

Express and Telegraph (Adelaide, SA : 1867 - 1922), Saturday 1 February 1868, page 2

GENERAL NEWS.

Mr. Baker, the Superintendent of the Fire Brigade, called at our office and reported that a fire broke out this morning about a quarter to 2 o'clock in the back premises of Mr. J. Stewart Saunders, Club-House-lane. P.C. Thomas Murphy gave the alarm, and No. 2 reel from Blyth-street was quickly in attendance, but Mr. Davis, from Messrs. Martin and Sach's, and Davison and Townsend, from Mr. Lawrence's premises, were before them, and with great promptitude burst the doors and removed the two horses, and with a few buckets of water soon put out the fire, which was confined to a box and coffee-screen at the south end of the western store.

South Australian Register (Adelaide, SA : 1839 - 1900), Tuesday 4 February 1868, page 2

Fire Brigade Exercise.— The members of the Adelaide Fire Brigade turned out at 6- o'clock on Monday morning, February 3, for their customary quarterly practice. The place of rendezvous fixed for the occasion was East-terrace, and at the appointed hour the two horse-reels (No. 1, Barlow's, and No. 2, Coulls's) assembled, in addition to the men belonging to the two hand-reels. On the Superintendent (Mr. A. J. Baker) giving the order to unroll, the men attached to the two reels set to work with the utmost celerity to perform the complicated operations of disengaging the hose from the reel, fixing it to the fireplug, and commencing to play within the prescribed time--three minutes. The process was satisfactorily completed, and after practising for about an hour the men returned to their quarters.

South Australian Advertiser (Adelaide, SA : 1858 - 1889), Wednesday 12 February 1868, page 2

The Advertiser WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 1868.

THE FIRE at Messrs. Murray's has excited more interest than any similar event for many years past, although there have been some very large fires in Adelaide on former occasions. We perceive that a contemporary has availed himself of the occasion to give the number of fires in each of several past years, but the mere "number" of fires is very unprofitable information. One large fire may cause more loss and damage than twenty small ones, and we shall therefore try to improve upon the statement as to number by giving a little intelligence on the question of loss. The following table has been compiled from records in the possession of Mr. Tapley, of the South Australian Insurance Company, and will, at the present moment, be regarded as of more than ordinary importance :— Summary of Fires since 1839.

We subjoin a list of the most destructive fires—those involving a loss of £1,000 and upwards. They are as follow: —In January—29th, 1847, at Port Adelaide (Bailey's, Wakeling's, Teakle's, Newman's, Turton's, Burfield's, and Parsons's), £4,000; 9th, 1854, near West Park Lands, £1,000; 14th, 1854, at Giles's, Third Creek, £1,500; 12th, 1859, at Port Adelaide, £1,200 ; 30th, 1862, at Finniss Vale, £1,200; 3rd, 1864, at Anlaby, £1,000; 18th, 1864, at Unley (Grossman's), £1,000; 26th, 1864, at Kooringa (Stanbury and others), £6,000; 26th, 1865, at Inglewood (Lambert's), £1,000; 14th, 1867, at Mount Gambier, £3,000 ; 16th, 1867, at Kapunda (Pearce, Wincey, & Co.), £1,000. In February 20, 1854, at Rowe's, near Willunga £1,000; 5th, 1855, in Peel-street (Abraham's), £3,500; 6th, 1859, extensive and destructive bush fire, £30,300; 13th, 1859, at Normanville (Dinham's), £2,000 ; 22nd, 1859, at near

