messrs. Hodgson Richards, provision dealers, had the adjoining shop and the damage sustained by them is most serious. The nature of their stock was such as all to readily assist the fire in its progress, and soon there was an enormous addition to the general blaze. The premises consisted of a large shop, with an office at the back, whilst the rooms on the two upper storeys were used for baking and for storing hams and bacon. In the yard was a sausage factory, where a new engine and boiler had only been put down a fortnight ago. Everything is gone, and the damage done to stock and fixtures is estimated at about £1,000. This is covered by insurance, and it is supposed that the building itself was also insured. About eight o'clock the front of the premises fell and several policemen and firemen had narrow escapes. Some members of the Fire Brigade were up the passage at the side trying to subdue an enormous blaze that had sprung up at the back, but owing to the shortness of the hose the men came back. Scarcely had they commenced to play upon the fire in front than there was a sudden crack and the tall building commenced to fall. The men working underneath had only just time to make a dash for either side of the street, and all got off safe. Police-constable Heptenstall had a narrow escape, for the wet wooden paving on the road caused him to fall to the ground when he had only proceeded a yard, but although bricks and stones were falling around him he got up and escaped without harm. Mr. George Chappell, boot dealer, occupied the next shop, but it has not suffered much, the back premises being most affected. The police had an opportunity here of saving some of the stock, and aided by willing civilians a quantity of goods was brought out and conveyed to the police station in Castle Green. The work was dangerous, but happily there was no accidents. Messrs. Mart and Chapman, grocers, hardly suffered at all the back of Messrs. Chappell's shop is known as Castle court, and is occupied by Messrs. B. Wake and Company, one of the oldest firms of solicitors in the town. Their offices were very extensive, stretching almost to the, back of the Wharnccliffe Hotel, and all were gutted. Fears were entertained at one time that the Imperial Hotel would help to augment the fire, but happily the wind did not blow in that direction. The tremendous heat was a great danger, however, and for a long time buckets of water had to be applied to that part of the building opposite the street. What with fire and water much damage was done. When Messrs. Hovey's building fell the large stones crashed on to the Imperial, and the thick coping-stones on the top of the bar window were smashed through. Mr. W. H. Naylor, confectioner, had his shop front broken in by the stones, and considerable damage was done to his stock by the smoke. At a later period Messrs. Chappell's front premises became ignited, but fortunately the Brigade were able to prevent any great extension of the fire in this direction.



MESSRS. HOVEY'S PREMISES AT ELEVEN O'CLOCK. VIEWED FROM ANGEL STREET.

GREAT DAMAGE TO ADJOINING PROPERTY

One of the most important features of the fire was the great amount of damage done to adjoining property. As most Sheffield people will know, Messrs. Hovey's premises stand at the corner of a dense block of buildings, bounded by King street, Haymarket, Castle street, and Angel street, the whole forming a square, every inch within which is built upon. Hovey's premises extend well back into this square, their rear premises nearly joining the Wharncliffe Hotel, and being in touch with a range of workshops and storerooms occupied by Tasker Sons, and Company, engineers and engineers' factors, Angel street. When the fire broke out there was a good breeze, which had increased to half a gale by the time the flames had taken strong hold of the building. This was a source of great danger to adjoining property, and as subsequent events proved was the cause of the fire extending to other buildings and eating its way into them. Considerable consternation was caused by this, and much fear was expressed that the whole of the square would be destroyed. The inhabitants of Castle street, Angel street, and King street, and the people at the Wharncliffe Hotel, were aroused from slumber, and every precaution was taken in order that they might vacate the premises should there be a necessity for such a proceeding. In addition to the property within the square, considerable damage was also done to premises on the other side of the thoroughfare from Hovey's corner both in Castle street and Angel street. The heat from the burning mass was intense, and was the cause, aided by falling sparks, of setting fire to several shops. Among the number were Horner's picture shop, Mr. Shaper's restaurant, and the Imperial Hotel, each of these suffering considerably.

