

Adelaide Fire Brigade Equipment Locations 1858

Adelaide Times (SA : 1848 - 1858), Tuesday 26 January 1858, page 3

THE FIRE IN FLINDER'S STREET.

Last night about half-past 10 o'clock, an alarm of fire was given, and hundreds of persons were instantly on the alert to know the whereabouts. Proceeding from Hindley-street as soon as the spectator reached King William-street, it was not difficult to discover that an extensive fire was raging not far off. On reaching Flinder's-street a few minutes after the alarm of fire was given, we observed the building occupied some time ago by Messrs Haswell and Elder at a carrara and soda water manufactory, in one mass of flame. The building consisted of a large two-story store with a smaller building attached on the east side in which latter, we believe the fire, broke out. In a few minutes after the shingle roofs of both buildings took fire, and, notwithstanding the abundant supply of water and the vigorous play of the fire engines, not the slightest check was given to the devouring flame, fanned as it was by a strong south-easterly wind. In less than one hour from the commencement, the whole of the interior was totally destroyed, the bare walls only being left. No clue whatever had, up to an early hour this morning, been discovered as to the origin of the fire; but, we presume, the usual enquiry will be instituted by Dr Woodforde, the coroner, in the course of a day or two. At one period serious apprehensions were entertained for the safety of two adjacent building known as the Old Corn Exchange, which is now occupied we believe by Mr Ladd, gingerbeer brewer. During the time the fire was raging with the greatest rapidity, the police engine played with considerable effect on the shingle roof, and long before the fire in the adjoining building was got under it was conceived that the Old Exchange was out of danger.

Mr Nitschke's engine was first on the spot, followed immediately after by that from the Police Station and the Cornwall. The supply of water was abundant from the arrival of the first engine, and so continued until the fire was extinguished. The police engine was worked with a good will by the military under the command of Captain Vereker ; and the mounted and foot-police, under the orders of Inspectors Hamilton and Reid, and it is almost needless to state that help was readily afforded, by the numerous bystanders, including Mr John Brown, Alderman Wright, Mr A. J. Baker, and others. We understand that there was no property whatever in the premises, which belong to Mr Emanuel Solomon, and which, we understand, are fully insured. No accident of any kind occurred ; and, before 1 o'clock, the crowd had dispersed, and matters resumed their customary quiet, &c. It is a most fortunate circumstance that the fire was confined to the detached buildings, or with the strong wind blowing, the consequences must, had the fire extended to the adjoining premises, have been disastrous in the extreme. The supply of water from Messrs Pybus and Turner's works was constant and continuous to the last moment.

Adelaide Observer (SA : 1843 - 1904), Saturday 30 January 1858, page 3

FIRE IN FLINDERS-STREET

On Monday night, at about a quarter to 11 o'clock, a fire broke out in the buildings formerly occupied by Mr. Howard (now of Yankalilla), subsequently by Messrs. Spence & Parr, afterwards by Messrs. Haswell & Elder, sodawater manuaufacturers. They consists of two houses, adjoining each other, that to the westward having two storeys, and being of

considerable size. The premises, which have been for a long time unoccupied, and were to some extent dilapidated, belonged still, we understand, to Mr. Howard, though Messrs Solomon & Co. are also said to be interested in them. The fire was first seen upon the roof the smaller house, where it appeared to have commenced, and not to have burned through from the inside. The alarm was quickly given, the fire bells rang, and the London Companies', the Police, the Cornwall, and Sir. Nitschke's engines were soon upon the spot. There was a pretty full supply of water, and the engines began playing upon the roofs of the two buildings, both of which were in flames before the engines could be brought into operation. The wind was blowing furiously from the south-east, and fears were entertained that the fire might spread to the large store now rented by Mr. Ladd, but formerly known as Beck's, which was only separated from the burning houses by a small strip of waste land. Mr. Sharpe's stables on the opposite side of the street were also in some danger, and the police engine was judiciously removed so as to drench the roofs of both with water. This precaution was effectual, and the fire was happily confined to the premises in which it originated. The military and police were early on the ground, and, under their respective officers, rendered good service. We regret to hear that one of the soldiers received a severe injury on his hand while assisting to work an engine.

Dr. Woodgrove held an inquest on Wednesday at the Freemasons' Tavern. His Worship was kept waiting some time by the want of punctuality of several Jurors, and, when the number was made up, two who were absent were fined £2 each. They came afterwards, and one of them, who had been misinformed as to the hour, was excused, and sworn upon the Jury. The premises were then visited, and the following evidence taken:—

Emanuel Solomon deposed that the property where the fire happened was part of his security for £3,000 advanced to Mr. Howard, of Yankalilla. The advance was made by himself, not by his firm. Knew nothing of the fire, except that he heard an alarm as he alighted from a Brighton omnibus at half-past 10 o'clock at night. The premises were not insured. They were not tenanted. Messrs. Spence & Parr had a lease, but he took it off their hands a month ago. Had never any other tenants; but Spencer & Parr underlet the premises till within the last six or twelve months. Believed the last occupants were Messrs. Haswell & Elder. The doors had latterly been left open, and there was nothing to prevent strangers getting in. The premises consisted of a two storied house and a one-storied house, adjoining each other. Several persons had applied for them lately, but he had declined letting, as he wished to sell.

