

20. The public entrances to the building on the ground floor were—

- (a) From Colombo Street to the soft furnishing department in Goodman's ;
- (b) From the corner of Colombo and Cashel Streets to the mercery department in Pratt's ;
- (c) From Cashel Street to the art department in Pratt's ;
- (d) From Cashel Street, from the west, to the hosiery and fancy-goods departments.

The only entrance from the street leading to the first floor was a stairway near the western end of the building in Cashel Street. This entrance led to the cafeteria, but was mostly used by persons attending private functions, and was not the general means of access to the tea-rooms.

21. Despite the detail supplied in Mr. Cornish's report, and what may seem unnecessary repetition, we consider it advisable to emphasize certain features which account for the spread of smoke and fire.

From the cellar, or basement, in Congreve's building there were two exits—one a staircase leading to the ground floor ; and the other an opening in the wall originally dividing Congreve's and Goodman's (which, at the time of the fire, was closed by a wire-mesh door in a wooden frame) leading into the basement of Goodman's block adjoining.

At the south-west end of Congreve's cellar a men's cloak-room was partitioned off by a wire mesh.

The cellar was used as a reserve depository of various goods which were drawn off by the furnishing department as they were required. The material stored was of a varied nature : on the shelves along the north wall stacks of linen and plastic materials ; at the eastern end, deck-chairs, card-tables, and electric cleaners ; in the north-east section, close to the point where the fire originated, lino squares, carpets, and two bundles of backing-material, or cane, for making furniture ; on the south side, electric cleaners, and a cupboard containing moth-preventative materials, tapestries, and linens ; along the south wall, cottage weaves and tapestries ; in the middle, cleaners, rolls of carpets, carpet squares, rugs, and similar goods.

Evidence has been directed to the inflammability of some of the materials, and the colour and the smell of smoke given off when burning. Some tins of naphthalene, which is very inflammable, were on the floor, but the majority of them were found intact after the fire, and subsequently sold.

22. In the north-eastern corner was a gas-meter.

The main alternating-current electrical supply came into the building at power-pole level on the first floor, and from there was led down to this basement. It was enclosed from the point of entry to the basement by wooden boxing of soft fibre board 8 in. square.

23. In the case of a fire starting in the cellar the exits—that is, both the stairway and the cyclone gates into Goodman's cellar—could serve as outlets for smoke. In the absence of any direct entry from Colombo Street to the basement, these entrances were the only ones through which firemen could bring their hoses to the cellar.

Approach to the basement could be made through a door that opened on to the right-of-way running from Colombo Street along the south wall of Congreve's building, or through Goodman's building by staircase or lift-well, and then through Goodman's cellar and the cyclone gates separating Goodman's cellar from Congreve's cellar ; or from the lift-well of the goods-lift in Pratt's building, at the back of the shoe department, that travelled from the basement to the ground floor ; or from the alleyway between Goodman's and Pratt's, where an opening in Goodman's wall, in preparation for an entrance between Pratt's and Goodman's, had been pierced. This has been called Luney's opening and perhaps provided the easiest approach to the cellar.

The stairs from both Congreve's cellar and Goodman's cellar were of wood, and were not enclosed with any fire-resisting material, but the stairway in Goodman's had a self-closing door at ground-floor level. The lift was not fully enclosed.