

# MILLER STREET/ARGYLE STREET SATURDAY 2ND JULY 1921

## BIG FIRES – £220,000 DAMAGE IN GLASGOW, TWO FIREMEN KILLED

The Glasgow Herald, Monday 4 July, 1921

### SCENE IN ARGYLE STREET

Three serious outbreaks of fire, one causing the death of two firemen, and resulting in an aggregate loss estimated roughly at £220,000, took place in Glasgow on Saturday.

The first occurred in the forenoon in Castle Street where damage estimated at £8000 was done in the premises of the Glasgow Waste and Sponge Cloth Manufacturing Company. The second and most destructive broke out in the early evening in a large block of buildings at the east corner of Miller Street and Argyle Street, which, was completely gutted and loss caused to the extent of £200,000. The third which was due to a spark from the Argyle Street fire, took place in a block of buildings at 127 and 133 Trongate, where the premises and stock of several firms were involved to the extent of £12,000.

Large crowds witnessed the fire in Argyle Street, and a painful sensation was caused when it became known that two of the firemen, Frederick True and James Farquharson, of the Western Division of the Fire Brigade, had been buried by falling wreckage, and that hope of their rescue had been abandoned. Three other firemen received injury, but after treatment at the Royal Infirmary they were able to go home.

Throughout the entire evening and all day yesterday through tramway service was suspended, cars from the east being turned at Glasgow Cross, and those from the west getting only as far as Queen Street. The Master of Works has deemed it advisable for a few days to barricade Argyle Street at the scene of the fire, and arrangements have been made by the Tramways Department to meet the circumstances.

### A FIRE ZONE

The centre of the city has been the scene of many serious fires. In a sense Glasgow may be said to have risen like the Phoenix from her own ashes. Within comparatively recent years there have been disastrous outbreaks laying waste extensive areas at three points of a comparatively small square, which is completed by selecting the scene of Saturday night's fire as the fourth point. There was first, over 12 years ago, the destructive fire opposite the Central Fire Station in Ingram Street.

A few years later the old Assembly Hall and Tontine Buildings at the corner of High Street and Trongate were destroyed, leaving the quaint Tolbooth Steeple in isolation there as a survival of olden times. Then during the years of war there was the destruction of Messrs M'Laren's large warehouse at the corner of Hanover Street and George Square. Heavy as was the monetary losses by those fires, they were happily free from disaster to the men who almost as part of their work of firefighting take their lives in their hands. Saturday's sad occurrence, which cast a gloom over the members of the brigade who doggedly struck to their dangerous duty, breaks a long immunity from fatal accident enjoyed by the Glasgow Brigade.

### ARGYLE STREET BLOCK GUTTED

The corner block involved in Saturday night's destruction was an ornate structure of four floors and basement, measuring 80 feet by 60 feet. The three top floors were occupied by Messrs Wallace and Weir, mantle makers, clothiers and wholesale warehousemen, and the street portion was occupied by Bowman's Economic Stores, drapers and house furnishers. It was in a portion of these stores that the fire was first observed.

The alarm was raised shortly before seven o'clock in the evening. At that time Messrs Bowman's shop was still thronged with purchasers, among whom and the assistants some excitement prevailed, but they were able to get clear before the situation became dangerous. Filled on the various floors with inflammable material, the building was not long in being entirely involved in the outbreak. The flames spread with great rapidity, and when a detachment of firemen arrived from the Central Brigade station it was apparent that further help would be needed.

The flames had secured a firm hold and were making great progress. Reinforcements were summoned from the Central, South, East, West, Springburn, and North Divisions, and in a few minutes these arrived.

In an incredibly brief time Argyle Street and the abutting thoroughfares were a network of hose pipes, which through the motor pumps poured great volumes of water on the flames, now burning brilliantly in the calm summer evening air.

Under the direction of Mr Gillan, the Deputy Chief Officer, who was in charge in the absence on holiday of Mr Waddell, the Firemaster, the men made great efforts to prevent the fire from spreading to neighbouring blocks. ➤



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Notwithstanding the huge volume of water that was being used the flames continued to eat their way upwards. It was when the brigade had been at work for some time that a portion of their number were overwhelmed.

## TWO MEN OVERWHELMED

Several of the firemen were engaged on the street floors of the buildings fronting Miller Street when the interior collapsed, and they were precipitated to the basement, some of them being buried in the wreckage. Three of the men were got out by their comrades, and as it was seen that they had sustained injury St Andrew's Association ambulances were summoned, and they were conveyed to the Royal Infirmary. They were Neil M'Donald, Western, who was injured about the arms; David Beveridge, Partick, who received slight leg injuries; and William Prentice, Central, whose hands were badly cut. At the Infirmary they received medical attention, and were removed to their homes.

Meanwhile it was discovered that two men were missing. These were Frederick True and James Farquharson both of the Western. Every effort was made to rescue them. Their colleagues worked desperately to get through the barrage of smoke and flame to search for them among the ruins, but it was a forlorn hope, for the floors were giving way above and the interior was a raging furnace. When it was seen that there was no hope of getting the men out, the firemen were visibly affected. They slackened nothing in their task of extinguishing the fire, however.

