

FAMILY OF FOUR BURNT TO DEATH

Terrible Fire in a Sheffield Cottage

HEART RENDING SCENE

Frantic Victims at the Window

RECOVERING THE BODIES

Fires attended with fatal consequences are happily a rare experience in Sheffield, and it is fifteen years since the annals of Sheffield Fire Brigade recorded one of such terrible consequences as that which occurred in the early hours of this morning, resulting in the death of; four out of the five inmates.

The names of the victims are:

Henry Shipston aged 53 years.

Emma Shipston, his wife.

Arthur Shipston 15, their son.

Mrs. Mary Shipston, mother of Mrs. Shipston.

The scene of the fire is a cottage of the back to back type at: 66 Furnace Hill, Sheffield, which was occupied by Henry Shipston, who carried on the business of coal' dealer, in a comparatively small way, at the next door premises.

The cottage contains in addition to the living room on the ground floor only a bedroom above and at the top of the; house a garret. In addition to the victims numerated above; there was also sleeping on the premises another son of the Shipston's Andrew McGuire, who, as will be seen, made a miraculous escape by way of the water- spout. Both Mr. and Mrs. Shipston, it should bet explained, had been previously married - hence the, difference in the: names of their sons.

The cottage is situated only 150 yards from the West Bar Fire Station. At the time of the outbreak Mr. and Mrs. Shipston and Mrs. Smith were sleeping in the bedroom on the first floor, while he two sons - aged 21 and 15 - were in the garret above. Mrs.' Smith had only just come from London to live with her daughter and son-in-law, and to this fact is possibly partly attribute the fact that the fire, though of comparatively brief duration and quickly mastered when the Brigade got on the scene, was attended with' such terrible consequences, for the outbreak was fed with the furniture with which the bottom room was packed. Mrs. Smith having brought with her a quantity of household effects, which, added to those already in the room, together with a quantity of harness hanging behind the door, provided an abundance of highly inflammable material, and, of course, hampered the work of the firemen somewhat when they, burst into the place

DOWN THE WATER SPOUT

The first alarm seems to have been raised by Mrs. Shipston who at four o'clock was awakened with a suffocating sense of burning. She called to her sons "Are you awake? I can smell burning."

Andrew McGuire jumped out of bed and found dense volumes of smoke coming up the

staircase. He attempted to get downstairs but could not do so for the smoke. The fire from which it originated was evidently in the bottom room, but as it appeared to be making its way up the staircase with alarming rapidity the Shipston's and Mrs. Smith went up to the garret. Andrew McGuire then opened the window and shouted "Fire." As the only means of egress - by way of the staircase was cut off - the youth, with commendable pluck and presence of mind, did the only thing possible to effect the safety of himself and the other inmates. He got on to the widow sill, grasped the rain-water spouting on the roof, and by means of the pipe made his descent to the ground, about thirty feet below, and then rushed to the West Bar fire station.

Second Officer Hadwick at once turned out with the horse escape, and within a very few moments was at the scene of the outbreak. He was quickly followed by the motor engine from Rocking Street and a contingent under Superintendent Frost and Inspector Corlett.

Mr. Hadwick saw a face at the window and promptly detached the escape and brought it to the rescue of the inmates. While firemen were mounting this, others spread a sheet beneath the window in case any of the inmates should leap from the burning building. By this time - Although only a few minutes from the discovery of the outbreak - the place presented all the characteristics of a "raging inferno" - to quote the description of an eye-witness.

The flames had burned through the door and windows, and entirely enveloped the front of the building to the height of the roof, and the terrified faces disappeared from the window - which they had to close on account of the stifling heat, now almost as bad on the outside as the inside of the building.

FORCED BACK

Undeterred by these terrible conditions two firemen - Waring and Booth - bravely made an attempt to get to the imprisoned occupants and mounted the escape until forced back by the overpowering heat and smoke. Waring did not come down until he was so badly burned that he had to be removed to the hospital, while the flames suddenly belched out upon Booth with such fury that he only escaped by jumping into the sheet held in readiness below.

