

Adelaide Fire Brigade 1948

News (Adelaide, SA : 1923 - 1954), Wednesday 3 March 1948, page 1

BIG FIRE MAY COST £1 MILLION

Loss fully Covered By Insurance It was estimated today that up to £1,000,000 damage had been done by the fire which gutted Charles Moore & Co.'s store in Victoria square last night. The fire is still smouldering. Chief Fire Officer J. J. Whyte, who said he had never seen a fire-protected building so badly damaged and with such a huge loss, expects the fire to burn for several more days. Managing Director Mr. Charles Moore, who arrived by air from Melbourne this morning, said the loss was fully covered by insurance.

Six firemen of the 70 who have been fighting the fire continuously since yesterday evening, have been treated at hospital after being struck by flying glass and in some instances overcome by smoke. Valuable records have been recovered, and although water stained are legible. They are being checked in temporary offices set up in Victoria square.

Cause of the fire is believed to have been an electrical fault. It started between ceiling and roof in what Mr. Whyte described as "a forest of timber, entirely unprotected." Arms of the fire sprinkler system which were suspended in many parts of the gutted building, today showered steam. At the height of the fire last night these automatic sprinklers were showering gallons of water down on to a floor where there was no fire. At that time the blaze was above the sprinklers. Firemen were on duty throughout the night. There was an urgent call at 9.30 for the 100-ft. extension ladder to handle a fresh outbreak in the lift well on the Gouger street side.

This was one of half a dozen outbreaks which flared up in several parts of the building this morning. There was a severe traffic jam between 8 a.m. and 9 a.m. today when thousands of sight-seers crowded Victoria square. Large numbers of motorists brought their families. Sightseers saw volumes of smoke curling from the gutted building and spreading over Victoria square. Barriers were used to keep back the sight-seers. Special police were called to Gouger street to move sight-seers back when there were fears part of the building might collapse. At times the super-structure seemed several feet out of alignment. Nearly 400 employes are affected by the fire. Most were in Victoria square this morning and reported to the company's temporary offices Secretary of the Shop Assist-ants' Union (Mr. W. Burke) said today he had told employes the union would co-operate with them if they found it necessary to seek other employment. Other unions had intimated they would help place assistants who needed employment.

Senior members of the stall, many of whom had spent most of the night, at the scene, helped recover records, which were protected in steel cabinets. Staff members recovered typewriters, adding and ledger machines, and records from the waterlogged office sections and lowered them by ropes from the verandah roof. Squads of girls carried the machines to the temporary office where a telephone has already been installed. Other squads loaded salvaged goods and fittings into vans which took them to store sheds at Wayville Showgrounds. Huge quantities of these goods had been pulled out of the burning building by members of the staff last night and stacked in nearby shops. Most goods recovered were from the men's department, although large quantities of crockery were also salvaged. This morning some store employes, clad in boiler suits, went into staff rooms to recover personal goods. Disregarding danger in the damaged building, girl staff members took raincoats and umbrellas from shelves and helped in salvage operations. A senior staff member said a portion of goods bought on the lay-by system, and stacked for delivery had been salvaged with records and accounts from the departmental office. There was laughter as a newsreel cameraman photographed workmen removing models from ground floor windows and undressing them in the street. Mr. C. Moore, managing director of Moore's, who arrived by

plane from Melbourne this morning, said under present market values of land, buildings, stock, plant, and good-will, he estimated the damage at about £1,000,000.

The loss, he said, would be fully covered by insurance. It was too early to discuss the future of the business or employes, he said. Another office would be set up in Thompson & Harvey's premises, Flinders street, where eight rooms had been made available. Mr. Moore said the business was one of the oldest in Adelaide. His father, Mr. Charles Moore, sen., first opened it in Gouger street in 1884. Building on the present site began in 1912, and the store was opened four years later. The store was the biggest of all the firm's shops. All stock was stored on the premises. Insurance assessors inspected the damage today. Firemen today paid a tribute to Mrs. J. O'Brien, of Strathmore Hotel, who provided them with hot meals throughout the night. Although marked and disfigured, the familiar electric signs "Moore's" which, for years had been a city landmark. still stood today (Continued on Back Page.)



TODAY'S AIR PICTURE of last night's big fire scene shows smoke still pouring from the building.

(Continued from Page 1.)

HAZAROUS JOB IN BASEMENT

Wearing special breathing apparatus and keeping contact in pitch darkness by lifeline, two firemen today spent a hazardous hour and a half in the water filled basement of Moore's.

Their efforts may result in the fire being completely out much quicker than was earlier anticipated. Firemen were Station Officer Colin Smith and Fireman A. Knight. They worked in water up to their necks, and Smith at one stage stepped into a hole and went under. Although he could not be seen by Knight, he was pulled out on the safety line. They had gone below after several futile efforts to locate an outbreak which had been causing considerable concern. They found stacks of towels and other goods smouldering. These were part of a huge quantity of goods stored above the waterline in the basement.

