

# DISASTROUS FIRE IN BARCALDINE.

Half the Main Street Almost Demolished.

**MIRACULOUS ESCAPE OF WHOLE BLOCK.**

**DAMAGE ESTIMATED AT £17,000.**

As the cleaner on the engine of a ballast train, which camped here Monday night, was lighting up at about 3.30 a.m. on Tuesday morning he noticed flames issuing in the vicinity of Mr. Dias' store at the southern end of the main street. He at once gave the alarm, but before much assistance could be obtained the flames had got a firm hold, and at 3.45 Mr. Dias' was well alight and Mr. Hawthorne's saddler's shop catching. Meanwhile the train alarm whistle, scour whistle, and school bell had aroused the inhabitants, and soon a very large crowd had assembled and commenced dragging furniture, &c., out of the places farther down the street. There was much speculation as to where the fire was going to stop as no water supply was available. When the fire started it was perfectly calm, with intermittent northerly breezes, which fanned the fire, which was spreading rapidly. Mr. Kemp's fine two-storey hotel adjoining Hawthorne's soon caught, and was demolished in about twenty minutes. The fire burnt down the street towards Devery's, and Vesper's billiard room.

Devery's, and Vesper's billiard room, and then the Carrier's Arms Hotel all succumbed to the flames. Here the flames veered, fanned by a slight breeze, caught Fong Sang's store, adjoining Mr. Dias' on the eastern side, and quickly caught Mr. J. Arthur's fine newly-erected shops. For some time it was thought that Mr. Tomi's shop was going to escape, as the fire seemed to be burning down in the other direction, but it subsequently caught, and was soon in ashes. This was a fine two-storey store, chiefly drapery. Mr. Tomi's loss was very severe. The flames then spread to Mr. R. Park, stationer and bookseller, and Mrs. McLoughlin's fruit and restaurant shop, both of which places were soon in ruins. The onlookers seemed powerless to do anything on account of the scarcity of water and material. Devery's Hotel then caught, and the fire spread to Mr. Ryan's tailor shop. This was the end of the street, and the flames somewhat abated there. Meanwhile the fire was spreading rapidly towards the western end. It was extremely hard to note both ends burning at the same time. A bucket brigade then soon got to work, and grafted like Trojans, but it seemed as if their efforts would be in vain. A very large crowd, probably the whole of the town, was now witnessing the devastating fire. The middle of the road was strewn with articles of all descriptions. The people were only half clad,

tions. The people were only half clad, many just escaping in their night apparel. After Arthur's shops had been laid in ashes the fire caught Wah Sung's fine big stores, and this too was soon reduced to ruins. While Wah Sung's was burning there was a regular fusillade of crackers, which formed a part of the stock. While the store was burning one or two people mounted the verandah roof of the Commercial Hotel to try and bring the Council hose into play, but the stream produced was most useless, it being only sufficient to about extinguish a match. Buckets were then resorted to, being filled from this hose. There being a narrow passage between Wah Sung's and the Commercial Hotel (McBride's) strenuous efforts were made to break the progress of the fire at Wah Sung's. For a time the buckets and wet blankets on the hotel balcony near Wah Sung's held their own, but with a crash the wall nearest the Commercial fell, and the flames soon caught the fine two-storey hostelry. Mr. C. B. Plumb's gentlemen's emporium, under the roof of the Commercial, was soon ablaze, but he had removed a large quantity of stock and suffered little. It was really heart-rending to see such a fine hotel being so ruthlessly destroyed. A very large number of people soon got ropes and axes, and endeavored to break the progress of the fire again by pull-down F. Hudson's tailor's shop on the other side of the Commercial Hotel. This was eventually done. the building

**This was eventually done, the building being drawn into the middle of the street, which left a good gap for the fire to cross. Many thought there was**

no hope of stopping the fire, and fears were expressed for the whole block. This latter step of removing Hudson's shop was really a last resource.

