

## *Arson in two big rail fires*

### *Four Sheffield Firemen Injured*

By Michael Crouch and Martin Green

Fires which raged through two British Railways' goods depots in Sheffield yesterday - destroying one and seriously damaging the other - were being investigated by city police last night as cases of suspected arson. Railway police were instructed to set up a guard at other depots throughout the city.

The first outbreak was at The Wicker depot in Savile Street; the second, reported 15 minutes later, at the Bridgehouses depot, off Nursery Street. The two yards are connected by a tunnel.

Four firemen were injured when part of the shed roof collapsed at The Wicker depot. Flames licked 70 feet in the air and a column of dense smoke, described by a witness more than a mile away as "resembling a miniature atom bomb mushroom," rose hundreds of feet.

The disused building, containing inflammable rubbish and oil-impregnated sleepers and lumber, was quickly consumed by flame as firemen, fought to bring the blaze under control.

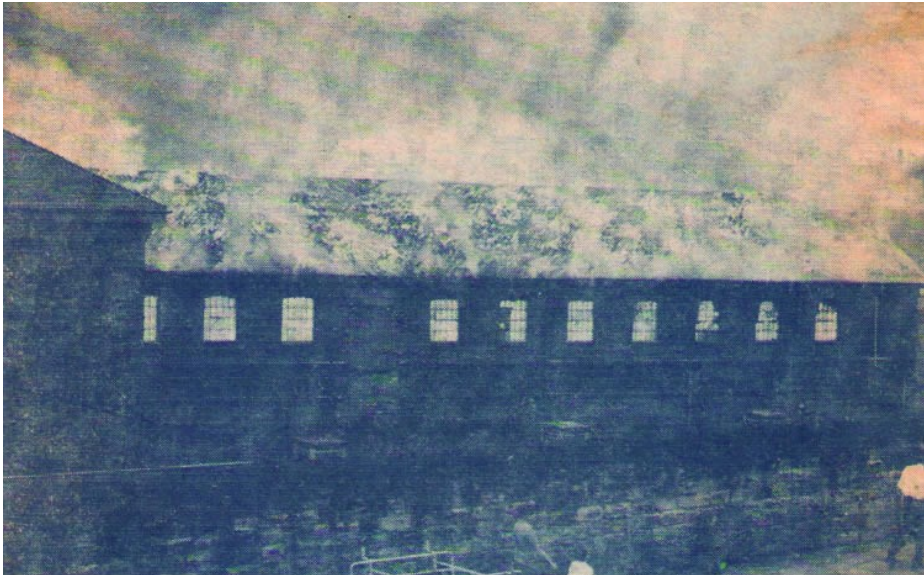
A total of 11 appliances and 50 firemen were sent to Savile Street, and three machines and 15 men to Nursery Street.

Sgt. George Brown, of the railway police, said the fire had been first noticed at about 5 p.m. and that it was under control by about 6.20 p.m.

The red brick building was supported inside by cast iron pillars and steel beams and was roofed by glass and wood. Its shell measures about 130 paces by 70 paces.



The huge blaze at the Wicker goods depot at its height. In the foreground, a Sheffield Fire Brigade officer



The roof collapsed in stages and as the flames and smoke rose into the air as a strong updraught sucked fresh air in through the building's open ends and broken windows, fanning the blaze. During the late afternoon a light, south-westerly breeze was blowing and it was not, until evening that rain began to fall.

Flames gnaw at the roof of the old British Railways goods depot in the Wicker, Sheffield, at the height of yesterday's blaze. Minutes later the roof collapsed and firemen went to work among the debris below

## Trapped



One of the firemen injured at the blaze is helped to safety by a colleague and a policeman

Mr. William J. D. Plevin, licensee of The Wicker Brewery Hotel across the street from The Wicker depot, said he noticed the west end of the building burst into flames at about 5 p.m. He said he rang 999 but that firemen were on the scene so soon afterwards that he thought someone else must have rung before him.

