

## Adelaide Fire Brigade 1859

*South Australian Register (Adelaide, SA : 1839 - 1900), Wednesday 16 February 1859, page 3*

### FIRE AT THE ELEPHANT AND CASTLE.

Early on Tuesday morning a fire broke out at the stables of the Elephant and Castle, West-terrace, which, with the stockyard and some articles of value, were entirely destroyed. The circumstances appear to have been of a very suspicious character. The landlord discovered a fire breaking out at the corner of the stables about 10 o'clock the previous evening, and succeeded in extinguishing it. But about 4 o'clock in the morning he was again awoken by a fire originating in the same place, which in a very short space of time destroyed the whole of the back premises. Fortunately the inn was saved. Dr. Woodforde held an inquest at the inn on Tuesday, when the following evidence was taken :— George Jolley, landlord and owner of the inn at which the fire occurred, deposed as follows :— I first discovered the fire at the back of my premises about 10 o'clock last evening. I had at that time occasion to go out of the house, and on turning the corner I saw a light in the shed adjoining the stable where the dog-cart was kept. I ran to see what it was, and observed that the fire had just broken through from the shed into the stable. I immediately ran back, and obtained a bucket of water and threw upon the fire. I continued to throw other buckets of water on the fire, which soon extinguished it. Very little damage was done at that time. One only of the palings was burnt, and seven or eight others were scorched. My wife made an alarm, which brought Mr. Carleton, but the fire had then been put out. I am quite sure that I put the fire out before I went to bed. I sent information to the police, and a constable was accordingly sent, who overhauled the premises about 11 o'clock. He told me that he was perfectly satisfied that everything was safe, and he left again about 12 o'clock. I remained up till after 1 o'clock, and went out again before I went to bed, to make sure that all was safe. There were no signs of either smoke or fire at that time, and I was quite satisfied that the fire was then put out, but could not swear to it.

About 4 o'clock this morning I awoke, and saw that there was a great fire near. I jumped out of bed, and ran down stairs with my trousers on, and saw the stable in a full blaze. All the south end was blazing from bottom to top, and the only part not on fire was the north-west corner. I had a valuable mare in the stable at the time. Not having the key with me I smashed the door open with a large stone, and drove the mare out of the stable with a big stick. I then snatched up a set of harness which was hanging over the door, and removed it, and ran towards the dog-cart, but could not get near it. The cart was then burning. I saw no one lurking about the premises when the fire commenced on either occasion. I had not been into the stable nor the shed with a light before the first fire commenced, nor had any other person to my knowledge. When the policeman was there I took a lantern to show him the premises. I have no grounds for suspecting any person in particular of setting fire to the premises. I am on good terms with all my neighbours, except one man, who lives very near to me. His yard adjoins mine, and I sent him notice some time ago to keep his cattle off my premises. I believe he was annoyed at this. Had some words with him about it, and also about an account for drink, which he disputed. This was two or three years ago. I never heard him threaten me in any way. By the Foreman— It is my usual custom to go round the premises of a night before going to bed to see that they are safe. I believe my wife cautioned my neighbour to keep his cattle away last night on account of a load of hay being in my yard. By the Coroner— The load of hay was destroyed, and the dray was partly burnt with the

harness. By the Foreman— The upper part of the stable has been used as a storeroom for lumber since the Corporation by-law prohibiting hay being kept in such places has come into force. By the Coroner— Was certain that the fire commenced from the lower part of the stable. It was locked every night, and I kept the key. By a Juror— A quantity of sweepings and dry manure was yesterday brought from my neighbour's yard and deposited on some open land close to my shed, and on the spot where the fire originated. By the Coroner— I refer to the same neighbour I have before alluded to. His name is John Bishop. I did not see the rubbish deposited at the spot mentioned, but was informed of it by Mr. Hibbert. My neighbours arrived too late to save anything after the second fire. By a Juror— The load of hay was not on fire when I first discovered the second fire. Louisa Hibbert, married woman, residing near the Elephant and Castle, stated that she saw Bishop's two children taking some rubbish from their yard and placing it at the back of Mr. Jolley's gighouse. They were carrying it in tin dishes. Did not think there was any thing very unusual in this at the time. Never saw them do so before. Thought the elder of the two children was about ten years old. Never heard Bishop threaten anybody, but was not acquainted with him except as a neighbour. The children piled up about a wheelbarrowful of rubbish against the corner of the shed. It was between 4 and 6 o'clock on the previous afternoon. Mary Bishop, a girl nine years of age, stated that she and her little sister were engaged the previous afternoon in removing some rubbish from their yard to a piece of open land near Jolly's gighouse. Their mother told them to do it. Had no matches to play with, and knew nothing of how the fire happened. Was in bed at the time. There were no ashes with the rubbish. Their mother told them to chuck it down at Jolley's gighouse. Edward Williams, wheelwright, living in Gilbert-street, near the Elephant and Castle, stated that he saw the fire about 4 o'clock that morning, as he was getting up. It only appeared then like the light of a fire or a candle. He thought nothing about it at the time, but went to prepare his breakfast. In about ten minutes afterwards saw that there was some building on fire where he had first seen the light. Ran to the spot and found the stable and shed all on fire. Mr. Jolley was get-ting the horse out of the stable. Assisted in attempting to put out the fire. Saw no one else about the premises nor in the neighbourhood, except Mr. Jolley's little boy and Mrs. Jolley who was giving the alarm. The light when he first saw it appeared to be about the height of a table from the ground. George Jolley, recalled— Was not Insured. Charles James Carleton, Superintendent of the Cemetery, was sworn, and stated that he was present just after the time of the first fire, about 8 o'clock the previous evening. Mr. Jolley had a lantern in his hand. Saw a hole which had been burnt in the shed. Advised Mr. Jolley to remove the lantern, in order that they might be certain that the fire was extinguished. Was quite convinced that it was out. Saw some dry rubbish at the back of the shed. Kicked it about, and seeing no fire was convinced it was out. Advised Mr. Jolley to send to the police. Went home to bed soon afterwards, and was awoke again somewhere about 3 or 4 o'clock by his children screaming "Fire." Ran over to the place, and saw the stables in one complete blaze. About twenty men were doing all they could to put out the fire. One of the engines arrived, but it was too late to save the stable, not on account of any delay, but of the rapidity with which the flames spread. Knew nothing of the origin of the fire. The men were exceedingly active in their endeavours to extinguish the fire, and amongst them be observed Mr. Crabbe, of Hindley-street, who deserved special notice for his exertions. Police-constable Rumble stated that he was on duty the previous night at about a quarter to 11 o'clock, when Mrs. Jolley called at the Station and reported that her husband had discovered the stable to be on fire. Sergeant Haynes directed him to go and endeavour to find out the origin of the fire. It

was out when he arrived. Mr. Jolley and himself examined the premises. It appeared to have originated between the stable and the post of the shed. They were unable to ascertain the cause of the fire. Saw the heap of rubbish, but the fire did not appear to have reached it, but to have commenced above it about a foot from the ground. Turned over the rubbish with his hand, and foot also, but saw no fire in it. It was dry manure. Did not believe there was any fire left. Knew nothing about the second fire. There had been plenty of water used where the first fire occurred. The ground was quite wet. During the examination of the witnesses Mr. Hills, Superintendent, of the Fire Brigade, entered the room and expressed a wish to interrogate the witnesses on behalf of the Insurance Companies, The Coroner in-formed him that he would be happy to render any assistance in his power to the Insurance Companies, but he had recently determined that no persons but the Jury should be allowed to question the witnesses except the solicitors on behalf of the Companies. Any departure from this rule would lead to great irregularities. Mr. Hills complained that there had not been sufficient time given to make arrangements for this purpose, but was informed by the Coroner that the inquest was not a final Court, and that promptitude was necessary in order to prevent any attempts being made to defeat the ends of justice where there were any suspicious circumstances. The Coroner, in calling upon the Jury to consider their verdict, expressed it as his opinion that there was no evidence to criminate any one. It was for them to say whether the fire had been accidental or not, and if the one fire was connected with the other. He thought it quite possible that the fire might have been smoulder-ing beneath the heap of rubbish during the interval referred to by Mr. Jolley. As to the origin of the fire, it appeared to be, like many others, unknown. With regard to Bishop, there was not a particle of evidence to criminate him. The Jury having retired, brought in a verdict to the effect that the premises were maliciously wilfully, and feloniously set on fire by some person or persons to the Jury unknown, and that they attached no suspicions to Mr. Bishop.

