

RENFIELD STREET FRIDAY 7TH JANUARY 1898

DISASTROUS FIRE IN GLASGOW – FOUR FIREMEN KILLED AND TWO INJURED

The Glasgow Herald, Friday 7 January, 1898

About three o'clock this morning fire was discovered to have broken out in the explosive premises in Renfield Street occupied by Messrs W. & R. Hatrick & Co., wholesale and export chemists and druggists. The firm occupy the greater part of the block, which consists of shops, two flats above, and other apartments in the roof.

The premises extend from 152 to 170 Renfield Street, and it was at once seen that the fire would be a difficult one to cope with. Not only were the contents of the building of a dangerous nature, but the northern portion of the property in which the fire originated adjoined a block of dwelling houses.

The fire had apparently commenced in the basement, but by means of the well for the hoist, it travelled right up the building to the roof. Here it had a good hold when the Northern fire brigade and Captain Paterson, with the engines from the Central Station, had arrived on the scene. The flames were bursting from a small tower, and the smoke issued from the majority of the windows of the whole building. Hose were brought to play on the burning woodwork from Cowcaddens Street through an entrance to a tenement, as well as from various points in Renfield Street.

About half past four o'clock quite unexpectedly there was a loud noise, as if an explosion had occurred in the interior of the building. The whole roof collapsed, and the entire building became one mass of flames. At the time a considerable number of firemen were on top of the building endeavouring to get at the burning wood in the ceiling, and with the exception of those standing in the windows, the rest fell down among the burning debris. An indescribable scene of excitement ensued.

The firemen rushed about in the hopes of ascertaining the position of their comrades, and the crowd seconded their efforts, pointing out where the men had last been. At last after what seemed a long interval shouts were heard from the ruins, and a few seconds later one of the firemen came out. He was covered with dust, and naturally greatly excited. He explained that there were others at the back of the premises, and that he was carried down himself and could do nothing to save them.

When the excitement had died away somewhat, it was reported that four men were missing, and this unfortunately proved to be true. Captain Paterson still hoped that some of them might be rescued alive, but at twenty minutes past five o'clock the whole building was in flames, the chemicals burning in some portions of the building with a bright white light.

The names of the men who were killed are:- James Hastie, foreman, Central Fire Brigade Station. John Battersby, first class fireman, Central Station. David Smith, second class fireman, Northern Division. Charles Orr, Central Division. All the men were married and leave families. The injured men are:- James Watson, Northern Division, Laurence Hamilton, Central Division.

These men were taken on ambulance wagons to their houses at College Street, where their injuries were attended to.

The body of the deceased man Orr was recovered early in the morning, and was conveyed to the Buchanan Street Station Hotel.

The circumstances under which the men lost their lives are almost unparalleled. The fire was almost extinguished, and the men were under the impression that it was absolutely safe to enter the building. Some of them, indeed, had gone into the cellar, among these being members of the Salvage Corps. Fortunately the men of the Salvage Corps escaped quite unhurt, as did all those in the basement. There has been no fire in Glasgow in which lives have been lost for nearly a quarter of a century.

It remains to be added that Superintendent Sutherland and all the lieutenants and a large body of men belonging to the Northern district were early on the scene, and that traffic was at once stopped in all the adjacent streets. The inhabitants of the dwelling houses in Cowcaddens Street and in Renfield Street were all warned, and many of them left their houses, taking some of their belongings with them. The damage is very considerable, and must at least be over £50,000. It has not yet been ascertained whether or not the property is insured. ➤



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The Glasgow Herald, Saturday 8 January, 1898

RECOVERY OF THE BODIES – CONDITION OF THE INJURED

In the special edition of the Herald yesterday morning we gave details of one of the saddest calamities which has taken place in Glasgow for many years. In a commercial city such as ours we must count on the occurrence of fire, but with a competent, well directed brigade these outbreaks are quickly and efficiently dealt with, and we have seldom to record the loss of life in connection with them, as it is our painful duty to do at this time.

This lamentable issue is all the sadder that it occurred in the early hours of yesterday morning when the fire was almost extinguished. The brigade had done their work well, and the men acted on the belief that the building might be safely entered. Suddenly an explosion took place, and four members of the brigade were swept into eternity, while two of their comrades sustained serious injuries.

The scene of the fire was a stone structure known as Renfield Buildings, situated on the east side of Renfield Street, and only separated by a single block from Cowcaddens Street. On the south it adjoins a building which at one time was occupied as Free St George's School where many of the older citizens received their education.

The block in which the fire occurred consisted of a basement floor, above which were three storeys and attics. It was owned by Messrs W. & R. Hatrick & Co., wholesale and export chemists and druggists. The firm was founded in 1830 by Mr William Hatrick, who started business in Paisley. Thirty years later, along with his son, he opened a wholesale house in Turner's Court, Glasgow. Their warehouse being required to form part of St Enoch Station, they removed to North Frederick Street; but the premises were destroyed by fire. In 1881 they removed to the building in Renfield Street, which had just been erected for them by an Edinburgh firm. Their stock was extensive and consisted of drugs, chemicals, oils, drysalteries, spices, essential oils, chemicals and surgical instruments, and propriety articles.

