

Adelaide Fire Brigade 1862

South Australian Register (Adelaide, SA : 1839 - 1900), Friday 7 March 1862, page 3

THE FIRE BRIGADE.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE REGISTER.

Sir — In the Register of Monday last I read an account of the late fire at the Kent Town Brewery. The remarks about the delay, and repeated messages sent to Mr. George Barlow before he could be induced to send the engine to the fire, also as to the inefficient state of the engine when it did arrive, call for an explanation from me. Mr. George Barlow was deputed to fill my place (as I had obtained leave of absence for a few days). I must exonerate him and the men who form his brigade in not sending the engine more promptly, as he had been instructed to lay up the engine in ordinary, and disband the brigades; therefore it was optional with him whether they went to the fire or not. I would further inform you that the two fire-engines and plant that have been in use in this city were introduced by some of the Insurance Companies at a cost of over £1,000. The brigades have cost about £200 per annum, and this amount has been rateably defrayed by the Insurance Companies.

The engines and brigades have, until the commencement of the present year, been liable to be called out on every alarm of fire, and the Insurance Companies have defrayed the entire expense, viz., on an average about £20, for each alarm, whether the property endangered was insured or not. They have now laid up the engines and disbanded the brigades, preferring to risk the chance of extinguishing fires without the aid of brigades on properties that are insured, rather than maintain expensive brigades for the advantage of such people as do not hesitate to say, "The house next to mine is insured, so if mine takes fire the engines must come and extinguish the fire, and therefore I may as well save the expense of insurance." I would here remark that about one-tenth only of the whole property in Adelaide is insured, leaving about nine-tenths uninsured. All the Government buildings are uninsured, and no provision has been made for their protection. Prior to the introduction of water in Adelaide the Insurance Companies protected all the property in the city, but now are not inclined to incur the expense of purchasing, new hose-reels, hose-pipes, standards, and other plant for the accommodation of nine-tenths of the public. The Insurance Companies have also incurred considerable expense in endeavouring to introduce private Bills and get Acts passed by the Legislature for the better protection of life and property at fires, but without success. A new Building Act was at one time introduced by them ; but it was also rejected. I take this opportunity of stating that the police at all times do all they can to assist myself, a Superintendent of the Fire Brigades ; but that does not remedy the evil arising from the fact of the brigades having no hose-pipes strong enough to stand the pressure from the water-mains, and which the Insurance Companies will not provide at their sole expense. Hoping that the remarks I have made will cause the public and those having authority to consider their position, and in a liberal spirit endeavour to assist the Insurance Companies in procuring efficient brigades and plant, and adopting such measures for the protection of life and property as are necessary for the interests and welfare of a large town like Adelaide,

I am, Sir, &c, ARTHUR JOHN BAKER, Superintendent of Fire Brigade. Adelaide, March 6, 1862.

Adelaide Observer (SA : 1843 - 1904), Saturday 15 March 1862, page 6

PROTECTION FROM FIRE.

Some facts have been elicited in connection with the recent conflagration at Kent Town which shows how completely unprovided for the city of Adelaide and its neighbourhood are in the matter of protection from fire. It appears that that conflagration might have been checked soon after its commencement if the fire-engine which was sent for had arrived promptly and had been in workable condition. But it was late in arriving, and when it got to the fire it was for some time useless on account of being out of order. "The water ran out of it," we are told, "as fast as ten men could pump it in," and the hose was leaky and un-serviceable. The explanation now given for this state of things is that the several Insurance Companies who until recently maintained fire-engines in efficient order and paid a brigade of men to work them, have now discharged the brigade and caused the engines to be "laid up in ordinary." We learn this from a letter forwarded to us by Mr. A. J. Baker, who signs himself "Superintendent of Fire Brigade," but as there is no brigade we suppose the office of Superintendent is at present only a nominal one.

The main fact, however, for the consideration of our readers is whether the public at large, in a city like Adelaide, ought to remain without any of the ordinary means for checking the spread of fire in the case of an accidental conflagration. The Insurance Companies complain that as only one-tenth of the properties in Adelaide are insured it would be most unreasonable to expect them to maintain engines and brigades for the suppression of all the fires that occur. They find it less costly, it appears, to let a fire take its course when it breaks out, and to run the risk of insured property being occasionally burnt. This may or may not be a good policy on the part of the Companies. That is a question between themselves and the persons who insure, most of whom, we imagine, will be of opinion that as long as the Companies send engines to fires, those engines ought, at least, to be in workable order. An un-serviceable engine is worse than none at all, as it causes exertion and time to be wasted on useless efforts.

