

Added to the many draughts running laterally and vertically through the buildings, when the gases given off by heated materials reached combustion point and flame broke through, a fire could spread with remarkable rapidity throughout the whole of the building. When the inflammable nature of the linings used throughout the buildings is added to these draughts, and when, too, the inflammable nature of a great portion of the goods displayed is taken into account, one can readily understand that after ignition of the gases Ballantyne's buildings would become practically a raging inferno which could not be quelled by the efforts of any fire brigade.

It is important, therefore, to depart from theories and take account of the evidence of those in the building at the time, who encountered smoke in the various departments, and those from outside the building who saw smoke coming from it.

We have already referred to the evidence of the employee Stringer, who first noticed the smoke and went down to the basement where it came from.

96. We now take the evidence of those who were working in the millinery workroom and accountancy and credit offices.

There was evidence that the lady in charge of the millinery workroom on the top floor of Goodmans (Mrs. Crew) proceeded from the cafeteria to the millinery room shortly after 3.30 p.m. and did not then notice any sign of smoke. On leaving there to return downstairs at approximately 3.40 p.m. she encountered smoke, which appeared to come from the top of the lift in Goodman's building and appeared to increase very suddenly. She opened the door of the display studio, also on this floor, and after calling to the two female employees to "get out," went to her own millinery workroom and told her girls to leave by way of the fire-escape. Almost immediately she led the way to the fire-escape and encountered very thick yellow smoke in the passageway.

From the evidence of Mrs. Crew it seems that smoke penetrated in considerable quantity to the upper floor of Goodmans at a great speed. She immediately left the millinery room and proceeded down the fire-escape to the credit office. Smoke there prevented her return to the millinery workroom. Her evidence shows the speed with which smoke travelled to the upper floors, as Mrs. Crew's movements were made not later than approximately 3.40 p.m.

97. The telephone-operator, Miss Hamilton, was stationed on the upper floor of Goodmans. She was overcome at an early stage, and was rescued and brought down to the credit office.

98. Mr. Kenneth Ballantyne went to the credit and accountancy offices at from 3.52 p.m. to 3.53 p.m. and, at that time, he found the main stairway and the tailoring stairs comparatively free from smoke. He went directly to the doorway leading from the credit office to the fire-escape and found it impassable because of smoke and intense heat.

99. In our view there is ample evidence that heated smoke and gases advanced up and through the buildings at great speed. It is supported by many photographs which were exhibited, showing the volume of smoke issuing from the buildings at about 4 o'clock, and the evidence of the firemen in the right-of-way at the south of Congreve's building. The speed and spread of smoke, and subsequently flame, was undoubtedly accelerated by the many draughts through vertical and lateral openings, the inflammable nature of the goods and wall and ceiling linings.

Other contributory factors were—

(a) The very large fire areas, or fire compartments created in the building by the cutting of lateral openings in the several external walls to the various buildings. The size of the fire areas so created is set out in the Introduction to this report. Such large fire areas quickly lead to development of fire of such heat and ferocity that it is difficult of control by any fire-fighting force :