***Adelaide Observer (SA : 1843 - 1904), Saturday 19 February 1859, page 6***

#### THE BUSH FIRES MEETING.

The meeting of Monday in aid of the sufferers from the recent fires in the bush, although scarcely so numerous as we expected it to be, was a decisive and effective movement. It was representative in its character, definite in its tone, earnest in its sympathies, and practical in its resolves. It comprised some of the more active individuals of all classes— political, religious, and social; and it created a machinery which can be promptly worked to relieve the distresses of the sufferers. Funds were immediately placed at the disposal of the Committee, and guarantees offered of amounts sufficient almost to accomplish all that can be required in the more pressing cases. These guarantees are not intended to pledge the offerers to give the amounts named, but simply to enable the Committee to act boldly without a moment's delay. They are merely drafts upon the yet unrealized generosity of the South Australian public. That they will be duly honoured cannot admit of a doubt; for the philanthropy which has never failed to exert itself on behalf of distant woes will not be lifeless now that the appeal is from fellow-colonists and perhaps personal friends.

There was one incident in connection with the meeting which calls for a special remark, and that one of congratulation. It was, that the assembly, by an immense majority, repudiated the proposition to apply to the Executive Government for aid in this emergency, beyond the very limited assistance of food for the starving and shelter for the houseless. Tents and rations are all the subsidy which is to be asked from the Government. In other words, the

Executive was to be appealed to, to do what indeed it would probably do without such appeal, viz., extend the operations of the Destitute Board, in a somewhat unusual manner, to certain of the country districts. We apprehend, however, that by this time very little of that duty remains to be done, for the prompt benevolence of more fortunate neighbours has doubtless already furnished temporary relief for these most pressing wants. However, if destitution exists, the community must undoubtedly support the destitute through its established machinery until there is no further occasion for the aid. This, however, is a widely different thing from that indiscriminate cry for the interference of Government, in which some otherwise right-thinking men have been betrayed by this emergency. We rejoice to find that a meeting of South Australians, promiscuous in its character to some extent, promptly refused to endorse such a piteous appeal. We are glad to know that the spirit of self-reliance is still strong in the people, and that correct views of the functions and duties of the Government have so general acceptance among them.

On the occurrence of any calamity it is but too common for men and for bodies of men to act from impulse, and without any proper amount of system. Whenever this is done it is done at a decided loss to the objects sought to be relieved. Sympathy is not sufficiently widely appealed to, and where the objects of distress are numerous some are altogether over-looked, and in other cases relief is afforded and funds are distributed not in the precise ratio of the losses which have been sustained. There appear to be two primary steps which should be taken at the present juncture, and without loss of time as it respects either of them. Efforts should be made to ascertain the precise amount of damage which has been sustained, and the precise amount of contribution that can be calculated upon, so that the latter may be dealt out in strict proportion to the former. The necessity of such a mode of action was felt in relation to Crimean suffering and Indian disaster, and its adoption was marked by the most advantageous and felicitous results. We had the idea that three or four gentlemen possessed of leisure, ability, and inclination for the work—men of tact and prudence, of shrewd businesslike habits as well as kind instincts, active but not rash—should go at once into the devastated districts accredited as the agents of the Committee, and empowered, not only to collect information, but also to administer relief. The Committee, however, seeks to ascertain the extent of the losses from the sufferers themselves, and have appointed a Sub-Committee to draw up a form to be filled in by each applicant for relief. This appears to be a most sensible and judicious arrangement—not only practicable, but easy; not only general, but prompt. Having devised this method of obtaining information as to the precise amount of losses sustained they have further decided to operate upon the inhabitants of Adelaide, North and South, by a well organized visitation from house to house to solicit subscriptions. They have it in intention, also, to make an appeal to rural localities which the fire has not desolated through the various. District Councils. There is a commendable breadth in this plan, albeit there may be many men in a given district more suited to act upon the sympathies, and through them to make a more successful set upon the pockets of their fellow-men than the gentlemen who have been chosen to the honourable office of District Councillors. However, the calamity has been so distressing—blackened ruins of once flourishing homesteads, houseless families, fenceless wastes, foodless, clothesless children, the contented and well-to-do settlers of a week ago, now anxious and penniless, that there is enough and more than enough to set any man working, of any class of men, and to ensure their working successfully, however unfit they might be by taste or by talent for appealing to the prosperous and the benevolent in behalf of those who have so strong a claim, at the present time upon their sympathy and aid. We trust the

Central Committee and the rural organizations will seek to accomplish the object which necessitates their exertions with a zeal and promptness commensurate with the urgency of the distress which, through them makes its appeal to the colony at large.

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#### PROTECTION AGAINST FIRE.

The immunity which the city has enjoyed against fires during the present summer must have struck most persons as a noteworthy circumstance. We do not know that the causes of this immunity can be distinctly traced, but no one can deny its existence. It may be that greater care has been taken by the inhabitants of the city generally than during former seasons, in order to prevent an evil which it is difficult to cure. It may be that the efficiency of the two brigades organized by the Insurance Companies has stopped at the outset one or two conflagrations that under other circumstances might have been serious. Certainly these brigades have shown a promptitude and vigour which could not fail of effect on an occasion of emergency. We are informed that on the last occasion on which an alarm of fire was given in Adelaide, the brigade connected with the Imperial engine had it ready for action in exactly 70 seconds from the time of their arrival on the ground. But this, as well as other causes of the civic safety which might be imagined, must be dismissed as unproved, for the simple reason that no great danger has arisen throughout the summer to test their value. We must be content, and thankful, to know that we have got through the worst of the season without a strain upon our powers of combating with the devouring element in the city, while our fellow-colonists in the country have unfortunately been unable to withstand its fury.

It is to be hoped that the experience of this season will not induce a false security for the future. It is certain that the citizens of Adelaide do not deserve the safety they have enjoyed. They have done little, we believe we may say nothing, to secure it. Some eight or ten months ago the citizens were fully alive to the importance of adopting measures of defence, and meetings were held to organize brigades, provide engines, and create all the necessary machinery for the protection of the city and its suburbs against the common enemy. The upshot of all that movement was an appeal to the Government, and it is a significant fact that nothing has been heard of the matter since. Parliament has been assembled since, passed through an entire session, and has been again prorogued, and yet no Ministerial Bill for organizing the promised fire brigade was even mentioned. The city members forgot to jog the Ministerial memory on the subject; and, as the session was held at a period when fires are not much dreaded, the public forgot the matter too. There was a Committee appointed at the time we refer to, of which nothing has been heard of since; but that Committee, we believe, considered its functions exhausted by one interview with the Chief Secretary. And thus, so far as the public and the authorities are concerned, the city is in a worse position than it was a year ago. We have been fortunate—certainly not provident.