Several times the oxygen apparatus which they carried on their shoulders, chest, and back, floated on the water. This caused breathing tubes to twist, and temporarily cut off their oxygen supplies. Each time they had to move to higher levels to get the apparatus to function properly again. There was constant danger the floor above would cave in on them. The wooden beams were creaking and the floor shifting under the tremendous weight of debris, water, and stock. All the time they were below the firemen were unable to speak to each other. They conveyed messages and instructions by code on bulb hooters attached to their equipment.

BEATEN BY FIRE

Chief Fire Officer J. J. Whyte said today in his 36 years of firefighting he had never seen a building fitted with fire-protective sprinklers—as Moore's was—so badly damaged and such a huge loss.

"While we were fighting the fire on the roof, I could not understand how it was beating us all the way," he said., "Step by step we had to give ground, until after an hour and a quarter we were forced to come down. "Checking later with officials of the company and those who installed the automatic sprinklers, I found why we lost the battle. "The flat roof consisted of heavy timber covered with malthoid—a type of highly combustible felt impregnated with tar—and below it was a 3 ft. 6 in. space to the ceiling. "This space was a forest of timber, entirely unprotected by the sprinklers, all of which pointed downward, whereas some should have been installed upward. "Water was very little use to us on the roof, as the fire was under our feet. We tried to control it by chopping holes in the roof, but each time it would break out behind us. "I do not know the cause of the outbreak, but I do know the position of the initial fire was in the concealed space between the ceiling and the roof."

FIGHTERS HURT

Most of the 70 firemen had narrow escapes as flying glass and huge pieces of masonry crashed round them. Six were treated at hospital during the night. Casualties included: Firemen R. Plew, six stitches in lacerated wrist, J. Cleggett, two stitches in lacerated fingers; L. Huxtable, two stitches in gash on shoulder; J. Karutz, lacerated hand; Fireman J. Merritt and Senior Fireman A. Reval, treatment for smoke affected eyes. Mr. Whyte is suffering from badly inflamed eyes, but declined to take time off until 11.30 a.m. today, when he went to Adelaide Hospital. He left after treatment. Fireman J. Breakey sustained a gashed thumb in Moore's today. He was treated by a doctor. Among the dozens of firemen on leave who came voluntarily to help fight the blaze was Station Officer Edmonds, of Port Pirie Brigade, who happened to be in the city. Last night there was the biggest muster of fire appliances seen in Adelaide. Thirteen pumps, hose-carriages, extension ladders, and salvage vans were called in from headquarters, Thebarton, Unley, Woodville, North Adelaide, Hindmarsh, and Norwood. More than 50 lines of hose were linked up as far from the fire as Brown street, Grote street, and Wright street. Mr Whyte today praised the work of police, and of water works officials who shut down mains in some parts of the city to divert the full flow to the fire scene. Some idea of the amount of water used in the fire was given by Mr. Whyte, who said two pumps were each forcing 1,000 gallons a minute through five lines of hose.

Man Collapses

A man who avoided the police cordon this morning and entered Moore's building staggered out a few minutes later and collapsed. A civil ambulance took him to hospital, where he was detained for observation.

News (Adelaide, SA : 1923 - 1954), Wednesday 3 March 1948, page 8



AT 11 A.M. TODAY, about 16 hours after the fire at Charles Moore & Co. broke out, Firemen A. D. Murdoch and G. J. Symons were working in a smoke haze playing hoses on the still-burning ruins.

BIG PUMP IN ACTION

Pump capable of clearing 1,000 gallons a minute being used to clear 8 ft. of water from Moore's basement, which covers nearly half an acre. Insurance adjusters have instructed that all salvaged stock be moved to premises of Theodore Bruce & Co., auctioneers, Grenfell street, where it will be sold by public auction. Architects and structural experts are inspecting the building this afternoon to decide if any parts should be demolished.

Chronicle (Adelaide, SA : 1895 - 1954), Thursday 4 March 1948, page 3

BIG FIRE IN CITY

Moore's Store Destroyed

Charles Moore & Co.'s department store, at the corner of Victoria square and Gouger street, was totally destroyed in Adelaide's biggest fire which broke out shortly after 6.30 p.m. on Tuesday.

The big building was reduced to a shell within 3½ hours, and although the fire was still burning fiercely in the basement early yesterday morning, it was considered that danger to surrounding buildings had been overcome. Damage to the building and stock, all of which was lost, is estimated at between £500,000 and £4,000,000. The damage was covered by insurance. The fire started in the 4 ft. space between the roof and the ceiling of the second floor, and had a strong grip when the first of the Fire Brigade appliances arrived. The roof and ceiling crashed to the ground at 8 p.m., and at 10.15 p.m. the firemen, helpless to quell the fierce blaze, were ordered to concentrate on preventing it spreading to adjoining buildings. A

crowd estimated at 20,000 watched the fire from Victoria square. People who saw it from the suburbs crowded into the city. Many missed their last cars and watched the fire.

General Alarm

The alarm was given at 6.50 p.m., and the Chief Fire Officer (Mr. J. J. Whyte), after an inspection, ordered a general alarm to all metropolitan and suburban stations. Two 100-ft. extension ladders were run up the northern wall of the building in Page street, and while firemen directed hoses from the top of the ladders, 18 firemen under Mr. Whyte began hacking holes through the roof in an effort to reach the seat of the fire. Fanned by a strong wind, the fire swept back along the roof towards the northern corner and the Victoria square frontage of the building, Firemen were forced back foot by foot until they were left standing on only six feet of the roofing. The building became a roaring inferno when great masses of the rubberised roofing crashed to the ground floor and set alight to stock there. Burning paper and sparks were carried high in the air for a radius of a quarter of a mile from the fire and the hat of a woman in Victoria square caught on fire.

