

## Riddle of the Albert Hall Fire Disaster Interior of Historic Sheffield Building Guttled Famous Organ Destroyed



Above the blazing building as it appeared at about midnight, and, below the still smoking roof at ten o'clock this morning

THE CAUSE of the fire which last night destroyed the Albert Hall, Sheffield, and which was watched by huge crowds of people in Barker's Pool, remains a mystery to the management.

The theory of originating from smouldering woodwork due to a dropped cigarette end is discounted by the fact that when the fire was discovered flames had got hold of a part of the building in which -nothing unusual had been noticed a few minute earlier.

Although the giant crowd of onlookers - estimated at 2,500 at one time - dwindled after midnight, many persons remained in the vicinity of the Hall throughout the night watching the work of firemen who carried on their safety measures until to-day.

At noon there were hundreds of people in Barker's Pool, and water was still being pumped on to the ill-fated building.

## Position of Employees

This morning it was seen that only the outer shell of the building, stands—the interior being completely gutted—and ' it is understood, that what, remains of the cinema will have to be pulled down.

Among the onlookers who watched members of the Sheffield Fire Brigade pulling away dangerous portions of smouldering timber and masonry to-day, were thirty-five employees of the Albert, Hall, who were disconsolately discussing the fire.

The "Star", was told, however, that no doubt the Gaumont-British Film Corporation will endeavour to obtain positions for these employees in other theatres under its control.

Shortly before he discovered the outbreak, in a short passage underneath the stage, Mr. T. Bolton, the staff foreman at the Albert Hall, turned off the gas at the main in accordance with his nightly duty.

Had the fire broken out before this was done there would have been the added risk of an explosion.

## Foreman's Account of Discovery

Mr. Bolton described in an interview, to-day, how he discovered the fire and the steps he took to deal with the, emergency.

"I was making my customary inspection of the building shortly after the audience of about 1,300 persons had left," he said.

"I had turned off the gas, and on my tour I suddenly heard a' strange noise at the back of the building.

"To investigate the cause I walked up an emergency exit at the back and found flames shooting along a short passage underneath the stage.

"Flames cut off the nearest fire extinguisher; so I dashed down the emergency staircase, I warned Mr. R. T. Rea, the divisional publicity manager for the Gaumont-British Corporation, and, an attendant, and while they went up to the scene of the fire I telephoned for the Fire Brigade."

## Upward Rush of Flames

Mr. Rea, and employees of the Albert Hall showed great courage in attacking the fire with fire-fighting appliances kept in the cinema for emergency use, and for a time they succeeded in getting the flames in the passage under control.

However, the fire spread in another direction.

The stage; which seated 250 people, was quickly involved, and by this means the fire spread swiftly to the roof.

Within a few minutes the flames had burst through the roofing, and the building was an inferno which lighted up the surrounding district; and became a spectacle seen from distant suburbs.

When the Sheffield Fire Brigade arrived, Mr. Rea, Mr. L. E. Tulley; manager of the Albert Hall, and members of the cinema staff, who were quickly mobilised for duty, risked personal injury in successful attempts to save valuable papers and money kept in the divisional offices of the Gaumont-British Corporation, which are in the Albert Hall building.

### Protection of the Films

Although this morning there had been no opportunity of making extended examination it is believed that films stored in the building will be intact.

The films were kept in a fireproof bin, the shutters of which; were closed last night, and this box was placed in a room built of fire-proof material and guarded by a steel door two-inches thick.

Interviewed in the ruined building while he was ruefully surveying the damage to-day, Mr. Tulley told a "Star" reporter that he was unable to give any precise estimate of the total: figure involved.

He agreed, however, that it would amount to tens of thousands off pounds - quite apart from the extensive damage caused to property stored in the premises of three firms whose showrooms are in the Lower Hall of the Albert Hall.

Explaining that the fire was still a complete mystery to him, Mr Tulley said: Bolton, who made the discovery, was met by flames only ten minutes after the audience had left the building and as nothing of an unusual nature was discovered then it must have been almost instantaneous.