Wakefield Bridge (Dunn's), £1,000; 18th, 1867, at Blumberg (Randall's mill), £3,500. In March—14th, 1857, at Thatched Cottage, Brighton, £1,000; 14th 1857, in Hindley-street (Mitchell's and others), £20,000; 18th, 1857, at Brighton Mill, £2,000; 24th, 1857, at Port Adelaide, £9,000; 9th, 1861, at Kooringa (Warren's), £1,500 ; 1st, 1862, at Kent Town (Logue's Brewery), £1,500. In April—18th, 1850, in Rundle-street (Conigrave & Oswald's), £1,000; 17th, 1855, at Crown Mills, Adelaide, £7,000 ; 9th, 1866, at Walkerville (T. Williams's), £1,000. In May—9th, 1861, at Gepp's Cross (Ragless's Mill), £3,000 ; 31st, 1867, at Pewsey Vale (Joseph Gilbert's), £2,000. In July—16th, 1855, in Rundle-street (Debney's), £1,000; 1st, 1867, at Gawler (Duffield & Co.'s Mills), £15,000. In August—17th, 1855, in Rundle-street (Turner's), £3,200; 14th, 1863, at Port Adelaide (Carpenters' Arms), £1,000; 23rd, 1865, at Port Adelaide (Devon Mills), £8,000. In September—27th, 1861, at Port Adelaide (Fleetwood's), £1,400. In October—8th, 1858, at Lefevre's Peninsula, £1,200. In November—30th, 1852, in Grenfell-street, £10,000 ; 16th, 1856, in Hindley-street, £50,000; 9th, 1857, at Port Adelaide, £33,700; 19th, 1859, at Port Adelaide (Walter Smith's), £21,000; 25th, 1859, Semaphore Hotel, £1,100. In December—28th, 1850, at Enfield, £3,000; 2nd, 1855, in Hindley-street, £8,850; 23rd, 1857, near Strathalbyn, £1,500; 27th, 1857, at Stepney (Sellar's), £3,000, 8th, 1863, on board the Bunyip, Murray steamer, and two barges, destroying steamer, barges, and cargoes, £16,500; 21st 1864, in Currie-street (Church & Co.'s), £2,000. A hasty glance at the above table will show in which months fires are the most frequent and disastrous. In November, December, January, February, and March, which are the warm months, we find that the total destruction has been very large, and that none of the other months make any approach to these in the amount of property which has fallen a prey to fire. May, June, September, and October appear to have been almost exempt from fires—the total property destroyed in these four months, as shown in the summary for the years 1839-67, being £15,465. Some remarks have been made as to the duty of people insuring their property, in which we heartily concur ; but we read with some amusement a statement to the effect that if the public generally were to "throw itself wholly and without reserve into the arms of the insurance companies it would facilitate the threatened advance of rates." We take the liberty of stating that it would have precisely the opposite effect. A large business can be carried on with less percentage of expense than a small one, and this holds as true of the business of fire insurance as of any other. We are satisfied that if people were uniformly to insure, rates of insurance would go down—not up ; but if any are incredulous they might satisfy themselves by enquiring of the insurance companies. Private watchmen have been recommended, and a very sensible recommendation too, where the business will afford the outlay. With reference to making wholesale drapery stores in fireproof compartments like watertight compartments in ships, we imagine this would—especially in drapery warehouses —so seriously interfere with the proper display of goods, and the free circulation of customers, that it is not at all likely to be adopted. Certainly the most spacious modern warehouses—such as Stevenson's, and Sargood & King's, in Melbourne, and many that we could name in Adelaide are constructed on precisely an opposite principle, and we presume wholesale dealers know what form of building is most convenient for carrying on their trade. Indeed, we do not believe that even the Register and Observer Offices have been built in fireproof compartments. One point of much importance may be noticed in conclusion. What a blessing is an abundant and immediate supply of water! What would, in all human probability, have been the effect of the late tremendous fire, if no water could have been had until it was slowly dragged up in barrels from the Torrens! We have, however, heard it said that there was not, at first, a

sufficient pressure on the mains, and if this be true, we would recommend the carrying of a line of telegraph wire from the central office to the valve-house, on the East Park Lands, so that an immediate alarm might be given, and a full pressure instantly obtained. It is to be hoped, however, that many years will elapse before we have to record another such disaster.

Adelaide Observer (SA : 1843 - 1904), Saturday 15 February 1868, page 9

DESTRUCTION OF MESSRS. MURRAY'S DRAPERY ESTABLISHMENT BY FIRE.

Adelaide woke up on Saturday, 8th February, to hear a highly sensational piece of intelligence. The extensive premises of Messrs. D. & W. Murray, in King William-street, were on fire, and little prospect of saving any of the stock presented itself. At an early hour hundreds of persons from all quarters hurried in to witness the terrible spectacle, and before 10 o'clock, the flames having effectually performed their work of devastation, were subdued into manageable proportions. The whole details of the catastrophe were worked out in a space little exceeding two hours.

Of course every one has seen and admired the noble pile of buildings in King William-street adjacent to the Napoleon Bonaparte Hotel, erected two or three years since by Messrs. Levi and Watts. A few months ago, and shortly after the transfer of the ownership to Mr. Philip Santo on behalf of an English principal, the premises were taken by Messrs. D. & W. Murray, who have for some years done a very large trade in the city in the soft goods line. Under their directions considerable enlargements and alterations were made so as to fit the premises for the purposes of their increasing business, and it is generally admitted that they had succeeded in rendering it one of the most complete and well-arranged establishments in Adelaide. Since stock-taking, which occurred recently, from £12,000 to £14,000 worth of goods from the cargo of the Verulam and other recent arrivals, has been added to the quantity in hand, bringing up the total amount to something over £60,000 in value. A word or two as to the situation of these goods may as well be given at this point to enable the reader to understand more fully the extent of the destruction wrought by the fire about to be described.

The whole building was divided into two distinct compartments by a massive stone wall running north and south, separating the original structure fronting King William-street from the large store at the rear, which is of a more recent construction. Each of these compartments comprised a cellar, and two storeys above ground, which were thus occupied:—The cellar or basement floor was appropriated to the Manchester department, the front for bulk, and the back for open goods. The first floor in front was mainly taken up by the office of Mr. H. Scott, agent for the Cornwall Insurance Company, and by the offices of the firm. The room behind this on the same floor was devoted to loose slop goods, with the exception of the space on the south-east corner, next to Mr. Cornock's wall, which was employed as a packing-room, and a narrow passage along the southern wall, extending from the packing-room to the street door adjoining Penn-Chambers, which was occupied by the haberdashery division. The second floor in front was principally filled with stuffs arranged in the following order:—Nearest to the southern wall dress goods; in the centre the silk, cloak, and mantle room, and to the north-ward, next the right of way between the building and the Napoleon Bonaparte, the hosiery-room. A large room, immediately behind these on the same floor, and extending the whole breadth of the building, was occupied by the fancy goods, and the rest of the space in the back store was used as a bulk room for three

departments—the slop, fancy, and haberdashery; the remaining three of the six departments accommodated in the building being the Manchester, dress, and hosiery. A large door way, at which drays loaded and discharged, occupied the centre of the first storey in the rear gable wall, and a well-hole communicating with the three floors, passed through the packing-room slightly to the southward of this entrance. There was another doorway at the south-east corner, but this had been closed up, and an immense pile of empty cases had been loosely stacked in the corner, fully a foot away from the main building, but close to the wall dividing the premises from Mr. Cornock's. Next to them was the stable and coach house.