The building which was 120ft long by 30ft high had an imposing front, with a small tower, with battlemented base at each end. The premises extended from No. 152 to 170 Renfield Street. At the former number was the entrance to the stair leading to the first, second, and top floors, all of which were occupied at a warehouse

by Messrs Hatrick. At No. 154 was the shop of Mr William Morrison, gilder and picture framemaker; at 156 that of Mr William Smith, provision merchant; at 158 was Messrs Hatrick's office; at 164 the shop of Messrs Bankier & Co., painters and decorators; and at 166 that Mr James Dobbie, American range and stove manufacturer; while at 170 was Messrs Hatrick's goods entrance, with a hoist running to the top of the building.

About ten minutes to three o'clock yesterday morning Mr Charles Kinloch, a clerk in the office of the District Superintendent of the North British Railway Company at Queen Street Station was passing, when he observed smoke issuing from the basement underneath the shop of Messrs Bankier. He ran towards the alarm at the corner of Bath Street, but on the way met a policeman, who, having been told of the outbreak, broke the glass and rang the bell. At the same Constable Troup gave information at the Northern Police Office, which is close at hand. Detachments from the Northern and Central Divisional Stations were quickly on the scene, under the direction of Chief Officer Paterson.

The fire in the basement was soon overcome, but the interior of the building being lined with wood and filled with highly inflammable materials, the flames shot up the well of the hoist, and even before the firemen reached the scene flames were issuing from the northern tower, and smoke was pouring from most of the windows. Lines of hose were laid not only from the front, but also in the rear from Cowcaddens Street through a close which gives admission to a tenement of dwelling houses and streams of water were poured onto the burning material. Special attention was also paid to the protection of the block of dwelling houses at the corner of Cowcaddens Street and Renfield Street, and to the property at the rear and at the south end.

Although it was a time when most people are asleep, a large crowd was attracted to the spot, mainly composed of persons resident in the immediate neighbourhood. These were kept at a safe distance by a detachment of police under Superintendent Sutherland, of the Northern Division. Within an hour and a half of its discovery the fire seemed to be practically extinguished.

James Hastie, the foreman of the Central Division; John Battersby, a first class fireman in the same division; and David Smith, a second class fireman in the Northern Division, were on the roof with a line of hose, and Charles Orr, a second class fireman of the same division, was on the second floor. ►



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Other members of the brigade were in different parts of the building.

Rain was falling slightly, but the moon was shining brighter than it has done for many nights. At the windows of the dwelling houses opposite the burning warehouses were men, women, and children, somewhat scantily clothed, talking, laughing, and enjoying the scene.

Suddenly about twenty minutes past four o'clock, there was a dull roar right in the centre of the building. Flames shot up high in the air, pieces of stone were thrown right across the street, and the crowd, fearing that the front of the building had given way, rushed down Renfield Street. The air was thick with dust, and for a little the street and pavements were white with powdered lime. At first there was no idea that anybody had been hurt. The north tower was still standing. This was the point to which the fire brigade men had gone, their object being to strip the roof, disclose the rafters, and play on the charred wood with the hose.

A few seconds, after the crash a large number of the men in the Salvage Corp, who had been covering up goods in the premises to the extreme south of the block, came down a staircase to the street, evidently under the impression that the portion of the building in which they were at work was unsafe, and the crowd felt relieved when they were seen trooping out. There is no doubt that if the explosion had occurred ten minutes earlier than it did the death roll would have been much greater. Not only were the men of the Salvage Corps in the shops and the upper flats to the south, but some members of the fire brigade had gone down to the cellars. They had either accomplished their task there, or had come up for hose, for at the moment of the collapse they were on the street.

Men were dispatched for ladders while others shouted to ascertain the whereabouts of any men who might be inside the wrecked building, and watched intently every opening by which a man could escape. Those who had been looking at the scene from the windows on the opposite side of the street had kept their eyes fixed on the toppling mass of stone, and one man shouted – "I saw three of them on the top floor just before the roof fell in. There! They are standing at the window." Another man located the unfortunate men in another part of the building. The firemen, however could see no one, but it was now certain that several men were inside.

The men on the street continued to shout as loudly as possible, but no reply could be heard. The excitement among the crowd became intense. At last a faint answering shout came from the very centre of the burning mass, and in a few seconds a fireman emerged from the flames, and reached the street through the broken window of one of the shops. He was in a sad condition. His face was pallid, he was covered from head to foot with dust and as he was taken in charge by his comrades he cried out in great distress – "I saw them, I saw them – Hastie and the others. They're at the back. I was carried down. I couldn't help them. I could do nothing."

