

Fatal Fire in Sheffield Exiting Scenes Plucky Action of a Sheffield Miner

About half-past 11 o'clock on Saturday night a fire broke out at 3 house, 1 court, Matilda road, occupied by Joseph Jonathan Beeley, a caster, employed by Messrs. Joseph Fenton and Sons, crucible manufacturers. The occupants of the house were out at the time, Mrs. Beeley having taken one of her two children with her, leaving the younger a child aged nine months asleep in a cradle in the kitchen. A paraffin lamp was left on the table. It is supposed that a cat jumped upon the table and knocked the lamp down. The room was soon in flames, and in a very short time every piece of inflammable material was consumed. Beeley returned shortly after the outbreak, and gave the alarm, but at the time did not appear to recognise the gravity of the situation he being evidently under the impression that his wife and children were in a place of safety. When Mrs. Beeley returned, however, she made a frantic attempt to dash through the flames and smoke, but was unable to reach the cradle in which the child lay. Her screams of "Save my child" were heard by a collier named Thomas Oxley, employed at the Manor Pit of the Nunnery Colliery Company, and who was doing good work, in the company of many others, towards extinguishing the fire, which threatened to destroy the whole house. The door was open and Oxley entered the room and crawled along on his hands and knees through the blinding smoke until he reached the cradle. When he seized it, it was already held by a man named Howson, whose wife had seen the cradle blazing and had noticed one of the infant's arms waving to and fro. The heat was most intense, and part of the metal on the wringing machine was cracked. Those who were holding the cradle stated that the child was not there, but Oxley had already seized the infant. Dashing through the doorway he made his way across the road to his own house. The poor child was then quite dead, and the body presented a terrible spectacle. Its left arm was burnt to a cinder, and the upper portion of its face was disfigured, and there were extensive burns all over its body. Oxley returned to the yard where an excited crowd had collected. Amid the din the presence of the elder child was unnoticed. Mrs. Beeley fainted upon discovering that her child was in the burning room, and removed to a neighbour's house, where she became so violent in her grief that it was with utmost difficulty that she was prevented from doing herself some mischief. The bystanders were under the impression that two more children were sleeping in an upper room, and a ladder was reared against the bedroom window. Police-constable Martin got on the roof of an outhouse and broke the window, but was met by such a stifling cloud of that he was unable to get far into the room, and fell back to the roof of the outhouse. Mrs. Howson made a plucky attempt to dash up the ladder into the room, but was pulled to the ground by some of the people who apprehensive for her safety. Oxley joined Martin in the effort to reach the spot where the children were supposed to be lying. He was, however, overcome by the smoke and had to descend the ladder. Here his attention was called to the older child of Mrs. Beeley who was unharmed. By this time the flames had been extinguished, and when the Fire Brigade, under Superintendent Pound, arrived, it was found that all danger of a further outbreak was at an end. The attention of Sergeant Platts, of the Highfield Division, was directed to the scene. When he arrived he found Oxley carrying the child. He helped to extinguish the fire, and subsequently removed the dead infant to the house of James Howson, 3 house, 5 Court, Leadmill road. Among those who assisted to quench

the fire, in addition to those already named, were Mr. Herbert Mackenzie, of 83, Eyre lane; Mr. J. Pashley, 38, Bath street; Mr. J. Belcher, of 6 Court, 2 house, Matilda street; Mr. Henry Mellor, of 83 Leadmill road; and Mr. H. Hinchcliffe, Matilda street. Numbers of others rendered great assistance, and it is stated that a man, whose name could not be ascertained was burnt in the mouth somewhat severely while engaged in pouring water on the fire.

Thomas Oxley, of 20, Leadmill lane states: About twenty minutes or a quarter to twelve o'clock on Saturday night George Beeley came down the yard in a hurry and shouted "Come on our house is on fire!" I ran across at once, after pulling my waistcoat off and taking my watch out of the pocket. I got some water and threw it on the fire. We did not know at fist that there was a child in the house. The door was open, and the flames were coming into the yard. There were crowds of people present, and after a time it was said that there were two little children in the house. I groped in the kitchen on my hands and knees to find the cradle, but at the time I thought the children might be upstairs in bed. Mr Howson got hold of the head of the cradle, pulled it up to the window, and after feeling for the child said, "There's no one here!" I said "Look out!" for I felt its little leg or arm, "It's here!" I ran through the doorway along the passage into my own house, and placed the child on the table but it was dead then. When I was first going to the burning house a woman, who I think must have been Mrs. Beeley, screamed "My child! "My child!" She rushed into the burning kitchen, but was pulled out again, as she would have been burnt to death. She fainted away, but up to to-night (Sunday) she has not been told that her child is dead, for she is dreadfully excited. I found a broken paraffin lamp on the floor, and every piece of furniture was in flames. We got the fire out before Superintendent Pound and the brigade came up. I tried to get to the children, who I thought were in the bedroom, but the sulphur and smoke overpowered me. I stuck to my "diggings" as well as I could, and Constable Martin lent me a handkerchief to tie around my mouth. I took his lamp, but could find no children there. When I went down I saw the other child all right, and said "Oh! tha'rt there, art tha. It's thee ah've bin lookin' for." The inside of the mouth of one of the men who went into the house was burnt. The fire was got out about midnight. Police-constable Martin worked well. He was trying to get into the bedroom window, after breaking the windows with his stick, but he was overpowered and fell back on the slates.