With this introduction the narrative of the fire will probably be more intelligible. From all that can be ascertained, it appears that the fire was first seen about half-past 7, and that the information was conveyed to the Superintendent of Fire Brigade by Mr. Jordan, horse trainer. About the same time it was observed by some of the young men at work in the Register Printing Office. One or two of them without loss of time set out to inform the Superintendent of Fire Brigades and the nearest proprietor of a reel, while others jumped over the gate leading into Messrs. Murray's backyard, and having discovered the empty cases to be on fire, industriously pulled away those that were uninjured to deliver them from the action of the flames. While thus engaged the doorway at the south-eastern corner fell away, and a gust of smoke and fire proceeding from it forced them to make a hasty retreat. Some of them set to work to remove the horses and trap from the way of danger, and after the lapse of about three minutes the smoke was perceived in clouds at the gable windows. Mr. Gordon, Manager for Messrs. D. and W. Murray, states that about five minutes to 8 he arrived, and entering the building at a private door in the north wall, penetrated to the packing-room, and observed that the fire was con-fined pretty much to the margin of the well-hole. There appears, however, to be some conflict of testimony upon the question of how far the fire had got headway at this period. Mr. A. J. Baker states that he reached the building a quarter or 10 minutes to 8, and that soon afterwards he saw the whole of the middle staircase, which springs from a portion of the first floor adjacent to the wall dividing the front from the back premises, to be enveloped in flames. About the same time the No. 2 (Coull's) reel reached the spot, and immediately afterwards was followed by No. 1 (Barlow's). They were speedily attached to plugs in King William-street, but a somewhat lengthened interval elapsed before they could be supplied with water and brought to play effectively on the fire, which spread through the slop department with appalling rapidity, and extending its ravages to the second floor, quickly gained dominion in the fancy room, and removed the support of the bulk goods, which fell to the floor below, and added fuel to the now resistless flames. Boddington's No. 3 reel arrived shortly after the other two, and, having been affixed to a plug in Grenfell-street, was, after some delay, directed against the chief body of the conflagration; assistance from the Pirie-street side being rendered, after a considerable interval, by No. 4 reel (Harris's), which had been brought from North Adelaide.

So soon as the serious nature of the fire was understood the most vigorous efforts were made to rob it of as much of its prey as could possibly be rescued. Persons with a zeal which in some instances entirely beclouded their discretion, swarmed into the front part of the building by every available opening, and with a wonderful obliviousness to consequences bundled valuable goods out into the street to the imminent risk of spectators and to the certain injury of the wares thus dealt with. Shortly after 8 o'clock Mr. D. Murray, the only

partner at present in the colony, together with some of his friends, made their appearance and checked this well-intentioned recklessness. The books, which had been securely lodged in the strong-room, were taken possession of and removed from the reach of all possible risks, and the costly silks and other goods in the second floor of the front building were freed from further molestation until it was seen whether it was absolutely necessary to take them away. At the same time trapdoors were cut through the floor into the cellar filled with the bulk Manchester wares, and employers and workmen lent a hand to remove the cases, the fire being in the meanwhile kept back by the hose in King William-street; so that the chief difficulty the salvors had to contend with was the ever accumulating quantity of hot water in which they were compelled to carry on operations.

At half-past 8 o'clock the centre roof of the back store collapsed, the iron bars and their galvanized iron coverings being bent or shrivelled up almost beyond recognition. A terrific volume of flame at the same instant shot upwards and spread in all directions. It was now that adjoining proprietors began to tremble in real earnest, for it seemed almost impossible to resist the extension of the fire. The fate of the Napoleon Bonaparte appeared tolerably certain, for the flames reached over to within a few feet of its shingle roof, as if eager to swallow it up. On the opposite side a momentary alarm was occasioned by a portion of the roof of Penn-Chambers catching light, but it was instantly extinguished. The Register buildings were by no means out of peril, for the wind from the burning stores was right upon them, and a miserable row of wooden shanties in the rear of and belonging to Mr. Coglin's premises, which offered a fearful attraction to the live sparks, and twice or thrice showed signs of active combustion, formed a dangerous connection with them. A few of these sparks also set light to some dry horse dung near the offices, but it was quickly put out. The roofs of all the contiguous premises were kept well saturated with water, to diminish the risk as far as possible.

