

Series of Fires in Barcaldine.

INCENDIARISM APPARENT.

FIRE BRIGADE DOES GOOD WORK.

MEACHAM & LEYLAND SUFFER HEAVY LOSS.

A NERVE-RACKING WEEK.

SPECIAL CONSTABLES AND VIGILANCE COMMITTEE APPOINTED.

It was a strange coincidence that within about three hours of the twelfth-month anniversary of the previous big fire in Barcaldine, when the West End block was gutted, the town was threatened with another fiery catastrophe last Tuesday night. Had the wind not been so favorably positioned, it is difficult to say where the fire would have stopped and what extent of damage might have been wrought. As it turned out, however, the wind—a great factor on this occasion—was favorable, there was ample water supply, the Brigade was excellent, and there was a vast army of volunteers who rendered yeomen service.

It was at about 9.15 p.m. that Mr. James Meacham first noticed the fire in the firm's timber rack nearly adjoining his residence. A peculiar roaring noise first attracted Mr. Meacham's notice, and on looking across he was shocked to see a fire about midway in the rack. Mr. Meacham immediately rushed down and rang the shop bell, procured some hand extinguishers, and endeavored to squelch the flames, but without success.

In the meantime, the ringing of Meacham & Leyland's bell, and subsequently a few tolls on the firebell, had given the alarm and people were hurrying to the scene from all directions. The fire spread with great rapidity. The Fire Brigade was quickly on the spot, and Supt. Lloyd-

quickly on the spot, and Supt. Lloyd-Jones had three lengths of hosing out ready waiting for water. As usual, owing to the necessity for manipulation of so many valves by the turn-cocks, this was not available for several minutes. When it did eventually arrive there was ample and plenty of pressure for the four jets in use.

At the outset Mr. Jones had his work cut out, as he had three danger positions to watch—Mr. Meacham's private residence and the "Western Champion" buildings on either side, and the main street at the rear. Four hundred feet (two lengths of 200ft.) of hosing were run out from Ash-street, and two lengths of 350ft. and 200ft. respectively from Oak-street, and these were soon in action doing excellent work.

Just when the timber rack was burning at its height, the wind veered, and the flames, with their accompanying terrific heat were blown clean over and towards the "Champion" buildings. Here, some months ago, three large open emergency tanks had been installed in handy positions in the grounds, with half-a-dozen petrol tin buckets. These tanks were always kept full, and on Tuesday night, with the assistance of the numerous large shade trees in the grounds, which acted as an effective break, it can be safely said that they not only saved the "Champion" buildings, but were most useful in squelching incipient outbreaks at the rear of the

were most useful in suppressing the violent outbreak at the rear of the Railway Hotel. Messrs. Fred and Frank James were quickly on the scene, and had the buckets in readiness for eventualities. With the assistance of several willing workers a very strenuous and anxious time was experienced. By means of the buckets and the simple water available the whole of the walls of the "Champion" property were kept saturated, and thus ignition was averted. At times the heat was terrific, and the walls dried almost as quickly as the water was put on; the large Currajong tree trunks were all scorched brown, and were so hot that one could not touch them. It was generally considered that the property had not a hope, but the bucket brigade stuck to it like Trojans until the wind changed to the north-south and relieved the tension somewhat. Still, a very close watch had to be maintained until danger was past. Inside the "Champion" buildings the manager and many very willing and energetic helpers had been vigorously removing everything of importance from the business and editorial sanctums. To all these assistants we are extremely grateful, and their services will not be forgotten. All plant, stock, &c., was left to the mercy of the gods.

The veering of the flames in the direction of the "Champion" office naturally eased the danger to Mr. Meacham's residence, which the Brigade had been watching. So great was the heat that the windows were broken, walls singed and a Venetian blind on the verandah actually ignited, but was extinguished. Most of the furniture and effects had been promptly removed from the dwelling, which was just as much in danger of demolition as the "Champion" offices. Happily, however, the residence did not ignite.

