

*"This is intended to be a cool book about fire".*

Johan Goudeblom  
First sentence of  
*"Fire and Civilization"* (1992)

*"The flaming fringe may, in truth, be the true core".*

Stephen J. Pyne  
Last sentence of  
*"Flammable Cities. Urban Conflagration  
and the Making of the Modern World"* (2012)

# Tinderbox City

Great and Less Great Fires in Glasgow



**Michael Blum**

## June 17, 1652 The Great Fire

In February 1652, there was a great eclipse of the sun about 9 hours in the forenoon on a Monday; the earth was much darkened, the lyke, as thought by astrologers, was not since the darkness of our Lord's passion. The country-people teeling loused their plews, and thought it had been the latter day: Some of the stars were seen, it fell so dark; the birds clapt to the ground.

There followed a great heat that summer, and in July of that yeir was Glasgow burnt, the whole Salt-Mercat, and a great part of the town; the fire on the one syde of the street fyled the other syde; I observed myself the wind to have changed the tyme of the burning five or six tymes, which occasioned the burning of severall parts of the city.

[Rev. Mr Robert Law, *Memorialis; or, The Memorable Things That Fell Out Within This Island of Britain From 1638 to 1685*. Edinburgh, 1818. P. 6]

The blaze began in the house of one James Hamilton in High Street and quickly spread to surrounding properties blown by an unseasonal north-westerly wind. The flames spread south to the Saltmarket and east and west along Trongate and Gallowgate, eventually reaching as far south as Bridgegate. The fire burned, out of control, for 18 hours and by the time it began to die down around a third of the city had been destroyed. The houses in the city were made of wood and thatch and burned quickly. Many people were killed and over a thousand families were made homeless.

[Stirling Council Archives. Retrieved on Nov. 10, 2017]



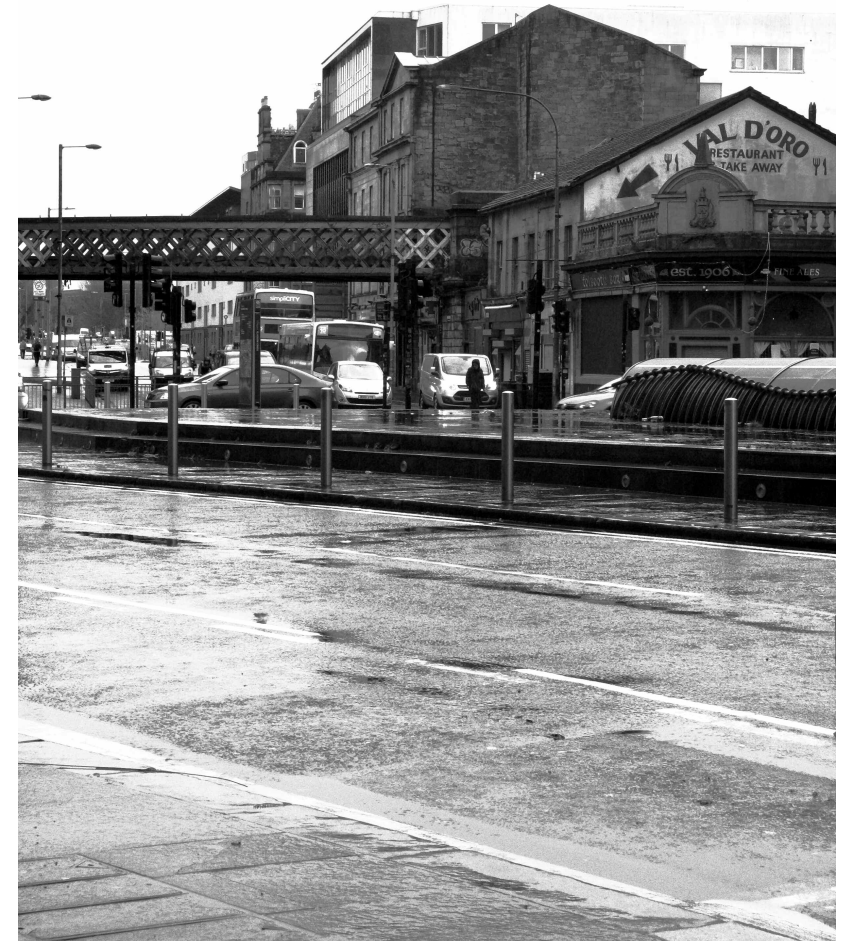
November 3d, 1677, the fire brake up in Glasgow in the heid of the Salt-mercat, on the right near the cross, which was kyndled by a malicious boy, a smith's apprentice, who being threttened, or beatt and smittin by his master, in revenge whereof setts his workhouse on fyre in the night tyme, being in the backsides of that fore street, and flyes for it. It was kyndled about one in the morning, and having burnt many in the backsyd, it breaks forth in the fore streets about three of the morning; and then it fyres the street over against it, and in a very short tyme burned down to more than the mids of the Salt-mercat, on both sydes, fore and back houses were all consumed. It did burn also on that syd to the Tron church, and two or three tenaments down on the heid of the Gallowgate. The heat was so great that it fyred the horologe of the tolbooth, (there being some prisoners in it at that tyme, amongst whom the Laird of Carsland was one, the people brake open the tolbooth doors, and sett them free); the people made it all their work to gett out their goods out of the houses; and there was little done to save houses till ten of the cloke, for it burnt till two hours afternoon. It was a great conflagration, and nothing inferior to that which was in the yeir 1652. The wind changed several tymes. Great was the cry of the poor people, and lamentable to see their confusion.

It was remarkable that a little before that tyme, there was seen a great fyre

pass throw these streets in the night tyme, and strange voices heard in some parts of the city.

[Rev. Mr Robert Law, *Memorialis; or, The Memorable Things That Fell Out Within This Island of Britain From 1638 to 1685*. Edinburgh, 1818. P. 135]

## November 3, 1677 The Great Fire





# FEARFUL EXPLOSION AND GREAT FIRE IN TRADESTON.

## GREAT LOSS OF LIFE.

Yesterday afternoon, one of the most frightful disasters which has for many years occurred in this city took place at the Tradeston Flour Mills, occupied by Messrs Matthew Muir & Sons, and situated at Nos. 8, 9, and 10 Commerce Street, South Side. The full extent of the catastrophe, in relation to personal injuries and loss of life, has not yet been ascertained, but no fewer than 18 persons are known to have been more or less grievously maimed, while 13 others, who are missing, are believed to have lost their lives. About four o'clock an explosion took place in connection with the machinery of the grain mill, spreading death and desolation all around, and followed immediately afterwards by the firing of the whole block of buildings. Before entering on a narrative of the disaster, we may first describe the extent and situation of the mills.

The Tradeston Flour Mills have been in existence for about thirty years. The principal frontage of the buildings was to Commerce Street, where the line extended to about three hundred yards. The southernmost portion of the block was occupied as grain stores, and consisted of five storeys, exclusive of sunk flat and attics. To the north of these stores was a large courtyard, used for loading and unloading purposes, and still coming northward were the boilers, three in number, and the engine shed. The grain mill, in which all the machinery was erected, adjoined the engine shed, and consisted of four storeys, having on the north of it again a smaller courtyard than the one previously referred to, the buildings terminating in a tenement of dwelling houses three storeys in height, forming the corner of Commerce Street and Clyde Place, and a granary occupying the three upper flats of a four-storey building fronting Clyde Place. From Commerce Street the mills extended westwards, in the direction of Centre Street, about 200 yards, having on the south Gorbals Free Church, and a number of dwelling houses, &c. The buildings, in short, formed the east side of an immense block, bounded by Clyde Place on the north, King Street on the south, Commerce Street on the east, and Centre Street on the west.

### THE EXPLOSION.

The works were in full operation when the explosion took place at about four o'clock. Between fifty and sixty hands were employed, divided into two "squads," forming the night and the day shifts. There were two women in the works and three boys, the remainder being grown-up men. The day-shift, being the greater portion of the whole number, were within the buildings at the time, and it is believed that about twenty were in the grain mill, where the explosion occurred. At first it was supposed that one or more of the boilers

Immediately after the explosion, whose disastrous effects we have thus indicated, a sheet of fire was observed darting upward from the ruins, and in a very few minutes the adjoining buildings were enveloped in flames. At this time, one of the members of the Central Fire Brigade was at work on the roof of a house in Oswald Street. Hearing the explosion, and observing the outbreak of fire by which it was followed, he hurried off to headquarters, where intelligence of the disaster had been conveyed by telegram from the Southern District. Mr Bryson at once set out with his entire brigade, who were speedily reinforced by the members of the district stations—namely, the Northern, Eastern, Western, Southern, and St. Rollox. The Brigades alone being kept in reserve for any possible fire elsewhere. The firemen were provided with the central steam engine and with four hand engines, all of which were in immediate requisition. When Mr Bryson reached the scene of the conflagration, he found the entire mills in one mass of flames. At first he thought it might be possible to save the south wing of the buildings, running parallel with King Street, and with this view the firemen endeavoured to stop the progress of the flames in that direction, but all their efforts proved abortive. In various other directions, however, they were more successful. At the back of the grain store, in Commerce Street, and separated from them by a courtyard, are ranges of dwelling-houses, which were in imminent peril; while at the other end of the works a coopersage, entered from Centre Street, was for a time in the like extremity. The South-Western Railway Station, too, which has a frontage to Commerce Street, right opposite the Tradeston Mills, was in very considerable danger, the flames being carried from the south-west. A detachment of the Brigade found their way to the roof of the buildings, while others from below directed a stream of water against the walls and woodwork. The greater number of the windows, by the way, as well as the glass roof, had been previously shattered by the force of the explosion. It was all the more important to protect the station buildings from the fact that underneath, in Commerce Street, are extensive spirit stores. For a time fears were also entertained that the sheds on the wharf might be fired, and the shipping thus placed in imminent danger. These fears were rather the result of the excitement attendant upon such a fearful disaster than of any actual danger, because although the heat throws out was very intense, the flames were not carried in that direction. As, however, in such a case extreme prudence is the soundest policy, the Anchor Line Sidonian and several smaller vessels were loosed from their moorings and taken out to the middle of the stream, so as to be beyond reach of all possible danger.

Meanwhile, the fire raged with resistless fury in the flour mills. The flames rose to a height of probably a hundred feet above the buildings, informing the citizens for miles round of what was going forward, while vast clouds of smoke ascended from the burning pile. In a short time the roof of the main building fell in, and the six-storeyed wall fronting Commerce Street appeared likely ere long to follow. When the danger of this became more immediate, the roadway in front was kept clear, and about 8 o'clock the greater portion of it fell outward with a frightful crash, the debris reaching to the other side of the street. The precaution which we

had probably the mill-stones, which were of great power, and liable to explosion from excessive friction. As we have indicated, the precise cause of the calamity has not been definitely ascertained, but so far as we could gather from persons competent to judge in matters of this kind, the explanation we have offered is likely to prove correct. Our supposition is strengthened by the fact that eye-witnesses speak of the explosion being accompanied or followed by a clear, bright flame, with an absence of steam or smoke, and also by the circumstance that the three boilers remain intact. If the exact source of the explosion is thus for the present a matter of doubt, we have sadly conclusive testimony as to its fearfully destructive character. The concussion was so great that the front and back walls of the grain mill were completely blown out, and the interior was reduced to a chaotic heap of stones and metal, under which it is believed no fewer than thirteen of the workpeople still lie. Of their fate we fear no doubt can be entertained. Even if they can be supposed to have survived the first effects of the explosion, the subsequent conflagration deprives us of any hope of their being got out alive. The explosion, while taking effect in front and rear, does not appear to have immediately brought down the flooring of the upper portions of the building, although the roof fell in. As will be seen from the narrative of a survivor given below, several of the men in the upper flats miraculously escaped with their lives.

[The Glasgow Herald, July 9, 1872]

In the neighbourhood of the works the explosion was also attended with the most disastrous consequences. Opposite the Flour Mills in Commerce Street is a cab stand, which at the time was occupied only by one cab and horse, near which, and at the doorway of the South-Western Railway goods station, stood a lorry laden with bales of cotton. When the front wall fell the animal in the lorry was instantaneously killed, while the cart, with the bales which it held, was buried in the ruins of the mill. At the time of the explosion the cab driver was inside the machine taking dinner, and as if by a miracle escaped without serious injury. His horse was injured, and the cab was greatly damaged. At the same time, five men were seen to creep out from the debris, each bearing evidence, in scorched faces and torn clothes, of the injuries they had sustained. One of the missing men, a joiner, who was standing beside one of the workmen, was blown amongst the debris into the street, while his neighbour was quite uninjured. The explosion, we need hardly say, was heard at a great distance, and created intense excitement, crowds of people hurrying from all directions to the scene of the disaster. We subjoin a list of

### PERSONS MISSING.

1. Arthur Farn, Camden Street, married, and has a wife and family.
2. John Rodger, West Street, unmarried.
3. Thomas M'Coah, Coburg Street, unmarried.
4. James Leing, recently married.
5. James Tanner, a boy.
6. John Young, a boy.

before a blinding cloud of smoke and sand. From what we have said, it will be understood that the total destruction of the flour mills was only a question of a very few hours. Unfortunately, the pressure of water for the purposes of the firemen, both in Centre Street and in Commerce Street, was not sufficiently great, and the steam-engine, from which two jets of water were thrown, was supplied from the harbour. If the resources of the Brigade in this respect had been better, the fire, in so far as it could be successfully attacked, might have been got under in a shorter time, although the ultimate damage of the conflagration would not have been much, if at all lessened.

