

Alarming Fire in Sheffield This Morning, Board Schools in Flames

An alarming fire broke out early this morning in the Hoyle Street, or Netherthorpe, Board Schools, a large group of buildings furnishing accommodation for both boys and girls. It appears that the caretaker, John Mills, whose residence, though separated from the school-buildings, is within the boundary of the school grounds, went round the premises at about a quarter to eleven o'clock, at which time everything appeared to be safe. It has been his custom recently to keep the fire in the apparatus used for heating the schools alight all night, and on his visit last night he attended to it as usual, there being then no sign that it was in other than its ordinary condition. Whether at that time there was really anything wrong with it or not cannot be ascertained, but from what was noticed at a later stage, there can be little doubt that it was the seat of the outbreak subsequently discovered. The person whose notice was first attracted to the premises after the fire broke out was Police-constable (190) Pindar. This officer was passing the school at about three o'clock this morning and seeing a light in the girls' department of the premises made an inspection, which satisfied him at once that the place was on fire. He lost no time in summoning assistance, and while he proceeded to arouse the caretaker from sleep, Police-constable Wilson hurried to Tenter Street. Police Station whence a telephone message was sent to the fire brigade station. The alarm speedily brought Supt. Pound and a number of his staff with the tender to the spot, but by that time the flames appeared to have secured a strong hold and to have extended over a considerable portion of the rooms in the middle of the block. The kitchen, which is situated immediately over the cellar containing the heating apparatus, was then all ablaze, and judging by the fierce light of the flames seen through the windows of the main girls' schoolroom, that apartment, which adjoins the boys' school buildings, also seemed to be in imminent danger of total destruction. Happily the results, though serious, were not so disastrous as at that time were apparently inevitable. With the assistance of the caretaker the brigade quickly got the hose at work, and so effective was their labour that by a quarter to four o'clock, although the fire was still burning, a sufficient mastery had been obtained over it to remove anxiety as to any extension of the flames. From the position of the fire when discovered, and the course of the flames throughout it may be safely concluded that the origin of the outbreak, as previously intimated, was in the heating apparatus, the kitchen over the cellar being first attacked and the flames gradually finding their way into the girls' schoolroom above. There was nothing in the arrangement of the kitchen itself which could possibly account for the fire as, though this place was used for cookery lessons and contained a kitchen range, the latter was never used, the cooking all being done by means of a gas stove. The fire, although occurring at an hour when few people were astir, was soon brought to the knowledge of the residents in the neighbourhood and caused no little sensation among them.

LATEST DETAILS

The interior of the school to-day at the end where the fire occurred presents by the light of day a scene of dilapidation and wreck which has been visited by large crowds of the residents of this densely-populated district. The fire brigade remained at work with the tender until about seven o'clock this morning, at which hour Supt. Pound, seeing that

all danger was over, returned to the fire brigade station, leaving two men with a hand pump and hose to watch the place and guard against a fresh outbreak. Supt. Pound again visited the schools at nine o'clock, when he was able to withdraw all his men. Later inquiries decide beyond doubt that the fire was caused by the heating apparatus, which, as stated above, is laid down in the cellar immediately under the kitchen used for demonstrations in cookery. The apparatus, which is known as the high pressure system, with small bore pipes, is of the kind used in the earlier built schools of the board, but it is not now adopted in the new school buildings. During the winter months the fire in the apparatus is kept alight day and night. Supt. Pound is inclined to the opinion that the fire was caused by the overheating of the pipes, while the School Board inspector of Schools (Mr. J. J. Bingham), who visited the scene this -morning, believes that the flue must have been overheated. The pipes run along the wall within a very few inches of the woodwork, and the transmission of heat from the former to the latter with such intenseness as to arouse fire would not be difficult inasmuch as the wood is inflammable pitch-pine. The school buildings were opened in 1873, by Sir John Brown. They have accommodation for 330 boys, 330 girls, and 371 infants. The apartments, damaged are the cookery kitchen, a room on the ground floor, about 20 feet square, which with its fittings, consisting of cooking ranges, demonstrating tables, and desks, is totally gutted; the infants' cloak-room adjoining, which is seriously damaged, and the main schoolroom for girls, on the second story. The damage to the latter has, however; been confined to that portion of the room immediately above the kitchen. The fire reached this room through the floor, a part of which had to be broken away by the firemen so that they could play on the flames. Mr. J. F. Moss, Clerk to the School Board, visited the school Mr. J. F. Moss, Clerk to the School Board, visited the school early this morning, and made arrangements for the accommodation of the girls and some of the infants in another part of the buildings pending the execution of the necessary repairs which will be commenced at once so that the inconvenience will only be temporary. Several members of the School Board have also inspected the premises. The damage done will not amount to £1,000, and it is fully covered by insurance in the Alliance Fire Office.