

159. The Superintendent (Mr. Morrison) arrived at the fire at approximately 4.40 p.m. and assumed control.

160. Considering the magnitude of the fire within a short time after the first appearance of flame, it was generally conceded that the brigade are entitled to credit for confining the conflagration to the Ballantyne blocks, and from then on we pay tribute to the brigadesmen, civilians, and servicemen who fought the fire.

161. Junior Station Officer Oakman, who arrived at the fire on the machine under the control of Third Officer Burrows, has been criticized for lack of initiative and not making an inspection of Goodman's building while Officer Burrows was at the rear of the premises.

Officer Burrows, in evidence, stated that he considered there was an onus on Officer Oakman to carry out an investigation of the area adjacent to the seat of the fire while he (Burrows) was in another portion of the building. It must be remembered that Officer Oakman was a junior station officer who arrived on a machine with his senior officer who, immediately upon arriving at the fire, went to investigate. He would also know that another officer, senior to himself, had already arrived at the fire, and he could therefore reasonably, and we think rightly, assume that he should await instructions from his seniors, and indeed this is what he appears to have done.

In evidence he said that he had no knowledge whatever of what he was expected to do while the senior officers were inspecting, and had never received instructions for that contingency. Nevertheless, he considered himself in charge of operations in the street when Officers Burrows and Stevenson were inspecting on other fronts.

When Officer Burrows first left his machine to go to the right-of-way he did not issue any instructions to other waiting members of the brigade. When Officer Oakman followed him to the right-of-way, to see if he had any instructions for him, he was left without orders. The first order Officer Oakman received was from Officer Burrows to put a lead in the first floor of Congreves.

162. It seems to us that chaotic conditions would soon arise if every officer dispersed his crew and conducted operations as he saw fit, without instructions from the superior officers, so we cannot agree he acted unwisely during the period his superior officer was absent on inspection, so far as his non-attack on the fire was concerned, but some criticism of his actions is made under the second heading of this reference. As a junior officer he was entitled to expect instructions from his senior officer.

163. We have so far confined our remarks and criticism to officers of the brigade, but it is necessary to discuss the actions of one fireman who, at a fairly early stage in the operations of the brigade, was taken into Goodman's ground floor and shown an alternative entrance to Congreve's basement.

Evidence that he took a fireman to a point where the stairway to Goodman's basement could be seen was given by Mr. Falkingham. There was a conflict of evidence as to whether a fireman was, in fact, taken to a point near the stairway to Goodman's basement, but the evidence was corroborated by witnesses and must, we think, be accepted. All firemen, except Fireman Dobson, denied that they had ever entered Goodman's building with or without Mr. Falkingham.

164. Fireman Dobson stated that, while standing at his machine in Colombo Street, he was approached by a man who said something to the effect that there was smoke, and might be fire, in the furnishing department, and that he (Dobson) with another fireman (Stockwell) crossed to the Colombo Street entrance to Goodman's ground floor. Fireman Dobson, wearing a Salvus breathing-apparatus, said he went about one pace into Goodman's, and then returned as the smoke was very thick and visibility was nil.