The constable in waiting here mentioned that a man named Petherbridge, who was able to give material evidence, had refused to attend, unless he were paid, or payment guaranteed to him. The Coroner accordingly issued his warrant, and instructed the police to bring him up immediately. In a few minutes the witness came of his own accord, and was reprimanded by His Worship for the trouble he had given.

Joseph James White, railway guard, Wakefield-street, deposed that he was in his own back premises about a quarter to 11 o'clock on Monday night, when he heard the alarm of fire. Saw immediately where it was, and ran round. The fire was then just bursting out about as big as a bucket through Haswell & Elder's smaller house. It was about halfway up the roof at the eastern end. At that time there were not more than half a dozen people there. Witness and another man pulled down the front verandah, which had taken fire. The flames spread very fast. Saw no one come out of the premises. Remained there about two hours, and the

fire was not then extinguished. Had often seen loose characters knocking about the premises at night; both men and women. Had seen them in the yard, but not inside the house. Noticed them generally of an evening as he went to the London Inn for his supper beer. Had often seen children playing inside the house as late as 7 or 8 in the evening. Did not know the people who were there when he came.

William Petherbridge, carpenter. Flinders-street, stated that on Monday evening he was returning from his Lodge, and passed the building at about quarter past 10. Called at the London Inn for a glass of beer. Was there about 10 minutes, when a man called in at the door, "The store is on fire !" Ran out, and on looking up the street saw a flame coming out of the front roof of the small house about the size of his hand. Ran towards the building, and on reaching the door found it open. It was a double door, and one side was open. Rushed in, and when he got three or four feet inside the passage, a man with white trousers ran against him from the back part of the premises, nearly knocked him down, and rushed out. As he ran against him, he said, with a coarse imprecation, "The place is all on fire." Was staggered for a moment, then ran to the back door, thinking the people were living in the house, and called out "Fire!" as loud as he could. Finding no one there, he rushed up the step ladder into the upper rooms. Saw that one of the flooring boards was up, and under it, between the ceiling and the floor, there was a body of fire. It appeared as if the whole was burning. Went down again, as he considered it unsafe to remain there, and met several persons coming towards the ladder. At the time he saw the fire under the floor he also discovered that the rafters were on fire above. Could not say whether there was any ceiling. It did not appear as if the two fires had any connection with each other, as the lower fire was entirely under the floor. Went out of the building and remained till 12 o'clock. Did not know the man who ran against him. Saw no persons about the place when he first passed. There was neither appearance nor smell of fire at that time. In answer to Mr. Delano, a Juror, he said he should not recognise the man who rushed past him. Did not think it was Mr. Delano, unless he could say that he used the oath he had mentioned. (A laugh.)

Mr. Delano (with derision)—I certainly did not. Are you quite sure of the expression ?

The witness—Quite sure of it.

Mr. Delano said he had himself rushed up the ladder and back again, but he neither knocked any one down nor used any bad language.

In answer to Mr. Wright (of Black & Wright), a Juror, the witness said he saw no bagging nor canvas about the house.

Julia Pickett, a little German girl, thirteen years old, who spoke English perfectly well, and stated that she attended Sunday-school, was satisfactorily examined by the Coroner as to her knowledge of the nature of an oath, and sworn. She deposed that she lived in Flinders-street; and was getting some water from the cask in the back-yard just before bedtime on Monday night, when she saw the shining of fire through the roof of the smaller house that was burned. Looked a little while, and saw a little bit of fire come through the roof. Ran off and told her brother-in-law. Lived just behind the houses that were burnt; in a street leading to Wakefield-street. The doors and windows were left open. Had often played in the houses with other little girls. Had not done so on the day of the fire. Noticed as she passed that the doors were shut that day, and the windows too. Had often been up the step-ladder, and played up stairs. There were lots of loose straw and rubbish there. Had seen Mr Douglas

there a few weeks ago folding canvas for tents, but not within the last four weeks. That was down stairs in the big house. Never remembered the children having lucifer matches or any other fire inside the house, but had seen boys smoking at the door. Did not notice any one in particular about the house on the day of the fire. There was a big hole in the floor of the upper room in the large house. Had played in both houses. Mr. Douglas's children used sometimes to fetch away bags full of straw from the large house. The upper floor of the small house was all to pieces and full of holes. There were windows in the roof of the small house. Could not say whether they were open or shut on the day of the fire.

The Jury, after some consultation, returned a verdict to the effect that there was no evidence to show how the fire originated. They expressed their opinion that owners of empty houses should be more careful to keep them closed, so as to prevent their becoming resorts of bad characters and endangering surrounding property.