The Brigade concentrated its full forces on the fire proper, endeavoring to confine the outbreak to the timber rack area and at the same time preventing the fire spreading to the Railway and Exchange Hotels, in the main street. In this work the Brigade was greatly assisted by many bucket wielders, and they undoubtedly did effective work. It was a fearfully strenuous fight however, and too much praise cannot be bestowed upon all

praise cannot be bestowed upon all the members of the Brigade—it would be unjust to individualise—and the many volunteer workers.

The flames were eventually beaten back to a safe position, and by 10.30 p.m. the fire was in hand. Mr. J. Lennon's aerated water factory, all the Railway Hotel horse stalls, a large quantity of heavy yarding and fencing and sundry hotel outhouses, in addition to the extensive timber rack (which was completely gutted) had been demolished, and the scene was a sorry one.

About 11 p.m. dense volumes of black smoke (presumably the lining material in galvanised iron cases) emanated from the pile of debris, almost choking everybody. One Brigade member remarked that it reminded him of a smoke screen on the western front.

By 11.30 p.m. only the smouldering embers remained. Supt. Jones detailed four men to play the hoses on the debris all night.

No doubt an excellent gale had been effected. A disastrous calamity could easily have occurred in this particular portion of the town had the wind been blowing in the other direction.

Messrs. Meacham & Leyland's loss is very heavy, amounting probably to £3000. A very large quantity of timber was stacked in the racks and the fact that there was not a penny insurance on the whole building and contents makes the loss more lamentable. We are sure the firm has the sympathy of everybody in their great loss.

About £20 will cover the damage done to Mr. J. Meacham's residence and £10 the "Champion" Buildings—mostly broken windows, singeing, salvage, &c.

Mrs. Lennon's horse feed room and harness were covered to the extent of £50 with the South British Co.

Mr. J. Lennon saved nothing from his factory, and his loss is estimated at £350. There was no insurance cover.

At one time there was some anxiety about the boiler at the aerated waters factory exploding, but Inspector F. C.

factory exploding, but Inspector F. C. Parker gave certain instructions to Supt. Jones, and although there was a full head of steam generated the safety valve continued blowing-off until all the steam was exhausted.

Mr. F. A. McLean (who lately opened business in Oak-street) did a very thoughtful action in supplying tea and sandwiches to the firemen and other workers. It goes without saying that this was very much appreciated by all who partook of Mr. McLean's generosity.

The origin of the fire at first was a mystery, but later events tend to show that the outbreak was very probably one of a series not caused accidentally.

On Wednesday morning a survey of the scene of the fire plainly showed the narrow escape the main street and block had. The fire had extended practically right up to the servants' quarters at the rear of the Railway Hotel, and how further progress was blocked here goes to show the thoroughness of the defence put up by the Brigade and those numerous young fellows who assisted so commendably. The debris of the timber rack was still smoking freely, and continued so all day notwithstanding continual hosing.

On Wednesday night, a brisk breeze, had fanned up flames again on the locality, and the Brigade was obliged to run out a length of hosing and subdue the renewed flames.

As is invariably the case many of those residents in the eastward portion of the town were quite oblivious for some time to the fact that there was a fire in progress on Tuesday night. Not a sound was heard of the firebell and the fire had been burning pretty briskly when several business people in that portion duly arrived at the scene of the outbreak. Such a delay as this may mean serious loss. It may have been so in our own case, to quote an instance. Things were not looking at all good for the "Champion" office when our managing-editor arrived and he having sole access to certain valuable business documents, &c., it was 10 chances to 1 on this occasion that he would have been able to rescue them. Mr. C. B. Plumb, another of our prominent business men, has on several occasions known

another of our prominent business men, has on several occasions known nothing of an outbreak of fire (practically on his doorstep) until some time after. On this occasion, too, Mr. Plumb knew nothing of the fire until it was well in progress. And there are others with business interests in the same category. A fire alarm in the eastern—in fact, in every quarter of the town—portion is badly needed, and Council should try and instal some system so that all residents can immediately be apprised of an outbreak. It is a serious matter for business people. We have mentioned over and over again, it is almost impossible to hear the fire bell in the eastern suburban area, and something should be done in the matter.

