

Adelaide Fire Brigade 1854

The Royal Fire and Life Insurance Company Engine House—Carvosso & Barlow, Hindmarsh-square

Imperial Fire Insurance Company Engine House—Carvosso & Barlow, Hindmarsh-square

Agents for Melbourne—
MESSRS HIRSCHLER, HEUSSLER, & KAEPPEL

DOG-CARTS, GIGS, PHÆTON, &c.—CARVOSSO
and BARLOW, COACH-BUILDERS, &c.—
In coming before the public in the above business, it is
their intention to be able to compete with any house in the
trade, and would intimate that they have supplied them-
selves with materials, both English and Colonial, of the
best quality, well seasoned, and adapted for the trade
generally; and hope, from their extensive Colonial ex-
perience, to obtain a share of public patronage; and all
orders entrusted to them shall have their best and prompt
attention.

Hindmarsh-square Coach Manufactory,
Adelaide, June 16, 1854. thetth4

THE ROYAL FIRE AND LIFE INSURANCE
COMPANY.

Adelaide Times Sat 23 Sep 1854 Page 3

According to a researcher, Thomas Barlow & Sons, coachbuilders, first established their business in 1855, in Hindmarsh Square - where they also ran one of the first Adelaide fire 'engines' on behalf of three insurance companies. They moved the business (and the fire appliance) to his site in Rundle Street East, opposite the Tavistock buildings, in October 1866. The royal coat of arms displayed on the roof was a Royal Warrant - "By Appointment to H.R.H the Duke of Edinburgh" - granted in 1868 for the construction of a coach for Prince Alfred's visit to South Australia. The gentleman wearing a white apron (to the left of the horses) is possibly George Barlow, the oldest of the three brothers then operating the manufactory (see B 40279 for George Barlow and B 7958 for the fire engine). The business moved back to the Hindmarsh Square site in April 1883 to a new purpose-built coachworks, which was the largest in Adelaide at the time.



B 7958

State Library of South Australia - Fire Fighters [B 7958], Fire Fighters with equipment. Note on the back of the photograph reads "fire reels belonging to Insurance Company 1880 King William Street". Insurance buildings undertook the maintenance of a fire brigade. These amateur fire fighters wore scarlet uniforms and could often be seen dressing as they ran up the street to a fire. In 1850 Adelaide Corporation provided an "engine" consisting of an iron tank, cistern on a cart body with a force pump, leather hose and a ladder. This appears to be the apparatus depicted in the photograph. 1865. Part of General Collection.

Adelaide Times (SA : 1848 - 1858), Thursday 16 February 1854, page 3

SUPREME COURT.

CRIMINAL SITTINGS. Wednesday, February 14th,

Before his Honor Judge Cooper.

Abraham Benjamin Aarons was charged with having feloniously set fire to his premises in Hindley-street, Adelaide, on 31st January, 1854.

Mr Parker and Mr Wearing appeared for the prisoner, who pleaded not guilty.

The Crown Solicitor, in his opening address, drew the attention of the Jury to the serious nature of the charge, which was indeed, by far the gravest on the calendar. Murder generally affected only a single individual, but arson endangered the lives and property of a whole community. But it must be particularly remembered that this was not a charge of negligence, felonious intention must be distinctly proved; for no carelessness, however gross, on the part of the prisoner would justify the Jury in returning against the prisoner indicted on such a charge; They must be fully satisfied of his felonious intent. There were several very material points in the case to which he would first draw attention. The shop in which the fire had occurred was unoccupied at the time, the prisoner being accustomed to sleep in a room at some distance from it. The prisoner, it would be shown, had at that time

SA Country Fire Service Promotions Unit

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10 April 2026

received notice to quit. Another material point was, the fact, that he was seen to enter the premises shortly before 12 o'clock, and was heard by one of the witnesses to go into his bedroom at the back of the shop a very short period before the alarm of fire was heard. Yet de spite all the noise and outcry made in extinguishing the fire, he did not make his appearance till he was sent for and brought into the shop by some of the persons present. The learned counsel then, at a considerable length, pointed out numerous other suspicious circumstances relating to the matter that would be elicited from the statements of the various witnesses, and concluded by again reminding the Jury, that unless convinced of the malicious intent of the prisoner it would be their duty to acquit him.

George Griffin, watchmaker, was examined, and repeated his previous statement as to being roused from his sleep by a cry of "fire;" of his going to the front door of Mr Aaron's shop, where he saw the signs of fire; and of his returning to the back of the premises, where, on opening the back door he observed the flames, and obtained assistance to extinguish them.