Passing from the main buildings in connection with the flour mills, we come now to speak of the corner building fronting Commerce Street and Clyde Place. The lower storey of this tenement was tenanted by James Burnett, spirit dealer, and Messrs Julius Pinto & Co., clothiers and outfitters, while the two upper storeys were occupied as dwelling houses. The top flat was quite destroyed, the roof being burned off, but the lower storeys were partially saved, although in the case of the clothier's shop the stock must be greatly damaged by water. Messrs Pinto & Co., we understand, are insured to the full amount. The tenants in the dwelling houses were unable to remove any of their furniture, which may be regarded as either altogether destroyed or hopelessly damaged. Adjoining this building on the west is a four-storey structure, fronting Clyde Place. In the ground flat are the premises of Messrs Wm. Rankin & Son, ship store merchants, and Mr J. D. Walker, tobacconist, the contents of which were more or less damaged by fire and water. Messrs Muir & Sons, also, had here a front shop, and occupied the three upper storeys as granaries. The roof of the building was destroyed, and the stores of Indian corn in the granaries streamed out of the windows and collected in great heaps on the pavement below. The fire was prevented from extending farther in this direction, the Bute Hotel, which adjoins the granary on the west, and to which we have already referred in a sad connection, being saved by the exertions of the firemen. Passing up the hotel staircase two or three hours after the fire broke out, we looked out from the topmost window upon the far-extending ruins which smouldered beneath. The charred and scorched machinery still marked the site of the grinding mill, but all else was blackened burning walls and smoking debris. The only auxiliary of the mills remaining was a tall stalk-connected with the engine shed, which stood quite secure. Returning by Commerce Street to the southern extremity of the works, we come to Gorbals Free Church. Here it appears that a portion of an ornamental window over the pulpit has been blown out by the explosion, while the windows of the session-house and the officer's house are similarly damaged. The extent of the loss in property and stock cannot yet be accurately ascertained; but we should think it will not be less than £100,000. Messrs Muir & Sons, we are informed, are fully insured to stock and





Source Illustrated London News.





March 18, 1889  
Milton House  
166/170 Cowcaddens Street

## DESTRUCTIVE FIRE IN GLASGOW.

DAMAGE £15,000 TO £20,000.

A destructive fire occurred in Glasgow between one and two o'clock this morning. The warehouse of Messrs D. Macphail & Company, general drapers, Milton House, 166 to 170 Cowcaddens Street, was entirely destroyed, and damage done to the extent of between £15,000 and £20,000.

The building was a very handsome stone structure, four storeys and attics in height, and occupied a prominent site near the Grand Theatre. The outbreak was discovered at five minutes past one o'clock. The presumption is that the flames must have some time previously got a good hold of the contents of the warehouse, for at the time mentioned the windows were blown out into the street with a loud explosion. Flames poured out of every window on all the five floors, and almost immediately the roof fell in with a loud crash, disengaging showers of sparks and burning embers, which, carried upwards by the force of the fire, landed on adjoining buildings, to their imminent danger. The warehouse was closely built in on three sides with dwelling-houses, one block of which, to the west, separated it from the Grand Theatre. Fortunately the wind was blowing from that direction, and that building escaped

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[The Glasgow Herald, March 19, 1889]

damage. The fire brigade from the Central establishment in College Street, with all the engines at their command, were on the ground within a few minutes of the time when the alarm was first given, but they were powerless to stop the progress of the flames. Floor after floor gave way, and before half past one o'clock the whole of the interior of the building was gutted. The contents continued to blaze in the basement for several hours, but danger to adjoining property was by this time at an end. Whilst the flames were at the greatest height the heat was very intense. The paint on the woodwork of the houses on the other side of the street was scorched and blistered, and it was impossible for the firemen to stand in front to direct water on the building. Naturally considerable alarm prevailed among the inhabitants of the dwelling-houses in the vicinity, and many persons began to carry out their furniture. As showing the danger to property in the neighbourhood it may be mentioned that large burning brands were carried by the wind into Matland Street, and that sparks fell in showers along the east end of Sauchiehall Street and in West Nile Street.

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# SPECIAL EDITION

HERALD OFFICE, 8 A.M.

## DISASTROUS FIRE IN GLASGOW.

### FOUR FIREMEN KILLED AND TWO INJURED.

About three o'clock this morning fire was discovered to have broken out in the extensive premises in Renfield Street owned 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. Hoses were brought to play on the burning woodwork from Cowcaddens Street through an entrance to a terrace, 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 same time a considerable number of firemen were on the 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 succeeded their efforts, pointing out where the men had last been seen. 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

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 are 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 the ambulance wagons to their homes 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 went 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.

[The Glasgow Herald, January 7, 1898]

Jan. 7, 1898  
W.&R. Hatrick & Co.  
Wholesale and export druggists  
152/170 Renfield Street



View from the interior of the building (which had been erected in 1881), looking across Renfield Street to a crowd of curious Glaswegians. Photo Glasgow City Archives, Deposited Collections.





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They were ordinary working men, many of them migrants from Ireland and the Highlands. Home was a five-storey lodginghouse off Gallowgate in Glasgow.

But early in the morning of November 19, 1905, fire broke out without warning. Blind panic ensued as men tried to flee. A one-legged man in desperation broke a thick fanlight, enabling him and some others, including a blind man, to escape on to the roof. But many unfortunates were trapped on the upper floors. In the event, 39 men lost their lives, and another 24 were seriously injured. (...)

The lodging-house - known as "N° 2 home" - stood at 39 Watson Street. It was owned by Councillor William Nicol, who owned a similar establishment in the same street and who was in Manchester on Glasgow Corporation business on the day of the disaster.

About 360 people were asleep when the lodging-house caught fire. (...) "the building was densely populated, with men sleeping in wood-lined cubicles and with only one exit to the street through a turnstile".

The fire "spread very rapidly, trapping those who couldn't escape on the upper floors." Public attention was swiftly drawn to fire and building regulations and the urgent need to improve them, and an Inquiry was quickly established.

The blaze was reported extensively by the Glasgow Herald in a report headlined "Appalling calamity in Glasgow". The report began: "A calamity appalling alike in its character and its conse-

quences occurred in the city yesterday morning".

It added: "None of the survivors are able to give a clear, still less a graphic, description of the scene. Only the imagination can picture the despair and the panic, and the frantic rush for life of several hundreds of undisciplined men of all ages, from youth to senility, called in an instant to face death in its most appalling form.

"So fierce was the fire and so dense the smoke they had to fight that, for those who were unable to escape, the fatal struggle was mercifully brief - so brief that some of them perished apparently without an effort to leave their beds".

The dead included many labourers. Others had been employed as bakers, brass-refiners or asphalt workers.

A one-legged survivor, Donald McNab, described as a "smart-looking young man", saved several people by smashing a fanlight of thick glass with his crutch as the flames grew closer. Many survivors found themselves in the freezing street, naked or with very few clothes on.

As 130 of the men were later being driven from Central Police Station to Barnhill Poor-house, members of the public came up and pressed gifts of money, food and clothing on them. Watson Street had been the scene of another tragedy a few years earlier, when 15 people were crushed.

[*The Glasgow Herald*, July 19, 2017]

## November 19, 1905 39 Watson Street Lodging





# APPALLING CALAMITY IN GLASGOW.

## MODEL LODGING-HOUSE ON FIRE.

### THIRTY-NINE LIVES LOST AND TWENTY-FOUR PERSONS INJURED.

#### HARROWING AND EXCITING SCENES.

#### MIRACULOUS ESCAPES—INTERVIEWS WITH SURVIVORS.



men were taken to the Central Police Office buildings not far distant. Then the officials were faced with the two-fold problem of housing over 100 homeless people and providing them with clothing. In the solution of these difficulties the aid of the Parish Council authorities was invoked. About nine o'clock the Inspector for the City Parish (Mr. J. B. Motion) was communicated with, at his residence at Onslow Drive, and he promptly put the machinery under his control in operation. He proceeded to the chambers of the Parish Council at George Street, and called out the officials of the transport department with their motor van and three ambulance waggon. He also instructed the Governor of Barnhill Poorhouse to forward a supply of wearing apparel to the Central Police Chambers, and to arrange for the accommodation of the disheebred men. Having thus provided for the clothing and the transport of the sufferers, Mr Motion next proceeded to the police headquarters and personally superintended the carrying out of his instructions. About a dozen cases requiring attention for minor injuries were first dealt with, and sent to Barnhill. The remainder were then forwarded in relays. To expedite the work the vehicles of the parish authorities were reinforced by two omnibuses from Messrs James Henderson (Limited). In this way all the sufferers, numbering about 120, had been taken from their temporary quarters by noon.

Lord Provost and the Calamity. Lord Provost Bilsland, who was informed of the calamity, arrived early in the day at the scene of the fire, and took an active part in relieving the distress of the sufferers. Councillor Cleland, convener of the Watching and Lighting Committee, was in attendance, as were also Chief-Constable Stevenson and Firemaster Paterson. The Lord Provost briefly addressed the people in the Muster Hall at the Central Police Office before they were taken in charge by the parochial authorities. His Lordship and Mr Cleland also visited the injured at the infirmary. Chief-Superintendent Orr and Dr Lethian, the casualty surgeon of the Central Division, were early on the scene, and rendered valuable assistance. Councillor Nicol, the proprietor of the home, was in Manchester yesterday on Corporation business, along with Bailie Willock and Mr David Elder, of the Town-Clerk's office. Mr Nicol, on hearing of the disaster, decided to return to Glasgow immediately, travelling by the train due at seven o'clock this morning. He is greatly grieved at the loss of life that has taken place, and is anxious to do what he can to relieve the distress of the sufferers by the disaster.

### THE ILL-FATED BUILDING.

No. 2 Home, which was the scene of the fire, is situated at the top of Watson Street, on the west side. It is bounded on the north by Greene Street, on the east by High Street, and on the south by Macpherson Street, a narrow street, which divides the two lodging-houses, controlled by Councillor Nicol. It is substantially built stone building, and had accommodation for about 400 men. On the ground floor, entering from the right side of the hall, is the dining-room, and on the other side is the recreation-room, both spacious apartments. On this floor also there is accommodation for 60 sleepers. The three flats above are occupied wholly by beds, or, in the language of the patrons, banks. The accommodation is as follows:—On the first floor, 120, on the second, 120 and on the third, or attic-floor, 60, a total of 360. The actual scenes of the outbreak were on the third floor. The cubicles are constructed entirely of wood, the ceiling as well as the floor being wood, and the cubicles are divided into each other by partitions of wood. On one side the bed was built on another side. On one side the bed

to the frightened men the passage to safety. But presently a more awful light illuminated the place. The noise of the crackling of the burning wood in Section K mingled with the screams of the sufferers who were hurled, and the flames glowing through the dense clouds of smoke, lit up the scene, revealing a horde of struggling men, some only scantily clothed, and many quite naked. Fortunately the prompt opening of the doors relieved the pressure on the stairs, and the bulk of the men got safely out on to the street. The bodies who were in the cubicles in the part of Section E where the fire originated did not fare so well. Many awoke to the sense of the peril too late, and in some cases they were literally burned to death where they lay in their narrow cubicles. Some of the bodies are charred, but in the majority of cases death seems to have been due to suffocation. By the time the brigade arrived Section E was in a blaze, and the flames were shooting through the third floor windows. Several of the lodgers in the doomed portion of the building, finding, however, that the flames were closing in on them by the flames, made for the fourth or attic floor. The lodgers here were in a particularly perilous plight. The floor underneath was enveloped in flame, and the windows so far from the ground to offer a means of escape. The flames, however, did not reach the attic floor. The men made for the stair, and were successful in gaining the street. Some exciting scenes took place on the burning flat. At least one man, rendered desperate by fear, leaped from one of the windows, landing practically in the arms of a watchman. Another man made his way to safety by the fire escape.