FIRE AT NORTH ADELAIDE.—On Monday, at noon, a fire broke out in the stable of Mr. Pretty, water-carrier, of Cambridge-street, near Wellington-square. North Adelaide, which in an incredibly short time was burnt to the ground. The thermometer was standing at 102 in the shade at the time, but fortunately there was very little wind blowing. The stable, though isolated from any other building, stood in a position surrounded by dwelling-houses, from whence, on the first alarm of fire being given, numbers of women and children rushed forth uttering the most distressing cries. Nothing but the most energetic exertions on the part of the men whom the alarm had called to the spot prevented the conflagration spreading far and wide. The adjoining fences were speedily broken down and removed, and the contents of every Water-butt in the neighbourhood used unsparingly in quenching the flames or preventing their spread. Just as the last available pail of water had been used for this purpose a water-cart arrived on the spot belonging to Mr. Finden, which was soon afterwards followed by several others. At this critical juncture the roof of Mr. Pretty's dwelling-house had caught fire, but the timely application of a wet blanket was the means of saving it from destruction. The stable was composed entirely of wood, and contained about half a ton of hay. The cause of the fire is at present unknown, but it is supposed to have originated in the spontaneous combustion of some damp hay. Besides the destruction of the stable and its contents, considerable damage was done to the fencing, &c., belonging to the gardens of the adjoining houses inhabited by Mr. Henry Hawkes and Mr. James Pearce. The premises destroyed are not insured. The loss is estimated at £100. North Adelaide being one of the City wards is entitled, we think, to have a fire-engine stationed there. The coroner instituted an enquiry into the origin of the fire the same day. It appears that it originated in one of the many old inflammable wooden sheds that still exist in Adelaide. In this instance the shed was closely surrounded by low chimneys, and only two or three yards removed from the back door of the dwelling-house. The only wonder is that it has not been destroyed before. There were no suspicious circumstances attending the fire.

ALARM OF FIRE.—On Tuesday afternoon, between 4 and 5 o'clock, the row of large houses at the eastern end of Rundle-street, known as Tavistock-buildings, narrowly escaped destruction by fire. Mrs. Ferneley, who occupies the centre house as a young ladies' boarding and day school, perceived a smell of something burning, and looking from one room to another found that it proceeded from her own sleeping apartment, where two of her own young children had just been playing. On opening the door, she saw the berceauette, from which the baby had been removed but a few minutes before, in flame, and then, in an instant, communicated with the bedclothes and curtains. She gave the alarm

immediately, and Mr. Allen, photographer, her opposite neighbour, ran at once to the room, and carried the burning cradle out of the house, while a waterman, who was passing, extinguished the remainder of the fire by doubling up the clothes and smothering the flames. After that a police-constable made his appearance, who, on receiving full assurance that the entire cause of danger was removed, and everything perfectly safe, proceeded incontinently to the Station-House, set the bell a-ringing, and spread the cry of "Fire !" all about the town. Thus the alarm was raised, but it was not generally known in which direction the danger lay, and comparatively few people assembled near the place where the accident had happened. For some unexplained reason the drivers of engines and water-carts, policemen, women, dogs, boys, and idlers of every kind, made their way towards the opposite end of Rundle-street, and gathered in great force round Gawler-place, where they stood staring at each other for a little while, and then departed on their several avocations, under the impression that the whole affair was a hoax. With the assiduous police-constable, however, it did not stop there; for he thought it requisite to give the Coroner notice of the fire, and accordingly Dr. Woodforde paid a visit to the house in the evening. He found that the accident had evidently arisen from one of the children having used a stray lucifer match as a plaything, and that the damage done was of the most trifling character. There being no circumstance of mystery or suspicion, he did not consider it necessary to hold an inquest. The policeman seems to have mistaken the object of the fire-bell, which is usually understood to be the giving notice that a fire has broken out, and not the ringing of a triumphant peal to announce its having been extinguished.

South Australian Register (Adelaide, SA : 1839 - 1900), Wednesday 7 April 1858, page 2

ADELAIDE: WEDNESDAY, APRIL 7. 1858.

INSURANCE AGAINST FIRE.

With the kind assistance of Mr. A. J. Wright we are now enabled to complete our narrative of the proceedings of the Committee appointed by the citizens to take measures for the security of Adelaide against fire. We brought that narrative, as our readers will recollect, down to the receipt of the official reply to the deputation. The reply was addressed to Mr. A. J. Wright, and, we presume, fell into his hands, but of this we were not assured until, by the tacit acquiescence contained in his letter, he confirmed the presumption. Our description of the proceedings of the Committee up to that period Mr. Wright endorses as correct. For what had transpired subsequently we were necessarily dependent on private information, and upon that information we declared that the Committee had done nothing since the appointment of the deputation. Indeed it was not possible that they could have done anything, if, as we were informed, they had not even been convened to receive the reply from the Government. In reference to this portion of the narrative, we are glad to be assured by Mr. Wright that our statements were equally accurate. The Committee have not been summoned, and nothing whatever has been done. One little fact only remains to be added in order to complete our statement. It is, that Mr. Wright determined, on the 20th ult., to convene the Committee, and that in a few days from the date of his letter the Committee will be called together. This is the sum total, as stated by Mr. Wright, of the acts and intentions of the Committee between the 11th December, 1857, and this 7th of April, 1858. Before we remark on other matters contained in Mr. Wright's communication, we will place the letter itself before our readers.

