

BURNING OF THE SHIRE HALL

A Mysterious Occurrence

Some fairy godfather or guardian angel must have visited Sunshine on Tuesday at midnight. A fortuity of circumstances evidently favored the initial spark dropped by the roguish imp, and our more or less decadent public hall went up in smoke. It certainly was a useful institution in its day, but the crumbling and decay of the pioneer civilisation and the rise of the numerous barbarian proletariat proclaimed aloud that the building, which had lasted scarcely more than a decade of years, had outlived its usefulness, simply on account of its limited dimensions. Sentence of extinction had already been pronounced, and ere long it was intended to remove and replace it with a modern brick structure. However, the resolve might not have been carried out for many a day had not the fire fiend taken a hand in the proceedings.

As usual, the arrangements for combatting the flames were reminiscent of the Darktown Fire Brigade. Sunshine appears to be the Cinderella of the suburbs as far as fire-fighting equipment is concerned. Apart from the inadequacy of the brigade equipment, the water supply, both in Sunshine and Braybrook, is quite below requirements in normal times, and at a peak period like that associated with a dangerous conflagration, in which the existence of the town is jeopardised, it fails dismally. It is said that it requires a bishop to be killed before the authorities can be moved to remedy any grievance

inimical to the welfare of the community. It may therefore be recognised that this happening and the extensive fire at Braybrook the previous week may be the means of drawing the Metropolitan Board of Works' attention to its contemptuous neglect of this part of the metropolis in the matter of provision of water facilities.

The fire evidently started to make itself conspicuous shortly after the last of the guests left the hall, in connection with the football social. Mr Cairns who was retiring about this time noticed when he entered his sleep-out apartment, which is closely adjacent, that a light was issuing from the hall, but thought it was someone clearing up after the dance. However, in a little while he saw the light increasing, and rushed out and broke the fire alarm which was in front of the Shire Hall. This alarm was received at Yarraville at 11.59, and as the hall was cleared about 11.30 the interval was short.

The brigades represented at the fire were Footscray and Yarraville and our local reel. There was the usual pressure of water at the spot, but it was not requisite enough to quell the flames, and the firemen directed their attention towards stopping the spread of the flames to the adjoining buildings, of the Mechanics' Institute, and Mr Cairns, both of which were wooden buildings and only a few feet from the burning structure. However, although they were alight several times they escaped being burnt. While the attention was being directed to these threatened quarters the flames crept under the eaves of the roof of the new brick building, and the fire broke out afresh in this quarter. Considerable damage was done to the upper story, especially to the Returned Soldiers' quarters, where

Returned Soldiers' quarters, where the roof was burnt through. However, the damage was confined to the roof principally.

It is a strange fact that the hall narrowly escaped burning on Friday night, a fire having broken out in the room set apart for the clerk of petty sessions. This fire was discovered by the caretaker's son, and was extinguished, although considerable damage was done.

The shire council, which controls the hall, meets on Monday, and the question of re-building will be considered, and no doubt tenders will be called immediately for a new building. Plans have been prepared for a hall 100 feet long by 40 feet wide.

It was reported in the metropolitan papers that some difficulty was experienced in finding a fire-plug opposite the hall, which was alleged to have been covered over by earth-work in road-forming. This fire-plug is not known to anyone in the council's employ, and at the spot mentioned the road has been cut down instead of being built up with earth. It should be the duty of the man in charge of

the local fire station to locate all fire plugs, and see they are in working order. Where volunteer brigades exist the members generally attend to such details, which are regarded as important. The newspaper report in question is inaccurate and misleading.

This matter came before the Fire Brigade Board on Thursday, when a member asked if periodical inspections were made. The chief officer said the plugs were tested periodically, but this was overlooked. He added that provision of better facilities at Sunshine would have to be considered by the board.

The insurance amounted to £3000 on the brick building, more than

enough to cover damage; £200 on office furniture; £600 on old building, and the piano and hall furniture were also lightly insured.