"All I saw was smoke and flames coming out of this end of the building," he said. "Then, whoosh! The whole thing was alight. It didn't take more than 20 minutes. I didn't see anyone near the place, but then I wouldn't have; I was in the hotel."

The four firemen were trapped on the ground floor of the four-storey structure when a cave-in caused glass and flaming debris to shower down on them. They were taken to the Royal Infirmary in three ambulances and other firemen were instructed not to enter the building.

Mr. Lambert said firemen played streams of water from many hoses on to the brick and unburned portion of the building to keep the temperature down and avoid wall collapses. He said that as the cast iron columns cooled they would crack and split and that the building would be dangerous for some time to come.

Hundreds of people watched the main blaze from the south side of Savile Street and from a bluff on the north side of the yard. As firemen stretched hoses from across Savile Street, bystanders were unexpectedly showered with water several times when hose joints slipped loose and spouted water 30 feet into the air.

Until- late at night Savile Street was the scent of intense fire brigade and police activity.



Kerbside help for more firemen injured in fighting The Wicker blaze

About 20 brigade hoses stretched across the highway from water sources on the opposite side from the fire and traffic was re-routed by way of Spital Hill. Surplus water from the fire was soon flowing out into the road.

## Negotiation

Despite the fierceness of the blaze, one factor in favour of the firefighters was that there was little worry about it spreading to surrounding premises. The wind was light and the nearest buildings too distant to be threatened.

A spokesman for the British Railways police said: "It is certainly very suspicious and we have got our eyes and ears open." He did not think the existence of a tunnel between the two depots could have been known to a lot of people.

The firemen who rushed to the Bridgehouses outbreak were able to bring it under control in a short time but as in the other fire the tinder of oil impregnated sleepers and rubbish had taken its toll.

"They could have been started by anybody," Chief Supt. E. Marshall, of the Central Division, said last night. "We have begun a full-scale investigation but are still in the initial stages and have no suspects yet.

"It could have been youths, it could have been a crazy man, a fool, and it wouldn't be the first time. But I doubt if it was children. They would have been scared when the first fire caught."

He said police would check their files for arson suspects but added that the nature and direction of the search had not yet been worked out. He did not know how many policemen would be involved.

## Rubbish

Mr. S. Lambert, Chief Fire Officer, said that the cause was of "doubtful origin." Once the main blaze was brought under control, he said, the fire brigade wanted it to burn rapidly because there was nothing in the building worth saving.

"It's not worth risking lives for this rubbish. We just want to contain it now and let everything burn."

He said later that none of the injured firemen had been detained at Sheffield Royal Infirmary. Mr. Barry Newbound and Mr. Barry Spellman had I been treated for bruises and shock, and Mr. Barry Wood for back injuries, and Mr. Ronnie Mansell for lacerations to his right leg.



The gutted shell of the depot today, with smoke still rising from piles of debris

# *Men Caught in Safety Dash*

By David Mastin

A STUMBLING run of just a few yards saved the four firemen from possible crippling injury last night when the roof section caved-in above them.

I was standing a short distance away when, with a loud crack, a blackened roof girder appeared to bulge and drop away from the roof.

Two of the four men looked up and shouted. So did a police officer and other firemen.

The girder came down with a shower of broken glass and red-hot bricks.

## Turned

All four firemen turned and ran to an open space but the falling debris caught them mid-way in their run.

For a brief second it looked as though two of the firemen were buried. The crowd outside on the road were hushed.

Firemen, police and two civilians raced to the rubble and a fireman at the gate shouted for ambulances to be sent to the scene.

## Stretcher

When the dust lifted three firemen lay on the floor, the fourth appeared to be kneeling and the main bulk of the debris had missed them by just a few feet.

Firemen ran to the scene with stretchers and two more firemen with a civilian helping, carried one man out onto the road.

Three ambulances arrived and the men, white-coated with dust, were helped in and driven to hospital.

Note: In the photograph above. Left to right: Bernard Newbound; Barry Woods; John Corden



The price of fire - Sheffield firemen help a colleague injured by falling roof timbers