The serious nature of the calamity was now understood. All the streets leading to the scene of the fire had been cleared by the police, and the search for the missing men proceeded without delay. Every effort was made to get at them. The men who had been outside the building went right in among the flames in their anxiety to help the others. Soon two men were got out, then a third. It was with difficulty that the crowd could be kept out of danger. Although they were kept at a distance, it soon became known that the man Orr was dead and that his head had been crushed. The other two were carried on stretchers to the ambulance wagons which had been summoned and which were standing at the corner of Renfrew Street.

The more severely injured of the two was John Watson, whose spine was fractured. He was conveyed to the Royal Infirmary, where he now lies. He states that he was playing on the fire from the staircase, and ran up to the second landing to see how it looked from there. While he was there the building collapsed, and something came down upon him and struck him on the back. A policeman found him lying in the back court beside Orr. Laurence Hamilton, who was injured internally, was conveyed to his home in College Street. A mournful little group of men took the bruised body of Orr round to the Buchanan Street Station Hotel and it was laid on the tiled floor of the corridor – the battered helmet covering the face. The body was at once placed in a coffin by Messrs Wylie & Lochhead's men and conveyed to the house of the deceased in College Street. It seems that he was in the back court when the explosion took place, and he was killed by large stones falling upon him. The back wall of brick was almost entirely blown away, leaving a gap of nearly 30 feet wide, and the yard was littered with stones and wood. Some of the debris extended a distance of over 30 feet, to dwelling houses which look into the yard, but not even a window of these was broken. The rest of the debris fell back into the interior of Messrs Hatrick's premises. ➤



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When it was discovered that some of the firemen were missing, a messenger was dispatched to the Central Station in College Street for the roll of the brigade. There had been in all 27 firemen called out to the fire, 17 of whom belonged to the Central division, and the remainder to the Northern. In addition, there were 15 salvagemen on duty. When the roll was called, it was found that three members of the brigade were still missing, bringing the death roll up to four.

These are:- James Hastie, foreman at the Central Fire Brigade Station, College Street. Mr Hastie, who was a native of Edinburgh, was in his forty seventh year. He was at one time a member of the Leith Fire Brigade and subsequently acted for a number of years as an inspector for insurance companies. He joined the Glasgow Fire brigade on 28th November, 1891, and was at once appointed foreman at the Western Division Station, Cranstonhill. When Mr Davis Burgess retired in June, 1895, Mr Hastie succeeded him as foreman at the Central Station. He has left a widow, two boys, and three girls. One of his sons is at sea, and his youngest child is a girl only six years of age.

Mr Hastie was a special favourite with the representatives of the press, owing to his genial and obliging disposition, being always ready to aid them with every item of information at his command. He was a widely read, genial, thoughtful man, attentive to his duties, liked by everybody, a teetotaler, and a Quaker. He made engineering a special study. About a year ago he was a candidate for the position of firemaster at Aberdeen, but was unfortunately not successful.

John Battersby, first class fireman at the Central Station, was a son of Bailie John Battersby. He was born in Glasgow thirty seven years ago, entered the service of the brigade on 9th December, 1889, and was highly respected by his comrades. He has left a widow and eight children, the youngest of whom is only three months old, the eldest being a girl about 16 years of age. By trade he was a joiner. In sad contrast to the gloom which now lies upon his home, it may be mentioned that on Thursday night Mr Battersby was at a party, and being a musician he contributed greatly to the harmony of the evening.

David Smith, who was a second class fireman in the Northern Division, was a native of Govan, and 44 years of age. He had been connected with the brigade for 21 years, having joined it on 20th November, 1876. He has left a widow and three young children. Prior to entering the brigade he was a seaman.

He had been a long time connected with the Northern district, and was occasionally stationed at the Grand Theatre, where he was highly respected.

Charles Orr, who was also a second class fireman in the Northern Division, was a native of Paisley, and 37 years of age. He joined the brigade on 30th October, 1891. he has left a widow and three children – two boys and a girl. By trade he was a tinsmith. In connection with his death a touching incident is related. Just after he had been called to the fire his wife sent a message to the Fire Station asking him to come home as his little girl was dying. Before the message reached Renfield Street he was dead himself.

As already stated there were two men injured. John Watson, who lies in the Royal Infirmary with his spine fractured, was born in Perth, thirty three years ago, and prior to joining the brigade in October, 1891, he was a slater to trade. He has a wife and four children. Laurence Hamilton, who is injured internally and lies in his own home in College Street, was born in Ardrrossan thirty three years ago, and was a seaman before he joined the brigade in November, 1891.

The brother of Chief Officer Paterson, had a narrow escape, having just stepped out of Messrs Bankier's shop when the explosion took place. Several other members of the brigade narrowly escaped injury.

After the explosion the flames resumed their mastery over the building, and by six o'clock it was entirely burned out. Messrs Hatrick's and Bankier's premises were entirely destroyed, and the other shops very much damaged by both fire and water. The total loss is estimated at about £15,000, of which Messrs Hatrick's loss will amount to about £13,000, namely, £5,000 for the building and £8,000 for the stock. All the loss is covered by insurance, Messrs Hatrick having their premises and stock insured for £12,500. The following are the offices involved:- Caledonian, £5,000; Sun, £2,000; Pheonix, £2,000; National of Ireland, £1,500; Royal Exchange, £1,000; Norwich Union, £1,000.