#### SHELTER FOR SUFFERERS.

Watson Street is a dark, uninteresting thoroughfare, and its model lodging-houses are its chief features. In the day time it is a quiet street, but at nightfall it becomes lively in a most kind of way, and acquires a bad reputation. It is frequently the scene of offends, and the association of the street with such things is doubtless the cause why people who live in its vicinity do not pay much attention to the rows that occasionally take place. On the night of the calamity, however, the scene was known as the "Star Home." It is smaller than the homes across the way, giving accommodation for only 120 lodgers. The sleepers in the Star Home were awakened early yesterday morning by shouts proceeding from the neighbouring model. They did not greatly concern themselves, being under the impression that it was merely revellers, who not infrequently break the morning quiet of Watson Street. Some of them got out of their beds and looked out of the windows, but when they saw flames shooting from the windows of No. 2, the alarm among them spread, but though a few went on to the street the majority contented themselves with such a view of the scene as could be gained from the windows. Presently the men were seen pushing their heads above the windows, and several of them, clothes in order, were seen in the shelter in the "Star." It was a bitterly cold morning, and assistance was readily given to as many of the unfortunate lodgers from Home No. 2 as could be accommodated in the "Star."

#### THE BURNED FLOOR.

The third floor, where the fire originated, had been completely burned out. Yesterday it presented a scene of desolation, the blackened walls of the cubicles bearing witness to the ravages of the flames. In some cases the beds, clothes showed no signs of having suffered from the flame, and on a "locker" here and there lay a pipe, a box of matches, or a roll of tobacco. No. 1 Home was thronged all day with the lodgers, but little excitement was manifested. Some of them were acquainted with several of the victims. They believe to have been the worst that life has to offer, and they were full of sympathy and grief. They bore themselves as though nothing untoward had happened. They swarmed round the "hot-plate" or banded themselves in leaving out on the rick tables of the dining hall their frugal meals. In the evening, it may be added, was originally erected for warehouse purposes by Mr W. G. Millar. It was converted into a lodging-house for Mr Robert Burns. It came into possession of Councillor Nicol about three years ago, and has been conducted under his management since that time.

#### THE LODGING-HOUSE REGULATIONS.

From Mr William Nicol, jun., a statement was obtained as to the regulations of the lodging-house. The ticket office is open from six o'clock till eleven, and the lodgers arrive in a steady stream. As a rule they proceed at once to make supper in the kitchen on the first floor, which extends to South Street for a considerable distance. The inevitable pathetic scenes were enacted. A wife had the melancholy duty of identifying her husband, brother identified brother on several occasions, and a sister fainted on seeing the fire had obtained such mastery that Mr Paterson was considerably surprised in the work of identification by a number of morbid-minded individuals who crowded up stairs to the mortuary ostensibly to aid in the effort, but who, as a matter of fact, were animated only by a desire to be participants in the scene.

the fire and the stampede which followed. Naturally, firemen, policemen, and other willing helpers devoted their attention first to these men.

#### AID FOR THE INJURED.

Innumerable rescues were effected with skill and celerity born of experience, and as the helpless forms were tenderly borne outside, where they received first aid from Casualty Bureau Latham, Fletcher, Green, Chalmers, and M'Lachlan. They were then conveyed to the Royal Infirmary in the waggon of the St Andrew's Ambulance Association. The sight of those sufferers made a deep impression on the spectators, who were more visibly affected when the somewhat sombre vans of the employed types used by undertakers drove up and discharged their offices to those who had lost their lives in the awful holocaust. When the injured had been attended to and removed, the bodies of the dead were reverently carried to three vans and conveyed to the mortuary at the Central Police Station. The short route up South Street, George Street, and South Albion Street was lined with spectators, many of whom were moved to tears. As a rule the habits of model lodging-houses lead friends live, and few if any of the injured or the dead were recognized as they were removed from the portals of the "Star Home" till a late hour last night. A hush seemed to lie over the crowd, which was composed mainly of the inhabitants of the district. Here and there a silk hat and a frock-coat betokened the presence of a man from other quarters, and occasionally a clergyman loomed up in the fog.

#### IN THE MORTUARY.

The mortuary in the Central Police Chambers has been the centre of many sad scenes, but it is questionable if a more melancholy spectacle has ever witnessed within its gloomy and forbidding walls than that of yesterday. From early morning till a late hour in the evening the precincts of the Police Chambers were completely blocked by anxious crowds, more or less desirous to glean information as to the extent of the calamity and assist in its identification. A moving incident occurred about eight in the morning, when 150 inmates of the home were escorted from Watson Street to the policeman's muster room. A proportion were absolutely without clothing, some had been provided with blankets, others had a few coats or head dress of any kind, and none had boots or shoes. The Lord Provost, Bailie Edward Watson, and Councillor Cleland were among those who visited the man while they were at breakfast—thoughtfully provided by Mr William Nicol, jun. His Lordship and Councillor Cleland addressed them in turn, each emphasizing with them, and promising to see that everything that could minister to their comfort was done. The men were provided with clothes, and later in the forenoon they were driven to Barnhill Poorhouse in a motor van, where they were to be their departure was witnessed with sympathy and interest. Several members of the crowd surrounded the vehicles and pressed gifts of money, food, and clothing upon the occupants, who received grateful for these little attentions and drove away in a brighter frame of mind than that in which they entered the muster room. The scene in the mortuary was chaotic in the extreme. Only twenty-seven of the bodies could be accommodated within its dining room, eleven were placed in a large cadaver cell, and some were removed to a smaller cell hard by. The majority of the bodies were those of men in the prime of life, the average age being about forty. The faces of the majority were a calm, peaceful expression. Others were contorted as if they had suffered much in the stampede, and only one or two bore traces of burning. Identification was slow, and the authorities were compelled to regulate the crowds who crowded anxious to assist in the process, and they had to be kept at a distance from the long queues which extended to South Street for a considerable distance. The inevitable pathetic scenes were enacted. A wife had the melancholy duty of identifying her husband, brother identified brother on several occasions, and a sister fainted on seeing the fire had obtained such mastery that Mr Paterson was considerably surprised in the work of identification by a number of morbid-minded individuals who crowded up stairs to the mortuary ostensibly to aid in the effort, but who, as a matter of fact, were animated only by a desire to be participants in the scene.

#### LIST OF THE DEAD.

The following is a list of the dead so far as they have been identified. The names are given in the order in which they were identified.

man in which the authorities had copied with the disaster. The citizens, he remarked, would well feel proud of their officials.

#### FINDING THE DEAD.

John Findlay, a thick-set, about thirty-five years of age, I have been staying in the last three weeks. When I woke heard something like a roar taking place. I went out on the roof of the police office. I was in the narrow escape, for an old who lay two beds from me, the dead.

#### FIREMASTER'S STATEMENT.

The building in which the sad calamity took place is five stories in height, with mansard roof, flat on the top. It is timber-lined throughout, and is fitted up with wooden beds or cubicles on the first, second, and third floors and also in the attic, the basement being used as the kitchen of the establishment. The access to the upper floors is by means of a broad staircase rising from the centre of the building and having no connection with the outer walls. The alarm of fire was received at the Central Station, which is only about a hundred yards distant from Watson Street, at ten minutes before six o'clock. It had been observed by a watchman belonging to the Cleansing Department, who communicated with the Fire Brigade by private wire. Realizing the gravity of the situation, Mr Paterson had an engine and a fire engine on the scene in course of a couple of minutes, but the flames had made so rapid progress that by this time all the windows on the third floor, in which the outbreak had taken place, were alight. Consternation reigned among the inmates of the burning building. Some had rushed to the street naked, others with bedrags around them or half-aided in such articles of clothing as they had been able to snatch in their alarm on being suddenly aroused from their slumbers. Orders were at once given that a couple of hose should be taken to the third floor, where the fire was raging, but it was with the greatest difficulty that this could be done. The staircase was filled with men in a state of nudity or scantily clothed. The wildest excitement reigned, men yelling, shouting, and obstructing the firemen, disregarding all appeals to clear the way and make for the street. On reaching the scene of the fire the branchmen with a couple of hose were stationed at the entrances from the landing, and played on the rapidly spreading flames to the right and left. A large staff of men were at the same time detached for the even more important work of rescue. A section of the firemen, assisted by men from the salvage corps, entered the burning apartments, and at great personal risk brought out a number of the inmates which they found in the corridors in a dazed and half-manebolic condition. Another section ascended to the attic floor, where the heat was intense, and which was filled with a blinding, suffocating smoke. In the darkness it was a work of great difficulty for the firemen to prosecute their task, but from this floor also a number of men were taken. Altogether between thirty and forty men were rescued in a partially manebolic state, and sent to the infirmary. By this time the fire had obtained such mastery that Mr Paterson was considerably surprised in the work of identification by a number of morbid-minded individuals who crowded up stairs to the mortuary ostensibly to aid in the effort, but who, as a matter of fact, were animated only by a desire to be participants in the scene.

#### A BLIND MAN'S EXPERIENCE.

William Frederick Nesbit, about 40 years of age, saw home last night, and got in at eleven o'clock. I slept soundly until the cry of "Fire" Imm about for my clothing, but could do nothing to save my life. For about twenty minutes I smelt smoke, and almost flames sweeping along the way was a great noise, and I the men were rushing to the next bank to me called just as there was no time to save my life. For about twenty minutes were getting through the roof backwards and forwards in bodies. At last I made my way by means of which the out on the roof. I clutched save my life, and I was in my body outside. I then groped and came to a square pillar where I sat down. I was in case I should go too near the fall over. George Finlay, a man of about 30 years of age, was crawling along the roof, and he until he came to the ladder down to the hatchway, and brought down to the street. The roof nearly half an hour ago, and I was in my trousers and a shirt on my back taken to the Police Office in a motor car.

#### MANAGER'S STATEMENT.

Mr William Nicol, jun., said in the morning that the fire broke out in the kitchen of the building in which the calamity took place.

A calamity appalling alike in its character and its consequences occurred in the city early yesterday morning. In the model lodging-house at 59 Watson Street, occupied by Councillor William Nicol, in which were housed for the night some 360 lodgers, fire suddenly broke out. Most of the inmates were asleep, and so rapidly did the flames gain possession of the portion of the building in which they originated that little or nothing could be done to rescue them, and thirty-nine persons met their death, while twenty-four received injuries of a serious character. Watson Street is

stairway owing to the smoke. The whole of the occupants of the two upper stories were thus caught as if in a trap. From the third floor a rush was made to the attic in the hope of finding an exit by the roof. The plight of the poor people was intensified by the fact that most of them were practically nude, and that even should a way of escape be found, they had to pass into the bitter cold of the night in this deplorable condition. For a time it seemed as if the holocaust were to assume frightful magnitude. Arrived at the attic, the only means of getting through to the roof was by a small single-pane skylight. Meanwhile the fire was raging along the third flat, and volumes of heavy smoke filled the upper apartment, almost stifling the



One of the most extensive and disastrous fires that has occurred in Glasgow for several years broke out shortly after midnight in Ingram Street within 30 yards of the Central Fire Brigade premises. It seems almost incredible that so great a conflagration should have developed literally at the doors of the institution manned by the men whose duty it is to fight the flames, but when one realises the nature of the outbreak and the inflammable description of the material lodged within the buildings now reduced to ruin it is not so surprising after all. The block destroyed extends from Shuttle Street to High Street, the frontage covering roughly 80 yards. It was a splendid piece of masonry, standing four storeys high, and was occupied by a large number of tenants as warehouses, in which were stocked wines and spirits, clothing, boots and shoes, hands and legs of pork, and divers other kinds of produce.

At a quarter past twelve o'clock there was no sign of fire. The brigade staff on duty were standing about in the muster room adjoining the hall in which the motor vehicles and other paraphernalia is housed. An outbreak of fire across the street was bound to be immediately noticed. At twenty-one minutes past midnight a member of the brigade detected a lurid like glare in a window on the top storey of the buildings opposite. Ere he had time to realise what he had seen, flames burst out of the window.

What caused the outbreak is not at present known. A rumour spread that

it had originated by a gas explosion, but no confirmation of that theory has so far been forthcoming. Whatever the source of the fire, it soon enveloped the building from top to bottom, and in less than 15 minutes the place was a seething mass of flames. The lurid glare attracted people from many quarters, but even when the crowd became large little difficulty was experienced by the police in preventing the onlookers hampering the efforts of the firemen, for the heat was intense. (...)

Shortly after one o'clock the masonry of the top storey crashed into the street. The movement of the wall, fortunately, was observed, and a warning shout caused the firemen to rush into the station. Some of them were within an ace of being felled to the street and buried beneath the mass of stone and lime and iron pillars. Along with the wall came down a telephone standard, carrying many wires, which hung over the main doorway of the brigade premises like a screen. The collapse of the wall also damaged the lines of hose to such an extent that they were rendered useless, and reserve supplies had to be brought into operation. Still, it was obvious that the attempts made to check the fire were absolutely futile. (...) There was a pathetic touch of irony in the spectacle of the Glasgow Fire Brigade having to turn the hose upon their own headquarters, which by one o'clock were almost red hot.

