

Fatal Fire in Sheffield The Park Club Destroyed Woman Killed - Exiting Scenes Accident to Superintendent Pound

One of the most destructive fires of recent years broke out at the Park Club, Bernard Street early yesterday morning. This institution, which has had a long and successful existence, was established on a thoroughly non-political basis many years ago as a working men's reading room. On Saturday night a number of the members remained in the club until about twenty minutes to twelve, and the caretaker and his family retired rest shortly after midnight. Arthur Kay, his wife Ann, and their two daughters - Nellie, aged 21, and Clarice, aged 15 - occupied rooms on the top story of the building and when they left the lower part of the premises everything appeared to be in perfect order. In the reading-room, that had just been vacated by the Club members there was a large fire in the grate, and two or three of the gas jets were left burning, in order to prevent possible inconvenience from the frost, which was unusually severe.

All was quiet, until thirteen minutes to two o'clock yesterday morning. Police-constable Radford (373), who was on duty in the vicinity of the Club at that time, then noticed smoke and flames issuing from the premises. He procured a hatchet, and attempted to make his way into the burning premises by chopping an entrance through the door. This he failed to do, however, the wood being excessively tough. While he was engaged at his task, a young man named Brown came up, and taking the hatchet from the exhausted constable, succeeded in smashing a panel, and gaining an entrance,. They were alarmed, however, to find that the staircase had already been partly destroyed, and that the whole of the ground floor was filled with smoke of the densest description. Instructions were given for a message to be sent to the Central Fire Station, and these were accordingly carried out by - Police-constable Kemm, M. Bovill, a cab proprietor who lives near by, kindly placing his telephone at the disposal of the messenger. The neighbourhood was by this time thoroughly, alarmed, and, attracted by Radford's whistle, numbers of men assembled to render what assistance was practicable. Among those who were earliest on the scene was James Albert Bradshaw, John. William Briddock, Joseph Briddock, and Bob Warnock, all living at 153, Bernard Street; Frank Harland, a railway spring fitter, of 114, Bard Street; and Joseph: Barber, Barber, collier, Bard Street. When they reached the burning building flames were issuing from several of the windows. In the meantime Mrs. Kay had been awakened by the noise. Discovering that her bedroom was full of smoke, she aroused her husband. He rose, partially dressed himself with all speed, not forgetting in his hurry to look after the cash belonging to the club, and descended the stairs as far as the second story. Here his further safe passage was barred by the dense clouds of stifling smoke that were making their way to the upper rooms. Driven back so rudely, and recognising that escape by this means was impossible, he retreated to the top story, and roused his daughters, Nelly and Clarice, who slept in a room at the end of the building. A shout from below, "There are people in the house" told that their presence was discovered. The occupants could be discerned, in the intervals when the smoke and fire did not entirely obscure the view, standing at the windows appealing for aid. Those in the roadway were for a time powerless to act in this

emergency. Then a young fellow named John Jeffcock remembered that at Collier's Row, two hundred yards distant, there was a ladder, and, putting on all speed, he possessed himself of this invaluable appliance, and, with assistance, reared it against the wall of the club under one of the windows where the elder daughter stood. One of the crowd, a young man named Walter Ellis, gallantly ascended the ladder, and brought the young woman down in safety. With commendable presence of mind, she had previously thrown some of her clothes into the street. Her sister Clarice, had in her fright made her way to her parents' room, and was severely burnt in various parts of her body in doing so. The ladder was removed as quickly as possible to the window, where stood Mr. and Mrs. Kay and their younger daughter. Here another difficulty presented itself - a difficulty that was responsible for the death of the poor woman. The ground drops rapidly at this point, and when the ladder was reared it was found to be several feet short. A young fellow named Joseph Barber made his way up the ladder in order to assist the younger daughter, who was put through the window by M. Kay, and held until Barber seized her. In her descent her nightdress was caught by the top of the ladder. Her father, who was at the window immediately above her was apparently under the impression that she had been conveyed safely to the ground. His own position was very precarious, for parts of the room were blazing fiercely. Mrs. Kay next essayed to descend, and prior to doing so threw to Barber soiree £10 or £12, the takings at the club for the week. Her arms were held by her husband until she called out that she was all right. She had evidently mistaken her daughter's body, suspended as it was from the ladder, for the ladder itself. Kay released his hold, and as he did so the ladder swerved, and fell with its occupants. Opinions differ as to whether the girl's nightdress gave way first, but the three - Barber, Clarice Kay, and her mother - reached the ground almost together. Several of the crowd saw that an accident to the girl was inevitable, and broke her fall, Harland being rather badly injured in the process. Before he had time to recover from the shock of the girl's fall he had a narrow escape of death, his head passing through one of the spaces of the falling ladder. Mrs. Kay fell to the ground, a distance of between 30 and 40 feet. Her head struck one of the lower window-sills in her descent, and her skull, in the words of the medical gentleman who attended her, was "hideously fractured," death occurring immediately. Barber, who stuck like a leech to the ladder, fell with it, but was uninjured. By this time the whole building was blazing like a furnace. Kay was forced by the heat out of the window, and he hung from the sill, vainly feeling for the ladder with his feet. He had a terrible choice - to drop, and probably share the fate of his wife, or to re-enter the bedroom by the window and be burned to death. Becoming exhausted at length, he dropped to the ground. He fell on his right foot, and rebounded on to his head, but beyond a bruise to his right leg and an incised scalp wound he escaped unhurt.