MR. HORNER'S PICTURE SHOP

Reaching across the roadway, the flames licked the side of the shops extending from Bank street corner to the Angel Hotel, and in the case of premises occupied by Mr. E. F. Horner caused great damage. The roof of Mr. Horner's establishment ignited first, the flames then extending downwards into the upper storey. This room was used for mounting pictures and general decorative work, and contained many valuable engravings and water colours. From there the fire continued descend until it reached the ground floor, destroying everything in its progress. The window was shattered, the contents destroyed, the outside ornaments and signs burnt away, and the structure gutted, fire and water together making a complete wreck of the whole place. Fortunately the fire did not extend in the direction of the rear, the stables and the outbuildings were saved and the horse removed unharmed. But things were quite bad enough as they were; the damage to stock alone amounting to nearly £400. In the window was a valuable picture worth a hundred guineas. This was destroyed. Mr. Horner says he is insured, and thinks his loses will be met. In addition to the damage to stock there is the ruin of the shop, this latter being no inconsiderable item, the place being totally unfitted for anything, and in need of entire reconstruction.



HORNER'S SHOP, ANGEL STREET OPPOSITE MESSRS. HOVEY'S. ALL THE FLOORS BURNT OUT. NOTHING REMAINING BUT WALLS.

OTHER SHOPS

The hosiery shop at the corner of Angel street, occupied by Mr. Benjamin Dixon, and the one next to it, also in Angel street, used as an umbrella shop, were injured very little. The shutters were scorched and the paint licked off, but no material damage was done. The jeweller's shop of Mr. Isaac Guttmann has escaped untouched. The shop next door is occupied by Mr. Greenwood, hatter. This suffered rather severely. The plate-glass window, valued at from £15 to £18, was destroyed, and the contents of the window were

damaged past recovery. Fortunately the window was half empty, Mr. Greenwood only having commenced to dress and decorate it for Christmas the previous evening. But for this the damage would have been considerable. As it is £40 or £50 will cover it. Mr. Greenwood had the window insured. The large sign outside the shop was destroyed, and the external fittings of the window were burnt away. Ascending Angel street, the next shop is in the occupation of Cash and Company, boot and shoe dealers, Mr. Lake being the Sheffield manager. The window was smashed, the outside and inside window fittings scorched by the intense heat from over the way, and a portion of the stock within the window ruined. A considerable amount of water invaded the premises from Mr. Horner's shop next door, causing great inconvenience and a certain amount of injury. In this case the damage will amount to about £50. The window was insured. Passing Horner's — already mentioned—ounces the tailor's shop of Messrs. Ormrod and Faulkner, and then the Angel Hotel. Messrs. Ormrod and Faulkner's place was scorched, but the damage was trifling when compared with the losses of others. The Angel Hotel escaped uninjured, the heat at that distance being powerless to work further mischief.

TASKER'S PREMISES

Of the premises on the same side of the thoroughfare as Hovey's, but higher up Angel street, those occupied by Tasker, Sons, and Company suffered most. The shop next to Hovey's is occupied by Fleming, Reid, and Co., generally known as the Greenock Wool Company. This, marvellous to state, escaped intact, the reason probably being that only the rooms fronting to Angel street, are occupied by that firm. Hovey's premises are



UP TASKER'S PASSAGE. FIREMEN PLAYING ON THE RUINS.

directly at the rear. But that these should be reduced to a mere shell, and the shop in front escape without injury, is a remarkable fact. The same may be said of the front premises, next door, used as a sales shop by Mr. Jeremiah Robertshaw, which were uninjured. Next to Mr. Robertshaw's shop is a passage leading to the back entrance of Hovey's establishment, and after the passage come the premises of Tasker, Sons, and Company. That portion of these fronting to Angel street escaped the violence of the fire, but the rear part was simply gutted. This portion is divided from Hovey's place merely by the narrow passage alluded to, and across this the flames reached and very speedily ignited the building, which contained three storeys, two rooms on each storey. Some of the rooms were used for storage purposes, and contained large quantities of valuable goods, such as macintoshes, driving aprons, and the like. Another apartment was used as a dining-room for the members of the firm, while others were stockrooms and workshops. All were destroyed, and much of the stock with them, although a great

deal was got safely away out of harm's reach. The damage here will amount to something like £2,500, and will be covered by insurance. Several telephone wires cross the roof of these buildings, and these were burnt down, the poles falling across the roofs. Telephonic communication was thus considerably interfered with. Had the fire occurred a little over a year ago the consequences in this respect would have been even more disastrous, as up to then the telephone switch room formed part of the building

demolished. A few electric light cables were broken, although the supply of the current was unimpaired. In a few weeks all these cables will pass under ground, and be out of the reach of fires of in this kind.