[*The Glasgow Herald*, August 17, 1909]

## August 17, 1909 "Great Fire of 1909" (Ingram Street)

Mitchell Library, Glasgow Collection, Postcards Collection.



Great Fire, Glasgow, August 1909; Damage, £250,000









Kingston Dock, Glasgow, was destroyed by fire yesterday, the damage being officially estimated to amount £160,000. The conflagration, by reason of its character and the area of destruction and the havoc wrought, is unique in the history of the city, and in this country at least is without parallel. (...)

Kingston, the oldest dock on the Clyde, was opened in 1867, and cost £155,000. It has a water area of 5<sup>1/2</sup> acres, a depth of 13 ft. at low water, 823<sup>1/2</sup> yards of quayage, and an entrance of 60 ft., which is crossed by a swing bridge. The dock, which is situated on the south side of the river, has its southern boundary on Paisley Road, its northern in Windmillcroft Quay, and is bounded on the east by West Street and on the west by Springfield Lane. The whole of that vast extent was for hours yesterday like a raging furnace, a fringe of flame surrounding the water area on all sides. (...)

Like many another great conflagration it had a simple beginning. For some time operations have been in progress with the object of widening and piling the quay walls. Yesterday morning men were engaged at the dock driving holes through piles by means of pneumatic borers. At the west side of the dock, near Dundas Street, this work was being performed. The piles are saturated with creosote, and the heat generated by the pneumatic boring, or rather what is known as the singeing process, set the pile in a flame. It was

like a spark to tinder. Within a few seconds the flames had seized on the other piles, and although a hose was promptly turned on it proved a futile check. According to an eye witness, the flames spread ravenously eastwards, along the quayside and sheds with the swiftness of a "galloping horse". The Fire Brigade received the alarm at 8.27 a.m., and the Central and Southern Brigades were on the scene in a few minutes, followed immediately by detachments from Govan, Partick, Queen's Park and Springburn. From then onwards the brigade operated without pause, and it was not after three o'clock in the afternoon that the ravages of the fire were checked. The entire line of sheds on the southern side was speedily a mass of flames, which, catching the sheds on the eastern side, spread along the quayage at West Street, thence seizing on the sheds running along the north side. Meanwhile the sheds bordering Springfield Lane had also caught, so that for hours there was a raging square of fire. Had the outbreak been confined to the sheds the task of the firemen would have been less difficult and, as a matter of fact, the flames there were got under with comparative ease. The fuel which fed the fire and gave it fierceness was the piling along the quayside. It also is of course soaked in creosote, and the intense heat of the past few days had made the woodwork of the quays the more susceptible. Within the sheds also was a quantity of highly inflammable material, including a large number of

June 18, 1914  
Kingston Dock



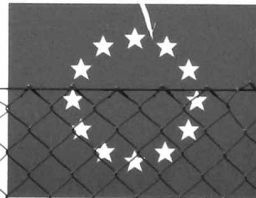
barrels of seal oil. Many of these caught fire, but fortunately, 200 of them fell into the river, consequent on the quay paving giving way. It was a curious sight to see the flames from the blazing barrels rising from the waters of the Clyde, which, however, speedily quenched them. The remainder of the barrels were rolled from the sheds into West Street.

An hour or so after the outbreak the quayage along the south side of the dock presented a scene of ruin. The heavy iron roofing lay torn and twisted, the masonry that coped the brick walls was dislodged and broken, and the

sheds along their whole extent were dense with smoke. Looking through the entrance gates in Paisley Road the scene suggested the fabled descriptions of an inferno. Smoke in huge volumes, black, yellow, and sometimes curiously blue, and laden with the odour of creosote, rose, obscuring the broken framework of the sheds and the water. It might have been the smoke from a myriad of industrial chimneys but for the red glow that shone through it, indication of the fiercely raging fire that was burning at the riverside.

[The Glasgow Herald, June 19, 1914]

# IFSD Tradeston Bridge



Project Part-Financed  
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European Regional  
Development Fund

Design and Build Contractor



Designer







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. (...)

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. (...)

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,

## July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1921 Building block Argyle and Miller Streets

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.

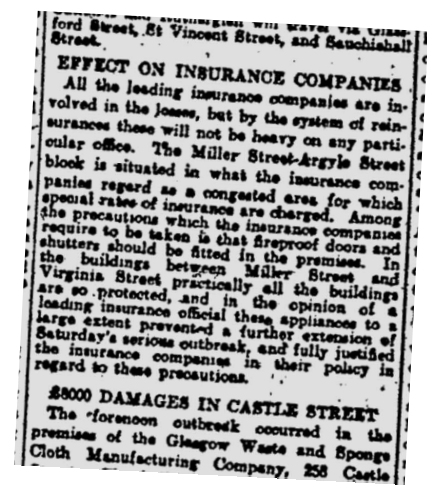
The crowds of sightseers, drawn from all parts of the city by the glare to join the usual Saturday night throngs in that busy thoroughfare, watched with fascinated interest the firemen's fight with the flames. Their curiosity was a source of inconvenience, however, and it required the services of a large 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.

[The Glasgow Herald, July 4, 1921]





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SPORTS DIRECT

WOW!  
OUR BEST  
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**£10,000 DAMAGE**

**ALARMING FIRE IN GLASGOW FLOUR MILL**

An alarming outbreak of fire which, but for the prompt measures of the Fire Brigade, might have involved the whole of the extensive premises of a Glasgow flourmilling company, occurred shortly before midnight last night in the Partick district of the city. The premises involved were those of Messrs John White and Sons (Limited), the Scotstoun Flour Mills, Scotstounmill Road, Partick, which are situated adjacent to the west bank of the Kelvin.

The outbreak originated in a large store about 30 feet in height and with a frontage and width of about 50 feet. Soon after the alarm was given flames were seen leaping from the roof of the building, and for a time the spectacle presented was disquieting. Detachments from the Central, Partick, Northern, Southern, and Western Divisions of the Fire Brigade were, however, quickly on the scene, and the men concentrated on the dual task of preventing the spread of the flames to the large buildings adjoining and of quelling the original outbreak, the operations being watched by a large crowd.

**VALUABLE CONTENTS.**

In this they were successful, for within an hour the outbreak was well in hand, and by one o'clock the fire was extinguished. In the short time, however, extensive damage had been done. The roof of the store was completely destroyed, and the top storey was gutted.

The building serves the purpose of a flour and wheat store, and, it is understood, contained about 8000 sacks of flour. About 1000 of these, it is stated, were on the top storey, and their loss alone is computed at about £2500. In addition the lower floors suffered damage by water. The total damage, it was estimated, would be in the neighbourhood of £10,000.

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December 25, 1925  
Flour mill  
Scotstounmill Road, Partick



[The Glasgow Herald, December 26, 1925]



# FOUR FIREMEN PERISH

## Christmas Eve Tragedy in Glasgow

### EAST-END WAREHOUSES GUTTED

ESTIMATED LOSS, £50,000

Four members of Glasgow Fire Brigade lost their lives while on duty at a fire in the East end of the city on Saturday night. The men, who were all attached to the Central Division, were:—

James Conn (40),	David Jeffrey (24),
Harry W. McKellar (31),	Morrison Dunbar (23).

The cause of the fire was a six-storey warehouse in Graham Square, and owing to the threatening circumstances many tenants of adjoining dwellings were warned out.

Some of the tenants were absent at the time of the outbreak, and on return—carrying with them, in numerous instances, their parcels got in the course of Christmas shopping—were surprised and alarmed when informed that it was unsafe to enter their houses.

A touching feature of the fire tragedy is that the men of the Eastern Division were enjoying Christmas festivities with their families in the Fire Station when the call came which was to mean death to some of their colleagues in the Central.

**FROM JOY TO SORROW** which they were drifting, and in which large crowds of spectators had gathered. The pungent smoke hung in dense clouds over the streets and sparks floated thickly down. The tramcar service, interrupted owing to the lines of hose across the street, was diverted for a period, and then was ultimately resumed over rail bridges. The tenants of houses, who had been Christmas shopping when the fire occurred, mingled with the crowd, their arms full of parcels. Some of them were unable to reach their homes, and experienced grave anxiety as the flames darted ominously higher and seemed to endanger the tenement.

A thrill ran through the watching crowd when the roof of the burning building collapsed amid an awesome pyrotechnic display of flame and sparks, to be followed a few minutes later by the thunderous crash of large portions of the walls into the interior of the structure. Dust and smoke arose in suffocating clouds. With this fresh development the career of the fire was checked, however, and half an hour later - that is, two hours after the raising of the first alarm - the outbreak was under control, and the occupiers of the tenements were informed that they might return to their homes. Lines of hose were in use all through the night, however, as a precaution against further outbreak.

About ten o'clock the fire was so far extinguished that several detachments of the Fire Brigade were ordered to prepare to return to their stations. The discovery was then made as the motors were about to depart that four firemen from the Central Station were missing. An exhaustive inquiry was at once begun, but it was early feared that the men had been trapped in the building when the walls and flooring had collapsed. So far as can be ascertained the four missing men, along others, were on the third floor at the south end of the building when the flames were first attacked. At that time the fire was confined largely to the northern end of the building, and it is assumed that with great fortitude the men had pressed some distance through the building towards the seat of the fire so as to be of greater service. (...)

The missing firemen are: James Conn (40), married, and with three of a family who has had 23 years' service with the brigade; H.W.M. Keller (31), married; David Jeffrey (24), single; Morrison Dunbar (23), single.

[The Glasgow Herald, December 27, 1927]

The fire was located in Graham Square, a cul-de-sac on the north side of Gallowgate, which leads to an entrance to the Corporation Cattle Market. The east side of the square consists, starting from the Gallowgate end, of a modern tenement and of a brick building of six storeys with a frontage of 136 ft. and a depth of 30 ft. This building, which was totally destroyed, along with corrugated iron sheds and a warehouse at the rear, contained business premises, workshops and a hotel. (...)

About 8 p.m. two constables on duty in Graham Square observed that fire had broken out in the premises occupied by James Houston. Further examination revealed that the outbreak had originated in a hoist at 34 Graham Square, which was used by several of the firms in the block. The constables

smashed the fire alarm and turned out several detachments of the Fire Brigade. By this time the fire was extending to other parts of the building. On the arrival of the first two detachments of the Fire Brigade from the Central Station great volumes of smoke pouring from the building indicated that the flames had taken a firm hold, and further reinforcements were summoned, along with four pumps and the fire escape. Firemaster Waddell took charge of the operations.

Immediately the fire was attacked both from the interior of the building and from the street. The intense heat, the density of the smoke, and the general threat to the structure, made it obvious at an early stage of the operations that it was highly perilous for the firemen to remain for long periods inside the building. Therefore, adopting what measures they could, the firemen continued the main attack from the roadway in Graham Square, from the roof of buildings to the east and south of the endangered premises, and even from the top of the fire escape. It soon became apparent that the entire structure was doomed, and that any measures adopted by the Fire Brigade would be futile except to restrict the area of devastation.

The flames were being strongly fanned by a north-easterly breeze, and showers of sparks and poisonous clouds of smoke were causing much alarm in Gallowgate towards which they were

## December 24, 1927

### Warehouse Graham Square

drifting, and in which large crowds of spectators had gathered. The pungent smoke hung in dense clouds over the streets and sparks floated thickly down. The tramcar service, interrupted owing to the lines of hose across the street, was diverted for a period, and then was ultimately resumed over rail bridges. The tenants of houses, who had been Christmas shopping when the fire occurred, mingled with the crowd, their arms full of parcels. Some of them were unable to reach their homes, and experienced grave anxiety as the flames darted ominously higher and seemed to endanger the tenement.

A thrill ran through the watching crowd when the roof of the burning building collapsed amid an awesome pyrotechnic display of flame and sparks, to be followed a few minutes later by the thunderous crash of large portions of the walls into the interior of the structure. Dust and smoke arose in suffocating clouds. With this fresh development the career of the fire was checked, however, and half an hour later - that is, two hours after the raising of the first alarm - the outbreak was under control, and the occupiers of the tenements were informed that they might return to their homes. Lines of hose were in use all through the

night, however, as a precaution against further outbreak.

About ten o'clock the fire was so far extinguished that several detachments of the Fire Brigade were ordered to prepare to return to their stations. The discovery was then made as the motors were about to depart that four firemen from the Central Station were missing. An exhaustive inquiry was at once begun, but it was early feared that the men had been trapped in the building when the walls and flooring had collapsed. So far as can be ascertained the four missing men, along others, were on the third floor at the south end of the building when the flames were first attacked. At that time the fire was confined largely to the northern end of the building, and it is assumed that with great fortitude the men had pressed some distance through the building towards the seat of the fire so as to be of greater service. (...)