Men mounted the roof of Messrs. T. E. O'Brien's and C. O'Byrne's store, on the eastern side of Hudson's, and there was made a desperate stand. Others on the ground were handing up buckets of water by means of ladders, and so a continual slouthing of water was maintained. How a cheer or two would have urged the workers to greater endeavors! But it seemed as if the onlookers were waiting in dread anxiety to see if the efforts would be successful. All this time the Commercial was being rapidly demolished, the flames leaping high into the air. A fairly strong wind fanned the fire, and it certainly looked as if nothing would save the entire block. When the whole roof fell in, and the walls nearest O'Brien's store were burning, brave men, almost touched by the flames, were slouthing water on the latter place, while on the roof the men there kept up a deluge. At the back of the store, too, a large brigade was doing excellent work. Every credit is due to these workers. Eventually the hotel collapsed amid myriads of sparks. Then an exciting

myriads of sparks. Then an exciting time was experienced in keeping the flames back from O'Brien's store. It was a grand effort of perseverance. The outbuildings were all ablaze, and the heat was intense. The breeze had died down, and after about a-quarter of an hour's hard work it looked as if the fire was beaten.

While the endeavors were being made at O'Brien's store another contingent had started demolishing Mr. O'Regan's private residence, adjoining the latter shop, in the hope of making another gap in case O'Brien's store succumbed, with the intention of saving the West End Hotel. Happily the fire showed signs of abating and these further measures were not required.

Things began to look serious for the dwellings in Ash-street, as the fire appeared to be spreading backwards. Large numbers kept a sharp look-out, and slowly the flames were got under control. By 5 a.m. the fire was completely mastered.

Some of the losers suffered severely, Mr. Tomi perhaps being the heaviest. He lost practically everything, had little insurance, and estimates his loss at £3000.

The total damage could be roughly estimated at from £15,000 to £20,000.

Many only escaped in the clothes they stood in, so little time being given them to rise from their beds.

Several business people removed large quantities of stock into the

large quantities of stock into the streets in both sections of the main

thoroughfare, while residents in back streets had all their belongings removed to safety. Along the school fence in Ash-street were articles of all descriptions—pianos, sewing machines, pet birds (cockatoos, canaries, &c.), fowls, buggies, horses, bedding, and other miscellaneous furnishings—all mixed up in glorious confusion. The various owners must have had a contract re-housing their belongings when the fire abated.

The fire presented an awful spectacle from the back streets. Sparks were falling thick in the backyards of residences in Willow-street.

In all eighteen places were consumed as follows, starting from Willow-street :—

Empty shop, owned by Mr. O. Devery.

P. Ryan, tailor

O. Devery's Springsure Hotel

Mrs. McLoughlin, fruiterer, &c.

Rd. Park, bookseller and stationer

J. Tomi, drapery establishment (two storey).

J. P. Vesper's Carrier's Arms Hotel and adjoining billiard room; also two-storey bedrooms.

W. Kemp's Welcome Home Hotel (two storey)

H. A. Hawthorne, saddler

J. Dias, storekeeper

J. Dias, storekeeper

Fong Sang, storekeeper

Empty shop (J. Arthur's)

W. D. Colman, butcher

Wah Sung & Co., general merchants

C. B. Plumb, men's outfitter

P. McBride's Commercial Hotel and  
billiard room (two storey)

F. Hudson, tailor (shop pulled down)  
and damages to W. O'Regan's private  
residence.

O'Brien & Co.'s store was damaged  
considerably by water.

One house so far away as Fir-street  
caught alight from sparks, but  
fortunately it was extinguished in  
time before getting a good hold.

As dawn began to break the scene  
was one of desolation. The middle of  
the street was strewn with articles of  
all descriptions and furniture, papers  
and documents flying about in all  
directions, and utter chaos. The

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scene was depressing to look upon.  
What the previous night was a fine  
line of business places and hotels was  
one heap of ashes and *debris*. The  
newly-erected telephone posts were  
smouldering and broken wires were  
swinging about.

It was really heartrending to stand  
and witness such wanton destruction  
with no fire brigade, and little other  
means, of checking the destroying  
evil. It is the first disastrous fire  
since 1896, and surely some steps

since 1896, and surely some steps should be taken in future to prevent a recurrence.

During the main part of Tuesday morning people were busily engaged carting away any articles or belongings which were thrown into the streets.