Cross-examined by Mr Parker—The walls of Mr Aarons' bedroom were very thick, like a castle. Closed the back door, where the fire was, whilst he admitted the persons through his shop. Was in his shirt this time but as there were two ladies present he went and put his trousers on. One of the persons present was a very tall dark man, with very black whiskers, and another was a man in a white coat, who might, perhaps, be called a gentleman. There was no ill-feeling between himself and the prisoner— oh ! not in the least. Had given him a quarter's notice to leave the shop about nine months since. There had been some difference between himself and the prisoner about a bill of exchange. Previous to that witness had a very high esteem for the prisoner ; thought him to be an intellectual young man, and believed him to be an honourable Jew. (Laughter.)

John Jeffreson stated that he slept over Mr Aarons' bedroom. Heard Mr Aarons come to bed on the night of the fire. Should think he came to bed not more than ten minutes before witness heard the cry of fire. Looked from his bedroom window and saw flames issuing from Aarons' shop. It was then half-past twelve by his watch. Heard Mr Griffin cry out. His voice might have been heard on North-terrace.

By Mr Wearing—The voice of course could not have been heard by a person asleep. There was no window looking from the prisoner's bedroom towards his shop. There was a wall about five feet high between the prisoner's bedroom and his shop, but that would not have stopped the sound.

John Davis, Sergeant of Police, stated that he was at the prisoner's shop the day of the fire. Saw Aarons there with Mr Cleland. Asked him if he suspected any one. He replied no, for he was in the shop himself with a lighted candle at about a quarter-past 12 o'clock, and that no one entered the shop after him, that he then went to bed, and was awake about half-past one by the noise made by the persons who had extinguished the fire.

Charles Mayson, clerk to Mr Bagot, left his employer's office in Clark's Buildings at about half-past twelve on the night in question. On reaching Hindley-street, he heard a cry of fire. Went with Mr Corvosso to the prisoner's shop and lent assistance.

Mertin Webber, private watchman, repeated his former statement, that on the night of the fire he was attracted by a cry of alarm to Mr Aarons's shop, where, on being admitted to the back of the premises by Mr Griffin, he saw a fire in the prisoner's shop, which he was the first to enter. The witness then described the state of the shop, the extent of the fire, &c.

There were two fires in the shop—one on the shelves, and the other on the opposite side, under the counter, the latter appeared to be a heap of waste paper burning. The heap was two or three feet long. The inside of the counter was charred. Saw nothing burning between the counter and the wall at the back of the counter ; no sign of anything that had fallen from a line.

By a Juror—The goods might have projected a little over the edges of the shelves. Did not observe whether the goods on the middle shelves, where there was most fire, were of a different texture to the others.

By Mr Parker—Could not swear that there were any shirts amongst the burning goods. Was sure that the inside of the counter was charred. There might have been clothes hung about the shop. Did not observe particularly. The fire in front of the counter was two or three feet off. There was none nearer.

Samuel Carvosso, fire-engine keeper to the Cornwall Fire and Marine Insurance Company, stated that he assisted to extinguish the fire. Was occupied in doing so about three quarters of an hour. During the whole of that time there was a great noise within ten feet of where Aarons was sleeping. Went to his bed-room door with Griffin after the fire, and knocked twice very gently. A voice replied, directly after each knock, " Who's there." Griffin said, " Open the door," and witness exclaimed, " Do you know your premises are being burnt down." A voice, that of Aaron's, replied, "Oh, oh ! put it out." The prisoner then opened the door, and came out. The clothes on the back part of the shelves appeared to have been burnt more than those in front. During the fire, there was nothing burning near the counter in front. On looking under the counter, on the morning after the fire, witness saw the charred remains of a large quantity of paper.

Mr Wearing was proceeding to cross-examine this witness, when the latter called the attention of the Court to three persons sitting near him, who, he stated, were continually interrupting him with such observations as "it's a lie," &c.

His Honor instantly ordered the three persons, one of whom was a witness on the part of the prisoner, to leave the Court.

The cross-examination was then proceeded with, but nothing material was elicited.

Timothy Tynin, Police-constable, stated that he entered the shop shortly after the witness Webber on the night of the fire. Some of the clothes had then been thrown from the shelves on to the floor of the shop. There was no fire near the counter in front.