The missing firemen are: James Conn (40), married, and with three of a family who has had 23 years' service with the brigade; H.W.M. Keller (31), married; David Jeffrey (24), single; Morrison Dunbar (23), single.

[The Glasgow Herald, December 27, 1927]

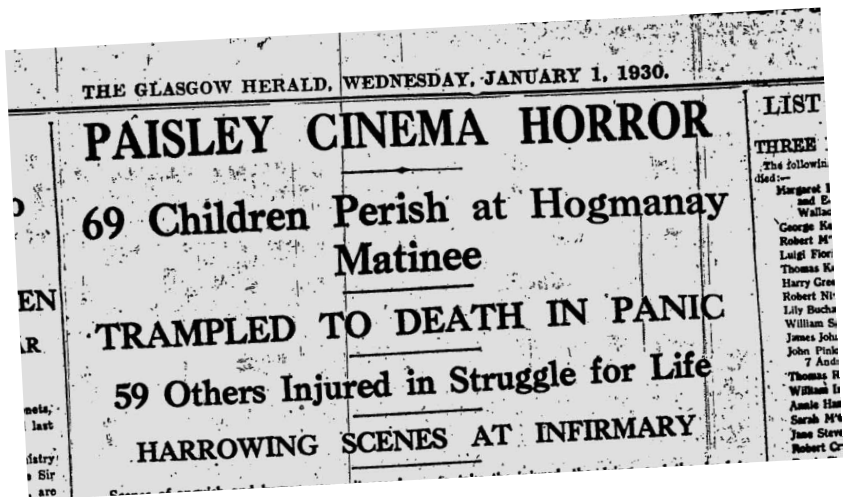


THE ~ DR

THE  
DR  
Partners of  
Quality Alms,  
Leaves, Berries  
& Nuts

T





Scenes of anguish and horror were witnessed in the Glen Cinema, Paisley, yesterday, when 69 children were killed and 59 others were injured as the result of a panic which arose suddenly on the call of "Fire".

About 2000 boys and girls, mostly from working-class homes, were witnessing a Hogmanay matinee performance in the cinema shortly after two o'clock, when dense clouds of smoke, caused by a film which had caught fire in the spool-room, were swept into the theatre from the vestibule.

The children immediately took fright and stampeded to a doorway behind the stage at the opposite end of the hall. To their horror, however, this doorway was closed and was protected on the outside by a closed iron gate. In a frenzied effort to escape the children screamed in terror. Some jumped from the balcony, many fainted, and their

bodies were trampled upon in the wild rush for safety.

All the windows in the building were smashed, and soon a large band of rescuers, including policemen, firemen, and tramway men, regardless of their own safety, laboured continuously until the entire audience was taken from the hall. All the available ambulance waggons in the town and several privately-owned motor cars were utilised to take the injured, the dying, and the dead to the Royal Alexandra Infirmary, where hurried preparations were made to deal with the emergency.

Agonising scenes were witnessed at the infirmary when parents and relatives, tortured by uncertainty, crowded at the entrance in an effort to obtain news of their children. Some women who actually succeeded in gaining admittance afterwards collapsed and had to be carried out again.

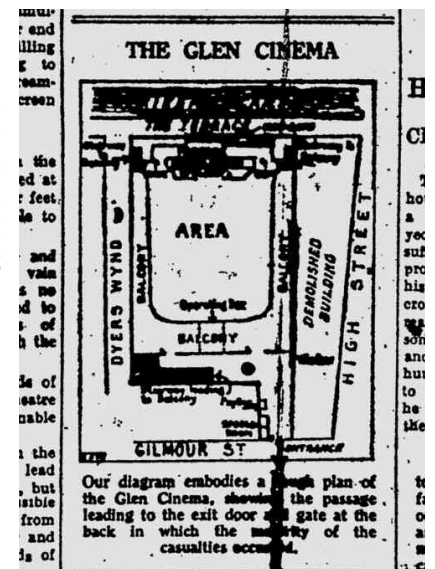
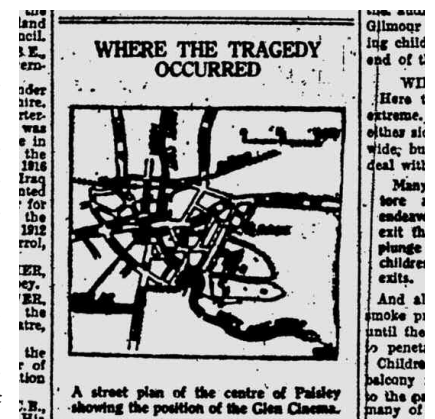
As the victims were carried into the infirmary it was impossible to find bed accommodation for them, and they were laid on mattresses in the corridors until they could be examined. Every minute another little figure was taken from the rest and carried over to a corner to be covered by a sheet.

Artificial respiration was applied, and several were saved by this means and were hurried to wards. Those who were not were added to the growing list of dead.

Accommodation in the infirmary mortuary was soon taxed to the utmost, and many of the bodies had to be laid in the Chapel to await identification. Parents and relatives were admitted one at a time, and many were so overcome that they had to receive attention on leaving the building.

[The Glasgow Herald, January 1, 1930]

## December 31, 1929 Glen Cinema Disaster Gilmour Street, Paisley







Ladbrokes

BIG MATCH  
RANGERS  
7/1

BLACK FRIDAY SPECIALS  
HUGE PRICES LIMITED TIME ONLY

BLACK FRIDAY SPECIALS  
HUGE PRICES LIMITED TIME ONLY

BLACK FRIDAY SPECIALS  
HUGE PRICES LIMITED TIME ONLY

BLACK FRIDAY SPECIALS  
HUGE PRICES LIMITED TIME ONLY



# 13 GIRLS DIE IN CITY FIRE

## Paratrooper on Ledge Helps Four to Safety

### CROWDS SEE VICTIMS FALL FROM WINDOWS

Thirteen girls lost their lives in a fire in a fashion store in Argyle Street, Glasgow, yesterday afternoon. Twenty-one people were injured.

Up to early this morning a man and two women were missing, and firemen continued their search of the debris until it was ascertained that they were safe.

Of the injured—who included two firemen and a policeman—all were allowed home except Isabella Carson (17), who is dangerously ill in the Royal Infirmary.

The death roll is the highest of any peace-time fire in the West of Scotland since the Paisley cinema disaster in 1929. Late last night police were still answering inquiries from anxious relatives of workers in the store—Grafton's (Fashion Specialists), Ltd.

Miss Clemenson, of Shotts, one of the victims, was engaged to be married. She began work in the store only two weeks ago. Her father is a patient in Law Hospital.

The fire is believed to have originated in or near the well of the lift, the shaft acting as a funnel and so spreading the fire to all parts of the building within minutes.

Argyle Street was thronged with shoppers and busy with traffic when the alarm was raised, and fire engines were brought to the scene with difficulty. The crowd quickly swelled to thousands, traffic was stopped, and side streets were jammed as police hustled the crowds away from the scene.

Early witnesses of the fire watched helplessly as the trapped girls threw open the top storey windows. The firemen were approaching the scene when two of the girls fell into the street. One of the two, Agnes Charnley, who fell 50ft. from the top storey, died later in the infirmary.

## List of Casualties in Fire

### The Dead

- Those who lost their lives in the fire included:—
- Agnes Charnley (16), 19 Morar Crescent, Coatbridge.
- Jemima McKenzie (18), Estate House, Palacerigg, Cumbernauld Station.
- Eva Smith (15), 103 Wilverton Road, Glasgow, W.3.
- Mamie Dickinson (22), 46 Altyre Street, Glasgow, E.2.
- Olivia June Smith, 24 Garry Street, Glasgow, S.4.
- Wilhelmina Clemenson, 13 Hawthorn Place, Allanton, Shotts.
- Janet Revel Robson (22), 508 Dumbarton Road, Glasgow.
- Sadie Walker (22), 15 Kirklee Road, Mossend.
- Irene Mills (20), 2 Breslin Terrace, Barhill.
- Mary Mooty (21), 31 Chapel Street, Gleland.
- Catherine Young Smith (15), 52 Gartness,

[The Glasgow Herald, May 5, 1949]

### Ex-Paratrooper's Rescues

A former paratrooper, who stood with one foot on a narrow ledge outside a fifth-storey window and grasped a rope pipe with one hand, helped four girls to escape from the fire.

Mr. Solomon Winetrobe, 71 Abbotsford Place, Glasgow (29), manager of the stock and invoices department of the warehouse, was in the office when smoke began to pour through the doorways and a voice shouted, "Get out quickly, girls."

Most of the girls ran to the doors leading to the main stairway, but they were forced back by smoke," he said in an interview last night. "I opened an emergency door leading to the fire escape, and the girls went out to the fire escape, but some returned, saying that they could not get down because of the smoke and flames. Others, I understand, got to the first floor, from which they jumped into the arms of firemen.

"When those who could not get down returned I climbed out at a window of the office, got one foot on to a ledge, and grasped a rope pipe with one hand. One by one as the girls came out through the window I pushed them under my outstretched arm and on to a ledge on top of the frontage of the cinema next door. I leaned as far back as I could while holding on to the rope pipe, so that any of the girls who should faint as they were escaping would fall against me.

"I banged on the glass to attract the attention of any who might still be inside. When none appeared I glanced inside, but the smoke prevented me from seeing anything. It was all I could do to follow the last of the girls on to the cinema ledge."

Mr. Winetrobe was last night suffering from severe shock as a result of his experience.

### Rooftop Climb

An eye-witness said, "I saw several girls climb out on to the window ledges of the top storey, and shortly afterwards a shower of glass fell to the street. Seconds later one of the girls fell from the top storey to the pavement. The crowd surged forward waving to the other trapped girls, and shouting 'Stay where you are, the firemen are on their way.' A minute before the arrival of the firemen, however, another girl fell into the street from one of the lower windows."

While the firemen were running out hoses and ladders other girls clambered out on to the roof of the building. They were seen walking along a ledge to a rope pipe leading down to the roof of an adjoining cinema. While clouds of smoke enveloped them from time to time, they climbed across the roof of the cinema and gained temporary refuge on the roof of a clothiers' premises.

One of the girls was able to descend a

### Danger Warning

Mr. Jack Morrison, managing director of Grafton's, was at work in his office on the third floor of the building when the alarm was raised. He had time only to gather together some of the girls of his staff, and the customers who were in the building, and see them safely from the premises.

Mr. John S. Mair, the secretary of the firm, was speaking on the telephone on the first floor, and just managed to run downstairs to safety.

Miss Isabella Douglas (18), 37 Robroynton Avenue, Glasgow, who worked in the stock and invoices department on the third floor, told "The Glasgow Herald" last night that shortly after 3.10 p.m. some of the girls in her department noticed smoke seeping into the room under the doors. "There were about 30 of us in the department," she said. "We didn't realise what was wrong, but heard a man shouting from downstairs, 'Girls, get out quickly.'"

Miss Douglas said that the girls normally reached their department from the ground floor by a passenger lift and did not use the stairs.

She added—"Mr. Solomon Winetrobe, manager of the stock and invoices department, opened the door leading to the fire escape, and all the girls in the department rushed for the stairway.

Some girls had collapsed from the effects of the smoke, and in the confusion





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MARKS & SPENCER

## September 28, 1953

### Stobcross Quay, Queen's Dock, Finnieston

More than 100 men and women working in an oil tanker at Queen's Dock, Glasgow, were rescued by tug and small craft yesterday when fire spread with alarming speed in a quay-side shed containing newsprint.

Shortly after a workman had seen smoke rising from the shed there was a series of explosions caused by the bursting of oxygen cylinders. Flames quickly caught hold of the wooden walls of the structure, and there was a danger that they might spread to the oil tanker, the Alva Bay, which was fitting out directly alongside.

One of the exploded cylinders shot through the roof of the shed and across the vessel, falling in fragments into the water. Another was blown over a roadway into an adjoining dock.

A squad of 120 men, who were finishing off the interior work before the ship runs its trials, and seven women cleaners from Port Glasgow found escape by the gangways cut off and had to clamber down ropes to safety.

The Alva Bay, which was later moved to avoid damage to her new paintwork, was not fully loaded but carried about 1500 tons of fuel oil.

Fanned by a strong wind, the flames spread rapidly along the length of the shed, but firemen who poured thousands of tons of water through dozens of lines of hose prevented the fire from extending to the entire quayside. The river fire float, summoned from Yorkhill Quay, lay under the stern of the Alva Bay and helped to bring the maximum possible number of hoses

into play. Although working in intense heat and under the constant threat of burning debris the firemen succeeded in isolating the blaze to a 200-yard section of the shed. Hundreds of heavy rolls of newsprint were destroyed.

Mr Neil Sharp, a tank scaler, said that the explosions made by the bursting cylinders sounded like a thunderstorm. *"It all happened within a few seconds"*, he added. *"It was astonishing how quickly the shed went up."*

For fear of further explosions, police closed the dock to hundreds of stay-at-home holidaymakers attracted to the scene.

