



Fire at Mill

DISASTROUS FIRE AT CHIPPENHAM

Waterford Cloth Mills Destroyed

Several Thousand Pounds Damage

FRIDAY MORNING

One of the most disastrous fires ever known in Chippenham or its neighbourhood occurred in the early hours of his Friday morning, when the Waterford Cloth Mills, owned by Messes. T. P. Pocock & Co., were destroyed by fire. The factory buildings are situated in the lowest part of the town, the River Avon abutting on the west side and they are dissected by a thoroughfare known as Factory Lane, which leads from the town into Westmead. The building on the river side was probably one of the oldest in Chippenham and was of irregular dimensions, some portions having as many as five storeys and it contained fittings and weaving material in use in days gone by, when the weaving of the West of England cloth was one of the most flourishing industries in the neighbourhood. Some 35 years ago a new building known as the weaving shed was erected on the east side of Factory Lane, the two structures being connected with a bridge over the thoroughfare. Trade of late has been particularly brisk at the factory, and the employees, numbering between 100 and 200, having been working overtime, the firm having special orders from France for the making of cloth for soldiers' uniforms.

When the employees left on Thursday evening the premises were taken charge of by Rowland Maloney, night watchman, and about one o'clock this employee was at work in the boiler house when he noticed the reflection of a light on the wall and in rushing up to the teasel shop found that it was on fire, the teasels, which are dried plants used in dressing woolen cloth, being ignited. The building was well provided with fire extinguishers, but the watchmen on making his discovery at once saw that the fire had got a hold and he immediately rushed to the fire syren in the Bath Road. The sounding of this fire alarm at 1.05 was followed by the ringing of the fire bell and the Fire Brigade, under Captain J. H. Buckle, were quickly at their posts. The building as we said, was an old one, the rooms contained much inflammable material, and the floors, owing to the nature of the work done, were of a kind to feed a fire, and no sooner had the outbreak occurred than the whole of the building in the lower part was alight from end to end, so that the efforts of the brigade were powerless to stop the progress of the flames within the factory itself. The steam fire engine was stationed in the yard of the waterworks near by, and the old manual was brought into use, and from every available source water was played on to the building, but as the fire made its way floor after floor gave way with a loud crash. Quickly the roof was entirely enveloped and now and then as some specially inflammable material was ignited the flames shot up yards high and lit up the whole town, the reflection being seen for miles around. Large crowds

gathered, and from such points of vantage as Bull's Hill, the Tan Yard field, and the Ivy Fields, watched the rapid destruction of the building.

The members of the Fire Brigade fought the flames and prevented them from spreading to the Tannery buildings, some portions of which are joined on to the old factory, and on the other side there was the danger that the fire would get across the road and set alight the newer weaving sheds. In this portion are also the offices and the storeroom for cloth, and close by Waterford House, tenanted by Mr. Baldwin. The flames got across the bridge already mentioned, but fortunately the members of the Brigade managed to keep the premises on the east side of the lane intact. At the south end of the old factory are the electric lighting works, and at one time this building was in danger. There was very little wind at the time or the efforts to combat the spread of the fire might not have been so successful as was the case. The occupants of the cottage near the electric lighting station deemed it prudent to beat a hasty retreat. When the fire was at its height the doomed building resembled a mighty roaring furnace, and the noise falling beams and masses of masonry could be heard for some distance around.

The building except for a small portion near the river and at the end near the electric lighting station, was burnt down entirely, and when morning dawned the walls were all that were left standing, and the extreme heat even caused some portion of the front end of the premises to collapse, the masonry falling into the roadway. The damage done probably amounts to some thousands, and one unfortunate result of the conflagration is that many will be thrown out of employment, including some who have worked at the factory for many years and have grown old in the service of the firm of Pocock & Co. The boilers, in which there were from 40 to 50 pounds of steam at the time were not damaged.

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