Meanwhile a length of hose had been run out from the hydrant in Furnace Hill and another from the West Bar Station, and these two powerful jets of water were applied to the scene with such good effect that within a couple of minutes it was practically mastered and the firemen were able to enter the house.

Second-Officer Hadwick went up this escape with three of his men, while Inspector Corlett flooded the living room and forced his way up the staircase followed by other members of the Brigade, all ready to risk their own lives in the effort to rescue the helpless inmates.

The first to be passed down the escape was Arthur Shipston, who was found on the bed. He was in a comatose condition when found, but when brought down into the street appeared to recover consciousness and, as he was being tenderly being placed in the waiting ambulance shrieked with the intense pain he was suffering. On the way to the Infirmary he became calmer, and expired just before reaching that institution. The dead body of his aged grandmother, Mrs. Smith was next found, close to that of her daughter, Mrs. Shipston, who had also succumbed to the suffocating heat and smoke.

Henry Shipston, the head of the ill-fated house-hold, was also found in the garret, just breathing and groaning, and the only lived for about five minutes

In no case had they suffered from actual contact with the flames, death having evidently resulted; from suffocation and the intense heat. They were practically roasted to death - the skin falling from the bodies at the slightest touch.

As has been stated, the fire itself was quickly mastered, one jet only being left playing on the embers for twenty 'minutes to cool the place.

The condition of the narrow and totally enclosed cottage while the conflagration lasted is indescribable. It was probably originally caused by a spark from the fire which had been left burning in the kitchen when he family retired to bed, and as explained above there was no lack of combustible material to feed the flames.

THE BACK-TO-BACK HOUSE DANGER

“Never in my experience,” said Superintendent Frost to a “Star” representative, “have I seen a dwelling-house blaze so furiously and with such a huge body of flame. It was of the kingdom of Hell itself. From the first I do not think it was possible that anything could be done.”

The door and shutters had been broken open by some person before the arrival of the Brigade and the well-like house with tremendous fury.

“This particular case,” added Mr. Frost, “is no what better or worse than hundreds and hundreds of other back-to-back cottages in Sheffield. They are one of the most dangerous class of buildings existing, and what happened here might happen in any other case; the inmates have no earthly chance of escape.

“Although this case was practically on the doorstep of the Fire Station it shows how absolutely helpless we are in outbreaks at such places.”

Mr Frost spoke in the highest terms of commendation of his men, who, he is satisfied, did everything mortally possible, and as evidence of the ordeal, through which they passed in their determined efforts to rescue the doomed family, if by any means possible, pointed to the scorched, blistered and blackened fire-escape.

Fireman Waring was rather badly burned about the face and hands, but after being attended to at the Infirmary was able to be removed to his quarters at Westbar. Several other firemen also suffered somewhat less severely.

One of the most pathetic circumstances of the affair was that the progress of the fire and the futile efforts of the firemen to rescue the perishing inmates was watched by the youth Andrew McGuire, who had made so daring an escape himself, and by two other married sons - William Henry Shipston and George Shipston - who had to involuntary stand by helpless while the parents met their terrible death.

At twenty minutes past three Police-constable (444) Rowe passed the premises in the ordinary course of his duty, but there was no sign of fire, although, of course, the shutters being closed at the time, the may have been in its early stages.

Councillor Cecil H. Wilson, chairman of the Sheffield Watch Committee, was an early visitor to the scene this morning together with the Deputy Chief Constable, Mr. G. H.

Barker, and Dr. Carter (Police Surgeon).

STEP-SON'S STORY *HOW HE ESCAPED A TERRIBLE FATE*

A representative of the "Yorkshire Telegraph and Star," visiting the scene of the fire, found a terrible sight at 66, Furnace Hill. The house is a narrow three-roomed cottage containing a kitchen, bedroom and garret. The first two rooms were entirely gutted, whilst the garret showed the effects of intense heat.

Andrew McGuire (21), a carter, and the step-son, told a graphic story of his escape.