Between half-past 8 and 9 o'clock the fire was at its height, and raged with surpassing fierceness. At the end of that period the ceaseless play of the water began to produce its necessary results, and long before 10 the flames were sufficiently subjugated to remove all danger of their once more acquiring the mastery. The efforts of all hands were therefore directed to the utmost to save the stock with as much speed as possible. Dozens of men and drays were therefore pressed into the service, lines of willing workers were formed in the streets, and load after load of bales and loose stuffs were dispatched to the vacant mill in Grenfell-street, formerly in the occupation of Messrs. Beeby and Dunstan, or to the store of Mr. C. E. Darton, in King William-street, to be afterwards transferred to the mill.

The spectacle exhibited by the interior of the building when the fire had been sufficiently got under to enable it to be inspected was such as has seldom before in the history of the colony been witnessed to so wholesale an extent. Every vestige of the roof had disappeared except the crumpled remains of the galvanized iron; the second-floor under the bulk room had entirely vanished, and the immense timber beams which had spanned the building as supports were surrounded by a deep coating of charred wood. The whole of the first floor was encumbered with heap upon heap of blackened and still smoking wares. At every step were half-burnt bales of slop clothing or rolls of piece goods; scattered in broken confusion were quantities of haberdashery and samples of the hundred articles which a first-class establishment of the kind has always on hand. On the portion of the second floor that remained standing the only rescued remnants of a splendid fancy stock were a few bandanas; the rest was represented by smouldering ashes lying amidst a number of burning

timbers, and iron bars twisted into astonishing shapes. The fire had devoured the contents of the packing and slop rooms, had utterly destroyed what it had not devoured of the bulk goods above, had made a clean sweep of the fancy department, found a passage into the hosiery and dress room, and committed some preliminary ravages which fortunately had been checked before reaching very great proportions; and finally it had swept along the haberdashery shelves, utterly consuming those nearest the packing-room, and singeing the packages of all the rest. The Manchester loose goods had been pretty well delivered from its ravages, but only to be flooded by water, the portions that were saved being seriously damaged. The bulk Manchester goods in the front cellar, for the most part soaked through with water, were conveyed to the mill; the offices on the first floor were untouched, and the hosiery, dress, and stuffs above them escaped with very little damage so far as fire was concerned, although for the most part thoroughly drenched. It will thus be seen that the progress of the flames was effectually stopped by the wall dividing the front from the rear premises, and through its interposition some thousands of pounds' worth of goods were delivered from destruction.

As the day advanced the large array of troopers and foot policemen who had been told off to preserve order began to find it a difficult job to restrain the inquisitive crowds from forcing themselves into positions of the utmost jeopardy. The principal danger that threatened was the falling-in of the walls, which now stood divested of almost all support, bearing evidence of the intensity of the heat in the fact that the plaster and mortar had been stripped away where the fire had had access. Towards 1 o'clock the top courses of the rear gable fell in, and later in the afternoon several yards more of the stonework, which displayed a great tendency to follow the example, were pulled down, breaking in large portions of the first floor, which previously had only given way in one or two places. The work of salvage, interrupted by the apprehension of danger from this wall, was then resumed, and several cartloads of stuff, which had been very extensively damaged by the fire, were removed. A good deal of the stock left in the back cellar was also taken out. A gang of men were employed at the mill spreading out the wet cloth, and taking all available measures for averting an outbreak of fire there. In this they happily succeeded, although some alarm was given to the proprietors in the neighbourhood, The operations here attracted a great deal of attention among groups of curious spectators.

Towards dusk a pumping apparatus belonging to Mr. Vosz was set to work to withdraw the water, of which there was an immense quantity, from the cellar; and by 2 or 3 o'clock on Sunday morning it was pretty well drained. One of the hose was left in charge of a couple of firemen, who continued in the building during the night, together with men appointed by the firm, to see after the safety of the goods. A number of plasterers were also engaged up till 2 o'clock, rendering the front rooms, which had been grievously disfigured by the smoke, habitable. At the mill, too, every precaution was taken, and during the whole of Sunday a score or two of men were engaged in spreading out the goods, and doing all that was practicable to get them into good condition. It is, of course, utterly out of the question to give an estimate of the value of these goods. They are all more or less damaged, and their selling value consequently diminished, and making all allowances for insurance Messrs. Murray are likely to be considerable losers in a direct way, to say nothing of the loss which must result from so great a calamity at this period of the year, especially as a great deal of the newly-arrived goods consisted of winter stock. It is quite evident, how ever, that Mr. Murray intends to lose no time in recommencing business, and the composure and energy

he displayed during Saturday prove that he is very unlikely to be weighed down by his misfortune. The personal and zealous aid rendered by merchants and others in the trade must have been exceedingly gratifying to him. Men holding good positions as large employers were at the scene of the fire, working as vigorously —some of them past their knees in water—as any ordinary labourer; a fact which shows how general is the esteem in which the firm is held.

