

Paper Mill Fire Destructive Outbreak at Oughtibridge Messrs. Dixon and Sons' Works Partially Destroyed

The well-known paper mill of Messrs. Peter Dixon and Sons', at Oughtibridge was this morning partially destroyed by fire. To the owner the consequences are serious, for it is doubtful whether his loss is fully covered by insurance, and the stoppage of the works comes at a time when orders were plentiful. The people of the village have a very direct interest in the catastrophe, for many of them depend on the mill, where paper has been made for over a century, for their daily bread, and the news that there would be no more employment for such there was despondently received. The Spring Grove Paper Mill - such is the name of the extensive range of buildings - is the property of Joseph Dixon, and it is one of the ironies of fate that whilst that gentleman was on his way to Bridlington in order to arrange a holiday resting place for his family and himself, part of his mill was wrapped in flame, and a process of destruction was going on which means a long stoppage of that industry which he has controlled so long and so successfully. It was about 8.30 when the outbreak was discovered. The mill had been running upwards of five hours. In such a large fire it is often difficult, so completely is the tell tale evidence burnt-out, to state the cause with any degree of certainty, but in this case those best qualified to form an opinion have no hesitation in attributing the mischief to an over-heated bearing in the rolling machine which set fire to a pile of shavings.

Once started the flames spread with great rapidity, not a surprising result, bearing in mind the highly flammable character of the stock with which the place is stored. The workmen did what they could, but in a few minutes it was quite obvious their well-meant efforts would be to no avail. It was with great anxiety, therefore, that more efficient means were awaited. Superintendent Frost and the members of the Sheffield Fire Brigade were on their way as the highly-suited horses could bring them. The brigade from Stockbridge too, hurried to the scene, and under Mr. Joseph Kenworthy was able to render very useful service. Superintendent Frost came well prepared. Four horses brought the engine, another four the manual, and there was a full compliment of men. But as soon as he reached the mill, it was obvious to him that part of the building under attack by the fire was doomed, and that the best work his men could do would be in the direction of preventing the spread of the flames to other portions, particularly to the modern structure on the other side of the stream, where there is a lot of valuable machinery. Of water for this purpose there was ample, there being a mill dam, the goit, and the river Don to draw from. With commendable alacrity the Sheffield firemen got to their work. Fire jets were brought into use, and some idea of the amount of water that was quickly pouring onto the burning mass may be gathered from the fact the Supt. Frost had about a mile of hose in use, and to this must be added a very useful outpour from the Stocksbridge men. From the building where the fire started the flames rapidly spread to that part of the building where great sums of money had been spent on the erection of the necessary machinery and plant. The pulp preparing plant was wrecked, so was what is known as No. 1 papermaking machine, a piece of mechanism which cost Mr Dixon £4,000, and the building was in a comparatively short time a complete ruin, nothing but a few girders indicating the situation and extent of the building.. Of helpers in doing the work which is sometimes left to firemen there were any number. The navies engaged in laying the new Corporation pipe up to Langsett Reservoir dropped pick and shovel as soon as they saw the flame and smoke in the morning sunlight, and hastened

to the mill, joined forces with Mr. Dixon's employees in clearing the bags of waste paper and other fibres used in the process of paper-making. The navies were under the supervision of Mr. John Holmes, the road foreman, and the work of the mill hands in saving the sock from destruction supplemented by the efforts of many of the villagers was directly guided by those holding responsible positions in Mr. Dixon's workforce. A short railway line runs from Oughtibridge station at the back of the mill, and so sudden was the outbreak, and so quick the spread of flames, that there was no time to move a railway wagon which was on the rails and close to the destroyed building. Of this wagon practically nothing was left but wheels and axles, and even in parts of the building which escaped the full force of the devouring elements a great amount of damage was done. The roadside for a considerable distance was piled up with bags of waste paper, but any hope of saving the stock soon had to be abandoned. All this has practically been destroyed. The firemen succeeded admirably in checking the flames were they reached the modern portion of the mill where there is another valuable paper-making machine and other plant. Unfortunately, however, this cannot be used owing to the complete destruction of the preparing plant, and it will doubtless be the end of the year before the mill can be re-started. This is bad news for Oughtibridge and the district for Mr. Dixon employed about 130 hands. He took over the mill about 27 years ago from Marsh Bros. and Co., of Pond Lane, Sheffield, and its output is known possibly to most, if not all, newspaper offices in the kingdom. Mr. Dixon has confined himself exclusively to the manufacture of newspaper paper. His inability as a result of this unfortunate event to fulfil his contracts is a matter of keen regret to him. Anticipating his feeling in the matter, the mills manager, Mr. McRorie, and Mr. Jno. Oliver, took steps immediately they saw what the effects of the fire would be to communicate with their customers. In time of course matters will right themselves, but meanwhile Mr. Dixon hopes for that indulgence from his customers which no doubt they will be ready to extend to him, in view of the very awkward position which the demolition of much of his buildings, and plant has placed him in. The manufacture of paper has been going on at this mill for over a hundred years. At that time of course, the hand process was in vogue, but following the introduction of machinery, in this, as in other industries, brought development in its train, and as a result of Mr. Dixon's determination to retain a commanding position in the trade, it may be mentioned that in 1898 the new buildings already planned were completed, and so well equipped was the new place that it has been turning out 140 to 150 tons of paper per week. Although Mr. Dixon was unfortunately away from home to-day, his brother, Mr. Wm. Dixon, of Mark Inch, who has been on a visit to Spring Grove, Oughtibridge, had not taken his departure, and he gave all the assistance he could to Mr. McRorie.

Excitement ran high in the village when news reached it that the mill was on fire. Men, women and children, hurried along the pleasant roadside, and lingered about till there was practically nothing more to be seen. Shortly after 12 o'clock it was seen, the fire was well in hand and by one o'clock Superintendent Frost withdrew the manual. For some time longer, however, the steamer continued to play its useful part. In the afternoon all danger of a further outbreak being over the two brigades returned to their respective quarters, leaving a man or two behind to play on the smouldering debris. Although much valuable machinery has been partially or wholly destroyed, it is a fact creditable to the firemen that the boilers are untouched. When the fire was at its height, when the flames were shooting out in all directions, and excitement was high, a less cool-headed lot of men might easily have been tempted to run hither and thither, trying to save the irrecoverably lost, to the detriment of that which it was still possible to protect from destruction. But Supt. Frost's experience enabled him, however, to accurately sum up the position of affairs. He saw at a glance that it was hopeless to save a certain part of the mill, but even in the doomed section he succeeded in shielding the

boilers from harm, and had the satisfaction of coming away knowing that the efforts of his men and those from Stocksbridge had resulted in keeping for Mr. Dixon a very valuable portion of his works.