Nothing is known as to how the explosion occurred, although, of course, there are numerous conjectures. Messrs Hatrick's warehouse contained many inflammable liquids, including quantities of ether and any of these may have exploded in the fierce heat. It should, however, be mentioned that the firm and their employees, who numbered 27, were exceedingly careful and took all possible precautions to prevent fire. ➤



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Bailie Cleland, the convener of the Fire Brigade Sub Committee of the Watching and Lighting Committee, was at the scene of the fire about four o'clock, and remained all day watching the operations for the recovery of the bodies. Soon afterwards he was joined by Bailie Battersby, who had just learned of the sad fate which had overtaken his son. Naturally he was deeply distressed, and waited anxiously for some time in the hope that the body would be recovered. Lord Provost Richmond, Bailies Robert Anderson, M'Intyre Thomson, and W. F. Anderson, and Councillors Chisholm, Gray, Finlay, Martin, Paterson, Sandilands, Carswell, Walker, and Norman Macleod Thomson, Deacon Convener Miller, Mr John Whyte, Master of Works: Mr James Hart, procurator fiscal; and Mr Gibb, city cashier, were also in attendance.

The firemen continued to pour water on the ruins until the afternoon was well advanced. A large crowd visited the scene, but the police stationed at Cowcaddens Street and Renfrew Street kept Renfield Street clear between these points. The tramway traffic to Maryhill and Possilpark was sent round by Sauchiehall Street and Cambridge Street.

The work of taking down the dangerous portions of the building was entrusted to Messrs Wardrop & Murray, Montrose Street, who set to their dangerous occupation in vigorous style, and soon after one o'clock they completed these operations, a barricade being erected in front of the building. The fireman then made a systematic search for the bodies of their comrades, the debris being removed in carts and lorries as it was thrown onto the street. About three o'clock the body of Smith was found in the basement at the rear of Messrs Bankier's shop, but some time elapsed before it could be extricated. When this was done it was reverently wrapped in a white sheet and placed in a coffin. The deceased man, was found in a doubled up position with his lamp in one hand, while the other was raised as if protecting his head.

Not long after the calamity took place, intelligence of it reached the various stations of the fire brigade, and, as might be expected, caused the greatest consternation. Women and children, roused from their slumbers, wept piteously, and though the men gave no such outward display of emotion, their grief was no less sincere. As is the case with all the members of the fire brigade, the deceased were steady, hard working men, and each of their surviving comrades feels that he has lost a personal friend.

Visiting the stations one was saddened by the sight of little children weeping for their fathers whom they will see no more on earth, and although nobody intruded on the grief of the widows except the neighbours that went in to comfort them, one can well understand their anguish and sympathise with them in their great affliction.

There is no fund in connection with the brigade for the relief of the sufferers by such a disaster, but the citizens of Glasgow are never slack in rendering aid in such circumstances. At the meeting of the Watching and Lighting Committee held yesterday Lord Provost Richmond and Bailie Cleland reported the sad occurrence. Both gentlemen gave expression to their sympathy with the bereaved families, and suggested that it be remitted to the Fire Brigade Sub Committee to make all arrangements for the interment of the bodies. This was agreed to, as also a suggestion that the sub committee be empowered to take what other steps may be deemed necessary in connection with the tragic event. In the course of the forenoon Mrs Cleland, wife of Bailie Cleland, visited the bereaved families, tendering to each the sympathies of the Fire brigade Sub Committee, of which her husband is convener.

The interments will take the form of a brigade funeral, and the members of the Watching and Lighting Committees will have an opportunity of being present.

Notwithstanding the great risks which they run, there have been few accidents to members of the Fire Brigade, and fatalities have fortunately been exceedingly rare. In the fifties a fireman was killed while extinguishing a fire in the warehouse of Messrs Black & Wingate in Princes Square off Buchanan Street. Ten years later Fireman Welsh was killed in the transit shed at Port Dundas Canal. In the seventies Fireman Morrison was suffocated in a brass foundry in Buchan Street. About the year 1884 Gore Stacey Morris of the Salvage Corps, was suffocated and terribly burned by the explosion of a barrel of benzoline in an oil store in Helen Street. ►



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THE SEARCH FOR THE BODIES – CONDITION OF THE INJURED

The search for the bodies of the firemen, which began about three o'clock, continued until shortly after six, by which time all the bodies – four in number – had been recovered. The body of Charles Orr was got out during the progress of the fire. The search party conducted their operations under the supervision of Firemaster Paterson, who was assiduous in his efforts throughout the day.

Owing to the immense mass of debris the work of the searchers was attended with the utmost difficulty; but the men prosecuted their melancholy task with steady perseverance. During the day considerable crowds hung around the ruins in Renfield Street, but the police maintained admirable order.