The fire brigades to which we have alluded have been organized, and are sustained by the various Insurance Companies having offices in Adelaide. It may, perhaps, be found more economical by those Companies to maintain these means of protection against fire than to pay for the damage which might otherwise be done. But as a considerable portion of city property is not insured in any of these offices it is scarcely just to devolve the whole cost of protecting that property upon the Companies. The least thing the city should do would be to establish a fire brigade at the cost of the citizens. The control of this brigade should be in the hands of the Corporation; in fact there is no more legitimate part of the duties of the

Municipal Council than the maintenance of these usual and proper precautions against the destruction of the property of the citizens. The Police engine, which, from a variety of causes, is comparatively useless at present, might very properly be entrusted to the Corporation and worked by the City Brigade. It is, we believe, a very effective engine, regarded as a piece of machinery; but it is palpably ridiculous to expect that it can be efficiently worked without the assistance of a corps trained to its use. It would be ludicrous but for the consequences involved to see the police attempting to get their engine to work on an emergency—screwing hose in the wrong apertures, pouring water into the wrong places, doing everything almost but turning the engine upside down. The police are not blamable for this incapacity; they are never trained to work fire-engines, neither could they be so trained in consistency with their other and still more important duties. And even though they were proficient at the mechanical work, their services on the occasion of a fire might be much more usefully employed in another direction. Their proper functions are to keep order in the crowd, to protect property exposed to spoliation, and generally to do with greater vigilance those duties which on ordinary occasions they perform as a matter of routine. On all accounts, therefore, it would be advantageous to place the Police engine at the command of the Corporation, and if a City Brigade were organized and properly exercised, it would probably suffice, in conjunction with the existing brigades, to secure a moderate amount of safety to the citizens.

It is a question worth consideration whether on the whole it is better to retain three separate brigades attached to three engines, or to unite them into one brigade, and place all the engines under the same command. In the first case, competition might tend to produce greater efficiency in practice; and in the latter case, want of unity might be productive of evil consequences in the moment of danger. This is a matter which ought to be fairly weighed before a correct opinion could be pronounced; but on one point there can be no difference of opinion. It is, that an energetic, courageous, and prudent man should be officially invested with supreme command in case of fires. With a Braidwood as the re-cognised Superintendent, armed with authority to command brigades, police, populace, and all, it would matter very little how each engine was worked in practice, or how many parties composed the force available on the occasion.

We have said that the citizens do not deserve the immunity they have enjoyed, because they have done nothing to secure it. We may add that, so far as we are acquainted with existing arrangements for their protection, that immunity may be lost at any moment. If we are rightly informed, it should be a source of unalloyed gratitude that no fire arose in this city during the recent hot weather. Had the trial been made the machinery would have been found most woefully wanting. The organizations we have are good enough in themselves, but they are individually feeble, and they lack coherence. There is, we are informed, discordance among parties who should be heartily at one in the moment of danger. Will it be believed that in consequence of some dispute about remuneration between the Insurance Companies and the proprietors of the Waterworks, it is a subject of doubt whether water would be supplied to the only efficient brigades in the hour of need? And yet we are told that such is absolutely the case, and that neither from the Waterworks nor from the tank at the Railway Station could water be obtained unless it were taken by force. We are told, also, that for some reason which we find it impossible to conceive, the police bell is not now rung to give the alarm in case of fires occurring in the daytime. If we are correctly informed on these points, it is most manifest that, by the non-occurrence of any threatening

outbreak, the city has escaped a danger more serious than is generally supposed. A fire during the past few weeks would have found the persons whose concurrence is most essential to the general safety at loggerheads, and while they were adjusting their differences Adelaide might have been destroyed.

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#### THE POLICE FIRE-ENGINE.

We have already informed our readers that the police fire-engine is no longer to be kept in a state of comparative uselessness for want of the means of transporting it from the Station to the scene of danger. For the future horses are to be stabled on the premises on which the engine it kept, so that the loss of time consequent upon sending to the police paddock on the outbreak of a fire will be avoided. We have already expressed our approval of the new arrangement as an improvement upon the previously existing system, and a step in the right direction. It is but a step, however, and one which we trust to see very shortly followed by others of a bolder and more efficacious character. The police horses, it must be remembered, are not intended for nor accustomed to the collar, neither is it necessary to the qualifications of a police officer that he should be able to assume the functions of a groom. It may happen that just at the moment of emergency, when the most energetic and well-regulated efforts are required, the men on duty at the Station cannot harness the horses, or that the horses will not draw the engine. If horses are selected for the purpose and kept constantly stabled at the Station, the probability is that they will become useless for want of exercise, their skin will chafe when they are called upon to work, and from the overfreshness induced by indolence and pampered appetite they will become terrified and unmanageable just when they should be most completely under command, with the rattling vehicle behind them, the crowd of people on all sides, and the glare and noise and confusion inseparable from a sudden outburst of fire startling and bewildering them. If, on the other hand, the horses are kept in sufficient work, they are sure to be away when most urgently wanted. If this arrangement be examined a little closely, we think it will be seen that, although it is better to have the police horses, so long as they are to be harnessed to the fire-engine, nearer at hand than a mile away, it would be possible to make much better arrangements for horsing the engine by contracting with some leading stable-keeper. There are several horse proprietors in Adelaide who have a large number of animals in constant work, and of this number have a few always at home ready for an unexpected demand. One of these gentle men, and the nearer his premises to the place where the engine is kept the better, would, we imagine, contract to draw it to all scenes of threatened danger, at a cost less than that involved in keeping a team of horses in indolence from week to week, for the sake of the occasional service rendered in cases of fire. And, as we have shown, this kind of service would in all probability be much more efficient than any which the police could render. The contractor would have horses in constant work, always ready, harness at hand and in its place, ostlers capable of turning out a team with the greatest possible promptitude, and a driver able to turn all these facilities to the speediest account. On the contrary, that portion of the police force available at the moment might not contain a single man competent to the discharge of any of these duties ; and with horses necessarily half trained and unruly it is easy to conceive of how little value the new arrangement may after all be found. It involves no reproach of the police to draw this contrast. In the one case men and horses would be doing substantially what they do every day of their lives; while in the other case a body of men and horses trained for certain specific and most important