Mr. Jones, Fire Brigade Supt., again complained about the delay in getting water. Until a special main is put down Oak-street things will not be satisfactory, says Mr. Jones. He further states that had the water been immediately available, on Tuesday the chances are the timber rack would have been saved. As it was, there were three lengths of hosing lying idle all ready to be used, and the firemen waiting until the turncocks had scooted all over the town adjusting the numerous valves to requirements. When the water did arrive there was ample and the engineers kept the supply up most satisfactorily. It is interesting to know that the pumping alone was sufficient for requirements; only four feet of the tank supply had been utilised (at the start), the pump keeping up the necessary supply throughout.

It is very gratifying to record that of all the furniture and effects removed from Mr. J. Meacham's residence, and a vast quantity of literature and office effects and furniture from the "Champion" office not one

thing has been missed. It is very pleasing to note the absence of any paltry pilfering so very common on such unfortunate occasions. There is no doubt a splendid lot of volunteer workers gave their services most ungrudgingly, and their readiness to so worthily assist in a time of great anxiety, when perhaps ruin is staring in the face of those people threaten-

in the face of those people threatened to be affected, is most commendable. It is difficult, and perhaps unfair, to individualise where there are so many in such cases, for all can rest assured that words of thanks or gifts of kind cannot express the appreciation felt by those who are unfortunate enough to be involved in a serious conflagration and when so much is at stake. In our own case lusty young fellows came forward and offered to carry out our linotype and other machinery, but owing to the position of the fire nothing would have been gained by removing them; therefore instructions were given that nothing but the most important and vital had to be touched. The loss of a large printing plant, with linotype, and a fairly ample supply of paper alone would have been a serious blow to the proprietary (and indirectly to the town and district, for the local Press is an important factor in keeping its town's affairs before the eyes of the world) in present conditions of trade and industry; therefore, all those who assisted us in any way on Tuesday night can realise the appreciation we feel towards them.

After the previous night's conflagration townspeople certainly never dreamt of what was in store for them on Wednesday night, and although many had not nearly recovered their equilibrium from the strenuous exertions on the Tuesday the pealing of the fire bell at about 10.30 p.m. on Wednesday roused everybody once again into nervous expectancy. The Lyric Pictures were well filled, and on the first stroke of the alarm there was a mad rush to the street, while people were soon scurrying from their homes, from all directions. Before many had nearly reached the scene of the outbreak, assurance was given that "It's all over," and minds were once more at rest. The outbreak occurred at McBride's Commercial Hotel in one of the maid's rooms. Miss Mona Price was the first to see the flare, and Mr. McLean in vain tried to raise the exchange, to notify the fire station. Mr. Jack Ivers, however, hurried to the station and rang the alarm. In the meantime, however, Messrs. Kahl, Jackson, and Cole had bundled out holus-bolus all the burning material from the room, and the services of the Brigade, which

burning material from the room, and the services of the Brigade, which turned out promptly, were fortunately not required. The strange thing about this outbreak is that the room had been unoccupied by the incumbent for the previous 24 hours, and, as we stated before, the only conclusion to be come to, especially in view of succeeding events, is that the fire was the result of incendiarism. A good deal of clothing, bedding, &c., was burnt, and the walls charred. When it was learnt that all danger was over the picture patrons returned to the Lyric and the programme was concluded. Others wended their way home hoping to complete a good night's rest. But this was not to be.

