

Serious Fire at Crookes House and Shop Guttled - Narrow Escape of Family

In the early hours of yesterday morning a serious fire broke out at Crookes, and but for the awakening of one of the inmates of the premises it would have been attended by loss of life, whilst every even as it was the family had a very narrow escape, and only made good their exit in their night clothes. The fire was at No. 72, Crookes, at a stone-built house occupied by John Edward. Loach, painter and paperhanger, and the flames were practically confined to a square block of property. Fronting the street Loach had his shop, and next to it was a lock-up occupied by Mrs. Amy Bruston dealer in fancy goods and paraffin. At the back of the shops were Loach's two living rooms whilst on the next floor were four bedrooms. The one over the shop was utilised for storage purposes, and contained much inflammable material, such as turpentine, paint, and paper, a quantity of similar goods being also in the shop. Loach and his wife occupied one of the back bedrooms, and his two children, who are only about six or seven years of age, slept in the other, whilst the room over Mrs. Bruston's shop was used by a cousin, Benjamin Sargent, who acted as assistant. Access was only to be obtained to the upstairs rooms by a staircase leading from a short passage opening on the front door, and the four bedrooms opened almost direct on the head of the staircase. The fire was first discovered by Sargent, who was almost suffocated by smoke pouring into his bedroom. He hurried out, and discovered that the contents of the storeroom were in flames, and that even the door, which, fortunately, was closed, was burning through. He lost no time in alarming Loach and his wife, and, taking the two children from their beds, the affrighted family made good their escape. So hurried was their departure, however, that they had not time to dress, and had to face the cold night in their sleeping attire. But they were fortunate to escape thus, as in a minute or two afterwards the storeroom door was burned through, and the flames spread with great rapidity to the adjoining rooms. The alarm quickly became general in the neighbourhood, and the police were soon on the scene with the appliances kept at the Broomhill Police Station. Inspector Thompson was in charge, and in a very short time had fixed a stand-pipe and was playing on the flames, most attention being paid to the lock-up shop where the paraffin was stored. In the meantime a message had been sent to the Fire Brigade, and Superintendent Frost was soon at Crooke with the manual engine and a number of men. He had three jets at work on the premises, which were then on fire from the basement, to the roof, and special attention was paid to preventing the flames spreading to the adjoining property, and in assisting Inspector Thompson in his efforts to guard the place where the paraffin was stored. Happily their efforts were crowned with success, and all danger in those quarters was soon at an end. The people in the house immediately adjoining were, however, prepared for the worst, and with the help of the police and willing neighbours had removed their furniture into a garden close by. In Loach's house the roof fell in, and the premises were completely gutted, only a few articles of furniture being left, and even these were much damaged. There was the greatest excitement in the neighbourhood, and a large but orderly crowd assembled. Mr. and Mrs. Loach, who were rendered ill by the excitement, and their children were clothed and carefully looked after by neighbours. The reason of the fire is not known, and there does not seem to be any idea as to how it was caused. It originated in the storeroom, but no fire was used there, and a light had not been taken in for some time. The loss sustained by Mr. Loach is very considerable, and is partly covered

by insurance with the County Office, whilst the building, which belongs to Mr. Arthur Ashmore, is insured in the Alliance. Every praise is due to the police and to the members of the Fire Brigade for the promptness and energy displayed by them, as but for their efforts the conflagration would have been much more serious.