purposes are expected to discharge efficiently on rare occasions. duties in which they are unpractised and must necessarily be awkward. But the horsing of the police engine is after all a subordinate matter. We are strongly of opinion that it is scarcely possible for an engine worked exclusively by the police force to rival in efficiency an engine entrusted to a specially-trained fire brigade. Indeed, in order to secure equal efficiency it would be necessary to practise the whole force regularly in brigade duties ; for as it would never be possible to know beforehand when a fire would break out, it could not be arranged for the trained men to be on duty for the occasion. Regular practice with the engine would be a serious addition to the labours of the police, and would interfere we imagine, very seriously with their regular duties. In fact, on the assumption— that the police a well-founded assumption— that the police already work up to their full strength, it is obvious that no such training could be given without such an addition to the numerical strength of the force as would practically amount to the establishment of a police fire brigade. The only possible alternatives, then, if the police engine is to remain in the custody of that body, are, to entrust its working to raw unaccustomed hands, or to organize and train a police brigade specially for service at fires. The former alternative promises little advantage to the public from the use of the engine— the latter, involves questions of cost of rather serious amount. But it cannot be denied that it is better to expend a large sum for efficient protection than to squander smaller sums perpetually with no useful result. A suggestion which we recently made deserves some consideration from the public, and especially the citizens of Adelaide. It is, that the police engine should be placed in charge of the Adelaide Corporation, and that that body should organize and maintain a City Fire Brigade, something on the same plan as the brigade of the Insurance Companies is now established. It should consist of a sufficient number of active, daring, and intelligent men, living pretty nearly in the same locality, and able to devote from their regular occupations an occasional hour or two for brigade practice. A small stipend for their routine duties, with a handsome payment on each occasion of actual service, would be regarded by these men as sufficient recompense, and would prove much less costly than the maintenance of a police brigade expressly for service at fires. Fortunately we have not in Adelaide occasions for the service of a brigade so frequent as to necessitate the retention of a special standing force. In our circumstances, the brigades must consist of men who partake very much of the character of volunteers— they must have a liking for the work ; but they must at the same time be trained to the subordination of discipline, and, be invested with the authority of office ; otherwise they cannot combine effectively in the confusion of a crowd. We do not doubt that such a force might easily be got together in Adelaide under the control of the Municipal Council, and the citizens, we imagine, would not object to the outlay necessary to secure an object of such vital importance as protection against fire. And among the numberless recommendations which might be urged in favour of this suggestion is, that it would tend materially towards the greater security of both property and life by leaving the police force free to discharge, during the dangerous emergency of an extensive conflagration, the legitimate functions of their office as guardians of order and public protectors.

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#### THE POLICE AND THE FIRES.

One important point which presents itself in connection with the fires that have recently occurred, and which at the proper time will require attention at the hands of the Legislature, is as to the duties of the police in reference to such disasters. At the present time these

officers appear to regard conflagrations in the country districts as a class of accidents over which they have no control, and with which they have no right to interfere unless called upon by the settlers to do so. When that happens, we are bound in justice to say that the police are ever ready to give assistance, and generally they exert themselves to the utmost. But up to that moment, according to facts which have recently transpired, they no more think of leaving their station on account of a conflagration in the neighbouring bush than they would for the purpose of checking the progress of a thunderstorm. We do not mean to say that this is any fault of the police ; for whilst there are Acts of Parliament requiring their interference for the preservation of order, and for the protection of life and property in almost every other way, there is no law by which they are authorized to call upon the public for assistance in cases of danger and destruction from fire. Her Majesty's name may be invoked by any Dogberry in order to compass the arrest of a drunken man; but the country may be ravaged by fire, to the great hazard and even destruction of life and property, for weeks together, and throughout the colony there is no one empowered to summon the settlers together or in any way to call for assistance. It might certainly be supposed that the people themselves would be sufficiently alive to their own interests to check as quickly as possible any fire that came within a considerable distance of their property. But this unfortunately is not always the case. It has been recently seen that in the neighbourhood of Hindmarsh Valley the fire which ended by destroying nearly all the property of a district was allowed, day after day, to pursue its own destructive course upon the hills; and now that great loss has been inflicted, the settlers and the police exchange recriminations as to who should have checked the progress of the flames. At the inquest which was held at Port Elliot after the fire, the Jury found, in their verdict—

"That the police erred in judgment in not going out earlier, and investigating the state of the fire; and they are of opinion that the law should be amended, so as to give the police authority to call upon every man to assist in putting out a fire when it approaches the settled districts."

The latter part of this paragraph, we think, contains a very valuable suggestion; but we can hardly agree with the complaint against the police which precedes it. Evidence taken at the inquest showed that those officers behaved with great energy at the fire when called upon, and it was also elicited that there was at present no law or regulation which made it necessary for the police to take cognizance of conflagrations in the bush, unless to proceed against persons who had wilfully or negligently originated fires. It is no doubt desirable that some authority in such cases should be extended to the police; but at present it is clear that the public have no right to complain of their want of action when they are not called upon to act. The Coroner, at the inquest in question, said—

"It was his opinion, from the queries put to witnesses and jurors, that the fire was as much due to the non-apprehension of danger from the fire in the scrub, which made the settlers in the Hindmarsh Valley too apathetic to call the assistance of the police, and thus secure a general rising of the settlers to extinguish the flames while yet in the scrub."

There is another part of this subject, however, upon which the police cannot be so easily exonerated. We have already referred to the power which these officers have to proceed against persons who, by their negligence, set the country on fire. This power is given under an Act which imposes a penalty for various offences which we need not here particularize, but which it is well known are daily committed throughout the country districts, and yet no

prosecutions take place with respect to them. About a week ago, for instance, the letter of our Riverton correspondent contained the following paragraph:—

"The dangerous practice of burning stubble without using the legal precautions is common in this neighbourhood. Last night, with a strong south-west wind blowing, several settlers were burning stubble, no notice having been previously given to neighbours as the Act requires, thereby endangering property to a fearful extent."

It is impossible, we should think, that a practice which is referred to as "common" should be continued in a neighbourhood like Riverton, without coming to the knowledge of the police. Informations laid by the police against publicans are frequent enough, but proceedings under the Fires Prevention Act are seldom or never heard of. This, we imagine, can only arise from neglect, and that principally on the part of the police. We trust, however, that the disasters now fresh in the minds of the public may lead to a strict enforcement of the existing law, if not to its amendment.

***Adelaide Observer (SA : 1843 - 1904), Saturday 27 August 1859, page 4***

#### FIRE IN GILBERT-STREET.

Early on Thursday morning a fire broke out at the Duke of Brunswick Hotel, Gilbert-street, immediately at the back of the garden attached to Mr. J. F. Ross's house, in South-terrace. The alarm was given shortly after 5 o'clock, and the Police engine was the first to arrive on the ground, the Cornwall second, and the London Companies' (belonging to the Imperial, Royal, Alliance, and South Australian Mutual) third. Nearly half an hour elapsed from the arrival the Police engine to that of the two others, which came up nearly together. This arose from the information having been conveyed, as is usually the case, to the Police Office only, so that the persons in charge of the engines had to wait the chance of knowing anything about it. There is a fire-bell at the Police Office, which can be heard all over that building, in the midst of which it is placed, a little above the ground, but the sound of which does not nearly reach so far as the other engine-stations. In the present instance the intelligence of the fire was communicated to Mr. Hills, Superintendent of the Fire Brigade, by one of the runners of this paper, who was early astir, and perceived the flames. On the arrival of the engines another bad consequence of the insufficient alarm was evident in the absence of any proper supply of water. Had the fire-bell been so placed as to have aroused the watermen, they would doubt have attended in force; but as it was there were only some six or eight of them to serve the three engines, each of which was, therefore, able only to work at intervals. The fire, labouring under no such disadvantage, went to work with a will, and before the engines could do anything effectual in saving the main building, the interior of it was entirely destroyed. Mr. Ross, however, admitted the Police engine into his garden, and that enabled the police and firemen to arrest the progress of the flames at the back part of the house. By 7 o'clock more water having been obtained, the flames were subdued. But very little furniture was saved, and none of the stock. Great praise is due to Mr. Hills, Superintendent of the Brigade, to Mr. Jones, Engineer of the Cornwall Company, to Inspector Reid, and the various members of the police force and the fire brigade, as well as to the numerous volunteers who lent their hearty assistance. Rumour was busy during the morning as to the origin of the fire, and as an official investigation has been instituted, it is better to give the evidence taken at it than vague reports, which might either clash with the evidence, or be injurious to private character.

