

24. At the time of the fire work was in progress to make an entrance from Goodman's cellar to the adjoining basement in Pratt's building, but was surrounded by a dustproof enclosure of soft-fibre board, and apparently this opening played no great part in the first passage of smoke. The soft-fibre-board covering would, however, when flames broke out, burn rapidly and prove no obstacle to the rapid spread of fire.

A steel door leading from Goodman's cellar to Pratt's cellar, to the west of Congreve's cellar, was found to be open after the fire.

A lift-counterweight shaft extended from the basement in Goodman's building through all floors and was open at the top and encased throughout with soft-wood-fibre board.

25. The main wall separating Congreve's building from Goodman's was of brick, but, on ground-floor level, an entrance between these two buildings had been cut in the dividing wall of some 12 ft. by 10 ft. 6 in. without any fire protection and, on the first floor, an opening in the same wall 10 ft. 6 in. high by 17 ft. 6 in. wide had been made. It also had no fire protection, but at the time of the fire was sealed off by a soft-wood-fibre-board screen.

On second-floor level an opening had been made 7 ft. high and 3 ft. wide. It was provided with a wooden door, but had no fire protection.

26. Congreve's building had, itself, no fire-escape and no lift. Originally it had an entrance to Colombo Street and a door alcove, but this had been permanently closed. Its second floor had a staircase leading to the first floor of Pratt's, but had no exist to its own first floor.

27. Between Goodman's building and Pratt's building there was a fire-escape from the top floor of Goodman's running down to the alleyway that led to Colombo Street. This escape was constructed of cast iron with fairly steep flights of stairs, and landings accessible to both Goodman's and Pratt's. One such landing was available to the credit office in Pratt's building where thirty-three employees were trapped, and another served the third floor of Goodman's building where seven of the employees who lost their lives were trapped.

The fire-escape between the credit office and the third floor of Goodman's building was used as a means of access to a women's convenience constructed above the strong-room in Pratt's building.

28. There are a number of general features which are obviously relevant to, and material to the inquiry, and these can be briefly cited as follows:

- (a) *Timber Floors*.—Timber floors existed practically throughout the building.
- (b) *Ceilings and Wall Linings*.—Ceilings and wall linings were matchlining, in many cases overlaid with wood-fibre board, untreated except for painting. Matchlining was fixed to the walls per medium of battens which allowed a clearance between the linings and the brick walls of approximately 1 in.
- (c) *Partitions*.—There were also numerous partitions constructed of timber, and lined either with matchlining and/or wood-fibre board.
- (d) *Roof-construction*.—The roofs throughout were timber-framed, frequently with complete absence of fire-breaks.
- (e) *Unprotected Lateral Openings*.—There were large unprotected openings in the brick walls between the various buildings giving intercommunication between practically all departments. The total area on the ground floor available to the public for shopping purposes was approximately 39,000 square feet. As Congreve's and Goodman's buildings on the ground floor could be separated from the remainder of the premises by fire-doors, the area of these floors, which is approximately 6,000 square feet, may be deducted, leaving 33,000 square feet in which there was no protection and which was, for all practical purposes, one continuous open floor.