Shopkeepers who shifted practically their whole stock into the streets and suffer greatly by damage from water, rough handling, &c., have been busy replacing their goods, while those whose buildings were demolished have been able to occupy temporary premises.

There seems to be no doubt about the fire starting in Dias' store, and Mr. Dias suffers to the extent of £1000. The majority of the sufferers lost practically everything. Messrs. Park, Devery, Vesper, and McBride were heavy losers. Mr. C. B. Plumb's loss was more than previously estimated as he had lately got in a big stock of gentlemen's apparel—hats, boots, &c. Being a young man just starting business much sympathy was felt for him. Mr. Tomi is perhaps the greatest loser. He says he is practically ruined. Mrs. McLoughlin, who had just got in a fresh stock of syrups, &c., for the summer lost everything, including aerating plant, which was uninsured.

The main street was in an awful mess on Tuesday afternoon. The debris was still smouldering, and many were pouring water on the timber to prevent any further chance

timber to prevent any further chance of it breaking out again.

Sergeant J. O'Sullivan states that everything while the fire was raging was as orderly as possible, and he had received no complaints of any pilfering so far, which speaks well for the town generally. We have since learned, however, of many cases of theft, practically the whole of Mr. Devery's bulk stock being stolen.

Mr. Elliott, in charge of the telephone installation, states that there was not much damage done to the installing, a couple of poles only getting somewhat charred.

An unfortunate dog which was chained up at Wah Sung's was roasted to death, his cries being most pitiful. Several attempted to free it, but could not break the chain.

How the fire started is a mystery, and the occupants of Messrs. Kemp's and Vesper's just had time to get out of their rooms before the flames from Mr. Dias' spread. The fire had a real good hold before the people had been properly apprised.

A man named Mr. W. Wilson, a painter, was instrumental in awakening a great many. Doubtless but for his prompt action some of the occu-

pants of the hotels would have been asphyxiated.

Great praise is due to Messrs. C. Jones, Mallory, Mulcahy, Vale, N. Bradford, Clarke, Pearce, R. Shaw,

Dickson, Meacham, and many more for the gallant and determined stand made at Messrs. O'Brien's shop, which undoubtedly saved the block, and very probably the whole of the main street.

It seems strange that Kemp's Hall, almost adjoining the hotel outhouses, was left standing untouched.

At one time some fears were expressed for the Q. N. Bank, but fortunately these were subsequently dispelled.

The following is a list of the insurances and losses sustained by the sufferers:—

Wah Sung & Co., £260 on building in the New Zealand Insurance Co. Stock uninsured. Estimated loss—£1500.

John Tomi, £420 on building in New Zealand Insurance Co. Estimated loss—£3000. Mr. Tomi carried an extensive stock of drapery and boots, and informs us that the insurance will hardly cover his stock of boots and shoes alone. Nothing was saved, except his buggy, and we hear that his books, which were in the safe, are illegible through the excessive heat. Mr. Tomi's very valuable gold watch and chain were also lost.

J. Arthur's three shops, including W. D. Colman's butcher's shop and Fong Sang's store, were insured for £350 in the New Zealand Insurance Co. Estimated loss—£550.

P. McBride's Commercial Hotel,

**Mr. W. McBride's Commercial Hotel, £1000 insurance in Royal Insurance Co. Estimated loss—£3000.**

Mr. W. McBride estimates the damage done to his building and stock by water, &c., at £250. He is insured in the Royal. It was at this shop where the fire was stopped—marvellously in the opinion of many—and we are informed there was over six inches of water on the floor next day inside the shop. The building caught several times, and it was only by the almost superhuman exertions mentioned previously that the ignitions were extinguished.

**H. A. Hawthorne, stock insured in South British Insurance Company for £100. Estimated loss, £250. The building, part of Welcome Home Hotel, is the property of Mrs. I. McIn-**

**tosh, Rockhampton, and is probably insured.**

**W. Kemp, £350 insurance on furniture and fittings in Sun Co. Estimated loss—£500. Building owned by Mrs. McIntosh, and was insured for £850 in the Colonial Mutual Insurance Co.**

**C. B. Plumb, £250 insurance on stock. Estimated loss—£175. Premises part of Commercial Hotel. Mr. Plumb's insurance is with the Lancashire Company.**

**Mrs. McLoughlin's furniture was insured for £100. She managed to save her piano, however, but the aerating plant (which was uninsured)**

aerating plant (which was uninsured) and some 40 lots syrups were all lost. Mrs. McLoughlin was just beginning to get together a comfortable little business and this is a cruel blow to her. Estimated loss—£200.

