

Sheffield Fire Chief Leaving To Take Up Work of National Importance Outstanding Career Some Remarkable Feats Recalled

Superintendent Tom Breaks, head of the Sheffield Fire Brigade, who has an international reputation as a fire chief, is shortly to leave the city, having been offered an appointment at the Home Office in connection with Fire Brigade matters.

Subject to the approval of the City Council, next Wednesday, he will take over his new duties on April 19th, after 14 years in charge of the Sheffield Fire Brigade, which he has made second to none in efficiency.

His duties at the Home Office will be to assist in the reorganisation of the British fire services on a national scale - a scheme in accordance with the recommendations of the Riverdale Committee which was appointed last year by the Government to inquire into the fire brigade services of the country under the chairmanship of Lord Riverdale. Superintendent Breaks was one of the witnesses who gave evidence before this committee.

At present the fire brigades of the country are of a purely local character, but it is proposed that they should receive the recognition of the Government, in a similar manner to the police service, and that local authorities should receive from the Exchequer a grant in their support.

Although Mr. Breaks will carry out his work from London, he will, in the course of his duties, pay periodical visits of inspection to the various fire brigades throughout the country.

Notable Career

During a career of distinction in the fire brigade service Superintendent Breaks has been, many times, honoured by the award of coveted distinctions, from the French Government, and from the internationally known organisations in England, France and Belgium.

He started his career in Nottingham before the war, his father being Chief of the Brigade in that city for 21 years, while another link with Nottingham is that Mrs. Breaks' father was also an officer in the same Brigade.

At the outbreak of war Superintendent Breaks joined the forces and served on the Western front in France and Belgium, being mentioned in dispatches and awarded the French Croix de Guerre with Palm, for services rendered at a fire caused by enemy bombardment at Hazebrouck, in July 1917.

At a later stage in the war he was instrumental in organising a military fire brigade at Calais, and he gained a wide experience of fire caused by enemy aircraft. The French

Government gain recognised his services and awarded him the Médaille de Sauvetage and diploma for work in connection with air raids.

After War Service

After the war he rejoined the Nottingham Brigade and in 1921 was appointed Chief Inspector of the Salford Fire Brigade. In April 1923 he was selected, from many candidates, to take charge of the Sheffield Fire Brigade, which he, at once, set to work to reorganise.

During the past 14 years he has attended nearly 10,000 fires in Sheffield - an average of 700 a year - and although most of them have been small this is, in itself, a tribute to the work of the Fire Brigade.

Some of them, however, have been fires of exceptional severity at which Superintendent Breaks distinguished himself by his cool resource, his outstanding personality and his remarkable powers of organisation in an emergency. On several occasions he has saved life at fires.

Apart from actual fire-fighting work his services have been found invaluable in many spectacular emergencies, perhaps the best known was the capture of a tiger in the basement of the Empire Theatre, some years ago.

Some Outstanding Episodes

Other outstanding episodes in his Sheffield career have been:-

The rescue of horses from a ganister pit in Stannington;

His adventures on a raft, leading to the recovery of a body in a gas holder in Arundel Lane, where a man had been drowned.

A descent in a diving suit into a 30-foot well at Rotherham, after three children had been drowned.

National recognition of his important work in the profession was shown by his election as president of the Institution of Fire Engineers, and he is also chairman of the Governing Council of the Professional Fire Brigades' Association.

He has been awarded the gold medal and diploma of the French National Office of Scientific Research and Invention, and is a Member of Honour of the French and Belgium Fire Brigade Federations.

On four occasions he has been awarded the silver medal of the Society for the Protection of Life from Fire, for personal gallantry at fires, and he holds the Certificate of Honour of the Professional Fire Brigade Association for life saving.

He has also been awarded the silver medals of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the National Equine Defence League for saving animal life.

Tribute to his Men

It is not yet known who will succeed Superintendent Breaks as head of the Sheffield Fire Brigade, but his deputy Chief Inspector Teather, will be in charge of the fire station for the time being.

Tribute to the loyalty and devotion to duty of the officers and firemen of the Sheffield Fire Brigade was paid by Superintendent Breaks in an interview yesterday, with a representative of the "Sheffield Telegraph."

"They have at all times stood by me and assisted me in times of stress, danger and discomfort" he said.

"A fire brigade is not judged by its buildings, its machines, and apparatus, but by the quality of its men, and in Sheffield, we have the right men, all doing a real "man's job."

"Some of the happiest years of my life have been spent in Sheffield. The public have supported me, and if it is the wish of the City Council that I should be allowed to serve an even greater public. I shall enter into my new life with enthusiasm and endeavour to place the fire brigade services of the country on a sound footing."