

Exiting Outbreak of Fire at Cockayne's (Limited) Fireman's Gallant Conduct

A fire which fortunately was prevented from assuming any large proportions, but which caused great excitement, broke out at the establishment of T. B. and W. Cockayne (Limited), just before ten o'clock last night. The spectacle of the Fire Brigade dashing down High Street and up Snig Hill – for both Rocking Street and West Bar stations sent men – with more appliances than are usually seen at a Sheffield fire, attracted crowds of people, and the street in the neighbourhood of Cockayne's Arcade was well-nigh impassable by reason of the congregation of spectators who thought that the fire which brought out a tender and two steamers must be a very serious affair. So, indeed, it might have been. It broke out under a counter in the counting house, which is on the first floor overlooking the Arcade. Some defect in the heating apparatus was probably the cause, and soon all the woodwork under one end of the counter was ablaze.

The premises are well equipped with automatic sprinkles, the heads which soon fuse when the normal temperature is much exceeded, and the nearest of these acted, and was quickly discharging a shower of water all around. As the fire was under the counter, however, the water could not reach it. When the firemen, who were on the spot within a minute and a half of receiving the call, entered the place they found it full of dense smoke, which necessitated their crawling on hands and knees to the seat of the outbreak. A chemical extinguisher was brought into operation and the fire was promptly subdued before it had done much damage. But then the injury by water had to be looked to. The sprinkler was playing away merrily, and, in their incomplete knowledge of the premises, the members of the brigade did not know how to turn the water off.

The rose-head of the sprinkler was knocked off, and the full force of the water coming through a half-inch pipe had to be stopped. There was nothing to for it but to plug it up and Fireman Basby mounted on the counter armed with a stick which he pushed into the pipe over his head. At the first attempt the force of water almost knocked him off his feet, and even when he had got the pipe plugged up, the water still, in diminished quantity, ran over him and through him, off his back, and down his sleeves. Fireman Thompson took a turn and between them they held the water in check for some ten minutes, until the pressure was cut off. Their action deserves to be recorded. The damage done by the water was no doubt considerable. The floor of the counting house was inches deep, and the water dripped through the ceiling into the fancy department below.