

£100,000 Damage in Hazardous Sheffield Blaze

Sheffield fire-fighters faced extremely hazardous conditions at a fire which, says CFO B. Jones, O.B.E., in a report for Fire, showed that it is a fallacy to say there is "nothing to burn" in the steel manufacturing industries.

During the first half-hour of operations heavy machinery caused weakened timber floors to collapse and pull the walls into the fire area.

The fire broke out in the premises of Messrs. Kayser Ellison which occupies a corner site in the heavy engineering area of the City, the factory covering an area of approximately 80,000sq ft with buildings of varying construction, these having been developed at different periods over many years.

The call was received at 22:34 and the predetermined attendance of water tender, pump escape, turntable ladder, emergency; tender and wireless car arrived at 22:39.

Well alight

Upon arrival, it was seen that the first and second floor levels over a length of about 80ft were well alight and spreading rapidly, assisted by strong winds. The total length of the premises in the affected section was about 330 ft and the fire area adjoined the wall of a 'neighbouring factory, this wall being in part constructed from bituminous metal sheeting.



A fireman collects more hose from the appliance as colleagues face the intense radiated heat shortly after the collapse of the roof.

Pumps were made three immediately and the Assistant Chief Officer arrived shortly afterwards to take command of operations. In the meantime, two jets had been put to work on the north side to prevent spread to the adjoining factory and three jets and the turntable monitor were sited to stop spread along the unaffected section of the Kayser Ellison premises on the south side of the fire.

The crew of the make-up pump had gained entrance to the factory yard to the East side and entered the building with three jets.

Despite the hazardous conditions, however, within 50 mins of arrival, the "stop was circulated with eight jets and the turntable monitor in use.

A later assessment showed that the fire was stopped when 25 per cent of the affected section had been involved and this was less than 5 per cent of the total production area.



Weakened walls collapse into fire area

The collapsed section was an old part of the building, principally used for the manufacture and testing of steel wire and the incident again showed that it is a fallacy to say that there is “nothing to burn” in the steel manufacturing industries.

A detailed investigation into the cause of the fire was carried out and this showed that the fire originated research laboratory on the first floor and, that an outside contractor had employed workmen, in the laboratory replacing roof glazing damaged in the recent gales.

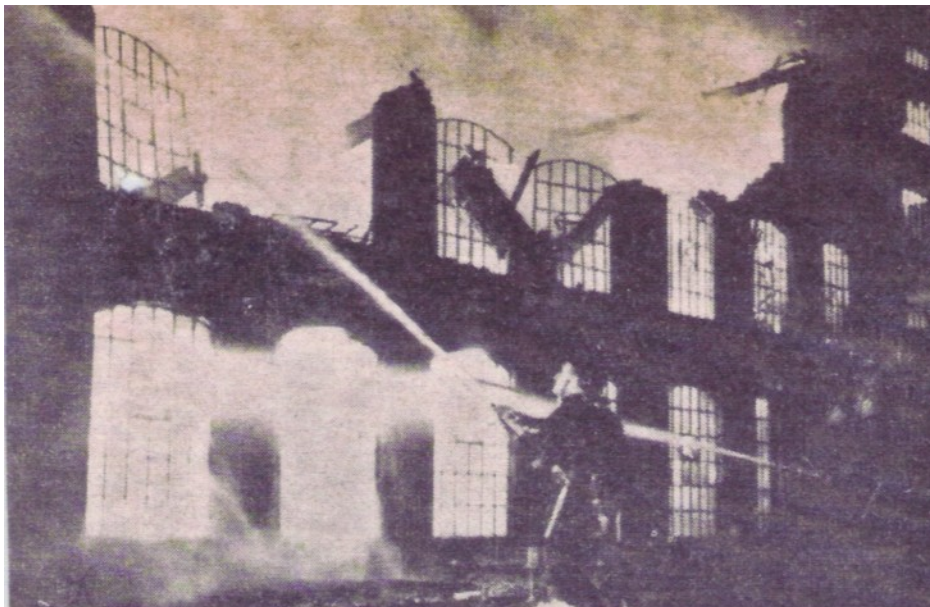
These men left the building at 16:30 six hours before the fire was discovered. No one had entered the area after that time until two maintenance electricians saw the laboratory and first floor well alight at 22:32.

There is little doubt that the outbreak originated in the laboratory but extensive inquiries could not reveal a definite cause and this has been returned as “unknown”.

Messrs Kayser Ellison's have always been conscious of their responsibilities in relation to fire precautions and maintain a high standard of safety says CFO Jones.

However, the fact that the outbreak occurred during a period when staff were employed in the department concerned undoubtedly contributed to the development of the fire before detected. The lesson, of course is an old one, to inspect all areas after workmen have left at the end of a working period."

Aftermath



The biggest factory blaze in Sheffield since the blitz—at Kayser Ellison's works in March, 1962.



Left: The collapsed roof and buckled walls bear tragic witness to the ferocity of the fire in the wire drawing department - the worst blaze in the city since the war.

A debt of gratitude

THE FIRE at Kayser Ellison's Sheffield works was the city's worst since the war. But it could very easily have turned into a catastrophe too great to bear thinking about.

A 24-inch gas main and a high wind combined to produce a situation that demanded rapid thinking, discipline, and training of the highest order - to say nothing of the courage we have come to take almost for granted from our fire brigades.

These were exactly what the few spectators in Carlisle Street East saw displayed by the men of Sheffield Fire Brigade on Sunday night.

It is very much to their credit that they were on the scene only a matter of minutes after the alarm, and that they were able to save everything that was not actually in flames on their arrival.

We owe these men a great debt of gratitude for making the difference between a fire and a tragedy.

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A bird's eye view of the crippled building in Carlisle Street where workers today joined in to clear up the mess.