The first body to be recovered yesterday afternoon was that of David Smith. Shortly after five o'clock the body of James Hastie was found, and about an hour later the men came upon the remains of John Battersby. The bodies were terribly mangled, although, strangely enough none of them was severely burned. The bodies were coffined and removed to the homes of the deceased. The Fire Brigade headquarters in College Street was the centre of much interest; large crowds collected round the doors and discussed the distressing event.

Happily the condition of the injured men, John Watson and Laurence Hamilton, shows signs of improvement. On inquiry late last night, it was stated that Watson – who lies in the Royal Infirmary – was progressing favourably. Hamilton lies in his own home in College Street. He is not so badly injured as his comrade, and is also making satisfactory progress.

It was announced at the Grand Theatre last night that a mid day performance of the pantomime will be given on Wednesday the 19th inst., the proceeds to be handed over to the widows and orphans of the four firemen. Messages of sympathy poured in all night to Firemaster Paterson, and telegrams were received by him from fire brigades all over the kingdom.

The Glasgow Herald, Wednesday 12 January, 1898

THE GLASGOW FATAL FIRE FUNERAL OF THE FIREMEN – IMPRESSIVE SCENES

The funeral of the four firemen who lost their lives on Friday morning at the fire in the premises of Messrs Hatrick, Renfield Street, took place yesterday. The occasion was one of widespread and mournful interest to the community at large. In the public mind courageous service and heroic sacrifice always command sympathetic recognition, and the tragic manner in which the men met their fate, together with the unusual circumstances of the calamity, evoked universal regret and sorrow. The depth of this feeling was shown by the enormous crowds who gathered in the streets to witness the funeral cortege and to pay a last tribute of respect to the men who lost their lives in their hazardous calling.

The arrangements for the funeral, which were made under the supervision of a committee of the Corporation, were of an elaborate character. At half past one o'clock an impressive service was held in St David's Parish Church, and the internment took place in the Necropolis. Two of the men who lost their lives, James Hastie and John Battersby, were connected with the Central Division, and resided at the College Street station; and the other two, David Smith and Charles Orr, were attached to the Northern section, and lived at the station in St George's Road.

In the course of the forenoon the bodies of the deceased were conveyed to St David's Church. The coffins, which were of oak, mounted with brass, were ranged side by side in the choir on trestles, and remained there till the service was concluded. At the head of each coffin there was a beautiful wreath of white hyacinths, camellias, lilies of the Nile, and maiden hair fern sent by the Fire Brigade Sub Committee, and similar wreaths from friends and relatives of the victims of the disaster were laid at the foot.

On the coffin which contained the remains of Orr was a wreath from "C. J. Anderson," on that of Battersby there was a wreath from the Parks committee, and on Hastie's coffin there was a wreath from "Mother," while on Smith's there was a similar token of respect from the Cowcaddens Ward. The helmets of the men were placed immediately above the name plates, and their belts and hatches were at the lower end. ➤



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The doors of the church were opened about half past twelve o'clock, and admission was only obtained by tickets issued by the Fire Brigade Sub Committee. The ladies and gentlemen who had been invited to the service began to assemble about a quarter to one o'clock, and soon the church, which accommodates about 700 persons, was filled in all parts. Seats were reserved for the relatives and friends of the deceased at the extreme west and east sides of the church. The centre part of the area was occupied by the Lord provost, magistrates, and members of the Corporation, who wore their chains of office, and behind them sat the officials of the Corporation. The members of the Glasgow Fire Brigade were accommodated at the left side of the centre, and in the corresponding pews at the west side were seated the deputations from the district fire brigades and the salvage Corps.

Among those present were Lord Provost Richmond, Bailies Cleland, Maclay, Murray, Dick, R. Anderson, King, Cuthbert, Thomson, Carswell, W. F. Anderson, Sinclair, Fife, Hunter, and Steele; Dean of Guild Graham, Deacon Convener Miller, Councillors Colquhoun, Chishoim, Osborne, Primrose, Willox, Finlay, O'Hare, Bilsland, Kerr, W. Stevenson, Sorley, Willock, Watson, M'Phun, Martin, Taggart, Johnstone, Thomson, Gray, Hutchison, Paterson, and other members of the Corporation; ex-Bailie Simons, and Mr Nicol, city chamberlain.

The pulpit, choir, and gallery were draped with black cloth. Rev. Mr Dickson, minister of the parish occupied the pulpit, and among the other clergymen who officiated were Rev. Dr P. M'Adam Muir, Rev. Mr Goodall, and Rev Mr Laidlaw.