Late last night, 15 lines of hose were directing more than 5000 gallons of water a minute into the still glowing mass of newsprint, which, like the shed, is a total loss. Firemen stood by throughout the night. A special watch was kept to ensure that sparks did not set light to neighbouring sheds. A senior fire officer said that there was as yet no indication of what had caused the fire.

[*The Glasgow Herald*, September 29, 1953]



The Finnieston crane at Stobcross Quay can be seen in the background and Queen's Dock is on the left of the photograph. Source Glasgow City Archives.





050 05  
City Centre  
Cathedral Square  
Lighthouse

Glasgow  
RIPPER



Three persons were killed and 25 injured when a crowded tramcar collided with a heavy lorry in Shettleston Road, Glasgow, yesterday, and went on fire. Flames spread the length of the tram within 30 seconds. The driver of the tramcar, David Blackhurst (29), Vernon Street, Maryhill, was thrown six feet back into the lower saloon, along with the control unit, resistance box, and front staircase.

Two women sitting on a side seat at the front were killed instantly. (...) Mr Blackhurst - who was doing an overtime shift on what should have been his day off, and who had transferred from another tram in which a fault had developed - was trapped and perished in the flames. (...)

The eight-wheeled lorry, loaded with 15 tons of steel castings, was at right angles across the road, and was about to back into the Parkhead Forge of William Beardmore and Co., Ltd., when the tramcar - travelling from Baillieston towards the city - ran into its rear. The driver of the lorry, Gerald Keown (36), 42 Barlanark Road, Easterhouse, tried to get off the ice-covered tramway track when he saw the tram approaching, and would have done so in about another second.

Passengers flung themselves from the top deck of the tram as the flames spread rapidly after a loud explosion from the resistance box. The intense heat drove back pedestrians who went

to the rescue.

A law student, Forrest Cairns (22), who was driving to his home at 35 Eckford Street, Shettleston, from Glasgow University, reached the tram as a workman was smashing the windows with an iron bar. Mr Cairns tried to lift a male passenger through a window, but was driven back by the heat.

One top-deck passenger, James Pitkeathly, 148 Killin Street, Sandyhills, Glasgow, had his hair burnt off as he struggled through flames on the platform. James Campbell, 1060 Shettleston Road, Glasgow, said he jumped from a top-deck window and then ran into the lower saloon to help three women and the conductress.

Within three minutes of receiving an emergency call a unit of Glasgow Fire Brigade arrived from Parkhead. By that time only the skeleton of the tramcar was left. It took the firemen one-and-a-quarter hours to free the bodies of the dead. A crane and a fork-lift truck were used to remove heavy castings and pull the lorry away from the tram.

The fire which spread so rapidly through the tramcar was electrical in origin, it was established later. The collision severed the main power cables and dislodged the resistance box. Cables and equipment were thrown into the lower saloon, causing severe flashing and short circuiting.



## January 28, 1959 Tramway fire Shettleston Road

Source The Herald Scotland



The metal chassis and framework of the tramcar immediately became "live" and the aluminium alloy structure melted and buckled under the intense heat, which caused the interior woodwork to go on fire.

The tram, a Coronation-type vehicle which had been in service since 1938, had about 25 per cent of timber in its structure mostly in the form of varnished facings and linings.

Experts are considering a theory that part of the metal load on the lorry

became electrically charged and helped to cause the sudden outbreak of fire.

Officials of Glasgow Corporation Transport Department said that this was the most severe collision involving a tramcar. It is at least 40 years since a passenger travelling in a Glasgow tramcar has been killed. Last year, trams were involved in 23 fatal accidents in the city, corporation buses in 15, other buses in nine, and trolley buses in none. (...)

[The Glasgow Herald, January 29, 1959]





Save up to £490 in the  
BT Black Friday event.  
No need to push or shove.

GLEN'S  
THE COOKERY'S  
WHERE IT'S AT.  
PASS THE PLATE.



Nineteen men of Glasgow's fire service perished last night when walls collapsed after explosions in a whiskey and tobacco bonded warehouse near the river Clyde at Anderston, in the centre of the city. The explosions were followed by the worst fire in Glasgow for many years and the occupants of tenements adjoining the warehouse, which belongs to Arbuckle Smith & Co, Ltd., were ordered out for their safety. (...)

There was little hint of tragedy when Glasgow firemen were summoned to investigate smoke issuing from a warehouse on Cheapside Street. Wearing breathing apparatus they were searching the building when, suddenly, there came the deafening roar of an explosion. Hundreds of tons of masonry were blown across the street, and a wall collapsed.

Flames which burst through the warehouse roof could be seen all over the city. So intense was the heat that attempts at rescue were impossible. Firemen at the top of 100ft, turntable ladders directing thousands of gallons of water on the fire were dwarfed by the flames.

Passengers boarding the Royal Scotsman for Ireland were showered with embers blown from the burning building. At Springfield Quay, where the motor vessel Yoma was berthed red-hot embers showered over the ship, and two tugs made preparations to remove her. Arrangements were also made to shift

the ore carrier Dunadd from terminus Quay to a berth out of danger.

Early this morning the west wall of the warehouse collapsed and the fire threatened to spread to buildings on the opposite side of Warroch Street, including a timber shed belonging to Harland and Wolff. Firemen prevented the flames spreading, however, and by 2 a.m. to have the outbreak under control. (...)

Onlookers said that one of the firemen who died was about to be raised on the tip of the extending ladder to tackle the blaze from Warroch Street, which runs parallel to Cheapside Street. The ladder was only partly extended, they said, when the force of the explosion struck him. He hung on the tip of the ladder with flames licking round him until the heat decreased and his colleagues were able to reach him. (...)

Five blocks of houses containing the homes of about 35 families were evacuated. Many of the displaced people made private arrangements to stay the night with friends and relatives, while others waited in near-by streets in the hope that they would be allowed to return to their homes.

Every vantage point from which the blaze could be seen was crowded with sightseers, young and old. Even the George V Bridge, almost a mile from the fire, was lined with people who had stopped on their way home. Streets

## March 28, 1960

# The Cheapside Street Whisky Bond Fire

## 76/120 Cheapside Street



[The Evening Times, March 29, 1960]

near Anderston Cross were lined with cars, nose to tail. The story of the death of some of the 19 firemen was told by a man who declined to give his name. He watched the firemen arrive in Warroch Street. He said: "They jumped from the fire engine and were trying to break down a door to gain entry, when the whole side of the building collapsed and engulfed them and the fire engine. There was

*nothing anyone could do as the flames immediately covered the area."* (...)

The warehouse contained 21,000 barrels of whisky, each barrel estimated to be worth £300.

[The Glasgow Herald, March 29, 1960]





SCOTISHPOWER

KPMG

Marriott HOTEL

16  
Anderson & Co. City Centre  
Bishop, Cairns & Edinburgh - R3

FOR RENT

FOR RENT

PAY HERE



October 28, 1961  
Metropole Theater  
116 Stockwell Street

# ROOF CAVES IN AS BLAZE SWEEPS "MET."

**FIRE** raged through the Metropole Theatre, Stockwell Street, Glasgow, to-day, causing heavy damage.

At the height of the blaze, with 10 units of Glasgow's fire brigade pouring hundreds of gallons of water on the flames, the roof collapsed.

Flames leaped high in the air and yellow-white smoke billowed out in dense clouds.

**Started in roof**  
From the "top" of turntable ladders in Howard Street and from the roof of a building in Metropole Land, at the rear of the theatre, firemen fought the blaze, which started in the roof of the theatre.

The fire was discovered shortly after one o'clock. Cafe proprietor Mr Zinor Parfidiou, whose premises adjoin the theatre, told the "Evening Times" that suddenly smoke filled his cafe and his customers rushed out into Stockwell Street.

**Power cables**  
Workmen from the corporation stood by ready to cut off the power from the overhead trolley bus cables in Stockwell Street if necessary.

Three girls in the theatre booking office in the foyer were warned out. There was no one else in the theatre at the time. Theatre manager Mr Sonny Allan was called from his home in Garribland Drive, Dennistoun, Glasgow.

Three-quarters of an hour after the fire was discovered flames were still raging fiercely in the roof. The Irish singer Bridie Gallagher is at present billed at the theatre in the "Bridie Gallagher Show."

**Plans**  
The roof of the theatre has been completely destroyed by fire and a great deal of damage has been done to the interior by water, but Mr Frutin said that if it were humanly possible to reopen the theatre this would be done as soon as possible.

Reconstruction work has been going on inside the theatre for some time. Only last week a new bar was opened and another is three-quarters of the way towards completion. Mr Frutin, who left the theatre at noon to-day when everything was in order, said that this morning he and the secretary of the company had been discussing plans which are in hand for the rebuilding of the gallery.

The Metropole's Christmas attraction, usually first in the field, was scheduled to open this year on Friday, November 17.

Clarko and Murray, Metropole favourites for many seasons past, were billed to head the cast in "Scotland Calling".

But this will be the first Christmas show not to open on time, for it is likely to be many months, before the theatre is in business again.

## AMATEUR

- P.O. Phones 6, Thorncliffebank
- Amfield 2, Carlaw 1
- Calderslea 3, Skelmorlie 2
- Holyrood 6, Woodside 2
- U.C.B.S. 5, Eastern Stags 1
- Cartha & Whitehill 1
- Dennistoun H. 2, Pollok Utd.
- Glasgow Utd. 5, Eastercraig
- Drumchapel 3, Brunswood 2
- Dumbarton Phoenix Utd. 6
- Lennox Amd.
- Mariatte 6, Levin's Utd. 3
- United Glas 1, Saracen
- Kilbride Y.M.C.A. 5, Rosy
- R.R. Springburn 8, Gifford
- East Kilbride Y.M. 3, Car
- Calton Thistle 4, Amnir
- Fleming Bros. 2, Claymoun
- Woodside 6, Hermitage
- Y. Bank Utd. 4, Cleburn 6

**Metropole may be reopened by April**

THE Glasgow Metropole, almost destroyed by fire on Saturday, may be reopened in less than six months.

This was the hope of Mr Alex. Frutin, the theatre's boss, to insurance officials, fire assessors, and master of works inspectors, surveyed the blackened theatre with its gaping roof.

Manager Sonnie Allan said: "Much will depend on the extent of the structural damage. It will be reasonable idea how long the reconstruction will take."

**WINTER SHOW**  
Mr Frutin has not yet given up hope of being able to find another theatre to house the winter show "Scotland Calling," which was due to open on November 17.

The firm owning the Granada Cinema at Parkhead Cross, but it is unlikely that the Granada will be suitable for rapid conversion into a theatre.



[The Evening Times, October 28, 1961]

[The Evening Times, October 30, 1961]



The James Watt Street fire on Monday 18 November 1968, was a fatal factory fire in Glasgow, Scotland. It was notable for the huge loss of life, with 22 employees killed, trapped in a building behind barred windows, a hangover from its previous use as a whisky bond. Around 100 firemen from Glasgow Fire Service attended this incident, which reinforced Glasgow's reputation for tragic fires in the 30 years after the Second World War.

The factory premises was located in James Watt Street, a street between Argyle Street and the Broomielaw on the north side of the River Clyde. It had previously been used as a whisky bond and in common with much of Glasgow's industrial premises at that time, had seen numerous uses over the years. The building consisted of a ground, first, and second floors, with basement. The previous use of the building resulted in high security measures, with barred windows meaning that in the event of a fire, escape could be compromised. In the following enquiry, it was discovered that the doors to the fire escape were locked from the inside. Julius and Samuel Stern ran the upholstery business B. Stern Ltd. on the upper floors. A glass company, G. Bryce, occupied the basement and part of the ground floor.

The alarm was raised at around 10:30, with the first crews arriving within five minutes. (...) 70 firemen attended to fight

the fire, with water poured onto the building from turntable ladders. It was found that efforts at rescue were futile due to the intense heat, and the difficulties in entering the building. Escape from the building had been prevented due to fire on the stairs, caused by polyurethane foam, and the escape doors from the first and second floors to the fire escape were found to have been locked from the inside. Eventually, no persons were seen at the windows, and any hopes of rescue for those inside ended when the roof of the building collapsed. Many attempts were made to enter the building where the employees were believed to be, but intense heat drove back the firemen. The Glasgow Fire Service personnel eventually gained access to the building, by cutting through the steel doors using oxy-propane cutting gear. The dead were found inside the factory to have died due to the inhalation of smoke, the burning of polyurethane foam resulting in poisonous fumes, fatal when inhaled.