The origin of the fire is likely to remain among those mysteries which Coroner's inquests, as a rule, are powerless to unravel. It appears that Mr. Murray and some of his assistants were engaged in unpacking goods up till about 10 o'clock on Friday night; but it is not at all easy to connect this circumstance with the occurrence of the fire, for Mr. Gordon declares that when he entered the building at five minutes to 8 there was no sign of fire elsewhere than around the mouth of the well-hole. At this time the cases had been burning fiercely for a considerable period, and his theory is that the flame had broken one of the windows, which just showed above ground, and was protected by an iron grating; that it had then communicated with the floor within, which was close by the margin of the well-hole: that it had spread with the utmost rapidity; fed as it was by the litter of the packing room; and that the well-hole had afforded it a passage into the departments above, where it had very rapidly developed itself. It appears that the upper windows in the front of the building had been purposely left open with a view to ventilation the night before, and that although the shutters were close a current of air was admitted through them which could easily find its way into every room in the establishment. The other theory is that the fire commenced inside, and spread to the cases. Against this theory there is the difficulty of supposing that the fire had smouldered for nine or ten hours, and only at the end of that period commenced its career of devastation, which was so rapidly accomplished. The explanation suggested as to the cause of the fire among the cases, is that they were ignited by sparks from a chimney close at hand in Mr. Cornock's premises. On previous occasions sparks have been seen to fly from that into Messrs. Murray's back yard, and it is only the fact that the goods were being daily opened in large quantities which could account for these cases, under the circumstances, being left even for a few hours so close to chimney.

With regard to insurance, we understand that the following list represents the exact number of premiums current. Those on the stock were— North British Mercantile, £8,000; Imperial. £3,000; Derwent and Tamar, £3,000; London and Lancashire, £3,000; Alliance, £3,000; Adelaide Marine and Fire Insurance, £5,500; Liverpool and London, £5,000:—Total, £30,500. On the premises the only insurance was in the Australasian for £4,000, which will probably fully cover the damage done to the building. It is said that an insurance of £6,000 in the South Australian expired in December last, and of £8,000 in the Northern in January, but that Mr. Murray had refused to pay the higher rates of premium demanded on renewal, and had therefore allowed the policies to lapse. But for this his direct loss by the fire would have been very trifling indeed.

The Inquest.

The Coroner (Mr. Ingleby) held an inquest at the Clarence Hotel on Monday afternoon, February 10, to ascertain the origin of the above fire, which took place on Saturday preceding. A respectable Jury having been empanelled, of which Mr. James Storrie was chosen foreman, they proceeded to view the premises. On their return the following evidence was adduced:— John Gordon, assistant to Messrs. D. & W. Murray, was the first

witness examined, and said—I reached the warehouse on Saturday morning at five minutes to 8 o'clock. I went in at the side door from the lane of the Napoleon Bonaparte. I unlocked the door myself, and saw a fire burning in the packing room at the south-east corner. The packing-room was a small room partitioned off from the main store; The partitions were lath and plaster and wood. The door to the packing room was open. The warehouse was not full of smoke. Went to the door of the packing room. Only a little portion was on fire. It was round the well used for the hoist between the two iron doors. Three sides of the well were burning. Then went out by the same door I entered, and thence into the yard. There was a hose, but no water was on them. Was the first person in the building. Saw no other person in, and I went out to shut the door. A fireman told me the front door was wanted open. Opened the front door, and sent a man for Mr. Murray. Did not know who was superintending the putting out of the fire—20 men at least. The hose was first made to play upon the cases in the yard. Went in a second time and opened the door. There was smoke all over the floor then. Every one seemed superintending. By the Foreman—Shut the front door again, and kept it closed. By the Coroner— Remained outside at the front door till Mr. Baker arrived. That was from 15 to 20 minutes after I first saw the fire. There was a much larger fire when I saw it outside than in the packing-room By Mr. Baker—When I first saw the fire in the packing-room it was not so small that it could have been put out with a blanket. By a Juror—There was nothing in the yard that I am aware of besides empty packing-cases. The cases were piled against the wall (Cornock's), having been newly opened. By another Juror—There were no goods packed around the well. By another Juror—I could have gone into the packing-room a little way. By Mr. Baker—Could not say whether the framework of the doors was burned. (There were two large doors of galvanized iron on wooden frames at the back of the warehouse, one on the north, the other on the south of the hoist.

James Cumming, architect, said, in reply to a Juror, there was not above two feet between a window under the hoist and the well. The frame of this window when the Jury inspected it appeared considerably burned outside, while inside it was scarcely charred.

Examination of Mr. Gordon resumed—In reply to Mr. J. Clark, witness said—My impression from what I saw is that the fire originated from outside. By Mr. Baker—The store was closed the previous night as near as possible to 10 o'clock. Witness was the last person in it. By the Coroner—The packing-cases were not usually in the place they were then. They had come up from the Port within a week. We were working in the packing-room up till 10 o'clock. Turned off the gas at the front door, and went out by the side door. Had no light with me. The gas jets had gone out. By Mr. Baker—There might have been 100 or 150 cases in the yard; 50 of them near the door.

Thomas Jordan, horsetrainer, deposed as follows: —I first saw the fire at about a quarter to 8, when I was riding up the yard from the Napoleon Stables. As I passed the gateway of Messrs. Murray's yard I perceived the fire rising on the south side. The blaze was seven or eight feet high at that time. I saw I could not do anything there, so sent a man to the Police Station and rode down to Mr. Baker's By the Foreman—The gate was not open. I saw over it. I saw no one in the yard. There were some small cases on fire. The flame seemed going straight up the wall, about seven or eight feet from the warehouse. By a Juror— It was up the wall of the Clarence I meant. Did not notice any signs of smoke in the building. By Mr. Baker—Did not see the door of the store on fire. Rather thought it was not. By a Juror—Left the stables at about a quarter to 6 o'clock, and saw no fire then. By Mr. Baker—When I gave

you notice had no notion there was any fire in the building. Am not confident it was a quarter to 8 when I left the hotel. It was within a minute or two of that by the Napoleon bar clock when I went to the stables.

