
The Fires in London During the Year 1875, and the Metropolitan Fire Brigade

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IV.—*The Fires in London during the Year 1875, and the Metropolitan Fire Brigade.*

SUBJOINED are some interesting particulars from Captain Shaw's annual report to the Metropolitan Board of Works :

"The number of calls for fires or supposed fires received during the year has been 1,668. Of these 90 were false alarms, 49 proved to be only chimney alarms, and 1,529 were calls for fires, of which 163 resulted in serious damage, and 1,366 in slight damage.

"These figures refer only to the regular calls for fires, or supposed fires, involving the turning out of firemen, fire engines, horses, and coachmen; they do not include trifling damages by fires which were not sufficiently important to require the attendance of firemen; neither do they include the ordinary calls for chimneys on fire, which are separately accounted for further on.

"The fires of 1875, compared with those of 1874, show a decrease of forty-four; and compared with the average of the last ten years, there is a decrease of fifty-nine.

"The proportion of serious to slight losses in 1875—163 to 1,366—is about as favourable as we have hitherto succeeded in making it.

"The following table gives it to both in actual numbers and percentages, and shows that we have had considerable success in reducing losses during the year:—

| Year. | Number of Fires. | | | Percentage. | | |
|-----------|------------------|---------|--------|-------------|---------|--------|
| | Serious. | Slight. | Total. | Serious. | Slight. | Total. |
| 1866..... | 326 | 1,012 | 1,338 | 25 | 75 | 100 |
| '67..... | 245 | 1,152 | 1,397 | 18 | 82 | 100 |
| '68..... | 235 | 1,433 | 1,668 | 14 | 86 | 100 |
| '69..... | 199 | 1,373 | 1,572 | 13 | 87 | 100 |
| '70..... | 276 | 1,670 | 1,946 | 14 | 86 | 100 |
| '71..... | 207 | 1,635 | 1,842 | 11 | 89 | 100 |
| '72..... | 120 | 1,374 | 1,494 | 8 | 92 | 100 |
| '73..... | 166 | 1,382 | 1,548 | 11 | 89 | 100 |
| '74..... | 154 | 1,419 | 1,573 | 10 | 90 | 100 |
| '75..... | 163 | 1,366 | 1,529 | 11 | 89 | 100 |

"The number of fires in the metropolis in which life has been seriously endangered during the year 1875 has been 41; and the number of these in which life has been lost has been 26.

"The number of persons seriously endangered by fire has been 109, of whom 80 were saved, and 29 lost their lives. Of the 29 lost, 14 were taken out alive, but died afterwards in hospitals or elsewhere, and 15 were suffocated or burned to death.

"The number of calls for chimneys has been 4,050. Of these 1,248 proved to be false alarms, and 2,802 were for chimneys on fire. In these cases there was no attendance of engines, but only of firemen with hand-pumps.

"The number of journeys made by the fire engines of the forty-eight stations has been 6,155, and the total distance run has been 18,710 miles.

"The quantity of water used for extinguishing fires in the metropolis during the year has been 10,502,605 gallons—in round numbers a little more than 10½ million gallons, or about 47,000 tons. Of this quantity 13,876 tons, or

about one-third of the whole, was taken from the river, canals, and docks, and the remainder from the street pipes.

“During the year there have been four cases of short supply of water, nineteen of late attendance of turncocks, and nine of no attendance, making altogether thirty-two cases in which the water arrangements were unsatisfactory.

“The strength of the brigade at present is as follows :—

- 48 fire engine stations.
- 106 fire escape stations.
- 4 floating stations.
- 54 telegraph lines.
- 98 miles of telegraph lines.
- 3 floating steam fire engines.
- 1 iron barge, to carry a land steam fire engine.
- 5 large land steam fire engines.
- 21 small land steam fire engines.
- 14 seven-inch manual fire engines.
- 59 six-inch manual fire engines.
- 12 under six-inch manual fire engines.
- 132 fire escapes.

395 firemen, including the chief officer, the superintendents, and all ranks.

“The number of firemen employed on the several watches kept up throughout the metropolis is at present 94 by day and 181 by night, making a total of 275 in every 24 hours; the number of those sick, injured, on leave, or under instruction, is usually between 40 and 50; the remaining men are available for general work at fires.

“Our list of wounds and other injuries for 1875 is, as usual, large; but, so long as the men work well, no diminution of accidents can be expected.

“There have been during the year 275 cases of ordinary illness, and 64 injuries, making a total of 339 cases, of which many were very serious, and four terminated in death.”

The tables appended to the report furnish the following particulars.—

By a table of the fires classified according to trades, we find they occurred in the following order of frequency; viz. :—

| | Number of Fires. |
|--|------------------|
| At private houses | 317 |
| „ lodgings | 204 |
| „ victuallers | 59 |
| „ oil and colourmen..... | 37 |
| „ tailors, clothiers, and outfitters | 30 |
| „ cabinet makers | 26 |
| „ stables..... | 25 |
| „ drapers | 25 |
| „ houses under repair and building | 19 |
| „ grocers | 19 |
| „ farming stock | 19 |
| „ tobacconists | 18 |
| „ greengrocers | 18 |
| „ coffee houses | 18 |
| „ builders | 15 |
| „ soot merchants | 14 |
| „ offices | 14 |
| „ printers | 13 |

| | Number of Fires— <i>Contd.</i> |
|--|--------------------------------|
| At bakers | 13 |
| „ beershops | 13 |
| „ booksellers | 13 |
| „ boot and shoe makers | 12 |
| „ butchers | 12 |
| „ china, glass, and earthenware dealers..... | 12 |
| „ marine store dealers | 12 |
| „ unoccupied | 11 |
| „ milliners and dressmakers | 11 |
| „ railways | 11 |
| | <hr/> |
| Remainder, varying from 10 to 1..... | 1,010 519 |
| | <hr/> |
| Total..... | <u>1,529</u> |