But there is a more important question involved in this matter than that which relates to the risk of insured property. In every fire which occurs there is danger to life and limb, besides which the public buildings of the city, none of which are insured, are all liable to be consumed. On these grounds the Government or the Corporation authorities are bound to see that there are some means of checking the spread of fire. Where buildings are within the reach of water-pipes there would, of course, be comparatively little risk; but even in those cases a brigade of firemen would be most valuable in directing operations. Much time, and property to a large amount, are lost at nearly every fire from the want of organization and experience amongst the men who assist to extinguish the flames. The public have no right to expect that the Insurance Companies will take this duty upon themselves for the benefit of the public generally. Where engines are required there should be at least one always ready for action, under the care either of the police or the municipal authorities, and there should be a brigade of men appointed to work it.

In no other city, probably, could there be found such a deficiency in this respect as now prevails in Adelaide. In the midst of a hot summer, and surrounded with buildings mostly constructed of highly inflammable material, we find that our only fire-engines are "laid up in ordinary," and that the fire brigade is disbanded. These are surely facts which ought to engage the attention of the Government and the Corporation. We have fortunately been very free during the present season from conflagrations in the city. But this ought not to

make us indifferent to ordinary precautions. There will always be great danger from fire in a climate like this, and it should be one of the first cares of those who are appointed to watch over the interests of the city to see that we are not unnecessarily exposed to that danger. In many cities rates are levied for the special purpose of maintaining fire brigades, and perhaps something of the sort would be desirable here.

Another point of importance connected with this subject is the indifference exhibited by persons on the question of insurance. It is surprising that in a city like Adelaide nine-tenths of the property should be uninsured. This is hardly to be accounted for, considering the great risk of fire which prevails here. It shows that many persons are neglecting an important duty, both as it affects themselves and the rest of the community. If all were to take this precaution for protecting their property the rates of insurance would fall less heavily than at present, and the distressing cases which sometimes occur of persons being left almost penniless by the burning of their property would seldom or never occur.

South Australian Weekly Chronicle (Adelaide, SA : 1858 - 1867), Saturday 15 March 1862, page 3

On Monday evening, about half-past 7, a fire broke out in Mr. Foote's bedroom, at the Victoria Hotel, Hindley-street. Immediately on its discovery, Mr. Foote and our reporter (who happened just to have finished tea in the public room) rushed up stairs, and each carried a bucket of water to the room, but the heat and smoke were so overpowering, that they could scarcely enter, and were compelled to dash the water in almost haphazard. The mosquito curtains of the bed having communicated the fire to a number of dresses, &c, in various parts of the room, the flames were general, and the difficulty of directing the water into the burning materials rendered their extinction a work of much longer time than would otherwise have been the case. More help arrived in a few minutes, until the number of persons on the stairs and landing was so great that they almost impeded each other's movements. Two soldiers of the 40th were particularly active, as also Dr. T. Y. Cotter, who, together with our reporter, filled buckets, &c., with water from a tap in the bath-room, and passed them on to the scene of the disaster. Several of the neighbours also rendered efficient assistance, and in about half an hour the flames were effectually subdued.

Three young men named Giles, Gray, and Wildy were soon on the spot with the hose from the Cornwall Insurance Office, which they fixed to the fire-plug, and played on the iron roof, but the fire not having penetrated the ceiling, of course this had no effect. Mr. Barlow, with the Imperial engine and Fire Brigade was very quickly present, and got three hose bent on to the plugs, but it was not necessary to get the engine to work. Mr. Brown also arrived with a few of the police, and Inspector Hamilton also came to make enquiries and give necessary directions. A large crowd of people were assembled in Hindley and Victoria-streets, outside the hotel. Though the fire was confined only to one room, the adjoining apartments had a very narrow escape, and long after the fire was extinguished the walls were intensely hot. We regret to say that almost every article in the room was either destroyed or seriously damaged by the fire, and in dresses and nick-knacks Mr. and Mrs. Foote's loss will be considerable. The origin of the fire could not be ascertained.