## THE INQUEST.

At 1 o'clock a respectable Jury assembled at the Star and Garter Inn, Sturt-street, and they elected Mr. T. H. Viney as their foreman. Anton Reese, builder, stated that he had been living at the Duke of Brunswick. Had lived there about six months. His wife managed the house for the landlord, who was unmarried, and witness attended to the business in the landlord's absence. The landlord's name was Linschmidt. He was not frequently from home. He went to Melbourne last Thursday week, and came back on last Tuesday evening. With that exception he had not been upon any occasion absent all night from home until Wednesday night. Witness received no payment for his services. He acted as the friend of the landlord, and lived in the house, with his family, free of expense. Last evening the landlord went away, as witness understood, to go to the Port, to a ball. That was between 5 and 6 o'clock. He (witness) was sober last night. He had now no interest in the Duke of Brunswick, but it had been his freehold, and it was he who built the house. He sold it to Linschmidt about 16 months ago. When the premises belonged to witness he had them insured in the Imperial Fire Office—the old house for £300, the new house, "the Duke of Brunswick," for £600. He (witness) went to bed about half-past 11 o'clock on Wednesday night. Some time after he closed, a person who had been in the house during the evening knocked at the door and demanded a bed. Witness refused to accommodate him, but gave him some matches to light his pipe. The man then said, "Well, if anything happens to-morrow, you shall suffer for it." He then went away, but came back again in three-quarters of an hour and said he would, if required, pay £1 for a bed. Witness said he could not accommodate him, knowing him to be a neighbour, and told him to go home. The man then went away grumbling, and witness saw no more of him. It was then about 2 o'clock, and witness went to sleep. He could not tell that man's name, but his wife and daughter knew him. He was aroused by his daughter, who said there was some one about. A few minutes after he heard a loud knocking and a crackling noise. He leaped up, opened the bedroom door, and saw the light and smoke of a fire in the bar through an opposite door. Witness was bewildered for a moment by the heat and smoke. When he recovered he called out to his children to escape from the fire. He went out by a door opening to the verandah. Witness, his wife, and three children slept in the same bedroom. They had been accustomed to sleep in that room; it was about 10 feet square. His children were aged respectively 14, 5, and 2 years. Witness did not exactly recollect what occurred when he left his house; he had part of his clothing in his hands. He cried out "Fire! fire!" He saw a neighbour approaching, and other people came to help. There was no person in the house during the night after it was closed, except witness and his family. He knew nothing of the present insurance of the house. There were chairs and tables in the day rooms, and the bedrooms were properly furnished. There was in one room a double bed. There was plenty of beer, brandy, and gin in stock. There were three 18-gallon casks of beer (one newly brought) in the cellar, and the shelves of the bar were full of bottles. There was a nine-gallon cask of porter on tap in the cellar. There were not, to his knowledge, any casks of spirits in the cellar, but there were several round and square cases, and there was brandy in bottles. There was gin or whisky in bottles; and some black bottles, the contents of which he was not aware of. He saved from the fire the furniture of his own bedroom and a few other articles. There had not, to his knowledge, been any furniture removed lately from the Duke of Brunswick.

By the Foreman—The person who knocked came to the back-door. Gave him some matches to light his pipe. The matches were on the kitchen table. He had no other furniture in the house except that of his bedroom.

By the Coroner—The kitchen was at the back of the house. It was not burnt. He believed the fire began in the bar, but he did not know how. He was under the impression that the back-door was open when he went out in the morning.

By a Juror (Mr. Moore)—Had been last in the cellar a little before 1 o'clock on Wednesday night. Placed a candle either on the bar floor or on the cellar steps to give light. The cellar flap was within the bar-counter. The steps were of deal. There might have been a little loose straw near the steps in the cellar, but there could not have been much. The bar was lighted by a camphine lamp generally, but he could not say whether it was so last night or not. He did not attend usually to the lamp. There were casks near the ladder. Could not say what they contained. Could not say that there were any casks under the ladder.

By a Juror (Mr. Rowe)—Thought Mr. Linschmidt could not have had access to the house on Wednesday night without his knowledge.

By Mr. Moore—The only ordinary fire in the house last night was in the parlour; it was nearly out before he went to bed.

By Mr. Hicks, solicitor—Had no interest in the stock-in-trade or the furniture. On opening his bedroom door he felt heat and saw smoke, but could not say whether he then closed the door or left it open. Escaped partly undressed to the verandah. His children escaped in their night-clothes and some articles hastily thrown upon them. They had not their shoes on. He had been in the cellar about 11 o'clock. Could not recollect when he had been there before that. He could not state how many packages were in the cellar. There was wine in bottles in the cellar. There had been no goods, such as wines or spirits, removed in quantity from the house lately. Mr. Linschmidt had some wine and spirits from Johnston, some from Hart, and some from Carruthers. He had his beer from Reid and Crawford.

A Juror (Mr. Whittington) enquired whether the examination had not gone into matters with which they had nothing to do, and whether it was proper to so occupy the time of the Jury.

The Coroner said inquests on fires had been instituted as much for the protection of Insurance Companies as anything else. It had always been his custom—and he was not inclined to break through it now—to give the Companies an opportunity to examine the witnesses through their solicitor.

By Mr. Moore—The name of the person who was with the man that afterwards returned to the house was McGowan; he was a soapboiler. He (witness) was not certain that the back-door had been bolted when he went to bed. He went to the Port for Mr. Linschmidt that morning; he was in bed when witness reached the Port.

Johann Heinrich Hermann Linschmidt, Landlord of the Duke of Brunswick, stated that he knew nothing about the fire. He had been at the Port; started for there between 5 and 6 o'clock on Wednesday evening. He went to a ball and intended to remain all night. He heard first of the fire that morning at Mr. Orkendorts, at the Port; that was between 9 and 10 o'clock. The premises were his freehold property, but were mort-gaged for £500. They were mortgaged to Mr. Thompson, butcher, Rundle-street. He purchased the property subject to that mortgage, and had to pay interest 12½ per cent. Had kept the interest paid regularly.

He valued the property in buying it at £1,000, and took them for £100, which he had lent Reese as a second mortgage. He held a general publican's licence. It was usual to light the bar with a camphine or paraffine lamp, which was suspended from the ceiling over the counter. It was usual to take a candle to the cellar. The house was pretty well furnished. Valued the furniture at from £250 to £300. The stock and furniture were insured in the Imperial Office for £300. The mortgagee's interest (£600) in the premises was insured, but his (witness's) interest (£100) was not insured. He valued his stock at from £50 to £60. He had three or four cases of brandy, the same of gin, and near a cask of porter, and other matters when he went to Melbourne. He valued the furniture and bar fixtures at £250. Mr. Anton Reese was his barman, and he had charge of the business in his (witness's) absence. Could not say how often he left the place for a night in Mr. Reese's charge. He paid Mrs. Reese 10s. per week for keeping the house. While he was away in Melbourne he paid Reese £1 a week. There had been neither furniture nor stock removed recently from the house. There were some partially emptied cases with straw in them near the foot of the ladder in the cellar.