The following table will show to what causes the fires have been assigned, and which of them have been most prevalent:—

| Cause. | Number of Fires. |
|---|------------------|
| 1. Unknown | 307 |
| 2. Lamps (not gas) and lights | 212 |
| 3. Sparks—from fires, &c. | 164 |
| 4. Candle | 163 |
| 5. Flues—defective..... | 138 |
| 6. Gas | 131 |
| 7. Children—playing with matches, &c. | 57 |
| 8. Overheating of stoves, &c..... | 55 |
| 9. Hot ashes..... | 50 |
| 10. Boiling over of oil, fat, pitch, &c. | 34 |
| 11. Lucifers | 40 |
| 12. Airing and drying stoves | 24 |
| 13. Smoking tobacco..... | 22 |
| 14. Stoves improperly set..... | 20 |
| 15. Spontaneous ignition | 16 |
| 16. Lime | 11 |
| 17. Boilers | 10 |
| 18. Vapour—of spirit and oil | 9 |
| 19. Hearths and fireplaces—defective..... | 8 |
| 20. Men at work—gasfitters and plumbers | 8 |
| 21. Fumigation | 7 |
| 22. Fireworks—letting off | 5 |
| 23. Burning of rubbish..... | 5 |
| 24. Intoxication..... | 5 |
| 25. Incendiarism | 3 |
| 26. Spirit | 3 |
| 27. Ironing stoves | 3 |
| Miscellaneous and doubtful | 19 |
| | <hr/> |
| Total..... | <u>1,529</u> |

From the daily and hourly summaries furnished in the report, we find that the largest number of fires (236) occurred on Thursday, and the smallest number (200) on Sunday.

The following table, which gives the total of the fires of each day of the week

during the five years 1871-75, is compiled from Captain Shaw's returns for those years.

| Year. | Sunday. | Monday. | Tuesday. | Wednesday. | Thursday. | Friday. | Saturday. |
|-----------|---------|---------|----------|------------|-----------|---------|-----------|
| '81..... | 286 | 202 | 247 | 302 | 271 | 258 | 276 |
| '72..... | 199 | 206 | 213 | 207 | 220 | 220 | 229 |
| '73..... | 202 | 209 | 237 | 199 | 230 | 243 | 228 |
| '74..... | 222 | 228 | 228 | 195 | 240 | 231 | 229 |
| '75..... | 200 | 203 | 231 | 227 | 236 | 209 | 223 |
| Total ... | 1,109 | 1,048 | 1,156 | 1,130 | 1,197 | 1,161 | 1,185 |

The *hours* subject to the greatest number of disasters from fire are from 7 to 11 P.M. On the other hand, the smallest number of fires occur from 4 to 10 A.M.

A monthly summary shows that the greatest number of fires (169) occurred in May, and the smallest number (96) in October.

It is pleasant to notice that *four* firemen are commended for special merit in saving life from fire during the year, and that Captain Shaw concludes his report by stating that "the condition of the brigade with regard to discipline and general efficiency is in all respects perfectly satisfactory."

V.—English Literature in 1875.

THE following extracts from the December number of the *Publishers' Circular* embrace the analytical and summary tables of books published in 1875, and compare the figures therein with those of 1874 :—

"1875 was a very good, in the sense of having been a very productive year, and a decided improvement on 1874. The works on theology published last year show an inclination towards recovery which is marked. The decrease last year was 150. This year we have 782 against 634, a very marked sign of recovery, although an absolute decrease. In educational, classical, and philological works, where we confess we had looked for a much larger increase, on account of the New Educational Code and the demands of the school boards, we find a more serious decrease, but yet a firmness. In 1874, of new books, new editions, and American importations, we had just as many as there are days in the year, 365; to-day we have to chronicle only 343, or a decrease of 20! We are by no means sorry to put 219 juveniles in 1875 as against 229 of last year. Law increases slightly, we suppose from publications on the new procedure; we have 135 law books in 1875, against 124 in 1874. In fiction there is again an increase: the total being 992, against 824 in 1874. History also has an increase, the numbers being 436 in 1875, against 393 in 1874. Arts are in full cultivation: we have to chronicle the issue of 686 during the year, as against 623 in issues of last year. In belles lettres, essays, and other interesting monographs there is again a slight declination, 199 as against 211 of 1874. We have before this noticed that poetry and the drama have again revived, and that not only are there more poems published, but purchased, than before; hence we can in this, the very flower and grace of literature, chronicle an increase. In 1874 we issued 305 volumes of poems and plays—which should be poems and which in cases such as that of Tennyson's *Queen Mary* are so; in 1875 we had 371 issues. With this small but sufficient comfort we end. The tide is turning, and it is evident that British intellect and industry are still in full force."