

*The Great Fire in Sheffield
Stacey's Circus Demolished
Narrow Escape of Surrounding Property*

Incidents of the Outbreak

Excitement was intense in the neighbourhood of Arundel and Tudor streets at early morning, when the great fire was raging which entirely demolished the clumsy, ungainly, and altogether unsightly structure known as Stacey's Circus. The blaze was, during the two hours it lasted, fierce and all destroying, and the Fire Brigade men whose duty it was to fight the flames had an almost hopeless task set them. Yet, be it said in their praise, that the ardour with which they performed their duty was entirely successful in preventing what appeared to be an almost certain spread of the fire to the adjoining buildings. The Theatre Royal, and the valuable property of Messrs. Gallimore, the Free Library, the Surrey Street Music Hall, and Messrs. John Round and Son's electro-plate works are all a close contiguity, and grave fears were entertained for their safety. More particularly were they jeopardised by the fact that at the corner of the building is an oil store, in the occupation of Messrs. Philip and Ellis Crapper. Oil was not, however, the only danger. Just behind the Circus is the yard of Messrs. Ash, Son, and Biggin, and the firemen had also to keep a persistent guard upon the stock of wood in the yard. They were successful to a certain extent, and kept the fire from proceeding beyond this yard to the engineering establishment of Messrs. Hattersley and Davidson, in Arundel street. In fact the possibilities of extension were almost innumerable, seeing that there is a continuous line of buildings in a triangular shape embraced in Tudor street, Arundel street, and Surrey street. The building is of somewhat peculiar construction. The street line in Tudor street is of low brick buildings. The corner portion is that in which the oil was stored, and those nearer the open square which divided the Circus from the Free Library are mainly used as dressing rooms and offices. There is only a wall on the Arundel street side, and on the Tudor place side and the other parts, the roof, the galleries, and promenades were built entirely of wood. This old wood naturally fed the flames, which swept over it with great rapidity, and now all that remains is the charred remnants level with the ground, only the brick buildings and the charred outlines of the windows and doors in the wooden walls remaining. Curiously enough, this was the last week in which playgoers were to be allowed to patronise this home of the drama, and last night, when Hardie-Von-Leer's company were performing in the Wild West drama, "On the Frontier", they had a house to witness the play crowded in every part. Little did the audience dream that the wild scene of apparent conflagration was to prove only a rehearsal of an actual even a few hours later. But so it proved.

The Circus has undergone, in its time, as many curious transitions almost as it has seen many parts played on its boards. Its site was originally occupied by a wooden shed in which the early volunteers used to meet for the purposes of drill. About fourteen years ago a circus was built there, in which most of the travelling circus companies have appeared from time to time. The bare-backed flights and the pirouettes on horseback of ladies attired in the old familiar costume of the stage danseuse gave to the performances of legitimate drama when Mr. Stacey took over the building three years ago. He did so with a view to purchase the land and erect on it a building more suited to

modern requirements. Most protracted were the negotiations and the plans for the new theatre have been prepared by Mr. Walter Emden, the eminent London theatrical architect, in conjunction with Edward Holmes, of Sheffield. By Christmas it is hoped to have the new building ready for the public. When it is completed - and the burning will by no means delay the work - the street between the Theatre Royal and the Circus will be very much wider than it is at present, as the Corporation have decided to place a cab-rank there. Mr Stacey estimates his net loss at £500.

The fire was discovered shortly after half-past three by Police-constable Wittington, who was on his rounds. He at once telephoned to the Fire Brigade Station in Rockingham street. The message reached Supt. Pound at 3.37 and within five minutes he was at the scene of the outbreak with the tender and four men. The building was blazing fiercely from end to end on their arrival, the material of which it was composed being dry and therefore highly inflammable. Additional help was afforded by four constables who had made their appearance and very quickly six jets were playing upon the flames, the water being obtained from hydrants in Tudor street, Arundel street, Norfolk street, and Surrey street. The serious nature of the outbreak, the Circus being surrounded by some very valuable property, became at once apparent, and a message was despatched for the steamer, from which, on its arrival two jets were brought to bear upon the flames. The heat was intense, and the firemen were exposed to great danger in their attempts to subdue the flames. Fireman Hill, who had taken up a post near the fiercest part of the fire, was badly scorched. One of his hands, indeed, was burnt so badly that he was advised to go to the Hospital to have his wounds dressed. He returned, however, and resumed his work with the brigade. Police-constable Ashton (60), while attempting to save some property in the oil shop adjoining the circus, was cut about the hands severely by falling glass. It was soon apparent that the building was doomed. With the exception of the frail-looking foundation of brickwork the Circus was composed almost entirely of wood, which owing to the heat given out nightly by the gas jets, was a dry as tinder. Very few persons had collected in the streets, the hour being unfavourable for a large assembly of townsfolk, and the firemen were thereby enabled to move more freely than would otherwise have been the case. Before the brigade arrived the police had broken in the doors and had cleared out some of the furniture with the assistance of some bystanders. Some timber and a quantity of oil from adjoining premises were also removed out of danger. A loud report was heard shortly after the fire broke out, and it was subsequently discovered that two cylinders containing gases, used in the oxy-hydrogen apparatus had exploded. The walls which at this time were in a very shaky condition did not appear to feel the force of the additional shock at the moment, and the explosion did not do very much additional damage.