Charles Frampton. Police-constable, stated that he entered the shop with the witness Webber, whose testimony he confirmed.

Richard Burley, sergeant of police, stated that he was present whilst the preceding witnesses were employed in extinguishing the fire, in which he assisted them. Was certain that there was no connexion between the fire in front and the fire behind the counter. Saw the prisoner in the shop after the fire, who, in answer to witness's questions, said that he was out on the night of the fire, that he let him self in after 12 o'clock, that he then struck a light in the shop, locked the premises and went to bed. He also told witness that his property was insured. Saw no materials of a combustible nature where the fire had been.

Robert Cleland stated that he was in the employ of the Cornwall Fire and Marine Insurance Company. He went with Mr Aarons to the shop the morning after the fire to take an inventory of the articles injured. Aarons' valuation was £82 17s. 10d. The goods consisted of Guernsey shirts, cot-ton shirts, woollen goods. &c.

By Mr Parker—This kind of stock had been depreciated in value considerably of late. Did not think it was customary for persons to insure in anticipation of arrivals from England.

Abraham Scott, agent to the Cornwall Fire and Marine Insurance Company, stated that Mr Aarons was insured in their office to the amount of £450. Went to the prisoner's shop the morning after the fire. Objected to his valuation of £82 17s 10d and valued the injured goods himself at 57 16s 10d. Offered to take the damaged articles, and pay him £52 10s, or to leave it to the arbitration of Mr J. M. Solomon. After some hesitation, the prisoner accepted witness's valuation, and the affair was settled, Estimated the value of the uninjured goods, and judged it to be less than £100. so that The whole stock on the premises at the time of the fire was worth not more than £150. Saw some pistols there, but they were apparently not the sort that would go off. Told Mr Aarons that he was making a trade of the fire.

By Mr Wearing—The pistols were of a very inferior quality. One which the prisoner valued at £8, witness could afford to sell himself at £1. Slop goods had fallen 25 per cent, within the last twelve months. Although Aarons claim for compensation might have been suspended on the grounds of suspicion, yet witness could not see his way clearly for instituting a charge against him.

When he said to Mr Aarons, " I am afraid you are making a trade of the fire," he did not merely al-lude to his excessive claims on account of the injured goods, but also because he (witness) had a very strong suspicion of an attempt at fraud throughout the whole affair. Witness hinted this suspicion pretty distinctly to the prisoner at the time.

By the Crown Solicitor—There were some pomatum pots on the shelves where the goods were burnt. By Mr Parker—The whole number of these pots were under half a dozen..

Justin Claude was called, and stated that he could not say how the clothes were generally arranged in the prisoner's shop.

Mr Parker then addressed the Jury at a considerable length for the defence, in the course of which he pointed out the improbability of a young man in the position of the prisoner attempting to commit a crime which involved so much risk, and by which there was so little to be gained. Fully sufficient reason had been given for his having increased his insurance without supposing that he had any fraudulent intent. The accident would be easily accounted for by the very natural supposition that the prisoner in passing through his shop, as it was shown he had done, on the night of the fire, accidentally set fire to some of the light articles hanging on the line, which it would be proved, was accustomed to be suspended across the shop, that the line was burnt in two by the flames, and that the articles on it fell down, some on each side of the shop, this would account for the fire both on the shelves and under the counter, to the paper behind which it was probably communicated by being drawn by a current of air between the front part of the counter and the floor. The only other inference must be that fire was placed intentionally in different parts of the shop for a malicious purpose, but had that been the case, it would have been done more effectually, and the whole premises would have been burnt to the ground long before assistance could have been obtained to extinguish the conflagration. But to show

that this could not have been the case, he would call witnesses who would distinctly prove that the fire could not have originated in such a manner.

William Benson, architect and surveyor, stated that he had been employed professionally by many of the London Fire Insurance offices for a number of years. Made the plan of Mr Aaron's premises now produced. The mark on the wall of the east side of shop as represented in the plan, was that of a nail to which was still attached a part of the line which had been apparently suspended across the shop. Minutely examined the holes in the floor of the shop, many of them were exactly under where the line would have hung. There was one hole no more than seven inches from the front of the counter, and there were marks of fire within three inches of the counter. The oil cloth covering the front of the counter was shrivelled by the action of fire, at a place where there was an aperture between the counter and the floor, large enough to place two fingers under. [The board which formed the front of the counter was here produced, but on its being examined, it was found that the bottom of it under which the fire was stated to have passed was not in the slightest degree singed or marked by fire, although the inside was charred.] Witness, speaking from his experience as a fire-office surveyor, should say that a line, suspended as had been represented across the shop, would, if set on fire, have fallen down and produced a fire exactly on that part of the shelves where it had occurred. A spark from that fire might have easily been carried by a current of air between the counter and the floor and ignited the paper lying there. There was a wall between Mr Aarons' shop and bed-room five feet and a half high, and nine inches thick.