The service was opened by the congregation singing the 255th Hymn. Rev. Mr Goodall afterwards engaged in prayer, and read a portion of the 39th Psalm. Rev Mr Laidlaw read from 1st Corinthians xv, 50, after which the 257th Hymn was sung. In the course of prayer Rev. Mr Dickson said – "O Lord, Thou hast chosen to visit this community with a sad and sudden calamity. Thou hast in a moment taken away those whose loss we now mourn. Thou hast taken away the husband of many families, the loving partner of sorrowful wives, the gentle father of affectionate children, the genial friend of loyal companions. O lord, though we are filled with sorrow this day, yet there is a silver lining to the dark cloud which hovers over us. We would now recall with grateful thanks the memory of our brothers deceased, their kindness, their affection, their manly uprightness, their faithfulness.

We remember especially that our brothers died at the post of duty, at the post of danger, which is the post of honour, a post which the best and bravest of the sons of men seek. Father, we have no fear for those who have gone. We leave them in Thy gracious keeping. Our heart's best sympathies go out to those who feel today that brethren have been torn from their sides to pass into the eternal silence. O Lord, be near to those, who have been made widows, be with the children who have been so early bereft of a father's strong love, and give grateful hearts to those who are now recovering." The benediction was then pronounced, and during the playing of the Dead March in "Saul" the remains of the deceased were removed from the church.

Outside the church many thousands of people had gathered soon after midday, and watched with melancholy interest the early arrivals of those invited to take part in the service.

The event assumed something of the proportions of a great public demonstration. The entire length of Ingram Street was lined with spectators, who were confined to the pavements, a large staff of police, under Superintendent Orr, being engaged for this duty. The service in the church was arranged for half past one o'clock. The quaint old edifice, however, was opened to the mourners about noon, and from that time onwards the congregation arrived in an almost unbroken stream.

Some of the younger relatives of the deceased men reached the building in mourning coaches, and were the objects of deepest sympathy of the public. The representatives of various public bodies came in groups. Special interest centered in the large detachment representing the fire brigade of Glasgow and other cities and burghs, including Edinburgh, Paisley, Govan, and Partick. They assembled at the Central Fire Station, in close proximity to the church, and came round in marching order. Accommodation for them was found in the interior of the building.

Soon afterwards a band and pipers and a detachment of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, and a similar number of men of the Scots Greys, came upon the scene, their magnificent physique and splendid military bearing attracting general, but silent, admiration. The drums of the Highlanders' band were draped in black. The soldiers, who were under the command of Quartermaster Williamson, were drawn up to the east of the church, their line extending as far as North Albion Street. ►



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The service took place during the dinner hour of the employees in the warehouses which abound on all sides of the church. Every window was filled with a group of onlookers, who maintained a becoming demeanour. On the extensive premises of Messrs J. & W. Campbell & Co. a flag floated at half mast, and on other buildings in the neighbourhood similar tokens of respect, were displayed. The whole of the upper part of the Candleriggs, which overlooked the entrance to the church, was crowded with spectators, and the windows of the business premises and the dwelling houses in the thoroughfare were also fully occupied.

During the long period of waiting a drizzling rain fell almost without intermission, and a heavily charged atmosphere hung like a pall over the scene. While the service was still in progress four hose carriages from the Central Fire Station took up positions in the centre of the street opposite the church. These were each drawn by a couple of horses, and were in charge of brigade drivers in uniform. The hose and ladders were in their places in each of the vehicles, which were in all respects equipped as for ordinary service.

Coming immediately after them was another brigade vehicle, conveying a beautiful collection of wreaths, sent by the brigade comrades of the deceased men and by brigades in other parts of the country and by other friends. While the main point of interest was around Ramshorn Church, during the service the route to Cathedral Square had meanwhile been taken up with people eager to see the procession pass on its way to the Necropolis. Street after street was thronged, and at some points the police had difficulty in maintaining perfect order.

Shortly before the close of the service a detachment of bluejackets from the warship at the Tail of the Bank arrived and joined the military, as did also a contingent from the Corps of Commissionaires. The crowding at the junction of Ingram Street became excessive towards the end of the long period of waiting, and one or two inconvenient rushes occurred. Fortunately, however, no serious results followed.

Towards half past two o'clock there were indications that the service was drawing to a close. Preparations were made for the removal of the coffins to the vehicles, and soon afterwards they were brought out from the side door. Each was carried upon the shoulders of six firemen, and besides a profusion of flowers, the offering of immediate friends, had upon the top the helmet, the belt, and the working appliances that had belonged to the deceased.

While the coffins were thus being placed in position a solemn stillness pervaded the sad scene, and every head in the vast throng was reverently uncovered.

The onerous duty of marshalling the mournful procession was discharged by Mr Freer whose arrangements were adequate in every detail. When the coffins had been placed upon the respective carriages there was still a considerable time to elapse until the various sections of the mourners could be got into order. The spectacle at this stage was singularly impressive. All eyes were turned with wistful attention upon the line of vehicles bearing the bodies of the men who fell in fulfilment of their duty, and there were many hushed but heartfelt expressions of admiration for brave deeds bravely done, and of sympathy of those with whom will abide a sad memory of sudden bereavement and of irreparable loss when the public excitement and commiseration have passed away. On either side of the carriages carrying the bodies two firemen took up positions.

