

Blaze Sweeps Steelworks



Smoke and flames engulf Firth Brown's works as the fire spreads "almost at running speed"



FIREMEN at work amidst the dense smoke

An appeal went out yesterday from a big Sheffield steelworks to its holidaying employees asking them to help clear up after a huge blaze which swept through a workshop.

Firemen from all Sheffield's six stations spent five hours tackling the blaze which broke out on Saturday afternoon - the first day of the annual holiday for the 120 men who work in the shop - at Firth Brown Ltd in Carlisle Street.

A spark from an oxy-acetylene burner caught bitumen-sealed fibreboard panels. A sudden wind change from east to west and the fire spread the 250 yards of the heavy machine shop "almost at running speed," said a fire brigade spokesman.

"This will cost us thousands," works director Mr Peter Fox said last night. "It is completely impossible at this stage to assess all the damage." He said the first thing would be to make the 80ft high shell of the works safe for clearing up work to begin inside during the fortnight's holidays to help.

"As soon as possible we would like to get workers back to clean up. "We don't want them in their hundreds tomorrow but we would like those who plan to stay in Sheffield Mr Fox estimated that although machines could be operating within a fortnight, production would be "hampered for some time yet".

The shop produces rolls for steel mills and heavy forgings for power stations and ships. Many of them go for export.

Mr. James Payne, of Carr Forge Road, Hackenthorpe, Sheffield, a steel erector working on dismantling of a 100-ton overhead crane said: "We were working on the gantry about 304 up cutting rivets. Sparks from the oxy torch ignited the gable end."

Another of the 17 workmen - subcontracting a two-week 12.000 job for Molyneux Engineering Co, of Gloucester - rang the fire brigade.

Others tried to put out the main blaze with buckets of water and stamp out small fires caused by flying sparks. "But: it was too late," said Mr Gordon Gill, aged 29, of Gleadless. Sheffield and some went into the smoke to drag 18 cylinders of welding gas away from the flames.

Railway guard Mr Alan Hutchinson, 30, of nearby Botham Street, raised the alarm when he saw smoke and 20ft flames. Mr. Hutchinson ran 50 yards to call the police and rouse Mr. Norman Heathcote, licensee of the Alexandra Inn, which adjoins the end of the works where the fire started.

Mr Heathcote and his wife, Joan, pushed their caravan and car out from the pub yard. Housebound widow Mrs Annie Lomax, 71, was helped from her home next door to the pub, by Mr. Hutchinson and her 88-year-old friend Mrs Edith Stevenson, of Carlisle Road. They carried her across waste ground to a neighbour's wife.

At the height of the fire — which was still being doused down yesterday — there were 14 fire engines at the scene including the Simon Snorkel 120ft hydraulic extension, in use at a major fire for the first time, and two turntable ladders.

Sheffield waterworks engineers stepped up the pressure to serve the 25 jets.

Firemen in Carlisle Street and on the turntable ladder jets had to wear breathing apparatus. Dense smoke made it darker than the middle of the night," said a brigade spokesman.

Brigade Ready for factory fire

By Mervyn Edgecombe

The fire, reported on Page One, at the Sheffield steelworks of Firth Brown's had been fought by Sheffield Fire Brigade before it happened - on paper. And at the weekend the paper plan was waiting in the files

In their time, the Sheffield brigade have mentally tackled every big fire imaginable in the

city; and how to do it when it really happens is all laid out in a master plan at their city headquarters control room.

So comprehensive and precise is this blueprint that a raw recruit could mobilise the men and the equipment to handle a blaze of any size within the city.

Countdown on a big fire begins with a phone call or a flashing light. The mobilising officer - one of two men at the headquarters switchboard - then consults a two ft high wad of indexed metal sheets. On these is listed every high risk centre or building within Sheffield and the prescribed number of appliances to be called out if they figure in a blaze. (This could be anything from a burning waste paper basket to a full scale inferno).

On Saturday the mobilising officer saw that Firth Browns needed a turntable ladder pump a water escape appliance, a water ladder appliance, one rescue. Tender, one emergency salvage tender, wireless car and Snorkel emergency platform.

They were supplied from the Brigade's headquarters, Intake fire station and Darnall fire station.

Behind them was the wealth of paper work amassed and implemented in the Sheffield fire nerve centre.

"And that could have all been looked after by any recruit on our staff so long as he could read," said Sheffield chief fire officer, Mr. Stanley Lambert.