At 2 a.m. the vigorous ringing of the firebell again roused the townspeople, and in no time the streets were swarming with almost panjostriken residents. Anxious inquiries soon elicited the information that Mr. R. J. McCullough's residence, at the corner of Yew and Willow-streets, in the southern suburban area, was on fire. The tired-out members of the Brigade were again quickly on the scene, and also a large number of people. Happily, the fire had been checked to some extent upon the arrival of the Brigade, but for some time the Brigade was engaged in making sure that all was safe. This outbreak could easily have proved a shocking calamity in view of the fact of the number of small children and other inmates sleeping in the building, and Mr. McCullough states that had it not been for the promptitude of Mr. J. Lynch in waking him in all probability one or two of the children would have been suffocated, as they were sleeping in different portions of the building, which is an extensive one, and there probably would not have been time to get them all out. It appears Mrs. Lynch first noticed the fire at the rear of the kitchen, and the blaze appeared to have a big hold. She roused Mr. Lynch, who hurried over and awakened Mr. McCullough's household, and gave the alarm. By means of buckets and a fairly ample supply of water, after a very strenuous fight, the outbreak was checked. It was indeed a lucky save. The floor of the kitchen is a very substantial one and was

is a very substantial one and was covered with good linoleum and felting, and it is probably due to this, the flames not being able to break through the floor, that progress was retarded, and when the felting was saturated with water it acted as a damper on the burning boards. An inspection of this outbreak gave the undoubted impression that the fire was deliberate incendiarism. Several charred lengths of cut block wood were found underneath the kitchen near the house block, and there is no doubt it was these that started the fire. Whether this wood was lit on the steps (which were badly charred, the top one being burnt nearly through) or underneath alongside the block is not clear. The fact remained that it was this wood that had started the fire. The kitchen door was almost wholly burnt from top to bottom where the flames had apparently ignited it from the steps, while the whole kitchen flooring boards were charred. Mr. McCullough estimates his damage at about £50. The Fire Brigade ran out a length of hosing and well watered the under-work of the kitchen so that there would be no further chance of an outbreak. This attempt was a dastardly one, and could easily have had dire consequences. It, however, threw out a clue as to the cause of the previous outbreaks.

The Brigade had just about returned to the fire station, and the people once again to their homes, when another alarm was sounded at 3 a.m. The bell pealed out sonorously, and once again residents were rushing townwards from all directions. People were just about at the height of

nervous tension now. The cry went up that the main street was on fire this time, but this was soon amended to the goods sheds. Here was found a large quantity of timber, stacked at the eastern end, burning briskly. Some young ladies, in the hotel opposite, noticed the fire first and gave the alarm. Assistance was quickly available, and the Brigade once again soon got to work, and checked the flames. There was a strong smell of kerosene on the burning material, thus again pointing to the fact that the outbreak was not accidental. Ha:

the outbreak was not accidental. Ha: the timber got well alight there is no doubt about what a serious fire would have resulted.

While the crowd of people were occupied in watching operations at the eastern end of the goods shed a cry went up that a man was lighting a fire under the shed at the western end. There was an immediate rush to the spot and vociferous shouts of—"Mob the shed, boys, don't let him out," and the huge crowd of people surrounded the building. The crowd was then worked up to an ugly mood, and anything was likely to happen. While all chance of exit was stopped from under the building, two or three young men, with railway lanterns, crawled under the shed to investigate. Nobody was found there, however, but Mr. H. I. Fysh, who was one of the cordon on the northern side, came upon an individual, presumably asleep, on the shed platform. He quickly laid hold of him and Constable Colfax subsequently arrested him and took him to the watchhouse. Two other men were seen by neighbors to make off in the direction of the cattle yards, but it was considered prudent not to give chase, but investigate at day-break. This incident created no little excitement, and the whole night's experiences now had the townspeople on the qui vive, the prevailing question being, "Wonder where the next one will be?" Further alarms were generally expected. Fortunately this was the last that night. It was considered that this kind of thing could not be tolerated and many of our sturdy local lads offered to form a gang to clean-up the whole of the undesirables known at present to be in town.