"I was asleep upstairs in the garret with my brother, when my mother shouted out and asked me to get up. I got up and she said to me "I can smell something burning." I dashed down stairs but could not get any further than the first flight of stairs, which brought me near my mother's bedroom.

"Realising the uselessness of attempting to go further, I ran back upstairs and pulled the window open. I leaned out and clutched hold of the water spout and then started to climb down. I had to climb down about forty feet. But when I got halfway down I could not, hold on any longer and fell to the ground. I then ran for the Fire Brigade and when I got back I saw the brigade holding a sheet out for my people to jump into.

"Nobody jumped because they were frightened of the flames that were passing in front of the window. When I got out of the window I got out of the window to go for; the Brigade I shouted to Arthur to follow me but .he said he wanted to wait for Dad.

Whilst detailing his story, 'the stepson said his Mother had married again and in the house at the time of the fire were his step-father, his mother, his brother and his grandmother.

George Shipston (21), a married son of a coal dealer, who lives in the yard at the rear of 66, said the first thing he heard was about four o'clock, when he was aroused by hearing his father shout "Fire, fire."

Slipping on his clothes he ran downstairs and me and a neighbour named Thomas Cunningham. "I kicked in a panel of the door with my clog, he said "whilst Mr. Cunningham ran for a large stone, which he threw at the door and burst it in. As soon as the door was open the flames, which had seen near the fire place chiefly came out of the windows and doors. Police-constable (444) Rowe came up, but we could do nothing much, as it was impossible to get near.

"THE LAST I SAW OF HIM."

"My father was at his bedroom window when the brigade came and I shouted to him ' to jump down, but he said 'Oh, I am all right for a minute or two.' That was the last I saw of him but he and s wife had evidently carried my grandmother upstairs into the garret when they could no longer stay in the bedroom. When my father was at the bedroom window mother and grandmother were behind him screaming for help.

"As I soon as the brigade arrived I saw that the fire had spread to the stable and hayloft which join the house, so I ran in and brought out the horse."

Mrs. Jessie Cunningham, wife of Thomas Cunningham, of 18 court, 3, house, Furnace Hill, said about four o'clock she heard somebody shouting. She aroused her husband and the both rushed downstairs.

"I saw Mr Shipston at the bedroom window and he was shouting for someone to open the shutters. I whipped off my clog and my husband broke open the windows with it, cutting his in doing so. When my husband broke open the door with the stone the flames were everywhere."

Questioned as to whether there was any hope for the four victims when she was there Mrs. Cunningham said it was her opinion that three of the family could have been saved if only they had made an attempt to save themselves. The husband and wife and son could have jumped out of the bedroom window into the sheet which the firemen were holding. There was not much hope for the grandmother, because she was an invalid, but there was a possibility of escape for the others if they had only jumped.

"When I saw them at the window, I heard Mr. Shipston say, 'Oh, for God's sake make sharp.' I saw little Arthur with his arm out of the garret, and then he disappeared from view as though he had been overcome and had fallen."

PACKED WITH FURNITURE

The house added the informant was packed with furniture. The husband had his furniture, and there was the furniture which his second wife possessed, whilst in addition to that the grandmother had stocked her goods in the house.

An inspection of the house after the fire showed piles of charred chairs, dressers, tables, etc., which had been packed into every corner of the three roomed house.

It is stated that Mr. Shipston had been living in the house for about eight, years. Three weeks ago his wife brought her mother (Mrs. Smith) home from London, where she had been looking after her after an illness.

All this morning a large crowd was gathered round the house discussing the news.

The escape down the water-spout made by the step-son occasioned considerable discussion. This pipe is situated about a yard or so from the garret window and he must have had great difficulty in reaching it from the small window.

The Fatal Fire in Sheffield



The scene of the fatal fire in Sheffield, Mr. Shipston, who lost his life, is shown standing in front of the window shutter. Inset (top) Arthur Shipston, one of the victims. Inset (bottom) Andrew McGuire, who had a thrilling escape