By Mr. Hicks—He valued the bar-fittings at about £100, and the furniture at about £150. There were ten rooms in the house furnished. He paid Mr. C. Gors £200 for the furniture bought from him when he left. That was upon a valuation, and did not include the bar fixtures, and he had bought several articles since. He had no interest in a house on South-terrace. He had neither stock-in-trade nor furniture in any house except that destroyed by the fire.

Augusta Reese, aged 14, stated that she thought she heard somebody in the house. Called to her father, who got up and saw that the house was on fire. Witness helped to remove the younger children.

Anton Reese, recalled and examined by Mr. Hicks, stated that he had a house on South-terrace. It was not furnished. He believed there was no furniture in it.

The Coroner said he must adjourn the enquiry, and he thought he could not resume it the next day.

Mr. Rowe said Saturday would be a very inconvenient day for shopkeepers.

Mr. Moore enquired whether there really was a necessity for a postponement.

The Coroner said matters had come to his ears which rendered further enquiry necessary.

The police were directed to examine the house on South-terrace, and the proceedings were adjourned until Monday next, at 11 o'clock.

***South Australian Advertiser (Adelaide, SA : 1858 - 1889), Tuesday 30 August 1859, page 3***

#### CORONER'S INQUEST.

#### ADJOURNED INQUEST ON THE FIRE AT THE DUKE OF BRUNSWICK INN.

The adjourned inquest upon the fire at the Duke of Brunswick Inn, Gilbert-street, was held before the Coroner (Dr. Woodforde), at the Star and Garter Inn.

The first witness called was Michael Burke, who objected to being sworn until he was paid for his loss of time ; but the Coroner informed him he had no power to order him payment,

and was compelled to threaten him with the Gaol before he would consent to give evidence. He stated—I am a mason's laborer. I saw the fire at the Duke of Brunswick last Thursday morning, but cannot tell the hour. I was called out of my bed by the landlord's little girl. I went to bed at about half-past 8 o'clock on the previous night. She told me her father's house was on fire; and I hastily put on some clothes and went to the scene. I went to the front of the house. I saw the fire through the window, but I could not get in. The fire appeared to be burning behind the bar, and when I first saw it, was going up the shelves behind the counter. The windows were not broken at this time, and the fire had not come into the streets. The counter had not caught fire when I first saw it, but in a few minutes it caught; and when the supports were burnt I saw the counter turn over, and apparently fall into the cellar. At the time I first saw the fire it was apparently confined to the bar. I went round to the back to see if I could render any assistance in getting the things out, and I met Rees, who had not got his trousers on, standing at the bedroom door. He was crying and roaring, and I was very much confused. I asked him where the children were, but he could not speak or did not answer me. I saw his wife run away with one of the children in a blanket. I did not notice what clothes she had on. I think I was the first about the premises, as I did not see any one else when I first went there, but I afterwards saw a man named Peter Lamont. I live next door to the Duke of Brunswick.

I used what water I had for the purpose of putting on the eaves of the house. I fetched out every-thing that was in Rees's room, with the assistance of Rees and Peter Lamont. I can't say what things were got out, but I remember two tables, a round one and a square one, and an iron bedstead. I can't remember the other things. The things we got out were taken into the cottage next to mine which was to be let. Some of the things were put in the square first, but were afterwards removed to the cottage. I was not in the public-house at all on the night previous to the fire.

By a Juror—The furniture was removed from the back part of the house. No furniture, to my knowledge, was removed from the public-house part. There were several rooms at the back from which furniture was saved; from such rooms as we could find without a light. I made as much alarm as I could by calling "Fire" for the purpose of getting more assistance. Sergeant Badman came in about a quarter of an hour. Rees assisted in getting out the furniture. It was not day-light when I first went to the spot, nor can I say how long it was before daylight. I do not think it was day break when I saw Sergeant Badman.

By Mr. Hicks (who attended for the Insurance Office in which the stock and furniture were insured)—I did not observe the camphine lamp over the bar.

Edward McGovern, tallowchandler, in the employ of Mr. Moore, stated—I know nothing about the fire, but I was on the spot next morning. I was in the Duke of Brunswick on the evening of the 24th inst., till 11 o'clock. I went there alone, but fell into discourse with two other persons who came in and with whom I spent the evening. I do not know the names of either of them. I live in Sturt-street, and went home at 11 o'clock. I drank a little freely that night but was not drunk. I should know the parties whom I was with on that night. The man produced is one of them.

Mr. Rees was recalled, and stated that the man produced (Edwin Keogh) was the one who on leaving the house threatened he would do something to him.

McGovern's evidence continued—No one had any words with the landlord in my presence.

By a Juror—I went to the house between 5 and 6 o'clock in the evening, and remained there the whole time till 11 o'clock. I think the lamp was burning in the bar, and that it was burning when I left. I think it was over the counter. I swear I was not at the Rose Inn at 10 o'clock when the lodge broke up there. After I left the Duke of Brunswick I went to the Rose Inn. It was after I had been home that I went to the Rose Inn. I did not see any furniture being removed from the Duke of Brunswick on that night. I spent the evening in the bar, but I could see inside the parlor, which appeared to have its usual appearance. I did not notice anyone go into the cellar whilst I was there ; I don't think anyone did. Keogh left the house before I did and I did not see him any more that night.

Edmund Keogh stated—I have been to the Duke of Brunswick two or three times, and was there last Wednesday night. I went there between 6 and 7 o'clock with a fellow-workman, and remained there till about half-past 10 o'clock drinking and talking. I was then fetched away by my uncle's wife and went home with her and had my supper. I had some words with my uncle's wife, in consequence of which I said I would not sleep there that night, and I went back to the Duke of Brunswick and asked for a bed. The bar was not open when I went back. I can't say whether the lights were out, but I did not see any in the bar. I did not go into the house but knocked at the back-door, and Rees came, though not immediately that I knocked. I asked him to let me have a bed, and offered him payment for it, but he refused to let me have one, telling me that I was a neighbour and should go home to my own bed. I told him that if anything happened to me between night and morning that I would pull him for it. Rees came to the door without a light, and I could not see whether he was dressed or not. I went from there to another public house and asked for a bed, but they would not open the door for me, and I then went back to my uncle's house and went to bed. I swear I was only at the Duke of Brunswick once after I was fetched away by my uncle's wife. I swear I did not light my pipe at the Duke of Brunswick when I went back, nor did I get any matches from Rees. I always carry a pipe about with me. I have not spoken to Rees or Linschmidt since last Thursday. I have been working at the Kapunda Railway since the fire.

An old lady, the aunt of the previous witness, corroborated Keogh's statement in reference to the time at which he left the Duke of Brunswick and the time at which he returned home.

Sergeant Badman stated that he had heard the evidence of the various witnesses, and did not differ with any portions of it. At about 5 o'clock in the morning, he was awoke by a noise, and his house facing the Duke of Brunswick, on looking out he saw the fire. He hastened to the spot and saw the bar on fire. No other portion of the building was in flames at that time. Seven or eight people were collected about the fire when he arrived. The progress of the fire was very rapid. The engines did not arrive for fully half an hour. He (Sergeant Badman) held the hose of the police engine and continued playing upon the cellar, in which, had there been any valuable property, it must have been saved from the flames. He afterwards went into the cellar and got two or three small casks, which were warm, but that was probably from the heat of the bar. He did not see any cases in the cellar. The fire might have caught boards in the cellar, but it would not have caught casks and destroyed them entirely. There must have been some remnants had any casks been destroyed, but none were perceptible. About a dozen and a half of bottled beer were brought from the cellar by the men belonging to the Insurance Company. One of the casks brought from the cellar was empty. He did not believe there were any bottles of spirits or wine in the cellar. All that he saw floating about were, he believed, empty. Had the fire caught bottles of spirits or wine, it would have burst them. He had heard that some goods had been removed from the

house previously to the fire, but was not informed where all of them had been removed to. He was told that some were taken to a house in South-terrace, belonging to Mr. Rees, which house had been searched, and a quantity of things were found, but no furniture worth speaking of. There were a few bottles of brandy, gin, ale, porter, wine, vinegar, and cloves. The furniture in the house consisted of a wash stand, worth £1, and two mattresses worth 15s. Some tumblers, wine-glasses, and all the family wearing apparel were there.