Mr. W. O'Regan estimates the damage to his residence by axes, &c., at £40.

P. Ryan, loss £30. Stock and fittings only. No insurance. Shop the property of O. Devery.

J. Dias, insured £150 on buildings in New Zealand Insurance Co. and £600 on stock in the Commercial Union Insurance Company. Estimated loss—£1000.

O. Devery, insurance on buildings and furniture and fittings £600 in the Royal Insurance Co. Estimated loss—£2000.

J. P. Vesper, insured for £1200, one policy in National Insurance Co. and one in the South British Co. Mr. Vesper estimates his loss at between £2800 and £3000. Miss M. Vesper lost a valuable lot of jewellery, music and clothing.

R. Park, stock and buildings insured for £500 in the Lancashire Insurance Co. Mr. Park had an extensive stock, and suffers to the extent of £400.

W. D. Colman fittings, &c., uninsured. Loss—about £40.

Messrs. O'Byrne, Catip and others who had removed stock into the middle of the street for safety must have suffered considerable loss and

have suffered considerable loss and damage, while Mr. Hudson's tailor's shop was piled up in the middle of the street. It was remarkable how quickly this shop was pulled down.

Mr. J. H. Vesper suffered to the extent of about £30 worth of carpenter's tools, and £30 in cash which he had placed under his mattress and forgot.

We hear Mr. R. Park, who has taken temporary premises next Mr. T. A. Graham's chemist shop, has already made arrangements for the erection of a shop. Mr. Park carried an immense stock, and saving little, his loss is severe.

Mr. H. A. Hawthorne, who suffers to a great extent, having just recently got in a new stock of saddlers requisites, &c., has lost no time in making arrangements for a fresh start. Mr. Hawthorne left by Tuesday's rail for Brisbane to select a new stock. He states he will be back in a week with a first-class assortment. Mr. Hawthorne saved nothing but his books.

Mrs. McLoughlin has taken temporary premises in Beech-street, next to West End Hotel, while Mr. C. B. Plumb may be found next to Mr. R. F. Lyons' office.

We hear Wah Sung & Co. are making arrangements for the erection of new premises.

The manager of Messrs. Wah Sung and Co. upon being interviewed, states

**and Co. upon being interviewed, states his firm lost heavily, because the heavy stocks carried were uninsured. The firm would be unable to build substantial premises at present, but proposed moving a building at Ilfracombe, at one time occupied by Lum Gee. The firm would eventually build over the improvised store.**

**Mr. W. J. P. Chambers, whose villa residence occupies an allotment at the rear of the Commercial Hotel, made every provision possible against the incursion of the fire fiend. He had conveyed all valuable documents, and wearing apparel to the School of Arts, and thoroughly saturated the grass and garden surrounding the premises. Some hesian blinds he placed at the rear of the kitchen, and kept them saturated. As the fire approached the hotel the heat was intense; huge flakes of fire fell all over the place, and some stables only 10 feet away caught, but wary eyes soon extinguished the incipient fire. Happily the fire died down and all danger was at an end.**

**Mr. W. Wilson has the general credit of being the first to observe the fire. He resided at Kemp's Hotel and suffers from asthma. He occupied the end room, almost over where the fire occurred, and he woke up thinking he was choking and called for assistance. He quickly observed Dias' store was**

**burning and rushed along the balcony arousing everyone. This prompt action probably prevented loss of life,**

action probably prevented loss of life, not only at Kemp's but Vesper's.

A boarder at Vesper's burst open the luggage room as the flames were sweeping round it, and of the twenty or so ports stored there he only managed to save one—and that his own.

Mr Jas. Arthur informs us he is rebuilding so soon as insurances are adjusted. He has partially made a contract, but there is difficulty in procuring timber.

