

Extensive Damage in City Church Blaze Stripped Roof Checks Flames Baptism to Noise of Falling Tiles



DAILY INDEPENDENT PHOTOGRAPH
Chief Superintendent Teather directing firemen on the roof of St Timothy's Church,
Crookes, Sheffield.

Fire which was discovered to be raging in St Timothy's Church, Crookes, Sheffield, about 1.30 p.m. yesterday, caused damage estimated at thousands of pounds

The choir, vestry, Vicar's vestry and War Memorial chapel were burnt out, and the roof of the main part of the church had to be stripped in order that the firemen might get to the flames and prevent their spreading further.

The fire developed suddenly, and the cause of it is not yet known.

No one was apparently in the church when the fire was discovered. The usual morning service had been held, and some of the church officers had stayed for some little time afterwards.

Flames Leapt Out

About 1.30 smoke and flames were seen belching forth from the windows, door and roof of the chapel and vestry at the south-east end of the church.

The Vicar, the Rev. H. Lee, was immediately informed and Sheffield Fire Brigade was sent for. Members of the church gathered to render what help they could.

The outbreak apparently originated in the vestry and spread to the adjoining chapel.

The choir and the vicar's vestries are separated by a wooden partition, and the choir vestry between the vicar's vestry and the chapel, and it was this middle portion that experienced the full force and fury of the flames.

Had to Strip the Roof

Chief Superintendent Teather, in charge of the Sheffield Brigade, told a "Daily Independent" reporter: "The first call was received at 1.50 and three calls were received immediately after.

“When we got there the vestry and the chapel were a mass of flames and smoke was pouring out of the door and the roof. Smoke was present for the full length of the building.

“We had to strip the roof partly in order to get at the flames. Had we not done that the fire would probably have run the full length of the building and the whole of the roof burned away.”

On Hands and Knees

So dense was the smoke that the firemen on the ground had to crawl into the building on their hands and knees.

The choir vestry was soon in ruins. The cupboards containing surplices and cassocks and music were destroyed. Among the ruined articles in the vicar's vestry were a charred table and a charred chest of drawers.

Many documents connected with the church were burned, including literature connected Hospital Sunday, to be held throughout the Sheffield Churches, next Sunday.

Registers Safe

The registers, however, were kept in a safe in the vestry, and on examination later they were found to be intact. An old register kept in a drawer was charred but still legible.

Other vestments were taken from a drawer in a damaged condition. The War Memorial Chapel was seriously damaged. It was originally a transept but was converted into a lady chapel during the vicariate of the Rev. G. R. Ekin. Afterwards it was made into a War Memorial Chapel.

The oak screens on the walls, containing the names of several hundreds of parishioners who served in the War, were damaged, the damage extending to the screen containing the names of the 150 fallen.

Names May be Lost

The damage in that part of the church is estimated at more than £1,000. It is hoped, however, that subsequent examination of the screens will show that some at least of the names are still legible, and that it may be possible to re-inscribe the names.

If not almost irreparable loss will have been sustained for it will take many years to re-collect all the names contained in the Scrolls of Honour.

The back of the altar in the chapel was also affected as were chairs, and a stained glass window to the memory of Mr. Alfred Jeffery, who died in 1913, was broken in one portion.

Picture Unharmed

A remarkable feature of the outbreak was the fact that while the frame of a picture of Our Lord was charred and the glass broken, the picture itself was not damaged.

Two jets were used by the firemen one from the vestry and the other from the roof.

By this means the Brigade soon had the fire under control, and prevented the whole of the church from being burned down.

It will be necessary to rebuild the roof of the vestry and chapel and part main roof, through which a hole had to be made.

Bystanders Help

A plucky attempt was made by bystanders to fight the flames before the prompt arrival of the Brigade.

Mr. H. O. Wright of 62 Melbourne road told a "Daily Independent" reporter that as soon as he saw the flames he dashed to the West door to see if he could shut any doors at the East end and cut off the fire.

"But the vestry door into the church was blazing and the church was full of smoke. It was impossible to get to the fire, and even if I had there was nothing I could have done. The fire must have had a good hold before it was discovered."

Salvage Work

Parishioners did some good work in helping to salvage valuable articles in the church as the firemen were at work.

Risking injury from the flames and flying tiles they entered the church and receiving the articles from the hands of the firemen carried them to a place of safety.

In this way they helped to salvage processional and other crosses, banners of scouts, Girl Guides, altar cloth and other articles.

The Processional crosses were damaged but the communion plate kept in an aumbrey in the Sanctuary was not damaged nor was the organ.

The main body of the church escaped the ravages of the fire except for the effects of the water which covered the floor and at the East end there was a lot of debris from the ceiling and roof.

Mr. Frank Terrant of 123, Bradley Street, Crookes, Sheffield, told a "Daily Independent" reporter that his son who is aged seven, drew his attention to the fire. He notified the fire brigade and stood by to render assistance.

“Flames were leaping 25 feet in the air” he said

Mr. Charles Hadfield, of 79, Brighton Terrace Road, Crookes, and a neighbour said they abandoned any attempt to get near the fire on account of the great heat.

They were unable to get within a distance of 20 feet of the flames. The false roof of the church was found to contain pigeons' nests, some of which had eggs in them. One bird apparently refused to leave her eggs and was found suffocated.

People who had arrived for a children's service stopped to watch the firemen at work, and the Young Men's Bible Class was also abandoned.

Baptism Carried Out

One service, however, was carried through. It was the baptism of three babies which took place in the Parish Hall. This was also where the service was held last night, when reference to the fire was made by the Vicar. For the christening service an improvised font in the form of a silver bowl was used and the service was carried out without a hitch.

Those taking part could, however, hear the falling tiles and the firemen at work.

The service was taken by the Vicar who apologised for the substitution of the hall for the church.

Full of Water

The floor of the church, he explained, was covered to a depth of two feet with water.

All the babies were boys. They were Gerald William Hoyland, aged six weeks, the son of Mr. and Mrs. William Hoyland, of 23 Melbourne Road, Crookes, Sheffield. James Toyne Smithson, aged three and a half weeks, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Fred Smithson, of 54, Netherfield Road, Crookes, Sheffield, and David Bingley Lunn, also aged three and a half weeks, the son of Mr. and Mrs. David Lunn, of 52, Slinn Street, Crookes, Sheffield.

The parochial hall was filled with bookcases. Bibles, prayer books, and church furniture salvaged from the fire.