“The apparatus used for playing gramophone records is underneath the stage, and the girl operator would have noticed anything unusual, or would have smelled burning, when the last record was being played at the close of the show”.

### Organ Destroyed

The famous Albert Hall organ, of Parisian make, which, when it was installed many years ago, was regarded as one of the finest in the world, has been destroyed.

The organ, a Cavaille Coll, has been distinguishing feature of the Albert Hall, and was a wonderful instrument, both in magnitude and style, and when first built, it contained more than 5,000 pipes, 76 stops, 16 combination pedals four row of manuals, and a full sized 32 foot pedal organ.

Modernised in recent years the organ has frequently been used during cinema performances.

## Restriction of Damage

Sheffield Fire Brigade, Under Acting Superintendent C. Teather, who was still directing the fire fighting operations this morning, performed a great work in preventing the fire spreading to adjacent property.

They had no chance of saving the Albert Hall but faced with a task of danger and difficulty, the firemen, shortly before midnight, concentrated on the rear end of, the building where there was the greatest danger of a spread of the flames.

The tower, which is about 40 feet in height, and opens on to the roof of the theatre, was in' danger of collapsing and of setting fire to the Regent Theatre, a garage, a cutlery works, and. other manufacturing premises in the immediate neighbourhood.

Watched by enormous crowds they used the ninety-foot escape, from which a fireman, poised on the top, played a hose into the burning mass.

By midnight there was no danger of an extension of he fire, but the tower was still burning and throughout the night firemen continued playing water on to the building.

## Deceptive Exterior

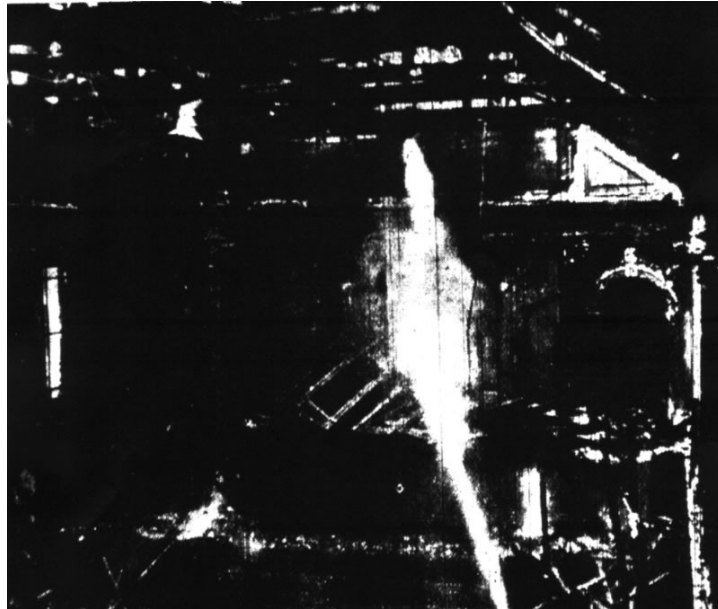
To-day the tower was still standing, but squads of police officers kept back the crowds from the roadway between the Albert Hall and the Regent as a precautionary measure.

The 90ft., escape was being used by the Fire Brigade staff on duty to-day to enable dangerous timbers to be removed from the tower.

Hiding the burnt out interior of the building the facade of the Albert Hall appears to have been little affected by the fire.

Posters announcing this week's programme and future attractions remain on the front of the building.

It is only from the inside that the full extent of the damage and the scene desolation can be adequately realised.



“Star photograph of the interior of the burnt-out Albert Hall, Sheffield, taken from the balcony at non to-day

## **SHEFFIELD ALBERT HALL FIRE**

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IT HAVE BEEN ADEQUATELY INSURED**

**?**

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Prudential policies afford adequate cover against the numerous risks run by Householders and Shopkeepers.