South Australian Register (Adelaide, SA : 1839 - 1900), Monday 9 June 1862, page 3

FIRE BRIGADES.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE REGISTER.

Sir —I notice in to-day's Register a statement made in the Assembly that, as "there are no Fire Brigades, it was useless to appoint a Superintendent."

Allow me to inform you that the Insurance Companies have a Superintendent, likewise Fire Brigades, and that they are still under pay, and will continue to be so until the 30th of this month. The engines and brigades have, up to the commencement of this present year, been pro bono publico. The annual expense of this liberality on the part of the Insurance Companies has been about £200, not including repairs, &c., &c. These brigades and engines were called out on every alarm of fire, at a cost of £20 each alarm, whether the property was insured or not. The brigades are now instructed not to go out until the Superintendent call them either personally or in writing. As all the Government buildings are un-insured, the Insurance Companies asked the Government to share in the expense of providing new plant, and suggested that they should bring in a Bill to authorize the appointment of a Superintendent, and for the better protection of life and property at fires, the Insurance Companies for their part agreeing to find engines, men, hose, reels, &c., to organize an efficient Fire Brigade of not less than eight men, and keep them at their own expense, the Government having the privilege of the brigade's services in event of a fire in any of the Government buildings in the city or suburbs of Adelaide. This proposition was rejected by the Government. The Insurance Companies have therefore again taken the responsibility of providing new plant at a cost of over £300, and are quite prepared to organize efficient and well equipped fire brigades, should the public Bill introduced in the House of Assembly by Mr. Townsend pass the Legislature. The great expense they have gone to in providing carts, hose-reels, hose-pipes, standards, and other plant, fully entitle them to the authority and protection sought for in the aforementioned Bill. I shall have much pleasure in showing Mr. Kingston or any other gentleman the new plant. The cart and hose reels are being built at Mr. Samuel Carvosso's coach factory, Blyth-street. The new vulcanized indiarubber hose-pipe, clothing, &c., are all ready. But all these exertions and expenses on the part of the several Insurance Companies are futile without legislative enactment. The Insurance Companies have hitherto protected all uninsured property ; and I may, in conclusion, observe that the present scale of rates is the result of a certain market value having been acquired by the protection afforded ; and that the price will come down in exact pro-portion to the expense at which the protection can be furnished.

I am, Sir, &c., ARTHUR JOHN BAKER. Adelaide, June 7, 1862.

South Australian Register (Adelaide, SA : 1839 - 1900), Thursday 10 July 1862, page 3

THE PARLIAMENT.

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 9.

The President took the Chair at 2 o'clock

FIRE BRIGADE BILL, In Committee.

Mr. AYERS moved that the 4th clause be re-committed, which was agreed to. The hon. member explained that his object was to remove the objection made by the Hn. Mr. Morphett to the clause, by providing that compensation should be made to the owners of property which had been pulled down at fires. The hon. member then moved a proviso to the clause to meet the objection referred to, which was agreed to, and the clause was