Mr. Linschmidt was recalled, and stated that he was not aware what things were in Rees's house. The only room which Rees had in the inn, was the bedroom alluded to.

Sergeant Badman was examined by Mr. Hicks, and stated that the flame was quite a clear blaze, such as would proceed from wood ; there was no appearance of spirits burning.

Mr. Hicks, in reply to the Coroner, said that he happened to know the stock was insured for £300.

The Coroner said that the evidence certainly was that the stock was insured for the paltry sum of £50.

The Coroner called upon Mr. Hicks to prove the amount for which the stock was insured.

Mr. Hills said that the stock was insured by Linschmidt on 18th July, in the Imperial Fire Office, for £300. He was in a position to state positively that the stock was insured for £300, as he had got the particulars from the Imperial Fire Office on the previous Friday.

Mr. Linschmidt was again called, and stated, in reply to the Coroner :—I have not got the policy of insurance, but I insured my stock, furniture, and bar fittings, in fact everything in the house, for £300. I insured all in one lump.

Mr. Hicks said he believed the policy remained at the office, and that Mr. Wright had blamed the clerk for taking so large an insurance on the stock. If Mr. Linschmidt merely considered the stock insured for £50, it would not be worth while to trouble the Jury any further, but Mr. Linschmidt and the Insurance Office would be left to settle the matter.

The Coroner could not agree with this view. It was his duty to elicit the whole of the truth which might materially affect the finding of the Jury, and it was absolutely essential that the clerk from the insurance office, who received instructions from Mr. Linschmidt, should be produced.

Mr. Linschmidt was again re-examined, and stated that he valued his stock at the time he moved at between £50 and £60.

A juror thought all the Jury had to do was to determine what was the origin of the fire.

The Coroner thought the verdict would be materially affected if it were ascertained that property not worth £10 had been insured for £300.

Corporal Everdale stated that he examined the cellar on the previous day, and found portions of wooden cases, a beer engine, and also the works of a clock. There was a great deal of rubbish, above the things, which were not found in the main cellar, but in a square hole under the bar, which was used also as a cellar. The works of a clock were also found, and the remains of a camphine lamp. No whole bottles were found, but there was a large quantity of molten and broken glass.

Mr. Rees was recalled, and stated that the family had been in the habit of keeping their clothing at the cottage, as they were uncertain how long they would remain at the Inn, merely intending to remain there till Mr. Linschmidt got married. The supplies which were in the house were for sale, and the use of the family, or rather they were the remnants of his stock when he kept a store or shop in the cottage in which the goods were found.

Mr Wright, of the Imperial Fire Office, produced the instructions for insurance, and the policy. The instructions, which had been taken by a junior clerk, appeared to be for stock-in-trade, whilst the policy was for stock and utensils. There appeared, as was observed by the Coroner to be a looseness about the matter, a discrepancy between the instructions and policy, and Linschmidt being but imperfectly acquainted with English, and never having seen the policy or instructions, it was possible the policy may not have been in accordance with his wishes or instructions. Mr. Wright stated that the building was not insured in the Imperial.

The Coroner did not deem it necessary to call any further evidence. It was true there was some slight discrepancies in the evidence of Rees and Linschmidt, but he did not consider them important, or such as should shake the confidence of the Jury in the evidence of the two parties to whom he had alluded.

The Jury returned a verdict to the effect, that the fire began in the bar, but that there was no evidence to enable the Jury to determine the origin of it.

#### Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> October 1859 - Fire at Mr. Burrowes premises, watchmaker, Hindley Street.

The Cornwall engine, superintended by Messrs. Pappin and Jones.

The London Company's engine, Mr Hill, superintendent.

#### ***South Australian Advertiser (Adelaide, SA : 1858 - 1889), Friday 21 October 1859, page 3***

ALARM OF FIRE.— About half-past 7 o'clock on the evening of Thursday an alarm of fire was given. The conflagration proved to be confined to a chimney, belonging to Mr. Burrowes, watchmaker, Hindley-street, and the flames for a short time appeared very alarming. The Cornwall engine was quickly on the spot, superintended by Messrs. Pappin and Jones ; but the supply of water was very scanty. Fortunately, how-ever, very little water was required. Mr. Hill, superintendent of the London Company's engine, was quickly in attendance, and the fire after a short time was effectually extinguished.

#### ***South Australian Advertiser (Adelaide, SA : 1858 - 1889), Wednesday 30 November 1859, page 2***

The Advertiser

ADELAIDE : WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 1859

A NARROW ESCAPE.— On Tuesday morning, between 9 and 10 o'clock, a paddock of stubble in the farm of Mr. John Burrow, on the Torrens, was observed to burst out into smoke and flame, between the Maid and Magpie Inn and the Collegiate School, and immediately afterwards, two little boys were seen to run away towards the road leading, to Payneham. Mr Burrow and a friend, who were in a distant paddock at the time hastened to the spot, and found the flames spreading rapidly. Several neighbours and passers by had by this time arrived, armed with buckets of water, and damp sacks, with which the fire was soon put out. The morning was fortunately cool, or possibly the flames would have spread so quickly as to

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render abortive all attempts to extinguish them, and to cause the destruction of a long line of fencing, as well as render possible a more serious catastrophe. Mr. Burrow on, making enquiries, discovered that the fire had been caused by a little son of Mr. Schneider, a neighbour. The young culprit, when interrogated, confessed that he had been striking a lucifer match in the stubble field. He appeared penitent, and was very kindly forgiven by Mr. Burrow, who at the same time warned him of the danger of such a practice. The extent of the peril to which the property was subjected may be estimated when it is known that in an adjacent paddock there were 160 acres of wheat ready for reaping, which, if once set on fire, could not have been extinguished by any agency short of a miracle.

***Adelaide Observer (SA : 1843 - 1904), Saturday 31 December 1859, page 4***

FIRE AT THE GOVERNOR MACDONNELL INN.