All this occurred within a space of from 15 to 20 minutes. The Fire Brigade received the message: at four minutes to two, and arrived on the scene; at nine minutes past the Hour. Immediately after the first notification another was received Calling upon the brigade to bring the fire escape. Accordingly Supt. Pound, accompanied by several men, set out with the tender, and four men were instructed to follow immediately with a new improved Kingston fire escape. The flames could now be seen for a considerable distance, and there was no difficulty in locating the fire. When the escape arrived -the four men were completely fagged, by reason of their exertion up the slippery hills with which the Park region abounds. The inmates had by this time been sheltered in the houses of neighbours. A hydrant was discovered close by the club and a stand pipe was fixed, but for a minute or two some difficulty was experienced on account of ice. Three strong jets of water were

obtained. The superintendent seized one of the nozzles, and was proceeding to direct the jet on the flame when, in consequence Of the enormous pressure of water, he was thrown bodily down. He struck the edge of the kerbstone violently, and a heavy pocket book in his tunic pocket inflicted several serious bruises on the ribs. The frost was so severe that as the spray fell on the clothes of the firemen and bystanders it was frozen into icicles. Those who were the proud possessors of bushy beards resembled the conventional portraits of Father Christmas. Their uniforms, also, were a mass of glistening ice. When the firemen removed the hose lengths that lay on the footpaths, considerable force was necessary to stir them, and as they were torn away the crackling noise of the ice that glued them down could be plainly heard. The firemen who were unfortunate enough to touch the brass nozzles attached to the hose received a practical demonstration of the truth embodied in Shelley's lines,

The bright chains
Eat with their burning cold into my bones,

for the result of the contact was extremely painful. In Superintendent Pound's experience of 37 years, he has never been abroad on colder night. For four hours the brigade worked incessantly, and: at the end of that time, nothing remained of the Park Club but a mere brick-and-mortar shell. The damage to the building; and contents amounts to between £1,000 and £1,100, and about half the amount is insured in. the Liverpool, London, and Globe offices.

The condition of the girl, Clarice Kay, who was burned and seriously injured by the fire which gutted the Park Club, Bernard Street, early yesterday morning, showed a slight improvement at noon to-day. Her medical attendant, Dr. J. A. Manton, says that in despite of the slight improvement her condition is still critical. The steward, Arthur Kay, is making rapid progress towards recovery. 'The injury to Superintendent Pound, has, however, been found to be more serious than was at first supposed.

It will be remembered that whilst directing a jet of water on the flames, Mr. Pound was thrown violently to the ground by the enormous pressure of the water. His side came in contact with the edge of the footpath, and he was considerably bruised. When hen returned to the fire-station, he was seen by Mr. Edward Skinner, surgeon, and subsequently by Mr. Arthur Hallam, police surgeon, who said that the superintendent had.' sprained the muscle on his left side. To-day Mr. .Pound complains of a difficulty in his breathing, and he, will be unfit for active duty far about a week. It has not yet been ascertained where the fire originated, but it is believed that the fire in the reading was the cause.