

Attendant Badly Mauled by Circus Tiger at Sheffield Theatre



The Empire Theatre, scene of the drama.

An intense drama of real life enacted at the Sheffield Empire theatre to-day, when an attendant was badly mauled by a tiger as he was cleaning out a cage on the stage.

The injured man Ernest George Dalton (30), of Brixham, is in hospital with badly lacerated neck, shoulders, and back.

Hearing screams, attendants rushed to the cage and found the tiger had leaped at Dalton and knocked him to the ground.

The animal, which was standing over the man, was beaten off with shovels and iron bars.

The animal dashed away and went into a cellar, defying attendants, police and firemen for four hours.

It was forced out of the cellar by use of the Sheffield brigade's fire hose.

Eventually, the tiger was enticed back into its cage. It is understood the animal is not one of the performers, but is in training.

Enticed into Cage

SCREAMING women, theatre attendants, keepers and police officers figured in an amazing scene at the Sheffield Empire Theatre, to-day when a tiger got loose, badly mauling one of the cleaners employed by the circus appearing at the theatre this week; and finally took refuge in a cellar, from where it was recaptured after defying attendants and Sheffield policemen and firemen for four hours.

The Injured man is Ernest George Dalton (30), of High Street Steps Brixham, Devon, and he was badly lacerated, about the neck, shoulders and back by the infuriated animal's claws, one of his shoulders also being nearly bitten through.

Dalton had gone to clean the cages which are at the side of the stage, and was cleaning the one containing the tiger when it got out and sprang on him.

He was borne to the ground, screaming, and about half a dozen attendants rushed to the scene and managed to beat off the animal with shovels, iron bars, and other weapons.

Man Rescued

After a terrific struggle they managed to drag the badly injured man away and he was carried off the stage and out through the stage door into Union Street.

The theatre commissionaire, who was in the street, had heard the uproar and telephoned for an ambulance and the police.

Dalton was rushed to the Sheffield Royal Hospital and after treatment was taken up to the ward and detained.

His condition was stated, this afternoon, to be "slightly improved," although his injuries are serious.

Dash into Cellar

Meanwhile, the frenzied tiger, maddened by the blows which had been rained on him by the attendants, in their desperate efforts to save Dalton, stamped round the stage and rushed down the steps into the cello beneath.

With great presence of mind the men slammed the two cellar doors to and kept guard over them.

When a "Star" reporter arrived at the theatre and was admitted through the stage door he found one of the attendants holding fast a door that, leads to the cellar, and the snarls of the animal could clearly be heard.

An attendant, William Carpenter of Exeter, told a "Star" reporter he was at work when he heard screams. He rushed to the stage with a broom, with which he had been working, and saw Dalton on the ground with the tiger savaging him.

"I threw the broom away," he said, and a grabbed a heavy iron scraper, with which I beat the animal over the head and when the others dashed up we finally managed to drive him off Dalton."

Police officer's were soon on the scene and the trainer, Mr. de Kok, was sent for but it was soon seen that it would be impossible to entice the animal quietly back to his cage as the cellar is a large one with any number of obstructions around which he could lurk.

Fire Brigade Called

A policeman telephoned the Sheffield Fire Brigade and Superintendent T. Breaks the Fire Chief, arrived with a detachment of his men.

The theatre hose had been placed in position on the stage in case the animal charged and the fireman brought other hoses out which they placed in strategic positions.

In the cellar is a large pit which is below the level of the stellar floor, in which large quantities of meat are stored when a circus is running at the theatre.

It was seen that the tiger had gone into this pit and further quantities of meat were thrown down to it.

Greatly daring, Superintendent Breaks and the trainer, together with fireman and police, descended into the cellar and Managed to drive the animal out of the pit into a corner by playing water on it from a hose pipe.

The tiger rushed, however, into the band room under the stage, and the door was slammed to and locked.

Recaptured

Attendants then built a tunnel of iron cage sections lashed together with rope, around the band room door, and up the steps on to the stage into the animal's cage.

While men were working the tiger could be heard stampeding in the room, and it was afterwards found he had wrecked the room, over turning instruments and ripping the upholstery of the chairs.

When the tunnel was completed the door was opened and the tiger was enticed into it by the trainer. He was then driven up the steps by the hose.

"One the stage all was in readiness to receive him." Writes our reporter, "and I stood on the top of the other cages from which I could hear the growls of the other animals, which had been aroused by the noise. The animal crept up the steps and was then driven into his cage by the trainer, and the door dropped into position.

Thrill For Woman Left Cellar Just Before Tiger Entered

For a time when the animal first got loose there was something approaching a panic in the theatre, in which there were about six Sheffield women, who were cleaning the auditorium.

Two of them were actually in the pit on a level with the stage, the others being in the circle and gallery, and all fled when the alarm was given.

One of the women employees, Mrs. Florence Hirst, of 14, Bishop Street, Sheffield, had gone into the cellar to mash some tea a few minutes before the animal bolted down the steps.

She heard the screams of the injured man rising above the roars of the infuriated animal, and ran up the steps, where she was met by a Corporation electric meter man, who had been in the theatre attending to the meters. He was running frantically into the street to give the alarm, and collided with her, both falling down the steps into the cellar.

They picked themselves up and rushed out into the street only a few seconds before the animal went down into the cellar.

Talking to our reporter, Mrs Hirst said: "I shall never forget the poor man's screams, they were terrible. It was only about ten minutes before that he had been showing us how tame the animals were by stroking them."

The Door to the Street

The street outside the stage door was quickly thronged with people, many of whom were attracted from neighbouring offices and shops by the roaring of the animal.

For about an hour, whilst the tiger was in the cellar, the only thing that prevented him from getting out into the street through the stage door was the door at the top of the steps, which an attendant held fast with rope.

Men were stationed in readiness to shut the doors, in case of emergency and a police officer was on duty at the iron grille at the stage door to prevent any one from going into the theatre.

Rehearsal Held Up

Members of the company arrived for their customary morning rehearsal but were prevented from holding it. Whilst the excitement was at its height the trainer of the sea-lions arrived and on hearing the tiger was loose dashed into the theatre to see whether his sea-lions were safe. No harm was done, however, to the other animals.

During the efforts of the firemen and trainer to get the animal out one of the theatre men accidentally dropped his pipe on to the animal's back. He waited until the tiger was safely locked in the band room and then went into the cellar and retrieved it, calmly walking out smoking a few minutes later.

Despite the confusion and damage that was caused the stage was put in order for this afternoon's matinee, which was given before a packed house.

The tiger, which is called Rajah, had never been used in the show before, and had only been put through its places during the morning rehearsals. Our reporter was told by a member of the company that it was practically untamed and was, therefore, not yet fit to take part in public performances.

It was Dalton's custom to sleep on the top of the cages every night with the animals.

The Chief Constable (Major F. S. James) and Chief-superintendent J .J. Peak were present at the theatre during the morning.