It is as follows:— "TO THE EDITOR OF THE REGISTER. "Imperial Insurance Company, South Australia Agency, Adelaide, April 5, 1858. "Sir— In your issue of Saturday last there appears an article headed 'Insurances against Fire,' in which you comment on the want of result to the labours of the Committee referred to by you, and draw the inference that the Insurance Companies, who, you state, were mainly instrumental in agitating the movement for organizing effectual means of protecting this city from fire, found in a higher scale of premiums a readier and more satisfactory solution of their difficulties than in the discharge of the duties committed to them by their fellow-citizens. "Now, Sir, as a member of that Committee, I must dispute the fairness of this accusation, and beg the favour of your columns to correct an impression which your remarks may have created. I will preface my observations by remarking that the Insurance Companies never had any desire to be represented in that Committee, and, with the solitary exception of myself, its members are not connected with any Insurance Office. You have correctly described the proceedings of the Committee up to the period at which you quote the letter from the Chief Secretary, and from this point you state the movement to have been 'strangled.' Such, however, has not been the case. When the deputation waited upon the Chief Secretary they presented a rough draft of a Bill to provide for a Fire Brigade, and as the carrying out of the requisite arrangements unavoidably devolved on the Government, the Committee might reasonably have considered that their labours were brought to a close. They had, however, in their desire to do the work effectually, previously arranged with two of the Insurance Companies here to obtain particulars of the working of the Melbourne and Sydney Brigades, the details of which it was thought might serve for our guidance. From one cause or another considerable delay took place before these particulars were obtained, and in the meantime some of the Insurance Companies, foreseeing that in the absence of voluntary effort the proposed organization must unavoidably be delayed till after the meeting of Parliament, endeavoured to arrange amongst themselves for the appointment of a competent officer, who, in the double capacity of their surveyor and superintendent, should take immediate steps for enrolling a temporary force. A meeting for this purpose was held not quite three weeks ago, but owing to a difference of opinion on the part of some of the Offices, it was found impossible to carry out the plan proposed. As soon as this was finally ascertained (which was not till the 20th ultimo), I determined to take an early opportunity of calling together the original Committee, with a view to taking any further action that might be considered desirable; and I have only been prevented from so doing by the Easter holidays and the approaching departure of the overland mail. In a few days, however, the Committee will be called together, when it will in all probability close its proceedings, and leave the carrying out of its suggestions to the proper authorities "Having thus disposed of the question as far as the Committee is concerned, I am desirous of correcting an error into which you have fallen as regards the course taken by the Insurance Companies in altering their rates. Although the disastrous fire at the Port and the severe losses it entailed may have precipitated this change, the necessity for raising premiums, which long experience has proved to be inadequate in this colony, has been gradually making itself evident, and from time to time has been impressed upon us by London Boards ; and had the immediate formation of an efficient Brigade followed the public meeting, the scale of rates would still have been raised, in obedience to instructions since received. In fact, to any unprejudiced mind it must be clear that this is but a natural result of the severe and steadily-increasing losses to which Insurance Companies have been subjected during the last three or four years, and which the best Fire Brigades will not avail to avert as long as the present style of

buildings exists. To many, indeed, it is a source of astonishment that shingled and wooden buildings in Adelaide are insurable on any terms. "In your remarks as to the propriety of the citizens themselves taking in hand some measures for protecting the city from fire I most fully concur, and cannot help expressing surprise that it has not been done long ago. In spite, however, of continual and destructive fires, the protection of our capital has devolved on the Insurance Companies, who have been left unaided to bear the cost— an apathy which contrasts very unfavourably with the state of things in other British colonies and in the United States, where Volunteer Companies, equipped at their own expense, bear their part manfully in contending with the devouring element. When a similar spirit is shown here, and the long lines of combustible buildings which have gained for Adelaide its unenviable reputation in insurance circles have disappeared, doubtless the charges for fire insurance will undergo a corresponding change. "In the hope that this desirable consummation is not very distant,

"I subscribe myself, Sir, "Your most obedient servant, "A. J. Wright, "Agent Imperial Fire Office.