[Wikipedia, consulted on Nov. 9, 2017]

**November 18, 1968**  
**A. J. & S. Stern's Upholstery Factory**  
**James Watt Street**

**THE GLASGOW HERALD**  
 TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 1968  
 CITY EDITION

**INQUIRY INTO FIRE DISASTER**

**“There would seem to be criminal negligence”—bailie**

**ONLY THREE ESCAPED**

**weighty problem?**

**Questions in the Commons**

**LANG'S**  
*Check them out*





Glasgow City Archives, Deposited Collections





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 Notices are subject to alteration to  
 conform to the standards of "The  
 Glasgow Herald."

# Fireman collapses and dies

A fireman collapsed and died when fighting a fire in Shawlands, Glasgow, early this morning.

Station Officer James Mathieson, aged about 48, had been called to 141 Deanston Drive, Shawlands, with two tenders from Pollok fire station.

He was leading his men up the stairs of the tenement to a fire in the top flat when he collapsed. Firemen with oxygen equipment attempted to revive him, but he was dead before an ambulance arrived.

It is believed he died of a heart attack.

Mr Mathieson was married with three of a family. His eldest son was to be married next week.

The fire was in a flat occupied by Mr Thomas Young, aged 22, his wife, Nancy, aged 22, and their 18-month-old baby daughter, Denise.

Mr Young said he smelt smoke and suddenly the settee next to him caught fire. He hurried his wife and child from the house, alerted neighbours, and then fought the blaze with pails of water while he awaited the firemen.

The blaze completely destroyed the flat and badly damaged the roof of the building. Seven families were temporarily evacuated from their homes.

**£500 FOR TEASET**

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[The Glasgow Herald, March 20, 1971]

● Lord Carrington

# FIREMAN DIES AT CITY BLAZE

Fire brigade officer James Matheson (48) collapsed and died early to-day during fire-fighting operations at a top-floor tenement flat at 141 Deanston Drive, Shawlands.

Mr Matheson, a station officer, is believed to have had a heart attack.

Mr Matheson, a married man with three grownup children, collapsed as he was running up the tenement stairs after arriving on the scene from Pollok fire station.

Seven families left the building for a time as firemen fought the blaze in the home of Mr and Mrs Thomas Young and their 18-month-old daughter Denise.

Although the flat was badly damaged, no one was hurt.

## Youth found

[The Evening Times, March 20, 1971]

March 28, 1970  
 141 Deanston Drive, Shawlands





The Kilbirnie Street fire, on Friday 25 August 1972, was a warehouse fire in the Eglinton Toll area (...), which killed 7 Glasgow Fire Service firemen in a flashover while they were trying to rescue a trapped colleague. What started as a routine industrial premises fire resulted in one of the highest losses of life for the UK Fire Service at a single incident in peacetime.

The warehouse premises at 70/72 Kilbirnie Street was used as a cash and carry warehouse by the Sher Brothers company, selling textiles, clothing and household goods. It was built as a stables in 1899, but in common with much of Glasgow's industrial premises at that time, had seen numerous uses over the years. It was a brick built construction of ground, first and attic floors, connected by internal stairs and a goods lift. The first floor was of concrete construction, and the attic floor of composite steel and timber, supported on cast iron columns. Internal partitioning consisted of timber frames with hardboard lining. An external steel stair opening off the attic and first floors acted as the fire escape route. Stock was arranged on steel frame shelving and stacked on the floor. The potential fire load was considered high following a fire prevention visit in December 1971 and again in March 1972. It had been occupied by the owners since 1970.

The tragedy happened in the premises of Sher Brothers, 70 Kilbirnie Street. More than 100 firemen had gone to the blaze which, at first, appeared to be confined to the attic of the three-storey building.

The seven firemen entered the blazing building and vanished into the thick smoke. Fears for the safety of the firemen rose when they failed to report back to their checkpoint after the time for their oxygen supplies to run out had expired. Although the building - a clothing warehouse - was still burning, firemen switched their pumps off to allow the search party to find the bodies.

The firemen were inside the building when the roof and rear wall collapsed at the height of the blaze.

The bodies were carried out on stretchers, covered by blue tarpaulins, while smoke was still pouring from the building. The stretchers were carried to ambulances by helmeted firemen - while their colleagues on turntable ladders, extended high above the building, were still pouring water on the flames.

[The Evening Times, August 25, 1972]

[Wikipedia, retrieved on Nov. 9, 2017]

# August 25, 1972

## Sher Brothers Warehouse

### 70/72 Kilbirnie Street



[The Evening Times, August 25, 1972]





[Glasgow City Archives, Deposited Collections.]





November 18, 1972

# Maryhill Road and Great Western Road

Scotland's greatest evening newspaper

The "TIMES" says...

## Fire dangers

THERE has been another serious fire in Glasgow which has this time claimed two lives, injured 31 people, and made 54 families homeless. The blaze began in a disused shop under tenements, and underlines the city's black record of tragic fires in warehouses and tenements.

One of the victims was a fireman, bringing the number of fire-fighters who have lost their lives at city blazes in the past 12 years to 27.

Mrs Nancy Ballantyne, convener of Glasgow Corporation police and fire committee, has put forward several recommendations and called for a co-ordinating committee to deal with all aspects of fire-fighting.

### MEASURES

She will ask the Lord Provost to see what steps can be taken to have all derelict property demolished, to have special precautions where there is empty property under occupied tenements, and to consider measures to ensure the safety of firemen and the accessibility of equipment into narrow lanes.

It would be wrong to comment on the precise causes of this fire in advance of whatever inquiry there may be, but the general principles put by Mrs Ballantyne are indisputable.

by Mrs Ballantyne are indisputable.

### EXPERTISE

A firemen's spokesman has made the point that increasingly the expertise of the firemen must be used in Glasgow as it is in other cities, not just to advise on safety in buildings but to help enforce local by-laws on fire prevention.

Sub-Officer Adrian McGill sacrificed his life in the Maryhill blaze while trying to save a trapped woman. How much wiser it would be to use the specialist knowledge the firemen possess before the event rather than put their lives in jeopardy.

From the "Evening Times"

**25 YEARS AGO**

Princess Elizabeth marries Prince Philip

[The Evening Times, November 20, 1972]



[Source The Evening Times]

On a bitterly cold Saturday afternoon in November 1972, Sub Officer Adrian McGill lost his life while trying to rescue a 43 year old woman from a burning building in Maryhill Road.

The fire had started in a disused furniture shop at 23 Maryhill Rd., one of a row of shops beneath a tenemental block housing many families.

Incredibly some residents had smelt smoke hours earlier but not taken any action. The speed with which the fire spread once it took hold, was blamed on the early Victorian construction methods, exacerbated by alterations

carried out in 1875. It took the fire-fighters nearly six hours to bring the fire under control.

More than 50 families were made homeless and Woodside Hall in Glenfarg St. was turned into an emergency reception centre. Taking place just a few months after Kilbirnie St. fire when seven firemen were killed, there were calls for greater enforcement of existing bye-laws on fire prevention, and special measures to be applied to disused buildings, especially under tenements.

[Woodside Community Council website, retrieved on Nov. 10, 2017]







May 7, 1973  
 Close Theater  
 127 Gorbals Street

# Thieves are blamed for fire at Close

By JOHN MCKINLAY and DUNCAN McNICOL

Police believe that thieves started the fire which destroyed the Close Theatre in Gorbals Street, Glasgow, yesterday and damaged the adjacent Citizens' Theatre and Palace bingo hall.

A rear door which had been forced was taken away by detectives for examination.

A senior officer said: "A cigarette machine was also broken into and rifled. We are carrying out a very thorough investigation."

The cost of the damage is estimated at £60,000, including repairs to the Citizens' and the bingo hall, both of which suffered mainly water damage.

## Hopeful

The alarm was raised when a taxi driver saw smoke billowing from the windows of the Close Theatre. Eleven families were evacuated as more than 80 firemen fought to prevent the flames reaching their homes, the Citizens', and the bingo hall. They were later allowed to return.

Officials are hopeful that the Citizens' will reopen for its Clyde Fair International programme in five weeks, but the Close is destroyed and there seems little chance of rebuilding on that site, even if it were desirable. Both theatres are owned by Glasgow Corporation.

A report on the damage and remedial work required will be given to the corporation's general finance committee on Friday by officials of the master of works department. They will be asked to consider ways of rehousing the Close.

Protest, promised corporation help for the Close. He said: "The theatre will need to look for other accommodation, and Glasgow will cooperate in every way it can when the Close Theatre committee decide on their most suitable site for a new building."

Mr Gray said the Citizens' would eventually be removed to the new cultural centre and concert hall. (This is expected to be achieved by 1980.)

He would have discussions with officials to see if plans could be brought forward in any way, but it was too early at this stage to say if this was possible.

The theatre, the Lord Provost added, had had an increasing audience over the past few years and it was the wish of the city that it should continue until the new centre was established.

An official of the master of works department said the facade of the Close would have to come down and with it the six Roman-doric columns and statues which surmount the theatre and the Citizens'.

## Mansion house

The columns came from a mansion house in Ingram Street, Glasgow, the architect of which was David Hamilton. It is hoped that another site can be found in the city for the statues.

The next production at the Close Theatre was to have been a visit there this week of the Strathclyde Theatre Group with a double bill of two plays, "Witch" and "The Return of the Women" by George Mackay Brown, to be given as a late night show on Thursday,



[Citizens' Theater, 119 Gorbals St., June 1975. Mitchell Library.]

rehousing the Close.

## Several offers

Meanwhile, several offers of new accommodation were received yesterday by Mr Stephen White, manager of the Close. He said: "It is difficult to say if any of them are really suitable for all the bits and pieces, we normally produce."

"The offers were made by various people, but I cannot really say any more until I have seen corporation officials."

He added: "This is tragic. It is impossible to put a price on all the effort and work that has gone into the theatre. The membership was growing every week and I think the Close provided a welcome breath of originality to Scottish theatres."

Mr William Gray, the Lord

[The Glasgow Herald, May 8, 1973]

night show on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. Arrangements have been made for two performances of the production to be staged in Patrick-Newton Church, 259 Dumbarton Road, on Thursday and Friday evenings.





## October 12, 1977 Hyndland Secondary School Clarence Drive

On October 12, 1977, flames destroyed Hyndland Secondary School, Glasgow.

The fire brigade contended with low water pressure.

The West End News reported: "The Water Board were carrying out work within the area" and "urgent requests were made to have the pressure increased."

Student Audrey Edmiston said: "When I arrived the roof was just falling in. There were sparks everywhere, and the smoke was thick and black."

Another pupil, Catrina Campbell, said: "I witnessed the whole fire from the first moment we saw smoke coming from the top floor. I could feel the heat from the road below, and it was very spectacular when the windows blew out."

In an account posted on the website Urban Glasgow, Michael Fleming a fire officer assigned to the Knightswood Station firefighter, recalled "there was no sign of fire" on arrival.

"After about ten minutes of investigating inside the school a member of the public ran to the fire engine to inform us that smoke was coming from under the eaves of the roof on the far side of the school entrance.

"My crew of four men were sent to the roof void with a line of hose to attack the fire. "When we got into the loft we spied the fire at the far end of the building and proceeded to drag our line of hose as near to the flames

as we could when suddenly there was a flashover which caused us to exit the roof space as quickly as possible before it engulfed us all in flames. The whole roof void was now an inferno.

"This school was built in Victorian times and had lath and plaster walls and ceilings throughout which meant it had many nooks and crannies behind the walls and ceilings which allowed embers from the fire in the roof to drop to the ground floor inside the walls causing fires in classrooms all over the school.

"The speed at which this occurred was amazing. By this time there were many fire engines in attendance trying to save the school.

"I remember my crew were fighting fires in classrooms all around us on the top floor when the water was cut off suddenly for about ten minutes.

"We retreated to the only classroom not involved yet in fire and waited in terror for the water to come back on again.

"That was the longest ten minutes of my life as we tried to think of some way to escape if the water was too late coming back on.

"If I remember correctly workmen had been in the roof space with an acetylene cylinder working with tar before they went for their lunch that day."

[Glasgow Fire Journal website, retrieved on Nov. 9, 2017]





The A-listed Grosvenor Hotel on Great Western Road was reduced to a smouldering ruin as young sailors and marines, replacing striking firemen, fought a seven-hour battle to contain the blaze. The servicemen argued that if they had been provided with turntable ladders and modern equipment they might have been able to save the 100- bedroom hotel, flagship of the Reo Stakis empire. The fire was thought to have been started by a chip pan and, at one point, two naval ratings who had tried to reach the seat of the blaze were trapped when the kitchen ceiling collapsed on them. Fortunately they managed to escape through a rear door and neither they nor anyone else was injured in the incident.

As it was, despite the £3m damage to the hotel, the servicemen and their antiquated green goddess fire engines were able to stop the fire spreading to the rest of the recently refurbished Grosvenor Terrace.

The magnificent Georgian terrace dates back to 1855 and, apart from the hotel, much of the rest had been restored with the aid of grants from the Scottish Civic Trust. The residents of the houses were evacuated to a nearby hotel as a safety precaution, many of them bearing their most prized possessions, which included a collection of Ming vases and a pack of five Yorkshire terriers.