The suggestion has been made now that the fire at Mr. McCullough's was intended to be a draw for the Brigade and residents, the goods shed conflagration to be set going while the Brigade and townspeople were away and engaged at the other end of the town. Another assumption is to the effect—and a very feasible one, too—that these alarms are created with a view to drawing residents from their homes, confederates in their absence to enter the residences and thieve. Townspeople would be well advised not to leave

gences and there would be well advised not to leave valuables about their premises just now :

In view of the foregoing circumstances it is little wonder that the Shire Council on Thursday, took action in the matter. It was considered that things had just about gone far enough, and that public property and safety must be protected. A urgent message was despatched to the Inspector of Police at Longreach asking for extra police protection, and that officer notified that he would detail a constable each from Jericho and Aramac for service in Barealdine. The Chairman of the Shire convened a public meeting for 4.30 p.m. for the purpose of forming a Vigilance Committee to patrol the town at night time. There was a very large attendance.

Cr. R. A. Parnell (Chairman of the Shire) was voted to the chair. He said the turn of events during the past 48 hours made it necessary to take steps to combat some foreign element in their midst; it behoved them all to take a firm stand in the matter. It was necessary to take steps to remove a great danger which appeared to be existing. His idea was to form a vigilance committee to go on duty in various parts of the town after nightfall. He invited discussion.

Cr. W. Fothergill proposed the formation of a Vigilance Committee. He said a roster could be made, and he suggested the town be patrolled for

two hours each patrol, by men in couples, and anyone out of doors after 11 o'clock should be required to give an account of their movements.

Mr. F. Crystall, in seconding the motion, would like to know the law on the subject; he doubted if a patrol would have a right to bail up a man and demand his movements. He thought special constables could perhaps be sworn.

Mr. R. J. McCullough said that under the "Police Act" special constables could be sworn in before a Police Magistrate or two Justices of the Peace, and they would have similar powers to the police. No community could tolerate the conditions

existing. There was indisputable evidence of incendiarism, and there was a great feeling of unrest; the recent alarms worked on people's nerves, especially the women. He strongly supported the motion.

This was put and carried unanimously, and a large number of names were handed to form a committee; inclusive of all members of the Shire Council.

Mr. R. Curtis, P.M., then swore in twelve special constables under the Town Police Act, and these went on duty at nightfall, the shifts being of two hours each, couples patrolling allotted sections of the town. Twelve more men were sworn in yesterday. In addition to the special constables a number of the Vigilance Committee are patrolling the town from Thursday night.

Thursday night was an ideal moonlight one, and many people, with nerves at high tension, paraded the thoroughfares until a late hour, fully expectant of anything happening. The special constables and members of the Vigilance Committee were promptly on duty, and the several allotted sections of the town were carefully patrolled all night. Many town-people are taking every precaution, and have provided themselves with firearms. As a matter of fact, the feeling of unrest has become so acute that the public are determined to resist the element in town to the utmost. The manner in which the citizens have responded in the matter of guarding the public interests is most commendable, and Mr. R. Curtis, P.M., recognizing the gravity of the position, lost no time in swearing-in the special constables and giving them the requisite authority to carry out to the full all such protective measures necessary. Mr. Curtis had also advised the Home Secretary of the position of affairs. About midnight there was an alarm in the southern end of the town, many residents being startled by the loud explosion of a gun. It appears a couple of men had been watched for some time trespassing in the vicinity of the residence of Mr. Leahy, at the corner of Fir and Beech-streets, and eventually they were cornered in the grounds of Mrs. W. H. Ogden—apparently bent on en-

W. H. Ogden—apparently bent on entering the little shop there. They were challenged, but made off, Mr. Ogden then fired over their heads—but they could not be seen for dust, and escaped. When Mr. Ogden first challenged them they threw a bottle at him but missed their mark, the bottle crashing against a wall. Otherwise, the night passed off uneventfully. Early in the evening the members of the Fire Brigade reeled all their hoses ready for eventualities, and a general readiness was very apparent. There were all sorts of rumors of what was going to happen, but if any of these fellows are caught in the act they can rest assured they will have a very rough time. Extra police assistance has arrived, and people are feeling a little more composed now, but still, the week's doings have naturally greatly disarranged the nerves of townspeople, who are strictly on the qui vive for any emergency.