MESSRS. HODGSON AND RICHARDS

One of the firms sustaining very serious loss is Messrs. Hodgson and Richards, provision dealers, whose shop was between that of Messrs. Dunn and Mr. Chappell. They took to the promises some three years ago and have an extensive business. In view of the approach of the festive season the firm had a larger stock than ordinary, and the place was full from top to bottom with highly inflammable material. The ground floor was occupied by the shop and an office, and in the yard was a sausage factory, in which new machinery was only placed about a fortnight ago. There were two rooms upstairs, and one was used as a bakery and the other for the storing of bacon and hams. The building is old, and as soon as the fire caught it spread with great rapidity. Water was poured on without effect, and in a short space of time the front of the premises fell into the street, of hams, bacon, pork pies, mince pies, and polonies being strewn about. When the Brigade had succeeded in somewhat checking the flames, Inspector Bridgeman and Mr. Richards (who had been telephoned for) entered the shop and recovered the books and cash from the safe. The whole of the premises and stock were practically destroyed, and the damage is estimated at about £1,000 for the stock and fixtures alone. This is fully covered by insurance.

MESSRS. S. WAKE AND COMPANY

Although from Castle street Messrs. B. Wake and Company, solicitors, Castle Court, do not seem to have sustained much damage, this is not the case, their premises being the most extensive in the street after Messrs. Hovey's. They occupy rooms over Mr. Chappell's shop, and the remainder of their offices are at the back and extend past the premises of Messrs. Altham, and Dunn, and almost touch those of Messrs. Hovey. The fire was communicated from the building occupied by Messrs. Hodgson and Richards, and quickly made its way from room to room. On the ground floor is the Board Room, two sides of which have been destroyed other damage done. Adjoining was a large lobby with a staircase leading to the upstairs room. Nothing now remains of this or the rooms overhead, and there is an almost uninterrupted view of the sky. On the floor are bundles of documents, paper boxes, and two large safes which had fallen from their places. On the next floor were Mr. A. E. Maxfield's office and various clerks' rooms. There was also Messrs. Wake's law library, a valuable collection of law reports and text books, in fact, it was one of the most complete of its kind. The books were in expensive cases, and everything has been destroyed. Adjoining the library was the cashier's room, which also contained a number of volumes from the library. Here again everything was burned, Mr. H. O. Maxfield's room is intact, and although much damaged by water and the heat has not suffered much hurt when compared to other portions of the premises. The general clerks' office did not suffer a great deal. The firm have four strong rooms built of solid masonry with iron doors, and notwithstanding the intense heat they preserved their valuable contents from harm. Mr. A. E. Maxfield's room was very much the worse for the fire. In the room was a beautiful stained glass skylight, representing Law, Equity, and Justice, the work of the late Mr. E. Page Turner, who was a well known Sheffield artist. This and other fine stained glass work was done at the instruction of the late Mr. Bernard Wake. All this has been demolished. On the top floor were a number of rooms which were much damaged by the fire, the heat, and the water. The firm is one of the oldest and most important in the town, and naturally were in possession of documents

of the greatest importance and value. Fortunately all these were placed in the strong room, or in the many safes. The latter are Milner's best, and preserved their contents, and the strong rooms were not affected by the fire. Of course there were a number of papers lying about in the various rooms or placed in cupboards or boxes, and the whole of these have been destroyed, but the letter book and a quantity of correspondence were saved. Fortunately the documents destroyed were not of special importance, and it is hoped that they will soon be replaced either by memory or by reference. There will, thankfully, be no inconvenience or loss to clients. Men were back at work all the morning, seeing what could be saved from the wet, but their efforts were not fruitful. Messrs. Wake at once took offices in the Town Hall Chambers, which are on the opposite side of the road, and business will be carried on there. The property belongs to the trustees of the late Mr. Bernard Wake, and with the whole of the contents was insured in the Alliance. It is impossible to give an estimate at present as to what amount of damage has been done but it will total up to several thousands.