Loud Explosions

The intense heat caused windows to break with loud explosions after the fire had been burning for more than an hour. Firemen had to run for cover several times. Four firemen playing a hose into the building while standing on the canopy near the front entrance of the building narrowly escaped being crushed by falling timber and furniture about 9 p.m. At 10.30 p.m. the entire in-side of the building was a mass of twisted iron girders. Moore's Adelaide branch was opened in 1916. Other branches are at Kadina, Perth and Melbourne. The-first business place in Adelaide was situated a few doors west of the present site in Gouger street, and there was an-other shop in Rundle street.

Chronicle (Adelaide, SA : 1895 - 1954), Thursday 4 March 1948, page 3

Moore's Fire At Its Height On Tuesday Night

Firemen fought unavailingly for hours against, the fire which destroyed Moore & Co.'s department store at the corner of Victoria square and Gouger street on Tuesday night. A picture at the height of the fire.

News (Adelaide, SA : 1923 - 1954), Thursday 4 March 1948, page 12

Alarm for Big Fire "Late"

Between 100 and 150 people were evidently too busy watching the smoke to think about calling the Fire Brigade to Moore's fire on Tuesday night, Mr. T. Lonnen, of the South Australian Ambulance Transport, said today. Mr. Lonnen was passing and noticed the smoke. He immediately broke an alarm. Mr. Lonnen, who for many years was in the Hindmarsh volunteer fire brigade, said today the fire must have been smouldering at least quarter of an hour before he gave the alarm. This time might have been vital to the brigade in bringing the fire under control.

News (Adelaide, SA : 1923 - 1954), Monday 15 March 1948, page 4

THEFT AFTER MOORE'S FIRE

A fireman stationed at Fire Brigade Headquarters admitted in Adelaide Police Court today that last Monday while on duty at Charles Moore & Co.'s burnt-out premises he stole goods valued at £7/12/. He was Ronald Arthur Grubb, 26, of Cleve-street, Nor-wood. He pleaded guilty to having stolen six shirts, two towels, four tablecloths, a cardigan, and seven pairs of women's silk stockings. Mr. Ziesing, S.M., released Grubb on a bond of £100 with two sureties of £50 each to be of good behaviour for two years. Assistant Police Prosecutor Hansberry said Grubb frankly admitted to Det.-Sgt. Gully that he stole the goods. Mr. J. K. Alderman, who appeared for Grubb, said his client joined the Fire Brigade seven years ago

and had an excellent reputation. If he were released on bond, Grubb would retain his position. Mr. Hansberry, in reply to Mr. Ziesing, said there were no similar cases pending.

Advertiser (Adelaide, SA : 1931 - 1954), Thursday 3 June 1948, page 3

THREAT BY FIRE BRIGADE MEN

Fire Brigade employes in the metropolitan area will hold a stop-work meeting at 9.30 a.m. on Monday in the Trades Hall unless a dispute with the Fire Brigades Board over working hours is settled in the mean-time. After a meeting of the State Council of the Australian Government Workers' Association last night, the secretary (Mr. F. K. Nieass) said that the council had endorsed the firemen's action. Arrangements had been made to permit a skeleton staff of six to remain on duty at the Wakefield Street Fire Station on Monday while the stop-work meeting was held. Four firemen would remain on duty at Port Adelaide, and one at each other station. Mr. Nieass said that firemen would not work after 7 a.m. on Monday until after the stop-work meeting finished, or any other time the meeting decided upon. He added that if the Fire Brigade Board agreed before Monday to allow the union's case on working hours to go before the State Industrial Court without introducing the question of amenities and privileges, the stop-work meeting would not be held.

Whyalla News (SA : 1940 - 1954), Friday 4 June 1948, page 1

Brigade Chief First at Fire

Mr. J. J. Whyte (Chief Officer of the Fire Brigade) visits country stations twice a year and he calls out the local firemen just to see how quickly they respond and if their equipment is in satisfactory condition. Mr. Whyte was at lunch at the Bay View Hotel on Wednesday. The siren sounded and in quick time the firemen were responding to a call from the hotel. Of course everybody who knew that Mr. Whyte was in the town concluded that he was exercising his privilege of calling out the brigade but they were wrong as there was a fire and it could have caused much damage. The head of a bed had ignited from the heat of a radiator in a wall and the flames spread to the mattress. Smoke pouring out of the room gave the first indication that there was a fire. Mr. Whyte, who was having his lunch, was informed, and he and Mr. K. Broughton, a member of the Fire Brigade Board, hurried to the room. The firemen came along quickly and soon had the flames under control but not before much damage had been done to the bed, the mattress and the floor covering. Mr. Whyte emphasised the danger of leaving anything inflammable near a radiator.