Having saved the Venetian facade from demolition, four years and millions of

pounds later, Reo Stakis was able to officiate at the opening of the restored Grosvenor Hotel.

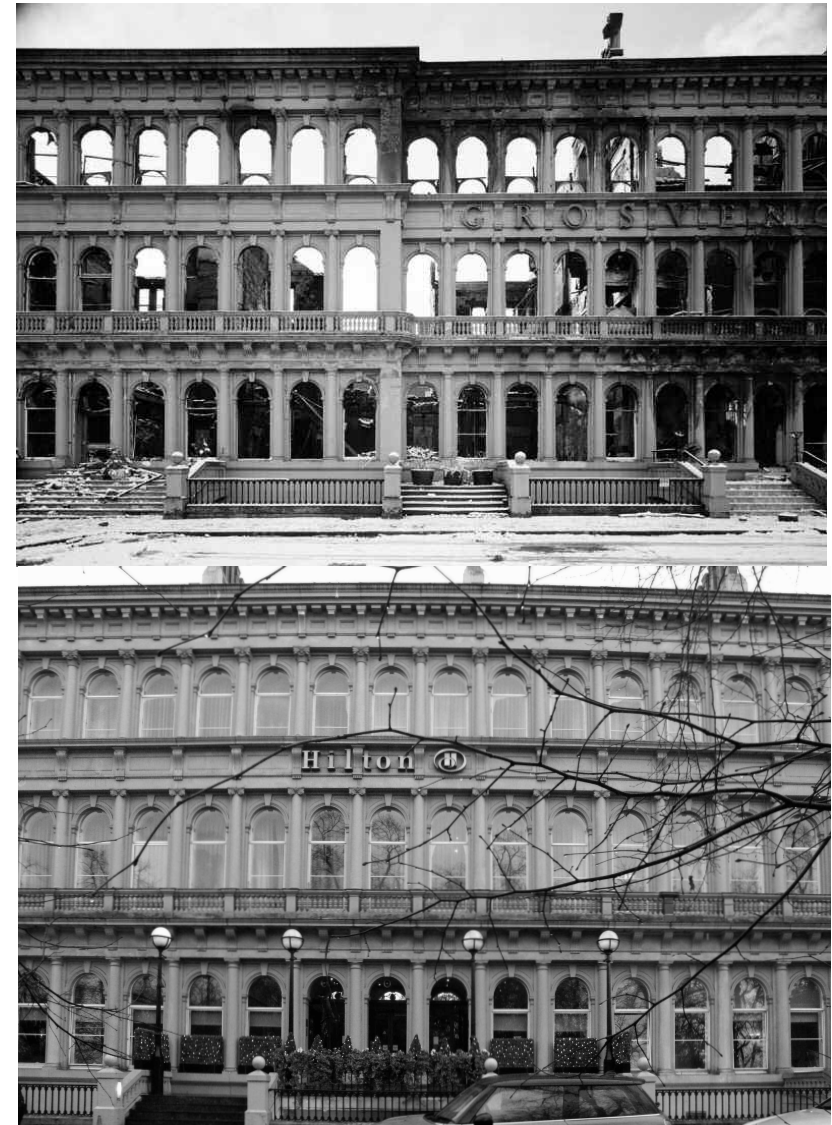
[*The Herald Scotland*, January 17, 2003]

Designed by J.T. Rothead, the Venetian-style terrace was built with three equal superimposed storeys, Corinthian above Ionic above Doric. There are five bays in each unit. At the time of its completion in 1858, the terrace was described as "*the finest range of buildings in Great Britain, being described after the most palatial style of architecture...*"

The Grosvenor Hotel opened at Nos 1 and 2 at the eastern end of the terrace in 1938, in time for the opening of the Empire Exhibition. The Glasgow-Cypriot businessman Reo Stakis acquired seven neighbouring houses for the expansion of the hotel in the early 1970s. In 1978 it was destroyed in a spectacular fire during a strike by firefighters, but rebuilt using glass-reinforced concrete to recreate the original distinctive facade. The Grosvenor reopened in 1982. In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century it became part of the Hilton hotel chain, under the name of the Hilton Grosvenor Hotel.

[*TheGlasgowStory.com*, retrieved on Nov. 10, 2017]

## January 7, 1978 Grosvenor Hotel Great Western Road





The interior of the former Elgin Place Congregational Church in Pitt Street, which was designed by John Burnet, was gutted in the early morning blaze, which firefighters battled for seven hours before bringing it under control.

It wiped out two clubs, Trash and the Shack, which between them played host to some 3500 clubbers every week, ranging from students to Premier-league footballers. (...)

The fire started shortly after 5am, not long after revellers had left a fourth anniversary celebration at the Shack.

Passers-by and staff at the nearby Novotel Hotel alerted the fire brigade, but the blaze quickly took hold, sending flames shooting high into the air and a plume of thick smoke around the city centre.

Fire stations from as far afield as Greenock sent appliances to reinforce the Glasgow crews, and 80 firefighters using 12 appliances and two aerial platforms were involved at the height of the incident.

They faced problems common in old buildings that have been subject to major alterations, including the installation of cavity walling. The Shack was on the ground and upper floors of the building, and Trash was in the lower floor at basement level.

A spokesman for Strathclyde Fire

Brigade said: *"When they went in and went downstairs to Trash, the flames were shooting up the cavities and appearing above their heads. They had to withdraw and fight the fire from outside.*

*"There would be plenty to burn - furniture and wall covering. Presumably there was also alcohol stored there, though that wouldn't necessarily be a major factor in the overall scheme of things."*

There were no casualties, but 24 people in six flats next to the rear of the building, on Bath Street, were evacuated.

Among the residents were Rachel Woodward and Sasha Jackson, both 20-year-old students at Glasgow School of Art, who slept through the commotion until Ms Woodward's mother phoned them from her home in Edinburgh.

*"She had heard about it on the radio and phoned to ask if we were all right,"* said Ms Woodward. *"We were going to go back to bed when a fireman started knocking at the door and telling us to go out."*

Ms Jackson, from Newcastle, still dressed in her nightclothes, added: *"We got quite a shock when we got outside and saw what it was like.*

*"There were police officers and firefighters up a ladder at the back, checking in the windows to see if anyone was still inside the flats."*

## November 26, 2004 Former Elgin Place Congregational Church (The Shack and Trash night-clubs) Pitt and Bath Streets



The evacuees were taken to a social work centre in Elmbank Street while alternative accommodation was found. Some of them were not expected to get back into their homes until today.

A spokeswoman for Glasgow City Council said officials would be meeting today with the owners, whom they expected to have appointed engineers to assess the state of the building. Fire investigators were also waiting for access. So far, the cause has not been determined.

Elgin Place Congregational Church, built in 1865, is sometimes misattributed to Alexander "Greek" Thomson and is very much in the Thomson tradition, but is in fact the work of John Burnet, a contemporary and one of four Scottish architects who kept the neo-classical tradition alive in Scotland in the mid-nineteenth century.

[*The Herald Scotland*, November 26, 2004]





[Mitchell Library, Glasgow Collection]





A landmark Glasgow building has been classified as a "dangerous" structure after fire ripped through it on Monday. Glasgow City Council said building control officers had carried out an inspection of the former Co-op Funeral Service building in Morrison Street. Two of the three buildings in the structure have been "gutted" with no floors from ground to fifth level. The third building is partially damaged. Fire crews continued to "damp down" the site. No-one was injured in the blaze. (...)

Emergency services were called to the scene, near the south bank of the River Clyde, at about 13:50 on Monday. At its height, more than 100 firefighters were involved in tackling the blaze. Flames inside the five-storey building were sent more than 100ft into the air, causing smoke to blow across the M8 and M74 motorways.

Surrounding buildings were evacuated for several hours. Residents and businesses were allowed to return late on Monday night.

[BBC News, November 29, 2011. Retrieved on Nov. 9, 2017]

The building known as the Gusset Building due to the wedge-shaped site it occupies comprised of three discernible parts, with the west part being the most ornate. A huge fire on November 28, 2011, gutted much of the building. Of the three buildings, two were completely gutted from ground floor to roofline with all the floors and roof burnt out and collapsed within. The third building to the west with the clock on the top of its west elevation and the most ornate of the three survived in a better condition.

The buildings had lain empty since the Co-operative funeral service vacated the site. Originally designed by the Donald Bruce and Edward Alexander Buckingham Hay architectural partnership with a building date of 1876, the building was one of the numerous warehouses the Bruce & Hay partnership designed and was commissioned by the Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Societies (SCWS). The building to the front of the warehouse was French Renaissance in style with carved details at the doors, and on the north elevation a large pedimented doorway with fine ashlar detailing and carving was sited halfway down the elevation. The building was Category B listed.

[architectureglasgow.co.uk, retrieved on Nov. 10, 2017]

## November 28, 2011 Former Co-op Funeral Service Building 120 Morrison Street





May 23, 2014  
Mackintosh Building, Glasgow School of Art  
167 Renfrew Street

The iconic library at Glasgow School of Art has been lost in the fire which swept through the Charles Rennie Mackintosh building on Friday.

The library was recognised as being one of the finest examples of art nouveau in the world.

Broadcaster Muriel Gray, who is the art school's chairwoman, said: *"This is an enormous blow and we are understandably devastated."* However, she revealed that the art school's archives were safe. Ms Gray, a former student at the school, confirmed that most of the building was still standing.

*"The most amazing, almost miraculous news is that the majority of the building is still intact,"* she said.

*"Due to one of the most astonishingly intelligent and professional pieces of strategy by the fire services, they succeeded in protecting the vast majority of the building, apparently by forming a human wall of firefighters up the west end of the main staircase and containing the fire."* (...)

[BBC News, May 25, 2014. Retrieved on Nov. 9, 2017]

The fire at Glasgow School of Art's historic Mackintosh building in May was started when flammable gases from a foam canister used in a student project were ignited, according to a report by the Scottish fire and rescue service.

The category-A listed building was engulfed in flames as students were preparing for their final-year degree show. Much of their work was lost, along with the building's famous library, one of the world's finest examples of art nouveau design, which housed many rare and archival materials as well as original furniture and fittings.

The report concludes that the blaze began when a projector ignited gases from the expanding foam and took hold quickly as gaps in the walls. Old ventilation ducts assisted its spread into neighbouring studios and upwards through the building.

The student work in question was made up of foam panels fastened to three walls, with one wall left blank to receive images from a projector. At the time of the incident, visible gaps between the

panels were being filled by applying expanding foam from a canister.

The report also notes that a fire suppression system, designed to enhance existing fire protection measures, was in the latter stages of installation at the time of the fire, but was not yet operational.

She added: *"Also, after ensuring no lives were in peril, they displayed an impressive understanding of the precious nature of the building, and due to their careful and meticulous handling of each developing situation the damage is considerably less than we dreaded."*

*"We have run out of words with which to thank them, but the school has most certainly gained a new gallery of heroes."* (...)

[The Guardian, November 29, 2014. Retrieved on Nov. 9, 2017]





[Photos p. 92-95 Francis McKee]









## Farewell I I

*Tinderbox City. Great and Less Great Fires in Glasgow* is a non-scientific, non-exhaustive micro-survey limited to 28 cases among many, many more. All the fires that have been excluded, whether the artist decided to ignore them, did not have access to reliable sources, or merely didn't know about them, will feature in the more extensive survey that might be conducted one day. For now, this modest enterprise will be limited to 28 fires and 96 pages.

Most cities have had great or less great fires that scarred and shaped them forever - whether physically or in their collective psyche. Fire is a disastrous, destructive, and frightening event, yet it allows urban regeneration and rebirth. Glasgow, for many reasons, has had so many fires that the fact became part of its public image. Chief among these many reasons are the dense and flammable city fabric inherited from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the very common repurposing of old buildings, which makes them perpetually unsuitable for the activities they shelter, and lethal for the people who work or live in them. In addition, the state seems unable to protect listed buildings, as some of them have been left to burn, rot, and were then demolished as unsafe.

*Tinderbox City. Great and Less Great Fires in Glasgow* has been produced during a Creative Lab Residency at the Center for Contemporary Arts in

Glasgow, from November 20<sup>th</sup> to December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2017. It was xeroxed and bound by the artist's clumsy hands at Publication Studio, Glasgow. Concept, research, design and photography are by Michael Blum, assisted by Baykal Çiçek, unless otherwise stated. The CCA Programme Coordinator is Alex Misick, and the CCA Director is Francis McKee, who kindly provided the photographs on pages 92-95. Great help came from Chloë Reid. Support for the residency was provided by the CCA and the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec. Gratitude extends to the entire CCA team, particularly Alex Misick, as well as Thomas Corriveau and Jean-François Guillon.

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