

Sheffield and Fire Alarms Dangerous Delay

Councillor Davison, when he spoke at the Sheffield Council meeting on Wednesday with reference to the need of a proper system of fire alarms in the city, and did not lay too much emphasis on a state of affairs almost akin to a public scandal. Sheffield has one, of the most efficient fire brigades in the kingdom but the facilities which it is afforded for saving life and property are in some important details less than are to be found in places a little more than a tenth its size. This has been recognised not only by the members of the brigade; but the Watch Committee also. As Councillor Davison put it, "the Council will awake to a sense of its duty some morning, when the city meets with one of those catastrophes which have occurred in other towns"; in other words when, through lack of means of communication with the fire station, life and property have been sacrificed.

Unless a resident has a telephone, he possesses no means of communicating directly with the station and, the members of the Fire Brigade are able to quote cases where serious results have followed the delay caused through messengers having to cover long distances before getting into touch with them. Nearly two years ago this matter was brought officially before the Watch Committee by the Chief Constable. (Commander Scott). He gave specific cases showing the longest distances, messengers travelled in consequence of a telephone not being available. His return for 1899, 1900, and 1901 shows that persons actually covered from a half to three miles within the city boundaries after an outbreak of fire.

No parsimonious policy should stand in the way of a remedy which has been adopted in towns, large and small, throughout the country. Probably it would be no exaggeration to say that in the means which are afforded to the public for getting into communication with the fire brigade, there is no important city or town in the kingdom in such a deplorable position as Sheffield. The situation is a nightmare to the responsible officers of the brigade; the Watch Committee have tried to induce the Council to erect alarms in various parts of the city, so that a resident might know immediately where to go, and indicate to the fire station the locality of a fire. But their action has been in vain. Different systems are at work in the country; but the Sheffield City Council are apparently waiting for proof of the necessity of such an installation; no doubt, it will be forthcoming one morning, and what Council Davison describe as the "amateur professionalism" in connection with this question will receive its death blow.

But the question is whether the citizens are prepared to wait for such a ride awakening. It is nearly two years ago that the Chief Constable visited Bradford, and made a report to the Watch Committee on what is known as the Gamewell "police and fire alarm." He pointed out that it would be found wholly adequate to the requirements of the Sheffield Police and Fire Departments. In addition, he stated the Tramways Department would find the system useful in sending reports of occurrences in connection with their duties. The following he mentioned as amongst its principal and most important points of value. "Calls to fires, for ambulance, hearse and other vehicles worked by the Fire Brigade, could be sent to the Fire Station much quicker, particularly after business hours, when telephones are not easily accessible. It would give every citizen the means of instantly summoning the Fire Brigade or police. It would afford the opportunity to convey to the police station, in a properly constructed wagon, the uproarious drunkard or street

brawler, without the lamentable exposures which are now only too often seen in our main streets. It would also be the means of calling assistance in case of riot or disorderly assembly. It would increase the power of the police officer, and could be used by him to communicate quickly with the Central Police and Detective Offices. Police officers in the outlying and scattered parts of the city would be required to report themselves during their tour of duty thus increasing the efficiency and discipline of the force.”

The telephone system in connection with the tramways might be utilised in the installation of an alarm system, and after considering the report of the Chief Constable, the Watch Committee recommended an expenditure of £475 for the supply and erection of the Gamewell fire alarm point in the Tinsley district. But the Finance Committee declined to sanction the expenditure, and the unsatisfactory state of affairs continues to exist. That such a parsimonious policy should 'be allowed to prevail when life and property are at stake must be regarded as deplorable, particularly when governing authorities in much smaller towns have recognised their responsibility in this matter.

A Practical Test

An interesting test of a new fire alarm apparatus was made in Sheffield yesterday at the printing works of Messrs. Pawson and Brailsford, Mulberry Street. The members of this firm, profiting by their sad experience in the early part of the year when they suffered to a serious extent from a fire, have made ample provision, in case their premises should be so attacked again, for the flames to be discovered and got at without the slightest delay. They have had installed the May-Oatway automatic fire alarm, a simple but ingenious contrivance for raising an alarm in case of an outbreak. The abstract principle is not new; it is simply the compensated balance of a watch adapted to a new and important use. There is a copper wire, coupled to a steel guard, the shape of which is determined by the calculations necessary to give approximate uniformity of expansion and contraction at an ascertained ratio of speed. The combination is adjusted to give the alarm at a given number of degrees above the normal, and when this margin is set it is automatically maintained, and does not require to be varied. The wire and its compensator are mutually self-adjusting, lengthening with every ordinary rise and shortening with every fall in temperature, but in the centre of the pair or the position of equilibrium (adopted in this system for the purposes of contact) there is no move – except in the case of fire, when the detecting wire lengthening rapidly establishes contact and give the alarm – and the margin is set faithfully maintained under any and every normal change of temperature.

In case of a sudden rise in the temperature, as in case fire, bells ring in different parts of the building to warn employees, and an indicator in the time office shows on which floor the fire has broken out. This is important, but far more important still is the alarm that is given at the Fire Brigade Station simultaneously with the ringing of the bells in the place. The firemen, therefore, receive the call over the specially constructed wire without the slightest delay.

Messrs. Pawson and Brailsford have .50 of the alarms fixed in their Mulberry Street premises - the first, in Sheffield - and the exhibition yesterday was a decided success. In the Chief office a tank of methylated spirit was ignited and allowed to burn. At the end of 93 seconds the temperature had risen sufficiently to make the electric connection. The alarm bells at once rang, and at the same time the special bells gave the alarm at the Rockingham Street and Westbar Fire Stations. From these places there came galloping two tenders and a steamer with a full compliment of men and their arrival on the scene in two minutes and ten seconds after the alarm sounded was at once a tribute to the expertness of the Fire Brigade and to the efficacy of the apparatus.