Advertiser (Adelaide, SA : 1931 - 1954), Monday 7 June 1948, page 3

Firemen To Stop Work Today

Employes of SA fire brigades will hold a stop-work meeting at the Trades Hall at 9.30 a.m. today. Skeleton crews will be left at all stations to answer calls. The general secretary of the Australian Government Workers' Association (Mr. F. K. Nieass) said yesterday that the meeting was being held because of the Fire Brigades Board's refusal to allow the union's case on working hours to go before the State Industrial Court without introducing the question of amenities and privileges. The board had refused to meet the men's committee to discuss the question of hours, he said, and had now refused to discuss the cause of the dispute. Port Pirie firemen had unanimously decided to stop work with the others. The Penfield brigade had not been included, but men at that station would stop in view of the board's "hostile" attitude.

News (Adelaide, SA : 1923 - 1954), Tuesday 8 June 1948, page 1

FIRE CHIEF AT FIRE; MEN AT MEETING

When the fire brigade was called to a city lift-well fire while today's stopwork meeting of firemen was in progress, Chief Fire Officer J. J. Whyte rode as crew member of one fire appliance—the first time in 27 years.

Instead of the normal strength of 30 men, brigade headquarters was left with four men and five officers. The call was to Royal Assurance Building, Grenfell street. Insulation on the lift trailing cables caught fire, and firemen smashed the glass in the lift door on the first floor and sprayed the fire with chemicals. Mr. Whyte said later that if the fire had spread up the cables, it could have endangered the entire building. "The stopwork meeting action of the firemen is extremely serious, and could result in a calamity," said Mr. Whyte. More than 80 per cent. of staff at headquarters had been withdrawn, and 50 per cent. of appliances were immobilised, he said. The remainder, were only half manned. Protection of Adelaide citizens had been weakened by the action of the Government Workers' Association. In the event of a big fire, it would be impossible to control it effectively.

Conference Plan

A meeting between representatives of the Fire Brigades Board and brigade employes will probably be held on Thursday afternoon. Whether the meeting takes place will depend on whether the parties are satisfied certain provisos and counter-provisos are acceptable. Today, 150 men from all metropolitan fire stations held another stopwork meeting in the Trades Hall. Yesterday, they stopped work for three hours because they claimed the Fire Brigades Board had refused to give an undertaking not to introduce the question of amenities and privileges when the case for new working hours was heard by the State Industrial Court. Today the men had before them a letter from the board saying the board was prepared to meet them on Thursday at 3.30 p.m., provided they had anything further to add to their views and would give an undertaking the men would not again place citizens in jeopardy by leaving stations inadequately manned.

The men adopted a resolution that they agreed to meet the board, "provided it never put the men in such a position as to precipitate another stop work meeting or strike." In the event of the board refusing to meet the men, it was decided that another stopwork meeting would be held at 9.30 a.m. on Friday. The meeting resolved that yesterday's and today's stop-work meetings had been held only because of the board's refusal to meet the men's committee.



CHIEF FIRE OFFICER J. J. Whyte travelled on a fire appliance as a member of the crew today for the first time in 27 years. Mr. Whyte was one of five officers and four firemen who answered a call during the firemen's stopwork meeting.

News (Adelaide, SA : 1923 - 1954), Saturday 19 June 1948, page 1

NO HEAP, SO NO FIRE

North Adelaide and Hindmarsh fire appliances rushed to the S.A. Gas Co.'s Brompton works this morning. Officers were making inquiries about the fire when brigade headquarters rang and said: "We believe you have a fire in your coal heap." Reply: "If you can tell us where the

coal heap is we will tell you where the fire is." City headquarters also turned out a fire hose. The telephone call to city headquarters turned out to be a false alarm. There was no coal heap: the only coal at Brompton today was in trucks.

Advertiser (Adelaide, SA : 1931 - 1954), Saturday 24 July 1948, page 3

Moore's Fire Finding

Burning gas had probably caused the fire at the Victoria square store of Charles Moore and Co, Ltd.. on March 2, the City Coroner (Mr. T. E. Cleland) found at an inquest on the fire yesterday. Mr. Cleland said that an explosion of escaping gas had occurred in the kitchen on the premises on the morning of March 2. The gas had probably remained burning, causing the fire, which did extensive damage to the building and its contents. There was no suspicion of the fire having been deliberately lit, he added. When the inquest was resumed, Edith June Geraldine Henderson, machinist, of Adelaide, said that she was employed as Assistant cook in the kitchen on the day of the fire. When lighting the bainnerie at 10.30 or 11.45 a.m., an explosion occurred as she turned on the gas. The gas lit when turned on a second time. John Gled-Hill, electrician, of Avenue road, Frewville, said that he was not on the staff of Charles Moore and Co. Ltd.. but he had been attending to electrical work for it on and off since 1914. On the day before the fire he was in the kitchen and he heard a crash. He saw a woman (Miss Henderson) on her knees in front of the bainnerie, a gas-heated cupboard used to keep food hot. The cafe supervisor, Miss Annie Higgins, entered and said. "You did not turn the gas jets off." The woman replied. "Yes. I did. I Just turned it on." The bainnerie was heated by gas from a gas stove opposite it, witness continued. Since the fire he had turned things over in his mind and he thought it quite possible that the explosion caused a slight fracture of the pipe. It was possible that after the explosion it could have fired back to the fracture and the escaping gas remained burning. Ten years ago, he said, the first floor was completely rewired and screwed conduit was used. It would be impossible for a short circuit be-tween the ceiling of the first floor and the roof to have caused the fire. A separate system operated in the kitchen, and a short circuit there could not have started it. To Mr. Eric Millhouse, KC, who appeared with Mr. N. McEwin for the company, witness said that the fire could not have started through any electrical fault. There were no live wires on the first floor after 5.30 p.m. Miss Higgins also gave evidence. There was no smell of gas after the explosion, she said. Mr. F. E. Piper, with Mr. Nelligan, KC, for the Fire Brigades Board: Mr. J. F. Brazel for the Western Assurance Co.