Mr. Frank Hall the well known shearer, was aroused when the flames were well into the carbide room at Vesper's, where his "Triumph" was rescued by a few seconds before the generator exploded, also three gallons of petrol.

A boarder at Vesper's sleeping in a room with a mate, possessing great presence of mind, took out the water jug and a water bottle, and left behind £29 which was entrusted to him for safe keeping. Another man was running about and saying, "Whatever you do keep cool." "Yes," said a bystander, "you appear to be keeping cool—where's your pants?"

Early in the morning, just at sunrise, Mr. Kemp's cockatoo was perched upon the back fence, whistling "There's Nae Luck About the House."

Mr. James, who on the morning of the fire, was residing at Morningside, a suburb of South Brisbane, states he awoke suddenly at about 3.30 on Tuesday morning, with a strange premonition of something being wrong. He

tion of something being wrong. He got up and walked round the premises fancying he could smell fire ; but all was quiet, and he again tried to rest but could not again go to sleep, still having a peculiar uneasy feeling. A strange coincidence.

Messrs. Noble and Short, fire loss adjusters, of Brisbane, arrived by Thursday night's goods train to adjust insurances upon all the contents, and upon some of the buildings destroyed (where the policies cover buildings and contents), on behalf of the Associated Insurance Companies. Mr. John Storie, builder and architect, has left Brisbane to adjudicate upon several buildings covered by building policies only, which will not be touched by Messrs. Noble and Short.

The fire created considerable consternation all along the railway line, and much sympathy was expressed on all sides for the sufferers. Owing to a break in the line only a few-line messages appeared in the Brisbane evening papers, and it was not until Bundaberg was reached by travellers by the coast mail that the seriousness of the conflagration was made apparent. The local *Daily Mail* had a fairly full telegraphed report of the catastrophe. Further details were supplied by travellers from Barcaldine, who left that town by Tuesday's mail, when trains met at Mt. Larcom, and at Gladstone the *Bulletin*, containing the excellent report telegraphed by Mr. W. D. James, of this office, was available.

**D. James, of this office, was available.**

**Mr. C. Clarson, head teacher, placed the State School at the disposal of those driven from home, and several used the building as a camping place.**

**Mr. H. J. Peut reports that he saw the glare of the conflagration from Elton, 25 miles from Barcaldine.**

**Mr. Hawthorne, it was reported, had a rather narrow escape. He managed to seize some of his books and on his way out of the door a new racing**

**saddle, when the wall next Dias' collapsed and fell into the shop. A few seconds later Mr. Hawthorne would probably have been buried under the debris.**

**Many of the business people in No. 2 block were not taking any risks, and removed their books to a place of safe keeping. Mr. W. C. Peel had removed the whole of his stock of boots and shoes. Mrs. Shakspeare had her valuables away and the beds stripped, so that the blankets could be available did the fire unhappily extend to the West End Hotel.**

**In Ash-street the residents at the rear of the burning block had removed their goods and chattels.**

**All those desirous of becoming members of a volunteer fire brigade are requested to enrol themselves on or before Tuesday, 24th inst., at the Shire offices.**

The following plan will show the extent of the damage, the fire area being marked with a black line:—

... WILLOW STREET. ...

**BUTCHER'S SHOP**  
[EMPTY]

**P. RYAN**  
[TAILOR'S SHOP]

**DEVERY'S HOTEL**

**Mrs. McLOUGHLIN**  
[REFRESH. ROOMS]

**R. PARK**  
[NEWSAGENT]

**J. TOMI**  
[DRAPERY STORE]

**CARRIER'S ARMS**  
[J. P. VESPER]

**WELCOME HOME**  
[W. KEMP]

**H. HAWTHORNE.**  
[SADDLER]

**J. DIAS**  
[STORE]

**FONG SANG**  
[STORE]

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<b>NEW SHOP</b>	<b>A K - S T E E T</b>	<b>T R A I L W A Y - E A S T</b>
<b>W. D. COLMAN</b> [BUTCHER'S SHOP]		
<b>WAH SUNG</b> [STORE]		
<b>C. B. PLUMB</b> [MEN'S EMPORIUM]		
<b>COMMERCIAL</b> <b>HOTEL.</b>		
<b>HUDSON'S SHOP</b> [Removed]		
<b>O'BRIEN &amp; CO'S</b> [Saved]		
<b>O'BYRNE &amp; CO'S</b>		
<b>Private Residence</b>		
<b>BUTCHER'S SHOP</b>		
<b>J. CATIP'S SHOP</b>		
<b>C. REECE</b>		
<b>WEST END HOTEL.</b>		
<b>Beech Street.</b>		
<b>SHAKSPEARE HOTEL</b>		