About half-past 11 o'clock on Thursday night a gentleman attached to this office returning to his residence in Gilbert-street noticed a thick smoke or dust in King William-street. For some time he was in doubt which it was, as there was a stiff south-easterly breeze at the time. He was, however, soon convinced that it was smoke, but as there was no other visible indication of fire he concluded that the smoke was wafted in from some fire in the bush. About a quarter to 12, however, he was startled by a call of "Fire!" and on going out was led by the outcry to the Governor MacDonnell Inn, at the corner of King William-street and South-terrace, in the occupation of Mr. Palmer. On approaching that building the smoke was most suffocating, and had a strong resinous smell. From King William-street there was no appearance of flame, but on gaining sight of the cellar windows on the south side of the building it was obvious that the fire had been raging there for a considerable time. The cellar, in fact, seemed a vast furnace, the fumes reaching nearly to the floor of the bar, and making the loud crackling noise peculiar to the combustion of deal and other resinous woods. A messenger was dispatched for assistance, who communicated with a policeman; while the few persons who had assembled determined with commendable caution to make no attempt to extinguish the fire in the cellar, as it would be futile to do so in the absence of water, while the admission of the breeze must aggravate the conflagration. At this time Mr. Deacon, landlord of the Brecknock Arms, had given shelter to Mrs. Palmer, who had gone to bed before the alarm was given, and had left the burning house in her night-dress. Mr. Palmer succeeded in removing a few articles of furniture and bedding; but the heat and smoke, together with the dread of admitting the air, prevented any advantageous exertion of that nature. For about 25 minutes after the alarm was given, and a message was sent to the Police Station, the fire had it all its own way. Sergeant Bosman of the detectives, was on the spot at an early moment after the alarm was given, but he could do little beside preventing foolish exertions until the engines arrived. Mr. Marles, water-carrier, Sturt-street, was first on the ground with a load of water. Soon after that the Police engine arrived, and went to work at the rear or east side of the building, where already the fire began to appear, and the flames soon jetted out through the door on the ground-floor. At this time a policeman most absurdly broke in the cellar-window on the south side of the house, and a few buckets of water were thrown in; but the admission of the air had an immediate and terrible effect in aggravating the fire in the cellar, which, as already stated, was most intense and steady, as if it had an immense quantity of combustible matter there to sustain it. The Insurance Companies' engine, under the charge of Mr. T. Hills, arrived shortly after the Police engine, and watermen kept driving rapidly to the scene; but the supply of water was lamentably short of the requirements of the case, or of the capacity of the engines. It was

hoped that the second floor might be saved; but about 1 o'clock, or when the Cornwall engine arrived, there was a cessation in the water supply, and the compulsory inactivity of the workers of the engines gave the fire time to regain fresh fury. The wind before this increased in force, and had veered round to the east, driving clouds of dust, which, with the smoke, made it difficult for the workmen to keep their eyes open. A fresh supply of water arrived about half-past 1 o'clock, and then it became tolerably certain that the fire would be confined to the lower storeys of the building. We understand that the premises, which are the property of Mr. Job Spender, are insured; but the stock and furniture, the property of the lessee, Mr. Palmer, are not insured.

#### THE INQUEST.

On Friday afternoon the Coroner held an inquest at the Brecknock Arms, King-William-street, for the purpose of enquiring into the origin of the fire which occurred at the above place on Thursday evening. A respectable Jury having been empannelled, and Mr. T. Roothman, of the Rose Inn, Sturt-street, selected foreman, they proceeded to view the premises, which consist of a fine handsome two-storey building, situated at the corner of King William-street and South-terrace. The house presents scarcely any external marks of the devouring element; but on going inside the traces of destruction are plainly visible, nothing but a mass of black cinders or charred wood, which still retained its resinous smell, meeting the view on all sides. The Jury went over the underground and the first storeys, but did not deem it necessary to go over the second storey, because the fire was subdued before it reached that part of the building. They then returned to the Brecknock Arms, and the following evidence was taken:—Henry Palmer, landlord of the house, deposed that on Thursday night, about half-past 11 o'clock, he was going to bed (every one else had retired) when he thought he heard a knock at the door. Having waited up till that time expecting that young Mr. Spender would come to stay the night with him, he went down to see if it was him. He opened the door but no one was there. He returned to his bedroom, and just as he had undressed himself he again fancied he heard a rap at the door. He descended the stairs, and was proceeding towards the front door when he smelt smoke. He immediately called to his wife and told her he thought the place was on fire. She caught up her two children and ran out of the house, while he woke up the only lodger in the house, a man named Grey. Did not know how the fire happened. There was a kitchen and sitting room on the same floor as the cellar. Had not been down the cellar that evening. There was a trap-door behind the bar leading into the cellar. They generally went that way to go to the kitchen or sitting-room, it being much shorter. About 9 o'clock he called to his wife, who was in the kitchen, to send up a candle for the lodger, who wanted to go to bed. His daughter, a little girl about eight years old, came through the cellar with the candle—a sperm one—and ascended the stairs, but finding the trap-door shut she called out to him. He opened the door and the current of air put out the candle. There was a box containing some straw under the stairs. The candle was in a pillar candle-stick. Lit the bar with a camphine lamp. Last evening he did not light it. He generally burnt sperm candles when it was a calm night, His daughter was the last person in the cellar to his knowledge. Let out of the house no drunken man that evening. Had no difference with any one that day, nor saw any suspicious person lurking about the premises. It was possible for a person to throw a match through the aperture into the cellar from the outside. None of his property was insured. Nearly all the furniture was burnt; that in the second storey was spoilt by the extreme heat.

Louisa Palmer, wife of the last witness, corroborated the preceding part of his statement, and added that from half-past 9 to 10 o'clock she was in the kitchen washing up the tea-things. About half-past 9 o'clock she took some meat, &c., and put in the safe, which was in the cellar close to the door. Took a candle with her, but did not let it out of her hands. After that she gave her daughter a lighted candle to give to her father. She went through the cellar, which was the way they gene-rally came up and down. Kept no lucifers in the bar and kitchen. Knew of no matches being kept for convenience sake on the stairs leading into the cellar from the back door. There had been no fire in the house, except in the kitchen, and that was quite out when she left.

Henry Richardson and Joseph Pritchard, two of the first persons who were at the house after the alarm, gave it as their opinion that the fire commenced in the cellar. They thought that there was a good supply of water, considering the distance the carts had to come. Corporal Everdell said he did not think there was a plentiful supply of water. Considered if there had been the fire would have been got under long before it was. The house was a very quiet and orderly one, and the landlord a steady, and straightforward man. Saw no suspicious person hanging about the place.

The Coroner said that was all the evidence. But before leaving the Jury to consider their verdict he had a few remarks to make. He had seen Mr. Wright, the Agent to the Imperial Fire Insurance Company, that day. He had heard from him that the Governor Mac-Donnell public-house was insured for a moderate amount, and that he did not entertain any suspicion at all about the matter. With regard to the cause of the fire, he thought they could have no doubt but that it was purely accidental. There had not been a particle of evidence to make them believe that there was anything like incendiarism or foul play. Concerning the supply of water, he went out himself directly he heard the alarm bell to see if the supply was good. He availed him-self of the best position in the city—the turret on top of the Register office—but saw no appearance of any fire. He at once saw that there could not be an adequate supply of water, because the water-carts were running about in all directions for the fire. He thought there ought to be some remedy for this evil. He thought the police, as they were generally the first to know where a fire was, should have some sort of signals whereby the people, and the watercart-drivers especially, could tell at once in which direction the fire lay. He merely threw out the hint. The Jury could, if they liked, add it in a rider to their verdict, and then probably the Police Commissioner would consider it, and perhaps adopt some such system as suggested.

The Jury found that the fire originated in a purely accidental manner; and added in a rider, for the consideration of the Commissioner of Police, that they deemed it necessary, in order to avoid such confusion as was occasioned on Thursday evening by the watercart-drivers not knowing where the fire was, that the suggestion of the Coroner should be carried into effect. They thought the best plan that could be fixed upon would be to hoist, say a blue light, if a fire was in the north of Adelaide; a red, if in the south; and so on; the bells ringing as usual, the lights erected sufficiently high so as to be seen all over the city. In the day flags of the same colours might be used.