News (Adelaide, SA : 1923 - 1954), Monday 23 August 1948, page 8

FIREMAN'S DEATH

Collapsing at Fire Brigade headquarters this afternoon, fireman George Goldfinch, about 52, was taken to Royal Adelaide Hospital, but was dead on arrival. Plainclothes Constable Horsnell is preparing a report for the coroner.

Advertiser (Adelaide, SA : 1931 - 1954), Tuesday 12 October 1948, page 5

Boy's 'Delayed Action' Fire Alarm Test

Appliances from headquarters and Norwood fire stations raced to Alexandra avenue, Rose Park, on Saturday afternoon to find that a false alarm had been given. Subsequently an 11-year-old boy allegedly told police that he had broken the glass in the alarm on Friday night and turned the handle on Saturday. He "expected to hear a bell" and was surprised to see the brigade come.

Advertiser (Adelaide, SA : 1931 - 1954), Thursday 28 October 1948, page 1

FIVE DIE WHEN FIRE SWEEPS CITY RESTAURANT

STAFF TRAPPED ON UPPER FLOORS

Girls Injured As They Leap To Safety

Five people—two men and three women—lost their lives in Adelaide's most tragic fire, which swept through Covent Garden restaurant, in King William street, in the heart of the city, early last night. Five others were injured, three seriously. In a scene of drama and tragedy firemen tried to force their way into the burning building to rescue waitresses and staff trapped on the second and third floors.

A crowd of 6,000 which gathered in King William street and in a lane at the rear of the restaurant shouted advice to terror-stricken girls as they forced their way through smoke and against the flames to windows. Some obeyed calls to jump and crashed into the lane or on to verandahs and awnings badly injured. Others tried to scramble out on to the Fire Brigade ladders. A man, with burns on the arms, climbed down a drain pipe to a verandah and was saved. A fleet of ambulances and taxis stood by ready to rush the victims to the Royal Adelaide Hospital as they were carried from the building by firemen and police as soon as the flames had been controlled.

At the hospital there were unprecedented scenes as victims followed in quick succession into the casualty section. Most of the bodies were found close together at the bottom of a stairway, down which the victims had tried to flee. They were overcome by flames and smoke before reaching safety. All the victims were members of the restaurant staff. But for the presence of mind of a manageress, the tragedy might have been greater, as the restaurant held many diners when the alarm was raised at 6.25 p.m. Flames from a griller on the ground floor spread with staggering speed up a flue, and enveloped the second and third floors. The manageress ordered the public to leave, and they were shepherded out to the footpath without panic. However, members of the kitchen staff were caught at the rear of the building and trapped by the speed with which the flames enveloped the floors. Three police cars worked for hours after the fire bringing relatives into the city to identify the victims. Telephone calls to the suburbs and country were made until late last night to identify victims whose families had not heard of the fire.

Fire Roars Up Flue

All three floors of the cafe were burnt out within an hour of the alarm being given. At this early stage, firemen were hampered by people who forced their way into the lane at the rear of the blazing building. While firemen poured thousands of gallons of water on the fire from the top of the three ladders, other lines of hose were run in through the front entrance. Several firemen wearing self-contained breathing apparatus smashed front windows on the first floor and entered the building in a desperate effort to drag out trapped employes. They were driven back by the intense heat. Unable to help, people below stood tragically helpless as they looked up at the windows and saw girls and men fight their way to the windows and stand there uncertain what to do. Some were helped to escape by firemen who ran up the extension ladders and led or carried them on to the balcony of the adjoining Imperial Hotel.

Damage was estimated at many thousands of pounds. Spreading from the griller, where meals were being prepared, the fire roared up the flue, fanned by a strong draught. Flames belched out on the second and third floors almost before men and girls there realised that any thing was amiss. When the Fire Brigade arrived, the fire was burning fiercely on the three floors. The Deputy Chief Officer (Mr. McCallum) had eight lines of hose run out from King William and Grenfell streets. Two large extension ladders were run up in front of the building in King William street and another smaller ladder was set up in the Imperial Hotel lane at the rear of the premises.