MR. GEORGE CHAPPELL

The premises occupied by Mr. George Chappell boot and shoe dealer, were right in the line of the fire and the contents that were not consumed by the fire have been destroyed by the water. This was thrown on to the place to prevent the fire from extending at the front from the shop of Messrs. Hodgson; and Richards. The fire has not done much harm in the shop, but the effect at the back, which adjoins Messrs. Wake's offices were terrible. In view of the Christmas and winter trade Mr. Chappell had an extra large stock of goods in the place, and the bulk were stored in a large room at the back. This was completely cleared out, and the office, also at the back, met with a similar fate. When the flames had been brought under control Inspector Bridgeman and Inspector Heptenstall proceeded with Mr. Chappell to the office to see if any books could be procured. The task was a risky one, and just when the safe was reached Heptenstall disappeared up to his middle through the floor, which were in that spot only a mass of charcoal. Bridgeman caught hold of him and pulled him out, and he was little the worse for the incident. The safe was found to be at a great heat, but by means of wet cloths, it was opened, and the books and cash secured. Mr. Chappell's loss is a serious one. All the goods in the front shop, with the exception of those in one window and a few saved by the police, are ruined. The damage is estimated at £2,600. Mr. Chappell is insured in the County office.

THE IMPERIAL HOTEL

Had it not been that the wind was not blowing in that direction the Imperial Hotel would also have been lost, and even as it was the people thought that at one time it would be impossible to save it. The landlord, Mr. Thornley, was awakened about 4.30 by the night boots, and all the people staying in the house were informed of the matter. The heat from the burning building was at that time something terrific, and as the flames darted across the narrow street all the windows commenced to crack, it was thought best to remove all the furniture from the rooms facing the street. The hangings at the windows were also taken down and buckets of water were placed ready to hand. All the people staying in the house packed up their luggage to be ready for a hasty departure, and then the whole of the inmates awaited events. The woodwork in front of the hotel did catch fire, but the buckets of water soon extinguished it, and all danger was at an end.

STATEMENT BY MR. HOVEY, JNR

G. H. Hovey, jun., who was early on the scene was interviewed by one of the representatives of the "Evening Telegraph." He stated that he left the shop about twenty minutes past eight the previous evening when all was safe and in a normal condition. He has not the slightest idea how the fire originated, when he left the heating apparatus - the first thing suggested - was cooling rapidly. Describing the building, he explained that in the basement were linoleum, blankets, bedsteads, and other reserve stock. It was in this part of the building also that the Christmas fancy fair was arranged. Here, of course, a large quantity of toys and other light goods. On the Angel street side of the building, on the ground floor, were the carpet and furnishing departments, the drapery department, coming next, this latter occupying that part of the premises fronting to the top of Snig hill. On the Castle street side were the mantles and millinery. On the ground floor there as was a large assortment of cabinet furniture. The floor was utilised as dining-rooms and sitting-rooms for the assistants, and on this floor slept the housekeeper and caretaker. The topmost, rooms contained sleeping accommodation for the 50 or 60 assistants in the employment of the firm. M. Hovey was unable to give the exact amount of the damage although he could approximate it with some degree of accuracy. The value of the buildings he put at between £40,000 and £50,000. As to the stock, his statement that it was unusually heavy by reason of Christmas novelties will readily be believed when it is said that he makes it total to a figure between £35,000 and £45,000, thus bringing Messrs. Hovey's loss up to nearly £100,000. The firm are covered by insurance, but the loss in other directions consequent to the stoppage of business, will be very great.

AN ASSISTANT'S NARRATIVE

Mr. Harry Miles, one of the assistants of the firm, as an eye-witness of the terrible scene, and was able to give a graphic account of what he saw. Sleeping on the top floor with the other assistants, he says he was roused just before four o'clock by hearing a loud shout, accompanied and followed by a violent and prolonged blowing of police whistles. At the same moment he smelt fire. Jumping out of bed, he looked out of the window, and at once detected, from the alarmed manner in which people were looking up at Hovey's premises that the fire was within the building in which he then was. Grasping the situation he shouted and awakened the other assistants. In a moment all was confusion. The females, roused from sleep by the call of "fire" were horror stricken. The thought that the flames were in the basement and they in the top of the building was one that would have appalled most people. There was not a moment in which to dress. Clothes were seized in bundles, jackets and cloaks were put on irrespective of fit or appearance - the one desire was to seize something to shield them from the inclemency of the morning, and to make good their escape from the burning building. The scene was one of indescribable confusion and horror, and will be indelibly stamped on the mind of more than one of those who were witnesses and participators. The whole party ran downstairs, and managed to make their way to a fire-proof staircase at the back of the building. The females were allowed to go first. In a very short time they had all made an exit through a door leading into a passage at the back of Messrs. Tasker's premises, which then opened out into Angel street. On arriving safely there it was discovered that one of the party, a young man named Ralph Cole, was missing. Instantly again, all was confusion, the thought of their own safety being swallowed up in apprehension of the possible fearful fate of a colleague. The police were informed of the matter, and the greatest excitement prevailed. The fire escape was brought round to the front of the

