

*Factory Blaze
Damage Estimated At £20,000
Fireworks Cause?
Brigade Still Engaged This Afternoon
Horses Rescued*

It is believed that a firework was the cause of the disastrous fire which occurred last night at the works of the Hardy Patent Pick Company, Little London Road, Heeley, and Sheffield. A 4ft. rocket which had penetrated the roof has been found on the premises, and the theory is that a similar rocket caused the conflagration which has gutted the extending over an area of about an acre.

At present it is difficult to estimate the amount of damage done, but the sawmills, shovel and pick departments and part of the general offices have been destroyed, and it is probable that the figure will be in the neighbourhood of £20,000. Practically one-sixth of the large works has been burnt out, and Mr. T. G. Jameson, director and secretary of the firm, stated this morning that about fifty men will be out of work temporarily. Other departments - forge, machine shop, foundry, drilling machine shop, etc - will open as usual tomorrow morning.

Thousands of people gathered in the vicinity of the fire last night, attracted by the brilliant glare reflected in the sky and visible for miles around. They saw Sheffield Fire Brigade, under Superintendent T. Breaks, working hard and with success in preventing the spread of the flames. The flammable nature of the contents of the premises was conducive to a rapid spread of the fire and great credit is due to the men, who were often in extremely dangerous situations, for having saved a large portion of the works.

When the Brigade arrived shortly after the discovery of the outbreak about 10 o'clock, the flames had got a good hold and it was obvious that the task of fighting them would be very difficult.

Water Supply Adequate

Difficulties would have been increased had it not been for the fact that within a short distance of the works there was an adequate water supply from the River Sheaf, and the Little London Dam. In the work were private hydrants, supplied by the Corporation, but the pressure on those was found to be inadequate, and throughout the night firemen used water from the river and the dam.

If such a natural water supply had not been available the position would have been much more serious than it was, but the efficient pumping apparatus of the Brigade solved the problem, four modern pumps being used. Some idea of what might have happened can be obtained from the fact that when firemen used the Corporation water supply this morning to turn a hose on the smouldering ruins, the force was not sufficient for a stream of water ejected from the hose to reach the first floor, about 16ft. high.

So far as the theory that a rocket caused the fire is concerned Mr. Jameson said this

morning he could not think of no other cause and a "Star" reporter who made investigations found considerable support for the theory.

Yesterday morning the stick of a large rocket was noticed in the roof of one of the departments which had escaped damage. Workmen climbed up under the false roof and were amazed to find the stick was firmly embedded while the head of the rocket was actually in the premises. The rocket had descended with such force that it had penetrated through two slates. The stick was four feet long, and a price of 4s., was marked upon it.

It is calculated that such a rocket would fall and strike the roof at a force of over 100 miles an hour, and if one fell on the sawmills - where the fire started - it would go through the roof and the head of it would quickly start a fire among the shavings and wood in that department.

Throughout last evening, despite the rain, bonfires were alight in the Heeley and Abbeydale Roads districts, and hundreds of fireworks including many rockets, were set off. Consequently it is possible that a rocket such as the one found in the roof yesterday started the conflagration.

Firemen have been engaged in finally quenching the fire throughout the whole of to-day and will probably have to continue to-night. It was not until about 5 o'clock this morning that the flames were finally smothered and at mid-day the ruins were still smouldering despite the constant flow of water from the firemen's hoses.

The wrecked machinery, twisted girders, blackened stacks of pick and shovel shafts, and heaps of bricks from fallen walls were evidence of the fierceness of the blaze. Roofs and windows were completely destroyed, and the whole of the affected departments presented an appearance of complete ruin and chaos.

"Worked like Niggers"

IN one shop there were extensive stacks of timber and sawn wood; and the fact that the front of these was charred and blackened shows how quickly the fire would have continued to spread had it not been for the effective efforts of the Brigade.

Supt. T. Breaks in conversation with the "Star" reporter paid high tribute to his men. "They worked like niggers," he said, "and not one of them ever made a mistake."