Jump From Window

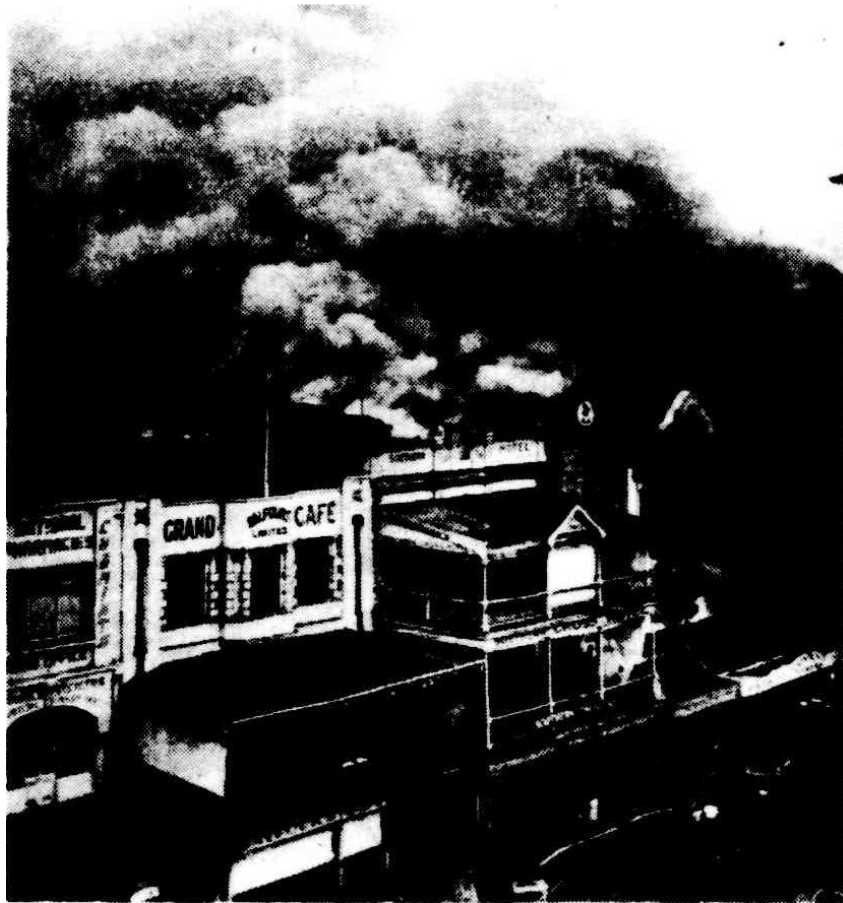
There were pathetic scenes as employes tried to identify the charred bodies of work-mates as they were placed on stretchers and hurried away to waiting ambulances. Young waitresses, after escape from the burning building wept and wrung their hands in the street as they mentioned the names of companions they knew must have been trapped. The Chief Officer of

the Fire Brigade (Mr. J. J. Whyte) said last night that the last comparable fire in SA was the City of Singapore disaster at Port Adelaide on April 26, 1924, when three firemen and a member of the ship's crew were killed. One woman jumped from a rear window on the second floor and crashed into the Imperial Hotel lane, where she was picked up by ambulance officers and rushed to hospital. In her haste to escape from the onrushing flames which by this time had enveloped most of the building, another woman fell from the second floor on to the awning over King William street, when she attempted to climb out to one of the extension ladders. William Davy, 64, one of the chefs, was about to jump from the second floor, when a friend warned him not to, and, instead he slid to safety down a drain pipe. Pamela Daebler, 17, of Old Port road, Queenstown, whose mother was burned to death, was reported to have jumped to safety from the first floor of the building. She suffered serious burns of the limbs. The fire was brought under control in about an hour. As soon as they could force their way in, firemen began their poignant task of locating the dead and searching for the missing, among the charred remnants of staircases, chairs and tables. Their task was made difficult by the presence of sulphur di-oxide gas, which had begun to escape from a burnt-out refrigerator. Three bodies—two women and a man—were found on the second floor landing of the back staircase in the north-eastern corner of the building. They were strapped to collapsible stretchers and lowered by firemen to the lane below. The charred body of another woman employe was found at the foot of the staircase on the first floor. She had apparently forced her way down from the second floor through the dense smoke before she collapsed. The fifth body, that of a man, was found lying face downwards on the second floor in the north-western corner of the building. He had reached within a few yards of the main staircase, which was not destroyed by the fire.

DRAMATIC ESCAPE DOWN DRAINPIPE

Clambering down a water pipe, William Davy, chef, of Magill road, Beulah Park, had perhaps the most dramatic escape of all in the Covent Garden fire. He has been employed at the restaurant for 44 years. "The fire broke out in the grilling room on the ground floor and developed with astonishing speed." he said last night at the Royal Adelaide Hospital, when he was treated for burns on his arms. "I was in the dining room on the second floor when I thought I smelt rubbish burning," he said.