"The members of the Committee are— S. Tomkinson (Chairman), J. M. Solomon. J. M. Clark, S. Bakewell, A. J. Wright,"

Mr. Wright contents himself with stating, but does not attempt to explain, the extraordinary circumstance that he suspended the action of the Committee appointed by the citizens for more than three months, while, during that time the Insurance Companies were endeavouring to organize a Volunteer Fire Brigade. When the Offices had finally failed in their attempt, Mr. Wright reverts to the original Committee, and determines to summon them once more to action. Mr. Wright in-forms us that he was the only person connected with an Insurance Office who held a place on the Committee. We fear it will be found that he has been attempting to achieve the old impossibility of serving two masters, only to furnish a new illustration of the futility of the attempt. We are quite unable to see why the Committee were compelled to devolve the arrangements for carrying out the object of their election upon the Government, while the Insurance Offices at least saw a possibility of carrying out a similar organization without any such assistance. It is still more remarkable that the Insurance Companies were placed in possession of information which enabled them to foresee that the proposed organization would unavoidably be delayed until after the meeting of Parliament, while the Citizens Committee were kept in ignorance of the answer to their own application. We may fairly presume that had the Committee been aware in December last that no practical result would immediately follow their appeal to the Government, they would have called the citizens together, informed them of the failure of their efforts, and left it to them to determine what voluntary exertions should be put forth to lessen the risks of fire during the then approaching summer. Mr. Wright wishes to correct an error into which we fell with respect to the course taken by the Insurance Companies, and we are anxious to give the Offices the full benefit of the correction. We assumed that they found it necessary either to diminish the frequency and severity of fires in the city or to increase their rates of premium ; and we inferred that having secured the latter they were not careful to accomplish the former. Here we were in error. They were not satisfied with one source of addition to their profits, but required both. They were not content to retain our premiums at the former rates in consideration of a reduction in the risks, but demanded that we should take greater precautions and pay larger premiums at the same time. In a word, they wished to incite the citizens to greater outlay for the prevention of fires, while

they were resolved to impose heavier charges for meeting the diminished risks. We appreciate their generosity. Regarding Mr. Wright as the representative of the Insurance Companies, we are not surprised that he concurs with our remarks on the propriety of the citizens themselves taking measures for their own protection, especially in the light of the fact which he has just permitted to transpire. The Offices having determined, at all events, to raise the premiums, are naturally glad to see the insured reducing the chances of demands upon their funds. We wonder, however, that it does not recur to Mr. Wright as somewhat anomalous to reproach the citizens for leaving to the Insurance Companies the protection of the metropolis, when he, the representative of those Companies, has been the cause — innocently enough, we have no doubt— of paralyzing the most energetic action that the citizens have yet taken on the subject. Had he submitted the reply of the Government to the Committee immediately on its receipt, and had the Committee at once placed the matter again before the citizens, the Volunteer Fire Brigade, to which he looks with so much desire, might have been by this time an organized institution. To "strike while the iron is hot" is a good maxim ; and had the movement been followed up while the popular feeling was fully awake, no doubt adequate results would have been attained. Mr. Wright does not allude to the Building Act passed during the last session of Parliament, and now in active operation, as the records of our Mayor's Court abundantly testify. While he refers to the danger arising from long rows of combustible buildings, it is scarcely fair to omit all mention of this decided step towards their removal. When this measure has been in operation a longer time, and its effects are more evidently perceptible, it will certainly nullify in a great measure the necessity for the increased rate of premiums which the Offices have imposed. We have no doubt that as civic improvements progress they will find it expedient to lower their rates, probably below the scale from which they have recently departed in an upward direction, in order to hold their ground against competition.

South Australian Register (Adelaide, SA : 1839 - 1900), Friday 9 April 1858, page 3

INSURANCE AGAINST FIRE.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE REGISTER.

Sir— As an individual member of the Committee appointed to carry out the resolutions respecting the protection of the city from fire, passed at a public meeting of citizens in November last, I am desirous of making one or two remarks in reference to your leader of this morning. It is no part of my business to reply to your remarks respecting the Insurance Companies, as their representatives are quite competent to take care of their own interests ; but it strikes me that your concluding remark upon the probability of competition nullifies all the reproaches that can be directed against the Companies for increasing their rates of insurance, or for neglecting to take measures for the protection of the city. Had you referred back to the report of the public meeting of November last before writing your article, you would not have been "quite unable to see why the Committee were compelled to devolve the arrangements for carrying out the object of their election upon the Government." They were compelled to do so because the resolution passed at the public meeting in reference to a Fire Brigade declared "That Government be called upon to take immediate steps to enrol, organize, and remunerate such a force," became it was also resolved "That to give proper efficiency to this movement, it is necessary that an officer of experience and discretion be appointed by the Government ;" and finally, because an amendment proposed at the meeting to the effect "That the citizens take action themselves in the matter, and request

