

125. Notices should be placed giving advice of the position of exits.

Pamphlets should be printed on fire-prevention and means of escape, and handed to every member of the staff. The pamphlets should give the elementary principles of fire-drill, and should be handed to every new employee on his entering the service. The employee should, at the same time, be taken over at least that part of the building where he is employed and shown the means of exit in case of fire. The actual drill should take place in working-hours, and need not disturb the business or customers if the instructions, when tests of efficiency were made, were that each and all went to their appropriate positions and the manager made a round of inspection.

126. At least once a year the drill should be supervised by an officer of the fire brigade appointed for the purpose. Manuals are available suggesting modes of conducting these drills.

ORDER OF REFERENCE (8)

The effectiveness of the operations conducted and the equipment employed by the Christchurch Fire Brigade to combat the said fire.

We deal with question number (8) under three headings :—

- (A) The effectiveness of the fire brigade in attacking the fire ;
- (B) The effectiveness of the fire brigade in attempts at rescue ;
- (C) The equipment employed to combat the fire.

(A) THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE FIRE BRIGADE IN ATTACKING THE FIRE

127. Dealing first with subclause (A), we have already under clause (1) of our order of reference stated our conclusion that, in view of conflicting evidence as to the time of the discovery of the fire, and the method of calculating the time of events by reference to the time at which particular employees went to tea, or came out of the tea-room, smoke from the basement was first noticed at approximately 3.35 p.m. Considering the volume of smoke in the basement at that time, it is obvious that smouldering or heating had been in progress for some time prior to 3.35.

128. This appears from the evidence of Mr. Stringer, who immediately entered the basement when smoke was first noticed. Remaining there for but a minute or so, he went straight to the ground floor for a fire-extinguisher. Having obtained it, he again went down the stairs and entered the basement. He found the smoke appreciably more dense, and being unable to see flame, thought the extinguisher could not be used effectively.

129. Stringer in evidence said that, after his first visit, he called to some employees standing in the vicinity of the head of the basement stairway to call the brigade and notify the principals. Considering the estimate of time given by an employee (Mr. Dawson) and other circumstances, we think this instruction, if given at all, was given by Mr. Stringer after his second visit to the basement.

130. Instead of ringing direct to the brigade, an employee made a call on the internal telephone system to a Miss Hamilton, who was in charge of the company's internal exchange, and notified her that there was a fire in the basement and that she was to ring the fire brigade and notify the bosses.

131. The call to the telephone-operator, Miss Hamilton, would not, we think, have been given much earlier than 3.39. She was told to ring the brigade and notify the principals. As the brigade did not receive a call until 3.46, it seems likely that Miss Hamilton thought it her duty to notify her principals before putting it through. There is evidence that she attempted to communicate with Mr. Ronald Ballantyne, but was unable to find where he was.