When the flames were at their fiercest racing along the roofs and shooting high up into the air, the firemen were undaunted, and took up precarious points of vantage in order to keep up a steady flow of water into the raging furnace. Men, women and children in the crowds scrambled excitedly back as showers of sparks were throw out, but the firemen moved very slowly from the danger source and grimly endeavoured to arrest further progress of the flames.

The flames burned more fiercely when fanned by the wind, and at frequent intervals clouds of smoke were pierced by enormous sheets of flame which rose to a height almost twice that of the building.

Some of the firemen mounted onto the roof and poured tons of water into the burning building. They took every practicable risk in their efforts, and several times just got down from the roof before that part on which they had been perched collapsed.

There was a terrific roar when portions of the upper wall of the departments concerned collapsed, and a tremendous shower of sparks was thrown up. It was then that firemen had remarkably narrow escapes from injury or death, for many of them were still working in the vicinity of the walls which collapsed, and if they had not been actually underneath brickwork arches which held firm they would have been buried beneath the smouldering debris which fell around them.

Valuable work was done by employees of the firm who assembled when they heard the news of the fire. As the outbreak spread towards the general offices many of the men set to work to remove valuable papers and books. They formed a chain, and passed these along to each other out of danger. But in the middle of this work the lights failed. At that moment one man was throwing a large drawer from a desk to one of his colleagues, and in the sudden darkness the second man failed to catch it, and trapped his fingers, cutting them to the bone.

Safes through Floor

In part of the offices which were affected there were several safes. Two of these fell through the burnt floor and are embedded in the ruins, while three other safes are still in a precarious position.

It is proposed to use the canteen as temporary offices, and the directors of the firm are doing everything possible to carry on work without serious losses. This is indicated by the announcement that the undamaged portion of the works will open as usual at 7 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The actual discovery of the fire was made by the night watchman when going on his rounds about 9.50 p.m. Very shortly afterward, however, the flames were visible to residents within a considerable distance of the works and soon large crowds soon assembled, including many persons who had left their beds and were scantily clad.

Spectators saw a Guy Fawkes bonfire of a magnitude which they did not expect, and many of them took risks in attaining points of vantage. The adjoining railway embankment was thickly thronged with people, and light engines had to be employed to keep them off the main lines.

There was no immediate entrance to the embankment, and hundreds of people climbed a 7ft high partition or scrambled over a high spiked railing. Others clambered into the Meersbrook Chapel-yard and the crowds were so great in Broadfield Road and Little London Road that the thoroughfares were impassable.

Adjoining the works of Hardy Patent Pick Co. are the premises of Messrs. Redmayne, stove and grate manufacturers, and at one time there was a danger of part of these premises, where a number of horses were stabled becoming involved. The screams of the terrified horses could plainly be heard, but the animals were quickly rescued.

The voice of Superintendent Breaks, who directed the fire-fighting operations from the top of a huge fire escape, could be heard as far away as Chesterfield Road on one side and Abbeydale Road on the other.

The premises of the Hardy Pick Co. are within a short distance of the works of Messrs. C T. Skelton and Co. where there was a disastrous fire on April 24th 1921. That fire was one of the worst Sheffield had ever experienced, damage to the extent of £100,000 being

done. The last big fire in the city was on February 26th this year when the basement of the Sheffield Corporation's new abattoir in Cricket Inn Road was burned out. In February, 1922, there was a disastrous outbreak at the premises of Carter and Sons, wholesale chemists, in Attercliffe Road.

Other big fires have been:

- 1891 Hovey's (damage estimated at £75,000).
- 1893 Swinscoes.
- 1897 Rawson's Brewery.
- 1898 Dixon's Paper Mills, Oughtibridge.
- 1900 Pawson and Brailsford's, Mulberry Street.
- 1900 Price's Flour Mills, Millsands.
- 1903 Albany Hotel
- 1904 Black's Woodyard.
- 1909 Ward and Payma's
- 1906 Grimesthorpe Gas Works.