the co-operation of the Government and Parliament," was "received with disapprobation," and rejected. Under these circumstances, the Committee did exactly what it was instructed to do. It drew up the heads of a scheme which was laid before Government, and enforced the importance, and the practicability of its proposals by means of a deputation. In reply the government, signified a general approval of the scheme, and promised to take the subject into consideration, with a view to the early introduction of a measure next session. Considering the lateness of the current session, this was, in my opinion, all that could be reasonably expected of Government, and for the Committee to take further action would have been as unwise as it was most certainly beyond the tenor of its instructions. It might perhaps have been better had a formal meeting of the Committee been held to receive the reply of the Government ; but as the Committee's labours were completed (saving in reference to those matters of detail, of which particulars have but recently been obtained), it smacks somewhat of a love for "red-tap-ism" to construe this omission into a serious offence. Nor are you justified in stating that the Citizens Committee were kept in ignorance of the answer to their own application. Such an assertion ought not to be lightly hazarded, nor ought it to be made, even supposing the source of your "private information" were an individual member of the Committee itself. Upon enquiry, I believe it will be found that most, if not all the other members of the Committee were, in common with myself, made acquainted with the reply of Government, and concurred in relieving Mr. Wright of the necessity of summoning a formal meeting, merely to read the reply once more.

I am, Sir, &c., JOHN HOWARD CLARK.

South Australian Register (Adelaide, SA : 1839 - 1900), Friday 9 April 1858, page 3

TO THE EDITOR OF THE REGISTER.

Sir— It is again my misfortune to find fault with your remarks in this morning's paper, under this heading. As regards the Committee. I leave the vindication of its conduct to an abler pen, and will merely observe that I neither "suspended the action of the Committee" nor "paralysed the energy of the citizens," inasmuch as the letter from the Chief Secretary was shown to my associates on the Committee as soon as received, and was not considered to call for a reply, as it merely announced a compliance with the prayer of the deputation. As regards the Insurance Companies, they took from the first an independent course, and their movements did not interfere with, neither were they effected by, the action of the Committee. They saw that a delay must take place before the requisite organization took place, and did their best to supply the want in the interim. I deny, however, that the maintenance of fire-brigades forms any part of their obligations to the public, and am under the impression that as long as they are able and willing to pay their losses, they do all that need be required of them. If, how-ever, they have, at considerable, expense, kept up a well-trained force, which turns out for the protection of property, whether insured or not, we at least set an example which is worthy of imitation. As to the question of rates, it is a very simple one. The Offices have, after a trial of some years, found that they leave a loss instead of a profit, and naturally raise them ; and, with the unfortunate experience that Adelaide afforded, competition from Companies who understand the risk is not very likely, and men of business in this city will form their own opinions of the soundness of Offices who continue to do business at a loss. I am glad to hear that a Building Act is in active operation, and trust we may soon feel its beneficial influence. Notwithstanding however, the energetic way in which the city authorities are proceeding, it will be a long time before our city is purged of

the combustible buildings which each summer threaten its safety—a fact of which those who are curious in street-architecture may satisfy themselves by an inspection of the back premises in our principal streets. I now take my leave of this subject, of which I think your readers must have had enough.

I am, Sir, &c., A. J. WRIGHT, Agent Imperial Fire Office, Adelaide, April 7, 1858.

South Australian Register (Adelaide, SA : 1839 - 1900), Friday 9 April 1858, page 2

INSURANCE AGAINST FIRE.

We have received another letter from Mr. A. J. Wright, and also a communication from Mr. J. Howard Clark, in reference to the remarks we recently made on the abortive result of the attempts to lessen the danger from fire which were put forth by the citizens of Adelaide early in the past summer. We publish both those letters in our correspondence columns to-day; and notwithstanding Mr. Wright's opinion that our readers have had enough of the subject, we intend to add a few "more last words" on the issues which our correspondents have raised. Here, however, as a matter of controversy between ourselves and the writers, we shall close the discussion ; but the general topic is one which we shall deem it our duty to agitate on convenient occasions, so long as the imminent but remediable risks, under which the metropolis lies are not provided against, and so long as the enhanced expenses springing out of those risks are imposed upon the citizens. The letters of Mr. Wright and Mr. Clark leave the matter of our complaint practically very much where they found it, excepting in one particular. That is, they shift the blame of inaction throughout the summer to the shoulders of individual members of the Committee. Hitherto we have not breathed a word of reproach against the Committee, but have all along assumed that their inaction originated in their ignorance of the reply to their application. That assumption we are not disposed to abandon, for it is now acknowledged by both our correspondents that the Committee, as such, really never were made acquainted with that reply. Certain gentlemen who formed part of that Committee were favoured with an informal peep at the official letter, and it now appears took upon themselves to assure the gentleman who acted as their Secretary that he might venture to dispense with the further discharge of his duties. We must still adhere to our conviction that it was extremely unfortunate that any circumstances were allowed to interfere with the further consideration of the subject by the Committee immediately after the 16th December last. Though some members of the Committee deemed further action needless, others, had they been consulted, might have entertained a different opinion. And even though each member of the Committee had been consulted individually (which, however, is not asserted to have been done), it is still quite possible that in consultation some new idea might have been suggested and some different course adopted. Every man of business knows what a different matter it is to have a Secretary come to him hastily, saying, "I have spoken to Mr. So-and-So, and he thinks we can do nothing more ; what is your opinion ?" from a meeting with five or six other gentlemen for the thorough consideration of any given subject. Even Mr. Clark allows that it might have been better had a formal meeting of the Committee been held to receive the reply of the Government. But he affirms that "it smacks somewhat of a love for red-tapism to construe this omission into a serious offence." Perhaps it does ; but, unfortunately for the effect of Mr. Clark's sarcasm, the object at which it is levelled is a creature of his own imagination, and not a statement of ours. We never charged it as a serious offence upon anybody that the Committee were not convened "to receive the reply of the Government" merely; the fact against which our