building, and reared against the side to the floor just vacated by the main body of employees. Great was the sensation of relief experienced by all – police, assistants, and public - when the figure of Cole appeared at one of the windows, clambered through, and slid down the fire escape, amid the rousing cheers of the crowd. The whole party were then taken across to the police station, where they were made as comfortable as circumstances would permit. Not a mingle one of them took away anything of value. Their first thought was for self-preservation - how to leave the building - and when that was accomplished the fire had made such headway that it was hopeless to think of anything being saved from the top storey.

THE CARETAKER'S STORY

William Ward, the warehouseman, whose wife acts as caretaker, informed our representative that he was the last to go round the premises last night after they were closed. He made his final inspection about 11 o'clock, retiring to rest shortly afterwards, believing all was safe - as to all external appearances it seemed to be. Like Miles he was partially awakened at four o'clock by a shout in the street, and was fully roused a moment or two later by the shrieks of the terrified females. He made his escape with the rest of the firms' employees. He is at a loss to account for the fire. He says it must have originated either in the basement or the ground floor. He is certain that when he went to bed there was not the slightest indication of anything wrong.

OTHER STATEMENTS

Mr. William Tasker, of the firm Tasker and Sons, and Company, says he was called from home at half-past four, and arrived at the fire before five o'clock. The premises, which at the rear come close up to the establishment of Messrs. Hovey and Sons, were then on fire in the centre, the woodwork fronting the passage having become ignited early in the proceedings it was apparent that the flames must spread, and the stock was therefore removed from this portion of the establishment and deposited in the yard at the rear of the Angel Hotel. Before the flames were put out the store-rooms and offices were gutted, though the shop and warehouses were luckily saved. Great damage was however done to a large quantity of the goods by water.

Mr. Tomas Robertshaw sleeps on the premises, occupied by his brother Mr. Jeremiah Robertshaw in Angel street. According to the statement made by him to our representative, he was awakened directly the fire was discovered, and at once rendered what assistance he could. Although the shop of his brother stands closer to Messrs. Hovey's place than the establishment of Messrs, Tasker and Co., the flames did not touch it, nor did they interfere with the Messrs. Fleming Reid and Co's establishment next door. Mr. Robertshaw explains this by the fact that the premises do not extend behind the shops.

INCIDENTS OF THE FIRE

NARROW ESCAPE OF THE CHIEF CONSTABLE.

Of course with a fire of such dimensions there were many narrow escapes from death or injury. The Chief Constable (Mr. J. Jackson) was early on the scene, and a large staff of constables was collected to keep the sightseers at a safe distance The work of the firemen was most risky, and as mass after mass of masonry fell the bystanders held their breath in horror. Huge stones were hurled for many yards, and breaking up

splinters were thrown all over. About five o'clock Police-constable Hoggard had a very narrow escape, a quantity of masonry from the Angel street side of the building falling at his feet. Later on he was placed at the corner of Angel street and Bank street to keep back too excited spectators, and once more was his life in jeopardy, the Chief Constable being also in great danger. The corner of Messrs. Hovey's building which had been standing without support, suddenly fell down whilst Mr. Jackson and Hoggard had their backs to it. There was a terrified shout from the spectators, which caused the two to spring forward, and almost at the same time great blocks of stone fell just where they had been standing. There were many overhead wires in the district, and the streets were soon encumbered by them, this causing much annoyance to those who were working. Even at such a serious time much amusement was caused by over-anxious spectators rushing heedlessly along the pavement; and being tripped up by the treacherous and almost invisible masses of wire.