Thomas B. Murphy, printer at the Register Office, said—I was at work as nearly as possible 15 minutes to 8, when I heard a crackling noise, and about five minutes afterwards, hearing cries, went downstairs, crossed to Murray's premises, and scaled the gate. Did not see any one in the yard. The first fire I saw was in some cases piled up against the south wall between the main building and the carriage-shed. The fire was at the back part of the pile. Moved some cases from the front of the pile and several from near the warehouse. Worked till the fire got too strong. Removed the horses and buggy out of the shed. Some one said the store was on fire, and I then perceived it running up the jamb of the door. There were perhaps 20 people in the yard by this time. Sent for the Register hose, but the thread would not fit Mr. Murray's union. Some small fires broke out in some rubbish in the yard, but were extinguished with a bucket of water and wet sacks. Soon after smoke appeared to come from the other door (north of the hoist). I then left the yard and entered the building from the front door, which was open. A hose was carried along the passage on the south side, but it was not at work, and I spoke to Mr. Coulls, who brought it round to the back, where it commenced playing on both doors. Soon afterwards—I think after they commenced playing—the door in the south-east corner fell in. I stayed a few minutes, and then left to look to the safety of the Register premises. By a Juror—Moved a large number of cases, and the fire appeared to get gradually nearer to the store. When I first went over into the yard I did not think the store was on fire. Saw no fire and no smoke in it. The fire was burning most near the wash-house chimney. Further from the wall, the cases being four or five high, I jumped up on them to get to the fire, which was nearer the wall, and I don't think I could have done so if the store had been on fire.

James Curnow, licensed victualler, deposed as follows:—First heard of the fire at 10 minutes to 8 exactly. Came down the passage belonging to the Clarence Hotel (hearing it was there), and when just opposite the chimney saw the smoke was on the other side of the wall, and heard crackling. Looked at the chimney that was close by, and saw smoke coming out, but not fire. I looked over the wall into the yard, and saw the cases on fire. I am positive the main building was not on fire then. By a Juror--It was the chimney nearest the ware-house which the smoke came from.

Jonathan Coulls deposed—I have charge of No. 2 Reel. Received intimation of the fire about 10 minutes to 8, and got to the place about five minutes after. Went in at the front door with a hose at first; afterwards took the hose to the back, and began to play through the window and door way in the south-east corner. It was about 8 o'clock as near as possible, when we began to play. Had no difficulty in getting water. By Mr. Baker—When I went to the back I saw the fire inside flaring up to the height of the building, and coming out through the doorway in the south-east corner. By the Coroner—The packing-cases in the yard were on fire. Have formed not the slightest idea of the origin of the fire. By Mr. Baker—It was at the fanlight over the door we played the water. When I went in at the front I went to the steps that lead to the cellar, and saw the fire in the south east corner above me. Went down in the cellar. Saw no fire, but the smoke was so thick I could not stay there.

Mr. A. J. Baker, the Superintendent of Fire Brigade, commented upon the evidence of this witness as tending to show that the fire was not only in the south-east-corner, but also

towards the centre of the building, as he had seen it on entering from the King William-street opening.

The witness Coulls said, in reply to a further question—When I saw the fire I went down under the stairs into the cellar and saw the fire at the end. By Mr. Baker—I did not see it when I first went in at the front.

The Coroner asked the gentlemen of the Jury whether they would prefer to adjourn the inquest till the morning or to finish it that night. They, however, agreed with him that as the tenor of the evidence seemed so similar, it would not be necessary to go further into the matter.

The Coroner very briefly summed up. He did not feel that he need say many words, as the evidence was all on one side, whether they looked at the evidence of Mr. Gordon who viewed it from the north. Mr. Curnow who saw it from the south, or the other witnesses who, as well as Mr. Curnow, saw the fire under the chimney. As to where the fire commenced there seemed no doubt, for all the evidence pointed to one spot. Then came the question—what was the cause? They had no evidence as to that except that Mr. Curnow saw smoke coming out of the chimney.

Whether that was sufficient to warrant them in fixing the origin of the fire was for them to consider.

Mr. Cornock here asked if it was necessary for him to say anything, and was informed by the Coroner that it was not; but that if he wished to say anything he could do so. Mr. Cornock—I have nothing to say but that Mr. Curnow's evidence is rather strange. ("Hear hear," from a Juror.) He could assure them the chimney was not on fire.

The Coroner—Mr. Curnow did not say it was. He said it was not on fire.

Winifred O'Brien, cook to Mr. Cornock, in reply to the Coroner, said—The fire was lighted in the morning at about 20 minutes to 7. lit it with shavings—nothing else: no grease or candle. The fire did not burn at all well. The place outside was all burning before I got the fire to burn. It was burning very fiercely. I saw the flames very much. Before I lit the fire I went up the yard and saw the fire burning, and gave the alarm in the house.