censures have been directed is, that a movement vigorously commenced for the accomplishment of an object of the most urgent importance, after being carried rapidly through a few stages, was suddenly allowed to become dormant by the persons to whom its conduct was entrusted. Mr. Clark's explanation of this fact is, that the Committee were bound by their instructions. It smacks bitterly of red-tapism, in one of its worst characteristics — indifferentism — to allow instructions to nullify the set purpose of the instructors, when they are at hand to be appealed to. We have not intimated that we wished the Committee to violate their instructions in the smallest degree ; but we do maintain that when it was ascertained at the beginning of the summer that the mode of action prescribed by the citizens in public meeting would necessarily fail of accomplishing the great object desired, until at least another season of imminent danger had been endured, the Committee should have appealed to their principals the citizens ; and informing them that the course they had decreed would postpone the establishment of a Fire Brigade for an indefinite period, should have at least enabled them to adopt other measures for their own protection. We formerly intimated that we thought the Committee should have endeavoured to organize a Volunteer Fire Brigade. We still think they might have gone beyond the strict letter of their duty, by suggesting some such scheme to the citizens, if only as a temporary measure. Some such action would only have been consistent with their reputation for vigour and earnestness. The gentlemen selected by the citizens to carry out their object were so honoured because they were regarded as men of energy and ability, in whose hands the purpose was likely to be effected. It was never supposed that they would act as mere clerks ; or that, regarding themselves in that light, they would fail in one of their chief routine duties, viz., reporting the result of their labours to their principals. We still affirm that, as a Committee, they have not neglected the trust reposed in them, because, as a Committee, they have never had an opportunity of taking such action as the reply of the Government might seem to necessitate. The gentlemen who took upon themselves the responsibility of preventing that collective action, whoever they may be, must bear whatever amount of blame may be considered due to their interference. The extent of their offence we must leave to the citizens to determine. Excepting in the one point which we have now disposed of, the letters under consideration do not affect our position in the least, and we will not weary our readers by commenting on the irrelevant statements they contain. In dismissing the topic for the pre-sent we may be allowed to express an earnest hope that another summer will not be per-mitted to find us unprepared with all possible means of promptly repressing outbreaks of fire in the city of Adelaide, at the Port and wherever else such protection is urgently requisite. We have had enough of the laissez faire system— it is now time to exert ourselves in earnest to ward off the dangers which are yearly becoming more formidable. That the public are alive to this necessity we have had experience, and we feel convinced that they will not again permit their purpose to be thwarted.

Adelaide Observer (SA : 1843 - 1904), Saturday 10 July 1858, page 4

FIRE AT THE LORD RAGLAN.--

CORONER'S INQUEST.

On Thursday afternoon Dr. Woodforde held an inquest at the Lord Raglan Hotel, Weymouth-street, on a fire which occurred the same morning at the rear of that house. The Jury, having elected their Foreman, proceeded to view the scene of the fire. The premises consisted of a

large stable, with hay-loft above, and a shed, in which the proprietor carried on the business of camphine manufacturer. From the large quantity of oil, camphine, and turpentine on the spot, and the number of shingle-roofed buildings in the vicinity, it appears almost miraculous that the amount of damage was not much more extensive. The first witness called was James Davey, landlord of the Lord Raglan Hotel, who stated that he carried on the business of oil refiner and camphine manufacturer. About 3 o'clock that morning, as he was rectifying turpentine into camphine, the cork of the retort containing the turpentine blew out, and the spray from the retort came in contact with a candle, which was standing on a box at a distance of about three feet, and took fire. The whole place was in a blaze in an instant. He ran out and tore down some blinds which he wetted and threw over the retort. Gave the alarm and procured some blankets, which he also wetted and put over the drums of turpentine, By that time there were several people in the yard, and they did their best to extinguish the fire. There was a small well in the yard, which he opened, and the water was drawn up and used where most required, by that means preventing the spread of the fire in the direction of the oil-shop. An engine after wards arrived and extinguished the fire in the stable.