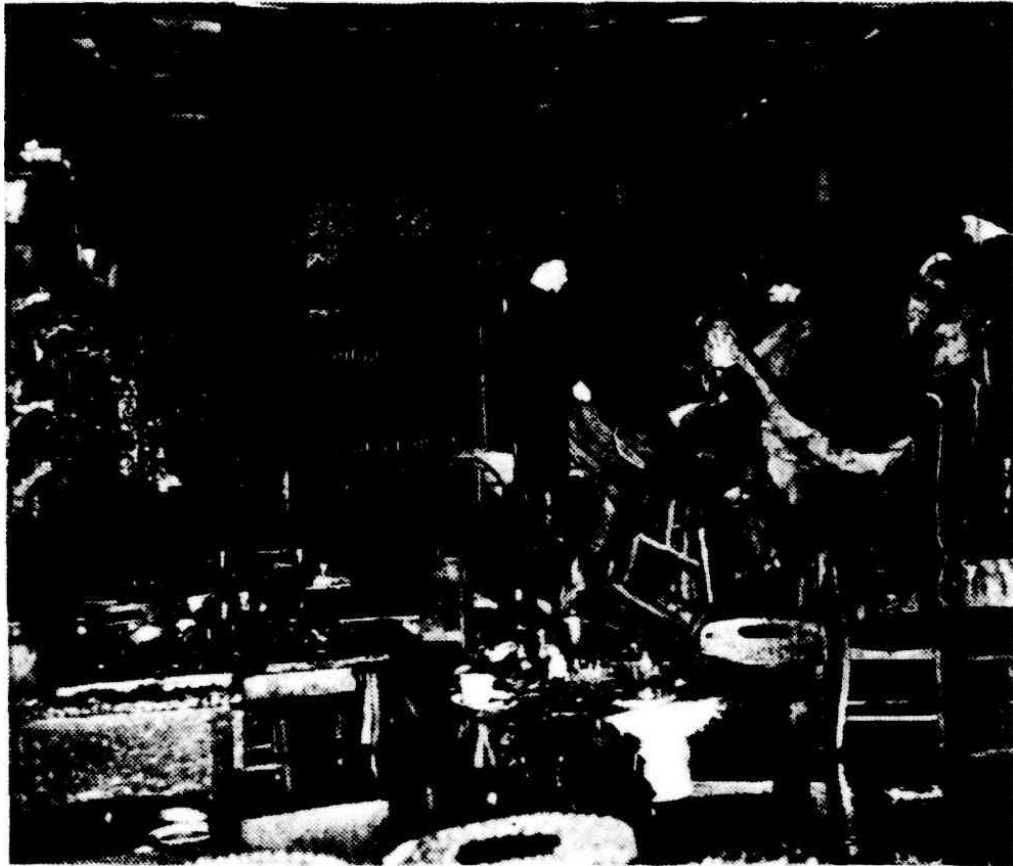
"Then I saw two or three girls running frantically towards a door, and I realised there was a fire." "Run girls," I called out, and I made a dash to the top floor to get my coat. With me was Sandy Jacob, a sculleryman. "We ran upstairs amidst belching smoke and flames. I didn't get my coat, but I remember getting hold of a drain-pipe and sliding down to a verandah, and then walking across to the balcony of the Southern Cross. "I didn't see Sandy Jacob after I ran upstairs." Davy said that after reaching King William street he went home in a tram. Seeing his injuries, a neighbor insisted on driving him to the hospital in his motor car.



Smoke enveloping the Covent Garden Restaurant and surrounding buildings at the height of the fire shortly after 6 p.m. yesterday. Photo taken from the C.M.L. Building.



The head of the stairway to the burnt-out top floor kitchen at Covent Garden. The bodies of two girls were found beside the window on the right and that of a man on the left of the stairway.



The fire-ravaged first floor dining room at the Convent Garden Restaurant. The firemen are holding a salvage sheet to drain off water pouring in from the floor above.



Covent Gardens Restaurant Fire – The Advertiser, Adelaide.

Advertiser (Adelaide, SA : 1931 - 1954), Friday 29 October 1948, page 1

DISQUIET OVER CAFE FIRE

Questions Asked In Parliament

Wednesday's fire at Covent Garden Cafe, in which five people lost their lives and five were injured, prompted questions on city fire hazards, the adequacy of safety fire equipment and the use of rescue apparatus by the SA Fire Brigade, in the House of Assembly yesterday. Of

the five people injured, three were yesterday reported to be in a serious condition as a result of burns and shock.

Mr. George (ALP) asked the Leader of the Government (Mr. Hincks) in the Assembly whether Covent Garden, and other similar buildings used as cafes in Adelaide, were equipped with the most modern fire fighting equipment. In the interests of the public and employes, he would like an investigation with the object of preventing a recurrence of such a calamity. Adequacy of life-saving equipment was questioned by Mr. Fred Walsh (ALP). He said that accounts he had read in the newspapers had not mentioned the use of rescue apparatus. He asked the Minister to ascertain whether the SA Fire Brigade was properly equipped with rescue and life saving equipment and, if available, whether it had been used. Mr. Quirke (Ind.) said it appeared that the fire victims, in trying to escape from the building, had been confused by directions shouted to them from the crowd. He suggested that the Fire Brigade might be equipped with extremely powerful loud speakers, capable of drowning the comments of spectators, and of giving rescue advice to trapped people at future fires. Mr. Jeffries (LCP).— One person was saved by the advice of the crowd. Mr. Hincks said that he would refer the points raised to the Acting Premier (Mr. McEwin).