**SHAKSPEARE HOTEL**

The following telegrams have been received at this office:—

From Rev. F. Hulton-Sams, Aramac:—“Terribly sorry to hear of fire. Please use my bedroom for any homeless person.”

From Mr. C. J. James, Rosedale, North Coast Railway:—“Sincerely regret to hear at Bundaberg of disastrous fire. Kindly extend on my behalf to all sufferers deepest sympathy.”

From Mr. W. Stephenson, Oakey (1 p.m. Wednesday):—“Just heard of disastrous fire. Please express my sympathy with all.”

From Messrs. Spooner, Hooper & Co., Longreach (letter):—“Just a line to extend to you the very sincere sympathy of all old Barcaldineites in this city of the three S's in the sad calamity which has befallen the town of which we have many pleasant memories. We trust that the characteristic energy and stamina of your residents will tide them over all difficulties, and that the devastated portion of the town will soon be re-built.”

From Mr. J. Adamson, M.L.A., Mt. Morgan:—“Give deepest sympathy to sufferers by terrible disaster to your beautiful town.”

From the Stevens Family, Irvinebank (1 p.m. Thursday):—“Only re-

bank (1 p.m. Thursday):—"Only received news of disaster last night. Deeply grieved to hear of the terrible calamity."

Mr. W. J. P. Chambers (who is acting as agent for Mr. D. Stibbards during that gentleman's absence in Brisbane) received the following telegram from Mr. Stibbards:—"Deeply regret to hear of disastrous fire. Do everything possible for sufferers on my behalf."

Mr. Rd. Park received a wire from Mr. Geo. Kerr, M.L.A. extending his sympathy to all sufferers by the fire; also from friends in New South Wales.

Mr. R. J. McCallough received the following wire from Mr. J. Rothwell, Brisbane:—"Sincerely sympathise with sufferers from fire."

The following messages of sympathy have been received by the Chairman of the Shire Council:—

From Longreach Shire:—"Please convey to the sufferers by fire the sympathy of Council and residents of Longreach."

From the Blackall Mayor (Mr. McKnight):—"Aldermen and townspeople desire to convey their sympathy to all losers by fire."

From Kargoolnah Shire:—"Members and residents of the Kargoolnah Shire extend their sympathy to all losers by the destructive fire."

From Walter Reid & Co. Ltd., Rockhampton:—"Regret to hear of the disastrous fire, and through your

the disastrous fire, and through your good self offer our sympathy to the sufferers."

**From Rockhampton Town Council :—**" Council on behalf citizens desire to express their deepest sympathy in your recent calamity."

**From Mt. Morgan Town Council :—**" Mayor, aldermen and townspeople of Mt. Morgan send heartfelt sympathy to all sufferers by recent fire."

**From Mr. A. E. Coldham, Brisbane :** " On behalf of Ilfracombe Shire Council I beg to express sympathy with your town over great disaster and loss caused by recent fire."

**From Mr. J. P. Peterson, Brisbane :—**" Just heard of Barcaldine's great misfortune. Please tender sufferers the sympathy of myself and Longreach Shire."

**From Messrs. Williams Limited, Rockhampton :—**" Deeply regret the disastrous fire in your city."

**From Hon. W. H. and Mrs. Campbell, Brisbane :—**" Our sincere sympathy with the townspeople who have suffered by the fire, but confidence, courage, and energy will soon re-build the town, and compensate them for losses sustained."

**From Hon. A. Parnell, Brisbane :—**" Please convey to all sufferers by the late disastrous fire my sincere sympathy."

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