

The Star, 16 February 1962

Hurricane! *Worst 'blow' since 1894*

Flustered and very worried, a housewife ran into Sheffield Fire Brigade's central office in Division Street. Could the brigade help her? The wind looked like bringing a chimneystack crashing into her house.

Sympathetically and with great patience, an officer tried to explain that nearly 800 other families had appealed for help before her, but the brigade would do its best for her. Telephone calls had been pouring in since one o'clock Monday morning to the brigade's switchboard, the nerve-centre in the tight against the gale.

But the calls total continued mounting yesterday afternoon as other housewives, like this one from Moore Street, discovered more and more of the frightening damage caused by 80 m.p.h. winds, the strongest recorded in the city since 1894.

Nerve Centre

As the: appeals for help came in - most of them by telephone - It became obvious that the switchboard and radio control room staff would have to be doubled. Quietly, with the competence of men who are used to dealing with emergencies, who are used to reasoning with people who are in a near-panic, the, switchboard staff took down particulars of every appeal.

The Front Line



Sheffields Fire Brigade - Swtchboard
(Bill Jones in picture)

Meanwhile, throughout the city, five fire-engines were continuously at work, each manned by a crew of six, in the front line of the battle.

Although fire-fighting is their job, they seemed willing to take on anything to ease the public's fear, ready, for example, to tackle roof jobs that had been categorically turned down by building contractors' men. It was too much of a risk - possibly a fatal risk - to climb about roofs with a 40 to 50 m.p.h., gale about.

This was stretching the city's brigade to the utmost because always it has to be ready to take on a fire. But this situation has been so serious that the Chief Fire Officer, Mr. Ben Jones, has decided to split his forces evenly - five engines and their crews to help gale hit buildings, five kept in reserve for fire outbreaks.

The principle he has laid down and which has been followed by every one of his men "Carry out as many urgent jobs as possible and be as helpful as possible. But we must maintain a reasonable fire cover."

There have been times when firemen and householders have been annoyed. Each householder, perhaps, understandably, thinks that his trouble is the worst that his house is in the greatest danger.

Six surveyors from the City Engineer's Department have been touring Sheffield, reporting on the condition of buildings.

Gangs from the department have had the jobs of bricklaying and fencing off where buildings are dangerous.

It should be obvious that with all the available services, both public, and private, stretched to their limits it becomes more and more the individual's duty to help himself as much as possible. Only by such co-operation will this weekend's gale damage be 'tamed' within the next two or three days.