The room was then cleared, and the Jury, after a brief consultation, found "That the fire was accidental, and originated among the packing cases placed against the south wall of Messrs. D. and W. Murray's yard." They also attached the following rider "The Jury are of opinion that the kitchen chimney of the Clarence Hotel is dangerous to the neighbouring buildings on account of the insufficient height."

Fire Reels listed during the latest fire, 8th February 1868 are as follows:

Horse Reel No 1 Station at Barlows in Rundle Street.

Horse Reel No 2 Station is Supervised by Johnathan G. Coulls at the Coachbuilders Coulls and Carvosso in Blyth Street. This business started in 1850 and expanded in 1868.

Hand Reel No 3 located with Samuel Boddington, Government Turncock in Chancery Lane.

Hand Reel No 4 is in North Adelaide with George Harris in Margaret Street.

South Australian Advertiser (Adelaide, SA : 1858 - 1889), Monday 2 March 1868, page 5

FIRE RETURNS.

The fire at Messrs. Murray's has excited more interest than any similar event for many years past, although there have been some very large fires in Adelaide on former occasions. We perceive that a contemporary has availed himself of the occasion to give the number of fires in each of several past years, but the mere " number " of fires is very unprofitable information. One large fire may cause more loss and damage than twenty small ones, and we shall therefore try to improve upon the statement as to number by giving a little intelligence on the question of loss. The following table has been compiled from records in the possession of Mr. Tapley, of the South Australian Insurance Company, and will, at the present moment, be regarded as of more than ordinary importance :— Summary of Fires since 1839

	1839.	1840.	1841.	1842.	1843.	1844.	1845.	1846.	1847.	1848.	1849.	1850.	1851.	1852.	1853.	1854.	1855.	1856.	1857.	1858.	1859.	1860.	1861.	1862.	1863.	1864.	1865.	1866.	1867.	Total.	
January ...	—	—	300	500	—	400	300	—	4,300	100	950	150	450	—	310	3,730	1,200	150	1,710	1,000	1,200	1,840	30	1,320	510	8,160	1,630	300	5,250	£38,170	
February ...	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	80	1,000	4,000	40	800	900	33,710	800	20	120	120	450	740	4,250	47,885		
March ...	—	40	—	—	—	—	—	100	—	—	—	100	100	200	450	100	32,300	100	32,300	380	400	—	2,200	1,750	610	150	250	30	39,010		
April ...	—	—	—	—	100	—	600	—	500	—	600	7,000	825	—	450	100	7,000	—	140	900	—	3,000	290	340	200	500	2,300	30	15,345		
May ...	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	20	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2,000	7,030		
June ...	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2,060	
July ...	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	18,545	
August ...	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	15,040	
September ...	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	14,115	
October ...	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2,330	
November ...	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	4,055	
December ...	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	8,000	
1,000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	126,485	
1,000	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	41,560	
Totals ...	£	1,000	40	300	500	200	600	1,030	300	5,410	100	3,290	4,650	2,925	10,990	2,390	5,370	25,280	50,990	72,780	4,135	62,400	4,410	7,830	4,775	30,000	12,040	11,710	4,615	34,570	£264,530
Number of Fires, included in estimate above, given above, Not included, As	1	1	1	1	2	2	7	2	10	1	6	7	10	9	12	15	17	14	32	17	34	16	13	20	12	30	36	12	22	332	
	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	80	

We subjoin a list of the most destructive fires—those involving a loss of £1,000 and upwards. They are as follow:—In January—29th, 1847, at Port Adelaide (Bailey's, Wakeling's, Teakle's, New-man's, Turton's, Burfield's, and Parsons's); £4,000; 9th, 1854, near West Park Lands, £1,000; 14th, 1854, at Giles's, Third Creek, £1,500 ; 12th, 1859, at Port Adelaide, £1,200; 30th, 1862, at Finnis Vale, £1,200; 3rd, 1864, at Anlaby, £1,000; 18th, 1864, at Unley (Crossman's), £1,000;. 26th, 1864, at Koorunga (Stansbury and others), £6,000 ; 26th, 1865, at Inglewood (Lamberts's), £1,000; 14th, 1867, at Mount Gambier, £3 000; 16th, 1867, at Kapunda (Pearce, Wincey, & Co.), £1,000. In February 20, 1854, at Rowe's, near Willunga £1,000 ; 5th, 1855, in Peel-street (Abrahams), £3,500; 6th, 1859, extensive and destructive bush fire, £30,300 ; 13th, 1859, at Normanville (Dinham's), £2,000 ; 22nd, 1859, at near Wakefield Bridge (Dunn's), £1,000 ; 18th, 1867, at Blumberg (Randall's mill), £3,500. In March.—14th, 1857, at Thatched Cottage, Brighton, £1,000; 14th 1857, in Hindley-street (Mitchell's and others), £20,000 ; 18th, 1857, at Brighton Mill, £2,000 ; 24th, 1857, at Port Adelaide, £9,000 ; 9th, 1861, at Koorunga (Warren's), £1,500; 1st, 1862, at Kent Town (Logue's Brewery), £1,500. In April—18th, 1850, in Rundle-street (Conigrave & Oswald's), £1,000 ; 17th, 1855, at Crown Mills, Adelaide, £7,000 ; 9th, 1866, at Walkervillo (T. Williams's) £1,000. In May—9th, 1861, at Gepp's Cross (Ragless's Mill), £3,000; 31st, 1867, at Pewsey Vale (Joseph Gilbert's), £2,000. In July—16th, 1855, in Rundle-street (Debney's), £1,000 ; 1st, 1867, at Gawler (Duffield & Co.'s Mills), £15,000. In August—17th, 1855, in Rundle-street (Turner's), £3,200; 14th, 1863, at Port Adelaide (Carpenters' Arms), £1,000; 23rd, 1865, at Port Adelaide (Devon Mills), £8,000. In September—27th, 1861, at Port Adelaide (Fleetwood's), £1,400. In October—8th, 1858, at Lefevre's Peninsula, £1,200. In November—30th, 1852, in Grenfell-street, £10,000 ; 16th, 1856, in Hindley-street, £50,000; 9th, 1857, at Port Adelaide, £33,700; 19th, 1859, at Port Adelaide (Walter Smith's), £21,000; 25th, 1859, Semaphore Hotel, £1,100. In December--28th, 1850, at Enfield, £3,000; 2nd, 1855, in Hindley-street, £8,850; 23rd, 1857, near Strathalbyn, £1,500; 27th, 1857, at Stepney (Sellar's), £3,000, 8th, 1863, on board the Bunyip, Murray steamer, and two barges, destroying steamer, barges, and cargoes, £16,500 ; 21st 1864, in Currie-street (Church & Co.'s), £2,000. A hasty glance at the above table will show in which months fires are the