Every effort was made by the firemen to save the surrounding property.

Damage to the Adjoining Property

Messrs. Phillip and Ellis Crapper, who occupy a warehouse at the corner of Tudor street and Arundel street, has stored there a large quantity of oil, colours, waste, and other inflammable substances. The stock was happily low, as they had been making arrangements to move to other premises. In an upper room, which adjoined the circus, there were three or four bags of cotton waste and a number of barrels containing cylinder oil. At one time the top of the oil warehouse was in flames, and notwithstanding the utmost efforts of the firemen half the roof was destroyed. Such volumes of water were directed into the place, however, that the warehouse was cooled and neither the oil

nor the waste was ignited. The firemen, it must be said, worked with commendable zeal. Their work was of the most exciting nature, as it was thought every moment that some of the buildings on the three sides of the circus would suffer. The roof of the Theatre Royal is coated with lead, and this metal melted with the intense heat, but otherwise not much more damage was done. The manufactory of Messrs. John Round and Son (Limited) suffered to a serious extent. The front had been handsomely decorated and painted, and the flames from the burning circus, driven by the wind across the road, seized upon the paint and scorched it to a degree that the work of decoration will have to be again undertaken. Panes of glass were cracked by the heat, and once a blind in the interior of the office was ignited, but the firemen were able without much difficulty to put an end to the danger. The shutters at the Weights and Measures Office in Tudor place were burnt away, but there was no damage to the interior excepting from water. A quantity of timber stored in the rear of the circus was destroyed by fire. Messrs. Gallimore and Co., silversmiths, have a manufactory in Arundel street. The firemen noticed that one of the rooms was in flames, and on investigation it was discovered that flames were issuing from a gas pipe a portion of which had been melted by the heat. The pipe was knocked up and the fire extinguished without much trouble. It was not until the brigade had been at work for two hours that all danger to the surrounding property was at an end.

Incidents of the Fire

The cause of the outbreak is not known. Last night the Hardie Von Leer company gave the opening performance in Sheffield of a military drama called "On the Frontier" The piece deals with life in the Wild West, and is full of exciting situations. In one of the scenes there is a representation of an Indian attack, in the course of which a number of shots are fired. This is followed by the burning of Osborne's hut by the Indians. The inflammable material used in the hut-burning scene was, however, confined in a fitting vessel, and there could have been no danger to the stage from the flames. One of the worst effects of the fire is associated with the visit of the company to Sheffield. The company arrived on Sunday and deposited all the materials and costumes in the dressing rooms. Of this nothing was saved excepting a copy of the Bible, belonging to one of the cowboys, which was presented to him by a friend in London, and a basket belonging to Mr. Stacey, containing pantomime properties. The company are taking an enforced rest this week, preparatory to commencing an engagement in Hammersmith next Monday. Mr. and Mrs. Betterton, who were engaged with the company, were called about twenty minutes to four o'clock by Miss Collins, an actress, who informed them that the Circus was on fire. They were told on their arrival in Tudor street that the fire had been blazing about a quarter of an hour. At this time the roof had burnt away. Miss Collins had been awakened by the loud report which followed the explosion of the oxy-hydrogen apparatus. Mr. Betterton tried to save some of the company's effects, but his efforts were futile. It is strange that the company is the last to perform at the Circus, as, three years ago, Mr. Thompson and Mr. Betterton opened the place, on its passing into the hands of Mr. Stacey, with a variety entertainment. The copy of the Bible was found near the remains of a box, and although the covers are scorched and slightly damaged, the leaves have not been injured in the slightest degree.

1870's Map showing the probable location of the circus (Highlighted)