passed as amended Clause 5. Remuneration for attendance of fire brigades, &c. Mr. AYERS proposed an amendment of this clause, to provide that the owners and occupiers of adjacent buildings should be liable to be charged for the expenses of the brigade in cases of fire when their property was endangered. He had consulted with the representatives of the several Fire Insurance Offices, who stated that they did not wish to make any charges for the use of their plant, but only that the expenses of the brigade should be chargeable upon property not injured. The hon. member also promised some other amendments in the clause, relative to the mode of recovering such charges, which it was proposed to effect by means of the Local Courts. Mr. FORSTER suggested that the amendments should be discussed seriatim. He thought that some simple means should be devised for assessing damages in the first instance; such, for instance, as the employment of the Superintendent of the brigade. He thought also that the Insurance Companies should themselves bear some part of the expenses. He would ask the hon. member if he thought the use of the plant a fair equivalent for the amount which the Companies would otherwise have to pay towards the expenses of the brigade. Mr. AYERS said that he had provided in his amendments that the assessment of the property should be made in the Local Courts, because it could not be done by the Superintendent of the brigade, as he would be the plaintiff. And with regard to owners of uninsured property, the Companies only asked that they should not be put in a more favourable position than the proprietors of those who were insured. The Insurance Companies would necessarily bear their full share of the expenses, as they would be liable to pay the amounts due on insured property. Mr. SOLOMON understood the amendment only provided that the owners of uninsured buildings should pay a pro rata amount towards the damages. He thought that the same principle should be applied as was in force with regard to marine insurances, by making the property saved liable to pay a pro rata portion of the losses. He saw, however, a difficulty in deciding upon the particular premises endangered by fire, which did not exist in the case of a ship being endangered. He suggested that the proposed amendments should be printed before the Council decided upon them. Mr. BARROW was sure the hon. member would not attempt to define the limit of contiguity. If a fire broke out in a block of buildings it could not be determined beforehand whether the second, third or any other building near to that on fire was in danger of being destroyed. Then a good deal would depend upon the wind, and even upon its shifting, so that the whole question must be left to some discretionary authority. Mr. W. SCOTT expressed a similar opinion. He thought that those who witnessed the fire would be the most competent to decide as to what buildings were in danger in any particular instance. Mr. BARROW understood the clause to provide only for obtaining compensation in the case of a fire breaking out in an uninsured house. Mr. SOLOMON repeated his opinion that all parties, whether insured or not, should be liable to pay their share of the remuneration claimable under the clause. Mr. AYERS stated that the Bill would provide that the Insurance Companies should in all cases bear their proportionate share of the expenses. The hon. member then read the clause as he proposed to amend it, and stated that there would be no necessity to make provision for payment of the remuneration fund by the owners of insured properties, because they would have a remedy against the Insurance Offices for any damages they might sustain.

The CHIEF SECRETARY thought the House was generally agreed with the principles of the amendments. He suggested that they should be passed as proposed, without, however, taking the Bill out of Committee, so that hon. members might have an opportunity of seeing the clause with the amendments incorporated with it before finally posing the measure. Mr.

HALL did not think the amendments were clearly expressed, so its to provide that the un-insured should bear their full share of the expenses. He though it would be better that the clause should he printed with the amendments, and that the House for the present should resume. Mr. AYERS agreed, and stated that he would get the amendments printed in italics if the House were to resume, and thee Committee obtained leave to sit again. Mr. SOLOMON said that he was glad the hon. member was disposed to adopt that course. He was sure that every hon. member was desirous that the Bill should be as little oppressive as possible in its operation. Mr. PEACOCK did not think the uninsured should be placed in a position to take advantage of the services of the brigade without paying their full share of the expenses. Mr. FORSTER was also glad to find the hon. member disposed to render the operation of the Bill as perfect and at the same time as little oppressive as possible. The hon. member seemed still disposed, however, to adhere to his proposal to make the Local Court the assessor. This, how-ever, would have this effect— it would be necessary in every instance for the plaintiff himself to assess the amount before he could carry the case into the Local Court to be assessed. He did not say that the Local Court would not be the best assessor, but some claim must be first made and resisted before the case could be taken into Court. He thought, therefore, that it would be best to provide for the appointment of an assessor, who should determine in the first instance the amount to be paid. Mr. AYERS was obliged to the hon. member for this hint, but he would see that before the expenses were sought to be recovered in the Local Court, the Superintendent of Brigade would make out the charges ; and he apprehended that in most instances the accounts would not be disputed. The items would be for so many men employed for a certain length of time, and others which would be matters of fact not easily disputed. It would be as easily done as the making out of an ordinary account by a tradesman. He would suppose that £60 had been expended and £6,000 worth of property saved. This would be a matter of fact easily ascertained. He did not apprehend that the clause would be frequently brought into operation, but he believed it was necessary to the effective working of the Bill. Mr. FOSTER— It appeared that the hon. member and himself were agreed as to the principles of the Bill: and they only differed as to the best means of carrying it out. Mr. BARROW was glad to see so much spirit even fire thrown into the discussion, as indicated by the frequency with which hon. members addressed the House. He wished, however, to point out what appeared to him to be a discrepancy between the several clauses, by the use in one in-stance of the term "majority of Companies," and in another of the term "any one or more of the said Companies." Mr. A. SCOTT remarked that the Insurance Companies would have no interest in making heavy charges, because they would have to pay their own portions of such charges. The House then resumed, and the Committee obtained leave to sit again on the following Tuesday.

South Australian Register (Adelaide, SA : 1839 - 1900), Monday 6 October 1862, page 1

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