

## Sheffield Fire Landlord's Fight for Life Thrilling Rescues Heavy Damage

Shortly before twelve o'clock last night a fire involving very serious loss to property broke out in the Park in Sheffield. The conflagration originated at the Plough Inn, Broad Street, and quickly spread to Mr. E. Smith's adjoining drapery establishment. That the whole square was not completely destroyed is due entirely to the promptitude and skill of the Fire Brigade. Although the damage is not as serious as appeared at first sight, the probable extent is about £10,000. As was almost inevitable from the hour at which the fire broke out, human life was considerably endangered, but fortunately, after some thrilling scenes the entrapped inmates were safely rescued.

The building involved is a sort of irregular rectangle shape. The Plough Inn, where the fire started, is in Broad Street, but extends backwards along Sheaf Lane some twenty yards, the rear portion of it, two storeys in height, comprising the smoke room and other apartments. The proprietor is Mr. John Lucas.

### A Powder Magazine Danger

On the far side is Smith's drapery and haberdashery warehouse, a bigger building, though of the same height, extending into South Street, where it joins another block. It was in the latter block where was the most dangerous element to be reckoned with, for they were occupied by a gun maker and contained a small powder magazine.

The fire manifested itself in the Concert room of The Plough. How it originated is a mystery, but it certainly had secured a firm hold ere the discovery was made. Even then flames had burst through the roof, and hissing spirals were piercing the midnight darkness.

The Brigade got the alarm at 11.46 p.m., and in three minutes were on the scene with the motor escape. It was providential that the speedy motor was first despatched, for every moment was precious. The startled inmates of the inn were screaming from the windows, the flames lapping round the window demonstrating their urgent need. Supt. Frost immediately had a line of hose directed on the burning mass, and at the same time had the telescopic ladders put into operation. The ascent was made by Sergt. Corbett and Firemen Kirby and Waller, the large crowd, who were most orderly and gave practically no trouble to the police under Deputy Chief Constable Barber, cheering lustily the rescuers as they proceeded with their perilous task.

### Thrilling Rescues

Altogether eight persons were in the building. The landlord, a man over 70 years of age; his wife, who is just convalescing after a severe illness; their married daughter, Mrs. Coldwell, and her three children, Walter (7), Evelyn, (3), and Jane (eight months), and two female-servants, Maggie Bennett and Alice Cordian. The inmates of the house were roused by the smoke which rolled in dense volumes through the bedrooms and threatened to suffocate them. Their retreat was absolutely cut off, and escape by the windows was out of the question save as a last resource. They were trapped.

The first to be brought down were Mrs. Coldwell, Mr. Lucas's daughter-in-law, and the children, Walter, Evelyn, and Jane, aged seven years, three years, and eight months. An affecting incident occurred in the rescue of Mrs. Coldwell, She refused to be parted-from the youngest child, and so tightly did she clasp it to

her breast that the fireman had carry .them away together. The two servant girls Annie Cordian and Maggie Bennett were next brought down.

All the imitates had now been accounted for save two, Mr. Lucas, who was discovered on the roof, whither he had been driven by the advance of the flames and Mrs. Lucas, who had not been discovered. The smoke had become so overpowering that the firemen could not force their way through. Supt. Frost, however, succeeded at the third attempt in getting up the staircase, and at the summit on the top flight found the unconscious form of Mrs. Lucas. He carried her to safety on his back.

### The Landlord's Escape

Mr. Lucas had a thrilling fight for life. The fire gradually closed in upon him until in desperation he flung himself through a glass landing window and alighted scorched, cut, begrimed, and utterly exhausted on the roof where he was found by the searchers. He was eventually released from his terrible position, but so seriously hurt as to necessitate his immediate removal to the Royal Hospital. Thither the ambulance waggon conveyed him. The rest of the family who suffered from shock and the ill-effects of inhaling smoke were cared for in "The Industry" close by.

Eleven very powerful jets were now in play, and several lines were directed upon the recreation-room, which was converted into a roaring furnace. When half an hour had gone it seemed as if the firemen had secured the mastery.

### Another Ready Prey

The next minute, however, the flames burst out with renewed fury, and the roof of Smith's premises caught. A few seconds sufficed to prove that this building, too, was doomed. The woodwork dry as tinder, blazed fiercely, sending showers of sparks flying upwards, and the light flimsy, and inflammable materials with which the establishment was stocked lent themselves a ready prey to the gluttonous flames.

So serious was the aspect of affairs at half past one that reinforcements were summoned, and the tender from Westbar together, steamers and light hose carts from headquarters soon threw their weight into the balance against the fire.

