

As she unfortunately was amongst those who lost their lives, what she actually did is uncertain. It may be that she eventually got a call through to the fire brigade, as a call was received by the brigade, according to fireman Hahn, who was in the watchroom at the fire-station, at 3.47 in a female voice. That may have been hers.

It is perhaps more likely that, in the time spent in trying to get in touch with Mr. Ronald Ballantyne, or some of the other directors, smoke had reached her telephone bureau, and she was unable to put a call through to the brigade. What, however, is certain is that the Occurrence Book at the fire-station shows the first call received, that a fire had broken out in the cellar at Ballantynes, did not reach the brigade until 3.46 p.m. We must take the Occurrence Book time as accurate.

132. The Superintendent of the Christchurch Fire Brigade told us that a call not given to the brigade within two or three minutes of the discovery of a fire was a late call and a heavy initial handicap to the brigade. We are of the opinion that the fire in the cellar had reached disturbing dimensions at approximately 3.48, the time of the brigade's arrival, and a call at 3.46—that is, eleven minutes after the fire was discovered—was lamentably late, so late that the task set the brigade, in the case of a building constructed as Ballantynes, was bound to prove one of great difficulty.

It seems clear only by prompt and vigorous action could the building be saved. It was unfortunate Mr. Stringer's request for a call to the brigade at what we think was approximately 3.38 was not put through directly to the brigade, and it is only fair to say Mr. Dawson could not foresee the breakdown of the internal telephone system.

133. There is no reason to doubt that, after receipt of the call, the brigade moved rapidly. The brigade put down the time of its arrival at 3.47½, and although the time of arrival is an estimate only, as it has no means of clocking the time of arrival, we think it did arrive shortly before 3.48. Independent evidence supports this claim. The first machine to arrive travelled a route covering a distance of 34½ chains, and the second a route covering 36 chains.

134. Unfortunately, both the Superintendent and the Deputy Superintendent were absent from the station when the call came through. The Superintendent and Deputy Superintendent were both on leave—the latter on extended leave. Their absence was not due to lack of duty on the part of those officers, but due to the system under which the officers are entitled to take leave.

135. Under the present system there is a lack of facilities for the training of officers to make them fitted to take control, but we deal with this question of the adequate training of officers, their selection, and promotion under clause (10) of the order of reference.

136. According to Station Standing Orders, the appliances to be turned out to city calls (and Ballantynes was within this area) are the first and second turnout appliances, the electric ladder, and the salvage van; but the senior officer present may cancel the turnout of the electric ladder if he considers it advisable during business hours, or to a call outside the high-building area.

On the day of the fire the Superintendent and Deputy Superintendent being absent, the Third Officer (Mr. Burrows) was the senior officer in charge. The Duty Officer, Station Officer Thomson, on his own initiative, without reference to Third Officer Burrows or the Fourth Officer, and without authority, cancelled the turnout of the electric ladder. The reason he gave for cancelling the turnout of the electric ladder was because the fire was a "cellar job," and he did not think it would be required. Although he appeared to think he had a discretion in the matter, it is clear from the Standing Orders that he had no such discretion, and he exceeded the scope of his authority.