

165. Fireman Stockwell confirmed Fireman Dobson's evidence regarding being approached by some one, but said that something was said about being shown an alternative entrance. He did not know how far Fireman Dobson went into the building, but he said no person showed the way.

166. It matters little who the fireman was, but it is clear that he should have either investigated the entrance to Goodman's basement and alternative entrance to Congreve's, or immediately reported the matter to a brigade officer, and this failure to do so is inexcusable.

167. While we have found it proper to criticize certain aspects of the activity or non-activity of officers of the brigade, we do so bearing in mind the standard of service that might reasonably be expected of a city brigade such as Christchurch. The fact that the call was to a cellar appeared to register on the brigade officers that it was something to be taken lightly, and there was a complete failure on their part, after arrival at the fire, to appreciate the potential danger, and an equal failure to take prompt and adequate steps to prevent that potential danger materializing.

168. This was the first occasion on which Officer Burrows took command of operations at a major fire, and he failed to take up the position of a leader and to work to any co-ordinated plan.

169. It was established during the hearing that the first duty of fire brigade officers on arrival at a fire is to locate the fire, and immediately thereafter take steps to cover and surround. It is true that, on arrival, the brigade took steps to locate the fire—ineffective though they were—but nothing was done to cover and surround.

The covering and surrounding involves the making of inspections of areas immediately adjacent to the site of the fire. In the case of this fire the adjacent areas would have been at least Congreve's ground and first floors and Goodman's basement and ground floor.

Knowing that Officer Stevenson had gone up the right-of-way with a branchman and a lead of hose, Officer Burrows should have taken covering and surrounding action. If he thought Officer Stevenson required assistance, he had Officer Oakman and a number of firemen awaiting orders. Had Officer Burrows made the inspections we think he ought to have made, he would have discovered that there was an alternative entrance to Congreve's cellar through which combustible gases and smoke were pouring; that there was an archway that gave direct access into Congreve's building; and that, having gone through that archway, he was then at the head of the stairs leading to Congreve's cellar; and, if he had been unable to use that stairway leading to the basement, he could have done what Superintendent Morrison said was the common-sense thing to do—namely, hack a hole in the floor and attack the fire by that means.

170. We believe Mr. Roger Ballantyne lacked judgment in taking Officer Burrows on a long route to the rear of the cellar, but as officer in charge Burrows could have been expected to inquire why they were going past what he should have observed as an entrance to the building next to the seat of the fire. This large entrance leading to a ground floor of an adjacent building should have been seen by him, and likewise, had he used ordinary powers of observation, he should have seen the alleyway between Goodmans and Pratts.

If the alleyway had been examined, the fire-escape leading to higher levels, and what has been referred to as Luney's hole giving access from the alleyway to Goodman's basement, would have been seen and the opportunities they afforded appreciated. The failure to make an examination or investigation of the surrounding buildings resulted in a failure to appreciate the danger spots and plan accordingly.