By the Crown Solicitor—Was not present as reporter for the press at the first hearing of this case. Had not read the report in the newspapers. Was employed in this case by Mr A. Powell for Mr Aarons. Did not go to the shop to make the plan until a fortnight after the fire. Some of the holes on the floor might have been made since. Would not undertake to swear that the counter had not been moved between the time of the fire and when he first saw it.

His Honor here noticed that Sergeant Burly, a witness for the prosecution, was speaking with the Crown Solicitor, and desired him not to evince so much eagerness in the matter.

The Crown Solicitor said that he had requested the Sergeant to sit by him, and instruct him in particulars relating to the fire, with which he was but imperfectly acquainted.

The cross-examination was continued, and the witness stated that he saw the remnants of the line on each side of the shop. Had the line been burnt in the middle, no doubt the articles on one side would have fallen on the counter.

By Mr Wearing—The remains of the line, which was a good stout string, was singed with fire.

Charles Lyon, a lad aged ten years, stated that he was shop boy to Mr Aarons. Had lived with him a month. Mr Aarons used to hang his goods on a line across the shop. Remembered the night of the fire. The shop was shut up about 7 o'clock. Swept up the shop after the fire, and saw some holes in the centre of the floor. Did not see any other holes. The clothes on the line across the shop used to be kept hanging there all night. The shirts on the line were over the counter. There were four or five shirts hanging there. The other part of the line near the shelves was hung with cravats, &c.

Henry Alford—Had been in the police. Was requested a few days since to examine the counter in the prisoner's shop. The portion produced was a part of the front and one end of

the counter. Was of opinion that a spark of fire might have been blown through the hole in the corner of the part produced. At that spot the oil cloth near the hole in question was slightly burned on the outside of the counter. Had the paper under the counter been ignited as early as the woollen goods in front, the whole place must have been burnt down. Would not undertake to say that when he saw the counter it was in the same position as at the time of the fire. Did not examine the shop until two days since.

At this stage of the proceedings, one of the Jurors (Mr Mullet) enquired if it was competent to the Jury to stop the case and acquit the prisoner at once if they were all unanimous in his favour.

His Honor said that they were justified in doing so, but the case should be a very clear one to warrant them in taking such a step. For his part he was far from considering that the case now before them was one in which they should inconsiderately do so. But it was not within his province to sway them with his opinion either one way or the other. It must rest with themselves and the prosecutor for the Crown.

A Juror—We are not unanimous in opinion. Our foreman was not instructed to say so.

The Crown Solicitor said that, in duty to the Crown, he was bound to carry on the prosecution as long as he believed there was a chance of conviction, but of course he could not do so if the Jury had decided on acquitting the prisoner.

A Juror—We are quite agreed. We have believed from the beginning that there was no case for us.

The Crown Solicitor said he would not for one moment concede that there was no case for prosecution, though he was bound to submit to the opinion of the Jury,

His Honor said that, although the Jury had come to this decision, he felt bound to express his opinion that with no amount of negligence could the prisoner have passed through his shop, and unintentionally have set the goods on fire, and then have turned round and locked the door, without observing the accident.

The prisoner was then acquitted.

The Court adjourned at 7 o'clock.]

Adelaide Observer (SA : 1843 - 1904), Saturday 30 December 1854, page 5

Destructive Fire—Between 11 and 12 o'clock on Monday night the report of a fire in Weymouth-street reached our office. The lurid glare of the flames was a sufficient guide to the scene of disaster, which was the house of German painter, contiguous to but not in the street named. Several engines were there, and many carts, but the fire was mostly extinguished by means of buckets; in fact, the want of a proper supply of water could not have been more fully exemplified. The house destroyed, though isolated, was near enough to have caused destruction to other premises, and among them those of a dealer in oil, whose stock is said to be considerable. It was reported that the premises were insured. The engine which first arrived was that appertaining to the Police Department, which was soon followed by the engines known as the Imperial and the Cornwall. There was no want of zeal or alacrity, but it was impossible to discover anything like system or skillful organization.