By the Coroner—Had been in the habit of making camphine in these premises and in the same manner for the last two years. Never had an accident of any description before. Took every precaution that was possible for the prevention of accident. Did not think the cork was put in sufficiently secure or it would not have blown out. It was put in in the same way as usual. The turpentine in the retort was boiling. The only other outlet for the vapour which was generated was through the pipe which passed through cold water for the purpose of condensing. Was aware that there was a pressure on the cork when the turpentine was boiling, but considered the pipe sufficient to take off the pressure. Had often taken out the cork when the turpentine was at boiling point. Had never done so with a candle near it. Was in the habit of commencing work about 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning. Generally used a lantern, but sometimes took a candle. Did not consider it dangerous to use a naked candle. Did not serve his time at making camphine. First learned to make it about two years ago when camphine was scarce. The process was shown him by Mr. Galley, who said he had been a distiller all his life. Never saw the process before he attempted to make it himself. Considered his apparatus perfectly safe in every respect. Generally made about 35 gallons of camphine in 12 hours. The boiler is made of iron, with galvanized-iron dome; the pipes were of galvanized iron, and the retort was a sheet-iron drum, originally containing rape oil. The vapour alone when mixed with the air would not take fire. Had frequently raised the cork during the daytime when the turpentine was boiling too fast.

By a Juror—Had seen a slight spray from the retort when he raised the cork in daytime, but always drew it gradually and replaced it immediately. Knew that the spray would catch fire if passing through the flame of a candle. Did not think of any danger in taking a lighted candle, because he did not think of the cork coming out. Never knew the cork to come out before, unless it was pulled out. There was perfect vent through the pipes. About three gallons had already ran off. There was a continual stream of cold water running into the condensing cask. The diameter of the condensing pipe is about $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{3}{4}$ inch. Had no means of ascertaining the amount of pressure of steam in the boiler. The fire was the same size as usual at the time the accident occurred.

By the Coroner—There was no oil in the same shed. In the shed adjoining, which was separated by a thin brick wall, there was about 1,500 gallons of oil, about 250 gallons of

turpentine, and 200 gallons of camphine. There was nothing in the shed where the turpentine was boiling. Two holes had been left for air in the wall of the stable adjoining the shed where the fire commenced. The fire entered at these holes, and the whole of the woodwork inside the stable was destroyed. Could not say what water there was except that on the premises. The door between the two sheds was open. The stable and sheds were insured in the Launceston Fire and Marine Insurance Office for £100, and the stock of oil, &c., for £500. Considered the stock then in the shed to be worth from £700 to £1,000. Estimated his loss at about £75.

By Mr. Hackett (managing clerk for Mr. Parker, who attended on behalf of the Launceston Insurance Company)—The oil, camphine, and turpentine were all in one shed. Had worked the apparatus for the last two years, and made upwards of 3,000 gallons of camphine without accident.

By the Coroner—Did not consider the wear and tear of any consequence. Had frequently examined the apparatus, but never found anything wrong.

Richard Nolan, Sergeant of Police, deposed that he was on duty about a quarter-past 3 o'clock. Was leaving the Station to visit the men on their beats, when he saw a light smoke, and immediately after a blaze. Directed a man to ring the fire-bell and send to the Barracks for the horses for the fire-engine. Hastened in the direction of the fire, and heard the screams of a female. On his arrival at the Lord Raglan found the shed at the back in flames. Ran round to the back of the premises, and on his return to the yard found two constables there throwing water on the fire. Saw a young man and a female in the yard. Did not see Mr. Davey during the fire. The police-engine arrived about 20 minutes after, but they had no water to use for some time. Two others arrived some time after, but neither played on the fire.

Remained till the fire was extinguished, which was about two hours. There were no water-carts when the police engine arrived, or for about a quarter of an hour after. After that time had a good supply. There were two horses in the yard when he come up. Asked some people to pull the fence down. Saw Mr. Davey after the fire was over. There were very few people at the fire.

By the Coroner—Saw nothing suspicions.

By a Juror—Did not see any water-cart previous to the arrival of the police-engine. There might have been one without his seeing it.

Thomas Hills, Superintendent of the Imperial Fire Brigade—Came to the fire about half-past 3 o'clock. Saw Mr. Davey, Mr. Dawson, and a few others throwing water on the fire. Went round to see whether any of the adjoining premises were in danger. Heard a water cart. Ran and stopped it, but it was empty. The driver tried to rush past him. Took the number of the cart, No. 72, Saw a water-cart belonging to Bew, without any horse, standing on the premises adjoining. With the assistance of Mr. Harrold brought it to the fire before the police-engine arrived. The first cart that arrived after the engine had only about 15 buckets of water, Refused the driver, whose name was Fox, a ticket. The Cornwall and Imperial engines arrived after-wards, but were not required. There was not sufficient water to keep one at work had it been necessary to do so.

The Jury, after some consideration, returned a verdict to the effect that the fire had been caused by accident, but they were of opinion that the manufacture of camphine or other inflammable articles should not be carried on unless in a building composed of incombustible materials, and detached from any other building.