The procession was now got quickly into position. It was headed by a contingent of the police force. The military, with the band of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, came next, followed among others by men from the Lighting and Fire Brigade Departments. Representatives of the fire insurance offices were next and after those came the Corporation officials, with the members of the Corporation immediately behind. The Lord Provost wore his chain of office, and the Magistrates, as well as the Deacon Convener also wore their official chains.

With the exception of a few carriages for the accommodation of some of the immediate female relatives of the deceased, everybody attending the funeral walked to the Necropolis.

Conspicuous among the chief mourners were Bailie Battersby and several of his grandsons, the youthful children of his son, who was one of those who lost his life in the disaster. They occupied places among the other relatives, behind the carriages on which the coffins were carried. About a quarter to three o'clock the signal was given for the procession to move off. The band of the Highlanders, under Bandmaster Hill, played with striking effect, Beethoven's Funeral March No. 1. ►



THE
FIREFIGHTERS'
HERITAGE
TRAIL

RENFIELD STREET FRIDAY 7TH JANUARY 1898

To the impressive strains of the music the procession turned slowly up North Albion Street in the following order:-

Representatives of Glasgow Police Force

Band and Pipers of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders

Detachments of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and Scots Greys

Representatives of the City Lighting department in Uniform

Representatives of other Fire Brigades and Salvage Corps also in Uniform

Representatives of Fire Insurance Offices

Corporation Officials

Members of the Corporation

The Magistrates

Glasgow Police Band

Members of the Fire Brigade Committee

The Lord Provost and Clergymen

Hose and Ladder Carriages with the Remains of the Deceased Firemen

Relatives and Friends of the Deceased

The Chief Officer's Brougham

Members of the Glasgow Fire Brigade

Body of Police

General Public

Turning into College Street the cortege passed the Central Fire Station. The blinds of the building were drawn, and the men on duty came to the front to pay a final tribute to their departed comrades. A few yards further along the cortege passed into High Street. Here as indeed at every point of the route, the crowd was enormous and the progress of the procession was followed with profound respect.

Cathedral Square, with its spacious area overlooking the Necropolis, contained many thousands of spectators, and here again the procession was received with many evidences of sympathy and respect.

In the course of the route the highlander's band played, besides the march already mentioned, Handel's "Dead March" in "Saul." The Corporation Band under Bandmaster Jarvis, played the same marches, also the "Funeral March" from Handel's "Samson," and Chopin's "Funeral March." The pipe band of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders rendered "The Land o' the Leal" and "The Flowers of the Forest."

The graves in which the firemen were interred are situated in the new portion of the Necropolis. It is a steep, rising ground facing north west, and is laid out in a series of terraces overlooking Wishart Street and the Royal Infirmary. The place of sepulture is on the second terrace immediately above the carriageway, and a few yards to the north of the original enclosure of the Necropolis. Nearest the entrance is the grave of James Hastie, those of John Battersby, David Smith, and Charles Orr following in the order given. This section of ground is as yet but partially laid out, and only the two lower terraces are occupied. The gates of the cemetery were closed some time before the hour fixed for the funeral, and only the officials and a detachment of constables were present within the ground.

In Wishart Street, James Orr Street, and Warnock Street people began to assemble shortly after two o'clock, while behind the infirmary and in the Cathedral and adjoining grounds spectators congregated, while nearly every window of the houses overlooking the Necropolis, the windows of the Nurse's Home, and other buildings were all occupied. The weather continued dull and cheerless, in keeping with the sadness of the ceremony, and a drizzling rain fell at frequent intervals.

About a quarter to three o'clock the mournful strains of the bagpipes were heard in the distance, and soon after the procession, headed by the band playing The "Dead March" in Saul, reached the gates of the Necropolis. The route was taken by the higher walk towards the northern portion of the cemetery, the bands leading and the mourners following on foot, the hose carriages with the bodies and the memorial wreaths bringing up the rear. At the summit the band of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders broke off, and, wheeling, marched along the higher terrace to a point immediately overlooking the graves. ►



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The magistrates, the members of the fire brigade, and the relatives of the deceased, followed by the carriages with the bodies, advancing by the lower walk, arrived opposite the graves. The coffins were taken from the carriages and carried to the place of internment, each on the shoulders of four members of the fire brigade. Meanwhile the mourners assembled on the upper walk. The pall bearers were afterwards placed in position, the Lord Provost taking one of the cords at the grave of Mr Hastie, Bailie Battersby being at the head of his son, cords being taken at the graves of Mr Smith and Mr Orr by Bailie Cleland and Mr Primrose.

Rev. Andrew Laidlaw then offered a short prayer, and the band of the Highlanders played "Thy will be done" from "Hymns Ancient and Modern." The bodies were then lowered amid an impressive stillness, and afterwards Mr Laidlaw offered prayer, comforting the mourners by pointing them to the assurance of a glorious resurrection for those who had died so nobly in the discharge of duty. Around the grave now gathered the relatives and younger members of the families of the deceased, and the piteous weeping of the children heightened the pathos and melancholy interest of the impressive scene.