"Needless Loss Of Life"

The Chief Fire Officer (Mr. J. J. Whyte) said yesterday that he fully supported a proposal that all public buildings not at present controlled by the Building Act should be equipped with adequate fire escapes and sprinkler systems. There were old buildings such as cafes, hotels and dance halls which were built before the 1923 Building Act came into force, and it was only right that the public should be protected in the event of fire. If fire escapes had been provided in the Covent Garden fire it was almost certain no lives would have been lost. Without a fire escape, the building also was not equipped with a sprinkler system. Mr. Whyte said that an even worse tragedy could have occurred if the fire had started when the dining room was crowded. The Town Clerk (Mr. W. C. D. Veale) said that before 1946 buildings were not required to have alternative staircases. The 1923 Act provided that any buildings constructed after the Act was passed were to have sufficient stairs and exits in case of fire. The secretary of Ellis Caterers Ltd. (Mr. D. S. Wilson) said yesterday that no estimate of damage to the premises could yet be given. Staff members who could not be absorbed in the firm's other cafes had been given a week's pay and asked to seek other employment. Other city firms had offered immediate jobs for many. Diners who had their meal on the first floor paid a warm tribute to the coolness and courage of the young manageress, Miss Geraldine O'Flaherty, of Lower Mitcham, who shepherded them through dense smoke to an escape window. One diner, Mr. V. Jacques, advertising manager of 5 AD, said that Miss O'Flaherty came into the dining room at about 6.30 p.m. and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, there is a small fire downstairs. I think you had better leave. Please don't be frightened." There were about 15 diners in the room. Some of them tried to descend the stairs, but were forced back by dense fumes. Miss O'Flaherty led them to two western windows—their last means of escape. The party made their way through choking smoke to the balcony of the Imperial Hotel. Miss O'Flaherty was back on duty yesterday, arranging for the transfer of staff and functions which had been planned for Covent Garden. She said that Mr. J. F. Kroeger, a 20-year-old cook, escaped down a drainpipe, but rushed back into the building shouting, "I have got to get Sandy." He lost his life trying to save Mr. Alan Jacobs, a 55-year-old kitchen hand, who was killed. Jacobs suffered from a leg disability and walked mostly with a stick.

Mother's Fatal Search

Mrs. E. M. Daebler, of Queenstown, refused to leave before making sure her 17-year old daughter Pamela was safe. She was overcome by smoke and fumes, and died on a stairway. Her daughter, who is in the Royal Adelaide Hospital with severe burns and a possible, fractured pelvis, crashed 30 ft. to the ground from a window at the rear of the building. She told a sister yesterday that she clung to a window sash. The heat and flames burst the glass of the window. With firemen's escape ladders only a few feet away, she could hold on no longer and fell. Firemen said yesterday that if she had stayed there a few seconds longer they

could have brought her to safety. After Pamela Daebler fell, they brought another waitress, Queenie Stoneham, to safety from the same window. Fireman W. J. Farthing said that one waitress, Mary Malone, 65, of Parkside, was clinging to a window in the front of the building. As she placed her foot on an extension ladder she lost her grip and fell 15 ft. to the top of the verandah over King William street.

Damage to business properties on either side of Covent Garden was estimated yesterday at hundreds of pounds as a result of water damage.

Sands & McDougall, stationers; Main & Sons, chemists; and S. O. Beilby, grocers, were closed yesterday while staff re-paired damage. Cellar stock in Beilby's and Main & Sons suffered most damage. Executives of both firms praised the promptitude with which firemen protected their display goods with tarpaulins, and the assistant general manager of S. O. Beilby's (Mr. R. S. Jervis) said that but for the brigade, damage would have been four times as heavy. The assistant manager of Sands & McDougall (Mr. E. R. Caust) estimated that the over-all damage to the firm's stocks amounted to less than 10 p.c. The Coroner (Mr. T. E. Cleland), the Coroner's constable (PCC W. Sutherland), Chief Fire Officer J. J. Whyte and Detective A. R. Calvesbert inspected the scene of the fire yesterday. They were accompanied by Deputy Fire Chief Officer A. L. McCallum, who was in charge of the brigade during the blaze. Detective Calvesbert is preparing a report for the Coroner. PCC Sutherland said that the Coroner would hold an inquest, on a date to be fixed.



Covent Garden Cafe and Restaurant Fire

News (Adelaide, SA : 1923 - 1954), Wednesday 8 December 1948, page 16

£1,000 BRICKYARD FIRE AT BEVERLEY

A roaring blaze destroyed longwood fuel, and sheds worth £1,000 at a Beverley brickyard this afternoon.

With two tyres burning, a valuable tractor was rescued from one of the sheds. The fire broke out in dry, stacked timber at C. W. James' brickworks in Toogood avenue. Flaring up suddenly, it burnt fiercely through a 500-ton stack. Firemen from headquarters, Hindmarsh,

Port Adelaide, and Woodville worked in fierce heat and blinding smoke to subdue the fire. Mr. James said the brickyard was covered by insurance. Loss of production was the main worry, because fuel timber was not readily procurable. Normally his yard produced 100,000 bricks a month. (Picture, Page 13)

News (Adelaide, SA : 1923 - 1954), Wednesday 8 December 1948, page 13

Wood fire at brickyard



HEAT WAS INTENSE when a fire destroyed a wood stack and two sheds at W. C. James' Beverley brickyard this afternoon. Firemen are shown playing hoses on the burning stack.