The evening was wearing on, and still there was the heavy crash as floors gave way and tumbled downwards, carrying with them the clinging fragments of previous falls and in their decent causing the flagging fires on the ground level to blaze up into momentary fierceness and to send forth fresh clouds of smoke. From the corner block the fire spread and gained a hold on premises ranging from 2 to 12 Miller Street. A Branch of the Bank of Scotland was damaged, but the books and the money were secure in the safe.

Meantime arrangements have been made for temporarily carrying on the business of the branch at the head office at 2 St Vincent Place. The premises of Messrs R. and T. Sinclair, writers, and Messrs P. Gartshore and Company, warehousemen, suffered serious damage by fire and water. The premises occupied by Messrs Sewell and Hulton and by Messrs Cook and Hunter, dental manufacturers, were damaged by water.

## ALL NIGHT SEARCH

By eleven o'clock the great block of buildings seemed entirely gutted. The masonry stood up gaunt and stark in the darkening gloom of the gloaming. Flames raged here and died down as the searching hose jets reached them, and smoke belched through the windows. Still there seemed sufficient wreckage left to cause a resounding crash as it was released by water or by the burning away of its last support.

The crowds of sightseers, drawn from all parts of the city by the glare to join the usual Saturday night throngs in that busy thoroughfare, watched with fascinated interest the fireman's fight with the flames. Their curiosity was a source of inconvenience, however, and it required the services of a large staff of policemen, who were present under the direction of Assistant Chief Constable Smith, to keep them at a safe distance and give the firemen room to work.

The scene looking eastwards from a point near the burning block was striking as the gloaming deepened. The air was calm and the sky clear and the smoke as it issued across Argyle Street from the wrecked windows formed a thin veil, through which some distance off the crowd could be seen surging against the barrier of police, the light dresses of the ladies and the cricket and tennis flannels of gentlemen in the more sombre attired crowd showing up vividly in the kaleidoscope, which had for background the rugged beauty of the Tron Steeple.

On to midnight a large section of the crowd waited, and anxious inquiries were made at intervals at policemen and firemen as to whether there was any hope of the missing men. All through the long summer night the firemen worked removing the wreckage in the search for their comrades. It was not till seven o'clock on Sunday morning that the bodies of the men were found. It is thought by the appearance of them that death must have been instantaneous when the heavy masses of wood and iron fell on them.

The total loss is estimated to be not less than £200,000. ►



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## OUTBREAK IN TRONGATE

Shortly after the outbreak at the Miller Street corner some of the firemen engaged there saw that fire had broken out at premises on the south side of the Trongate.

Motor pumps and detachments of men were detailed off and they immediately set to work to extinguish the fresh blaze, which, it is presumed had its origin in a spark carried by the slight breeze from the big fire. In a short time the fire was got under control.

The building involved housed several firms. Extensive damage was done. The premises of Messrs A. Oliphant and Co., warehousemen and of Messrs John A. Graham and Co., wholesale clothing manufacturers, 133 Trongate, were gutted. The offices of Messrs P. and W. MacLennan, 129 Trongate, were damaged by water, and slight damage by water was caused in the shop of Messrs Stead and Simpson, bootmakers, 131 Trongate and Messrs Munn and Co., grocers and confectioners, 127 Trongate. The loss at the Trongate fire is estimated at £12,000. At these fires the men of the Glasgow Salvage Corps under their foreman Mr C. Taylor, rendered valuable assistance in the hazardous work of minimising damage to property and stock. Sparks started small outbreaks on other roofs in the vicinity, but the watchful alertness of the firemen prevented these from developing.

## THE CAR SERVICE

Throughout yesterday detachments of firemen were still on duty under Mr Waddell, who had returned. The scene was visited by hundreds of sightseers, who all day long congregated near the barricades erected across Argyle Street. These had been put up on the instructions of the Corporation Master of Works, who after an examination of the site yesterday morning deemed it advisable to close that portion of the street to traffic for a few days.

The fire caused serious inconvenience to the car service, but under the direction of Mr L. Mackinnon, the traffic superintendent, the temporary arrangements which had to be put into operation worked as smoothly as possible under the circumstances. East going cars were turned at Queen Street, and those coming westwards were turned at Glasgow Cross. That will continue in operation today, and blue cars from Oatlands and Rutherglen will travel via Glasford Street, St Vincent Street, and Sauchiehall Street.

## EFFECT ON INSURANCE COMPANIES

All the leading insurance companies are involved in the losses, but by the system of reinsurances these will not be heavy on any particular office. The Miller Street-Argyle Street block is situated in what the insurance companies regard as a congested area for which special rates of insurance are charged. Among the precautions which the insurance companies require to be taken is that fireproof doors and shutters should be fitted in the premises.

In the buildings between Miller Street and Virginia Street practically all the buildings are so protected, and in the opinion of a leading insurance official these appliances to a large extent prevented a further extension of Saturday's serious outbreak and fully justified the insurance companies in their policy in regard to these precautions.

## £8000 DAMAGES IN CASTLE STREET

The forenoon outbreak occurred in the premises of the Glasgow Waste and Sponge Cloth Manufacturing Company, 256 Castle Street. The building involved was of three storeys. When the brigade arrived the flames had secured a firm hold, and it required two hours of strenuous effort on the part of the firemen to extinguish them. The loss is estimated at £8000.



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