The flames ate their way through the floors towards the ground, and inside of ten minutes the saloons on the ground floor enveloped in their fiery folds. All available hydrants were brought into use, and from every vantage point the fire was grappled with.

### Explosive Danger

Next door to the drapery establishment Roper's gunshop with its stock of explosives was a constant menace to the firemen who, oblivious to their danger, toiled strenuously, at the delivery pipes driving the flames foot by foot before them. The Westbar escape was pitched, and by its aid hose lines were carried across the roof, and jets played effectively upon the blazing interior.

Little by little at first, almost imperceptibly, the men gained upon the fire, which gradually blackened, though now and then, as if the embers had been poked by some malicious spirit, the flames would leap up with renewed vigour, and lick the bare gaunt walls of the building which could offer no further sustenance.

The work of saving the adjoining properties, which at first; seemed a hopeless task, was absolutely effectual. The men worked through Messrs. Owen's and Messrs. Roper's shops, which adjoin, and brought jets over the roof from every point of vantage.

By one o'clock the fire was in hand, and by 1.30 it was practically extinguished. The fact that at two minutes

past one the steamer which had been requisitioned was not required shows how short and sharp was the struggle. The total number of machines attending were the motor escape the horse escape, the tender, and the steamer.

## The Damage

The premises this morning presented a woeful sight. The ground floor of the shop is completely gutted, but the upper floors fronting Broad Street are not damaged either by fire or water. Several rooms on the upper floors facing to South Street are also only slightly damaged. So far as the public-house is concerned, the damage is practically confined to the concert room, which is quite destroyed. The total loss is roughly put at £10,000. Both buildings are insured, but the contents of the public-house are not covered.

## Rescued Woman's Story

Interviewed by a "Telegraph" representative at an early hour this morning Mrs. Caldwell stated that she was awakened about a quarter to twelve by her boy Walter who was suffocating. The room was full of smoke. Mr. Lucas was also roused by a stifling sensation and suspecting fire proceeded to warn the servants. It was while thus engaged that he was cut off by the flames. Mrs. Lucas had been ill for three months and arrangements had been made for her removal to-day to a change of scene and air. The fire, according to Mrs. Caldwell, originated in the concert-room.

On inquiry at the Royal Hospital this morning it was learned that Mr. Lucas was as comfortable as could be expected.

The owner of the block involved is Mr. H. Vickers, of Birley Carr. The principal of the firm trading as E. Smith is Mr. C. C. Heartley, of Nether Edge, who with his wife is meantime at Bournemouth. His nephew, Mr. C. H. Bramhall, who occupies a prominent position in the business, and the manager, Mr. C. C. Buxton, were early on the scene.

Great credit is due to a young man named R. H. Rowley, who is attached to the staff in the Industry Inn. Rowley kept his head, and when in a moment of panic the inmates of the burning house were preparing to leap from the windows he succeeded in restraining them until the Fire Brigade arrived.

## How the Landlord was Roused Remarkable Statements

Some rather remarkable statements are made in the official police report of the fire. P.c. (440) Straw states that at 11.40 p.m. he was on duty in Sheaf Street when he heard a man named William Holleley, of 11, Yardley Street, shouting, "There's a fire down here."

The constable went to the spot and aroused the landlord, and came to the where John Marples of 81, Wicker Lane, was standing. Marples told him the house was on fire. The landlord shut the door and locked it again. The constable kicked at the door, and the landlord shouted "What are you making all that row for?" and opened the door again. The constable told him to tell the inmates to come out. Eventually a ladder was procured, and the constable told got it through the first story window. He asserts that he found the door locked.

## The Landlord's Explanation

A "Telegraph and Star" representative visited Mr. Lucas at the Hospital this afternoon in order to learn his explanation of the matter. Mr. Lucas, whose face is almost entirely hidden in bandages readily submitted to an interview.

He denies absolutely that the police had, to summon him twice, and had ultimately to get in through a window.

He states that when he heard the shouts he went down to the door, and a man who was not an officer told him there was a fire.

"I bolted the door for safety, "he said" not knowing who might come in, and ran back to the concert room."

When ho saw it was true, he ran and unfastened the door and admitted the police. He was some time in finding the key of the concert room, but whether he looked for it before admitting the police or afterwards he did not make clear.

"I ran and wakened all the family, "he stated." That was how I came to be burned. I got dead beat, I was wet and cold, for I was only in my shirt and trousers, and I hardly knew what I was afterwards. Lucas combatted the firemen's theory that the fire originated in the concert room. He damped the fire, he declared, before he went to bed shortly before eleven, and he did not see how such a blaze could have arisen in such a short time even if the conflagration had started there.