Four firemen had narrow escapes. Police-constables Pittaway and Genness were working in Angel street when there was a fall of walling. They were shouted to by Inspector Nichols, and managed to get fairly clear. Pittaway was, however, struck on the leg by one piece of stone and knocked down. In the other case Firemen Hill and Whittington were working at the back of the premises of Messrs. Tasker, Sons, and Co., when a fall took place, and both men narrowly escaped injury. Whittington was struck on the arm, but fortunately was not seriously hurt.

THE DAMAGE - £250,000

There have been various estimates given of the amount of damage done by the fire, but the general estimate is that it will be at least £250,000. Mr. G. H. Hovey, jun., estimates the loss of his firm at between £80,000 and £100,000. The amount of damage at Mr. Altham's is about £600, at Messrs. Dunn and Company's about £600, and at Messrs. Hodgson and Richards' £1,000, in each case exclusive of the damage to the property. All these three shops have been gutted, and therefore the loss sustained by the owners must amount to thousands of pounds. Mr. Chappell estimates his loss at £2,250. The damage to Messrs. Wake's buildings and also to their fixtures, etc., is serious. Messrs. Mart and Chapman have not been seriously interfered with, and a few pounds will cover their loss. The Imperial Hotel has been badly injured, the plate glass window broken, and the upper windows and frames destroyed, and a quantity of the stone work damaged. The estimate for this was between £100 and £200. Messrs. Jones machine shop has been injured to the extent of £300. Mr. Shaper had his plate-glass windows broken. About £250 will cover the loss of Mr. Naylor, confectioner. The large plate-glass windows of Mr. Richardson, mantle dealer, were irreparably damaged. Mr. Dixon, hosier, Angel street, only had the paint scorched at his establishment, and a few pounds will cover this. Mr. Greenwood, hatter, fixed his loss at between £15 and £18. Messrs. Cash and Co. their loss at £50, and Messrs. Ormrod and Faulkner theirs at £30. Mr. Horner, whose place was gutted, has lost all his stock, and the damage will be about £350, exclusive of the injury to the property.

AN UGLY RUMOUR

During the morning rumour of a somewhat startling character got abroad. It was stated that though it was thought all the assistants had been saved one was still missing. After leaving the police offices the young ladies and the male assistants were taken up to the residence of Mr. G. H. Hovey, jun., and it was on their arrival there that a young man was missed. The news soon spread, and general credence was given to the rumour that

one assistant had lost his life. Inquiries show that there is unfortunately some foundation for the rumour, but whether the young fellow has been killed or not is not known. Some of the assistants' state that they saw him in the corridor at the time the alarm was given. He was then trying to awaken a colleague, and others state that they believe he came downstairs with the rest. Nothing further is known of his movements, but the hope is entertained that instead of going to Mr. Hovey's house with the rest he went to some of his friends in the city.

AFTER THE FIRE

It was ten o'clock before the fire was considered out, though the firemen continued playing on the debris, some of which is still smouldering. The scene was visited by some thousands of people, and general surprise was expressed that the fire having assumed such alarming proportions, the Brigade had been able to check it while so strong a wind was blowing.

The ruins present a weird spectacle. Castle street and Angel street, at that point where they join each other, are strewn with huge blocks of masonry, while the iron skeleton of Messrs. Honey's buildings which still remains standing, and those portions of Messrs. Hodgson and Richards' and Messrs. Tasker, Sons, and Company's establishments which have not fallen, only tend to show how severe the fire has been. About noon some of the men employed by the Corporation commenced the work of clearing away the debris in the thoroughfare, under the instructions of the City Surveyor, but their task was not an easy one. The large stones were not easy to lift, and the network of telephone wires lying about impeded their progress.

MESSRS. HOVEY'S ASSISTANTS

We understand that a general meeting of tradesmen and assistants will be held tomorrow night at the Cutlers Hall for the purpose opening a subscription list on behalf of the assistants, who have lost in the fire all their personal belongings. Nearly 50 assistants lived on the premises, and everything belonging to them has been destroyed. There were also other assistants who lived at home, but kept much of their personal property on the premises. The meeting commences at half-past eight o'clock.

In response to a wish very generally expressed we shall be glad to receive subscriptions at our office, High street, on behalf of Messrs. Hovey's assistants.