

She then proceeded in the direction of the passage leading to the stairs, and there met the other members of the staff who were returning from the direction of the stairs, having been unable to escape by that means. The lights failed at that moment, producing total darkness.

In her opinion, apart from a command of "All out," there appeared to be no one directing operations or giving directions, and every one appeared to be expecting a command from Mr. Ken Ballantyne and Mr. Hudson, who were two of the principals of the firm. One girl attempted to jump from a window, but was told, "Do not jump yet; there will be some one here."

Mrs. Nash confirmed what Miss Kennedy said about endeavouring to gain access to the credit office with a view to trying again to escape by way of the fire-escape and being prevented from doing so by fire in that office. She said timbers above the lead-lights were falling through. She then followed Miss Kennedy by jumping from a window.

66. The fact that a substantial portion of the records was placed in the strong-room was borne out by Mr. Ronald Ballantyne, who admitted under cross-examination that virtually all the records of the credit department were saved, and also a part of the accountancy records which were found when the strong-room was opened after the fire.

67. Prior to the arrival of the fire brigade, Mr. Hudson had been to the foot of the main stairs at a time when there was no smoke on the main stairs, and knowing about the fire and the calling of the brigade, inquired of Mr. Ronald Ballantyne, who was at the north-west corner of the inquiry counter, what should be done with the cash. He was told by Mr. Ronald Ballantyne to get the girls and the cash out, and to get every one else out "straight away." By "every one" Mr. Ballantyne said he was referring to every one in Mr. Hudson's area, and he had no doubt that Mr. Hudson understood this.

Mr. Hudson then left in the direction of the main stairs. Mr. Hudson perished in the fire, so that his actions can only be judged by the evidence of others; but it is clear that he was given instructions by Mr. Ronald Ballantyne to take steps to evacuate the staff under his control at a time when the stairs were free of danger for evacuation, but no effective steps for such evacuation were carried out.

It is all the more difficult to understand his failure to evacuate when he must have been aware the telephone operator had been forced out of her bureau and taken to the credit office, and knew of Mrs. Crew's concern for the safety of her staff still on the top floor of Goodman's.

From the evidence of the two girls who were saved it appears likely that some order may have been given to bring the girls' coats from the cloak-room and so prepare to evacuate, but valuable and vital time was used in preserving records of the company at a time when a way of escape was open.

68. When considering the evidence of Mr. Ken Ballantyne, Miss Kennedy, and Mrs. Nash, the times of coming and going, and the words used, we cannot fail to be influenced by what must have been the nervous state of suspense the parties were in at the time—in the last few minutes, at any rate, one of nervous apprehension. Mr. Ken Ballantyne had a miraculous escape. Miss Kennedy and Mrs. Nash saved themselves by jumping from the window of Goodman's building on to the veranda and received injuries—Mrs. Nash severe injuries; Miss Kennedy's injuries were less severe.

We think the sequence of events subsequently related by Miss Kennedy, Mrs. Nash, and Mr. Ken Ballantyne must be subject to the state of mind they were in at the time of occurrence, and to the fact that they were then in no condition to estimate time passing between events in seconds or even, perhaps, in minutes. There was a lapse of some five to eight minutes between Mrs. Nash and Miss Kennedy jumping to the veranda, and the rescue of Mr. Ken Ballantyne from the window of Pratt's.