

DISASTROUS MIDNIGHT FIRES IN DUNDEE

Public Gymnasium Mass of Smoking Ruins

FANCY GOODS WAREHOUSE GUTTED

Two disastrous fires occurred almost simultaneously in Dundee early this morning. The Gymnasium, in Ward Road, was burnt to the ground; and a block of buildings off Bell Street, together with a large quantity of goods, was extensively damaged.

The Gymnasium fire was by far the more serious, and, unfortunately, three of the firemen, while engaged in their duties, were severely injured by part of the roof falling upon them.

FIREMASTER, SON, and VOLUNTARY HELPER INJURED

The firemen were busily engaged with fighting the flames in Bell Street when the alarm went forth that another outbreak had occurred in Ward Road. There was little doubt as to the seriousness of this new outbreak, as sparks were seen rising high into the sky, and flames were issuing through the roof. By the time that a contingent of the Fire Brigade, who hurried from Bell Street, had arrived at the Gymnasium the fire was completely beyond control, the building from end to end being a mass of flames.

It was somewhat remarkable that although the building had been burning for some time the outbreak had not been observed, this circumstance being no doubt due to the fact that few people were on the streets, and attention was wholly directed to the fire in Bell Street. The start which the fire thus got made it impossible for the Brigade to make any impression upon it when they arrived.

The front of the building was constructed of freestone, the gymnasium, extending to the rear, being built of brick.

When the fire was first observed it was confined to the south end of the building, but it spread rapidly, flames issuing from every window and piercing the roof from end to end.

Escaped in Night Attire

Adjacent to the Gymnasium, on the east side, is a block of dwelling-houses, and the fire developed so suddenly that the occupants, who were mostly in bed at the time, had to make their escape in their night attire. It was not a case of warning them out, for there was no time to do so. The people heard the hissing, crackling noise of the flames, looked out and saw a building within a few yards of them enveloped in fire.

When the police arrived on the scene great anxiety was manifested as to whether all in the building had succeeded in making their escape. Firemen and policemen alike were much relieved when the "All safe" signal was given.

Although the firemen poured a copious supply of water on the flames it had very little effect, and about a quarter of an hour after the fire was tackled part of the roof collapsed, sending up a great cloud of sparks into the air, and revealing within a fierce cauldron of flame.

At this stage the fire had a most picturesque, if somewhat alarming, aspect. Surmounting the stone frontwork of the Gymnasium was a symbolical statue, long an architectural feature of Ward Road. For a time the statue stood conspicuously high above the flames, but gradually its wooden foundations were encroached upon by the fire, and the statue, wavering for a moment, fell with a crash into the court of the Water Commissioners, which is situated immediately to the east of the Gymnasium. The remainder of the roof also fell, and the building, which about half an hour before was intact, was a mere skeleton of itself.

Jute Stores in Jeopardy

A number of jute stores to the rear of the gymnasium were placed in jeopardy. A brick gable divided the stores from the fire, but the flames overleaped this structure, and for a time it looked as if nothing would save the stores from destruction. Captain Weir was quick to observe this alarming feature of the outbreak, and succeeded in getting a number of hose from Lindsay St. to play upon the fire at this point. The result was that the fire was kept within bounds.

It was while firemen were attacking the outbreak in this quarter that a serious accident occurred. It was a ticklish job, as a large brick partition was swaying to and fro, threatening every moment to collapse. Burning parts of the roof were hanging at dangerous angles, and on every side slates and pieces of metal were dropping like rain. Notwithstanding, the firemen bravely stuck to their work, and had succeeded in placing the jute stores out of danger, when suddenly, without warning, a part of the roof at the rear of the gymnasium collapsed right on the heads of the firemen.

A number of onlookers and several of the other firemen rushed to the assistance of the men, who were precipitated from a stair on which they were operating, and lay prostrate on the ground under a heap of fiery debris. They were soon extricated from their dangerous position.

The men who suffered most were George Weir, son of Captain Weir, who was assisting at the fire, and a Post Office mail driver, who was also lending a hand.

Captain Weir, who was standing on the ground a little below the two men when the roof collapsed, was knocked down by the fall, and severely injured, a deep gash being inflicted in his forehead.

Mr Weir, jun., and the postal driver were removed to the Royal Infirmary with the ambulance-van, but Capt. Weir, despite his injuries, courageously stuck to his post, only going to the Infirmary after the fire was under control.

One of the women, scantily attired, who escaped from the adjoining dwelling-house with a child in her arms, stated to an "Advertiser" reporter that the first warning of the fire was given by the excited chirping of canaries. "When I looked out of the window", she said, "I saw that the Gymnasium was in a mass of flames, and, snatching my child from the bed, I rushed downstairs, warning others as I went."

The Gymnasium, which was burnt to the ground, was built about 30 years ago by public subscription. During the war it was used for military purposes, and recently it was utilised by the unemployed in the city as a recreation hall and shelter.