most frequent and disastrous. In November, December, January, February, and March, which are the warm months, we find that the total destruction has been very large, and that none of the other months make any approach to these in the amount of property which has fallen a prey to fire. June, May, September, and October appear to have been almost exempt from fires—the total property destroyed in these four months, as shown in the summary for the years 1839-67, being £15,465. Some remarks have been made as to the duty of people insuring their property, in which we heartily concur ; but we read with some amusement a statement to the effect that if the public generally were to " throw itself wholly and without reserve into the arms of the insurance companies it would facilitate the threatened advance of rates." We take the liberty of stating that it would have precisely the opposite effect. A large business can be carried on with less percentage of expense than a small one, and this holds as true of the business of fire insurance as of any other. We are satisfied that if people were uniformly to insure, rates of insurance would go down—not up ; but if any are incredulous they might satisfy themselves by enquiring of the insurance companies. Private watchmen have been recommended, and a very sensible recommendation too, where the business will afford the outlay. With reference to making wholesale drapery stores in fireproof compartments like watertight compartments in ships, we imagine this would—especially in drapery warehouses —so seriously interfere with the proper display of goods, and the free circulation of customers, that it is not at all likely to be adopted. Certainly the most spacious modern warehouses —such as Stevenson's, and Sargood & King's, in Melbourne, and many that we could name in Adelaide are constructed on precisely an opposite principle, and we presume wholesale dealers know what form of building is most convenient for carrying on their trade. Indeed, we do not believe that even the Register and Observer Offices have been built in fireproof compartments. One point of much importance may be noticed in conclusion. What a blessing is an abundant and immediate supply of water! What would, in all human probability, have been the effect of the late tremendous fire, if no water could have been had until it was slowly dragged up in barrels from the Torrens! We have, however, heard it said that there was not, at first, a sufficient pressure on the mains, and if this be true, we would recommend the carrying of a line of telegraph wire from the central office to the valve-house, on the East Park Lands, so that an immediate alarm might be given, and a full pressure instantly obtained. It is to be hoped, however, that many years will elapse before we have to record another such disaster.

South Australian Advertiser (Adelaide, SA : 1858 - 1889), Monday 6 July 1868, page 2

TOPICS OF THE DAY.

On Sunday evening a fire broke out in Dorsetta-terrace, Flinders-street, in a house occupied by a Mrs. Soyer. The fire seems to have originated from the window curtains in a bedroom catching fire from a lighted candle which was carried by a little girl. The fire was luckily confined to the room, nearly the whole of the contents of which were consumed. Nos. 1 and 3 reels, with the Superintendent of Fire Brigades, arrived shortly after the fire commenced, but their services were not required, the flames having been extinguished before they came.

Adelaide Observer (SA : 1843 - 1904), Saturday 15 August 1868, page 3

ALARM OF FIRE AT THE GOVERNMENT OFFICES. —On Friday at about half-past 12 many persons were alarmed on seeing smoke issuing from near the parapet of the south-east wing of the Government Offices, Victoria-square. Mr. Burt and others having given information,

the Fire Brigade reel No. 2 was promptly in attendance, together with the Superintendent, Mr. Baker, when it was discovered that the smoke came from the furnaces of apparatus used in heating the offices. Upon the tubes being examined no trace of fire could be found in them.

Express and Telegraph (Adelaide, SA : 1867 - 1922), Monday 7 September 1868, page 2

GENERAL NEWS

On Saturday night an alarm was raised that the Theatre Royal was in flames, and the Superintendent of Fire Brigades, Mr. A. J. Baker, was soon on the spot, and almost at the same time Nos. 2 and 3 reels appeared in front of the Theatre. It was found, however, that the report arose from a mistake, and that there was nothing more serious the matter than a fire in a neighboring chimney.