The graves having been filled, the wreaths were taken from the wagon on which they had been carried to the cemetery and reverently laid on the newly made mounds, and the company shortly afterwards dispersed. Messrs Wylie & Lochhead had charge of the funeral arrangements.

Internet Article

LAST ONE HUNDRED YEARS CATCHES UP WITH STRATHCLYDE FIRE BRIGADE

On the 7th of January 1898 a large fire raged in the centre of Glasgow. The Glasgow Fire Service responded to the alarm call in the usual manner by dispatching horse drawn steam pumps and handcarts which raced to the scene from the fire station located in College Street. As the fire ripped through the property of W&R Hatricks chemical works in Renfield Street a large explosion took place causing an upper floor to collapse, burying and killing four Glasgow Firemen.

The four men who perished were:

John Battersby	James Hastie
Charles Orr	David Smith

These four brave men were documented as the first Glasgow Firemen to be killed whilst doing their duty in the city. All who perished left behind wives and children to pick up the pieces and carry on with life as normally as was possible. In particular Fireman John Battersby (37) left a widow Jane and eight children, hence the tale unfolds.

One hundred years after John Battersby's death a chance meeting took place between two neighbours. One of the neighbours was a retired Strathclyde firefighter (Sub Officer John Jamieson formerly of Knightswood Fire Station in Glasgow). The other neighbour was Agnes McAlden (68) also known as Nancy, the Grand daughter of John Battersby.

Through conversation John Jamieson, informed Nancy that he was a retired Fireman. Nancy then explained that her Grandfather was a Glasgow Fireman and that he was killed whilst fighting a fire in Glasgow. As it turned out she knew very little about the circumstances of the fire other than it was in Glasgow. This was due to the fact that her Grandmother Jane was so distraught that she was unable to discuss the event. This may have been the reason why Nancy and her Brother, Jim (71) have to this day never seen a photograph of their Grandfather.

As the conversation became more in depth it transpired that Nancy and Jim's Great Grandfather, John Battersby senior (a Glasgow councillor and magistrate) had penned a poem in memory of the four Firemen who were killed. ►



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RENFIELD STREET FRIDAY 7TH JANUARY 1898

This poem had never been seen outwith the family till this day. The poem is very poignant to all members of the Fire Brigade both past and present including their families and friends alike.

Unbeknown to Nancy and Jim the events of that fateful day were recorded and documented in the book "A PROUD RECORD", a history of the Glasgow Fire Service. In 1975 this publication was gifted to all that had served with the Glasgow Fire Service. This was prior to Regionalisation, which formed the present Strathclyde Fire Brigade.

Although the said publication only gave a brief account of the Renfield Street fire, it did however contain a photograph of the four Firemen who perished on that day.

This chance meeting is interesting as it has not only filled a void in the history of the Battersby family but has also brought to light a poem. A poem where the words are as poignant now as they were a hundred years ago and will be a hundred years from now.

Nancy and Jim were invited to Central Command Headquarters, Cowcaddens on Tuesday 13th of July 1999 (Invitational Press Day). They were VIP guests of Assistant Firemaster Rab Coke the Commander of Central Command. Nancy and Jim are justifiably proud of what their Grandfather did one hundred years ago, as are the members of Strathclyde Fire Brigade both past and present.

A TRIBUTE TO THE MEMORY OF CHARLES ORR, DAVID SMITH, JAMES HASTIE & JOHN BATTERSBY

The Noble Firemen who lost their lives while bravely doing their duty at the Fire in Renfield Street on Friday morning 7th January 1898

A CALL TO DUTY; T'was nobly done,
In doing that DUTY a crown was won;
The lives of others, a life each gave.
A CALL TO DUTY; t'was nothing rare
to receive the summons, and danger share;
Each man to his post of peril sprang
The moment the alarming Fire-bell rang
The sleeping city aroused by the sound
of rushing feet, while all around
a ruddy glow o'er roof and spire,
Proclaimed the dreadful sign of 'FIRE'
soon, brave hearts, they thought the danger past
The flames grew dim, subdued at last.
When lo! regardless of the hissing sound,
The Firemen nobley stood their ground.
Hark, The loud thunder burst, the shattered wall,
The choking cloud, the crashing fall,
The piercing shriek, the smothered groan,
The mattered prayer, the dying moan
Think of the dead, for ever gone,
Leaving wives and weans to mourn,
The skillful may heal, assuage the pain
But who shall call the dead to life again.
Mourn for the dead by the blood stained hier,
Stand mute, and let a sympathising tear,
Be shed for the widows and children left,
Their nearest and dearest by , death now bereft.

JOHN BATTERSBY (senior)

The poem which Deputy Firemaster David S. Kennedy read out at a service in Glasgow Cathedral on the 16th July, 1999.



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