

HOPE STREET MONDAY 3RD NOVEMBER 1969

FIREMAN MISSING IN BLAZE AT STV STUDIOS

The Glasgow Herald, Tuesday 4 November, 1969

Teams of firemen wearing breathing apparatus combed smoke filled corridors and fought their way through heaps of foam 6ft high in a search for a comrade reported missing early today in a fire at the STV studios in Hope Street, Glasgow.

The missing man – Station Officer Archibald McLay, aged 35, of Central Fire Station – had only an hour's supply of oxygen with him, and was estimated at 12-45 a.m. to have been missing for two hours.

The fire which started at about 4-30 p.m. yesterday, was still smouldering more than nine hours later in the sub basement, 30 ft. below ground, where STV stored their paper files. Firemen had covered the area in foam.

More than 90? Firemen tackled the blaze which started in a basement under studio A, some distance from the main control unit in the studios. At one stage Mr George Cooper, the city Firemaster, and two firemen were rescued by turntable ladder after being overcome by smoke.

An STV official said last night:- "We have high hopes of putting out our normal programme tomorrow." This would be done using undamaged Glasgow studios and the Edinburgh studios. Yesterday was the first day for colour trials at the studios. A £250,000 colour scanner in Studio C is enveloped in six feet of foam but officials believe it is undamaged.

STAFF SENT HOME

The fire, believed caused by an electrical fault, started as interviewer Bill Aitkenhead was discussing cancer in an interview on "Scotland Early" at 4-20 p.m. The person interviewed was explaining that one reason for cancer was that "we smoke so much," and as smoke drifted into the studio the programme ended abruptly.

Within five minutes the 370 employees were evacuated and all but 35 programme control staff were told to go home.

A 15 minute interruption came during "Cartoon Cavalcade" and an emergency call was made to the Independent Television Authority in London. Programmes from other networks were transmitted via STV's Blackhill transmitter. Scottish programmes affected by the fire were "Scotland Now"; "The Lion's Share" and "Late Call."

Fifteen fire appliances attended. Hoses were led to the basement, which is used for storage and rehearsals and isolated from the main studio and rehearsal rooms.

OVERCOME BY HEAT

The fire appeared to be brought under control, but later last night it broke out again and dense clouds of smoke billowed from the building. Foam was pumped into the studios at such a rate that fresh supplies had to be brought from Paisley.

Around 10 p.m. Firemaster Cooper, accompanied by Sub Officer Andrew Leitch and Station Officer Norman Lees, entered the building. They were making their way along partly lit corridors to the third floor, where they were overcome by heat and smoke.

The men collapsed, but, holding on to each other for support, stumbled to the second floor. There they were helped by other firemen onto a turntable ladder down to the street. Mr Cooper recovered in his mobile control unit but the two others were taken to the Royal Infirmary.

LUNGS SCORCHED

Mr Cooper said later:- "We were making an inspection when we were enveloped by smoke and heat coming up the ventilation shaft from the basement. We were not burned but our lungs were scorched by the heat. We were not wearing breathing apparatus."

Earlier in the evening two firemen were overcome by smoke but after oxygen treatment on the spot they recovered. The fire is estimated to have cost STV, £50,000 in lost advertising revenue. Less than a fortnight ago the company announced that profits fell from just under £1m for last year to £198,000 for the first six months of this year.

LATE NEWS

MISSING FIREMAN. At 4-15 this morning, the body of the fireman reported missing in yesterday's STV studio blaze, had not been found. ➤



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The Glasgow Herald, Wednesday 5 November, 1969

FIREMAN'S BODY FOUND IN SIX FEET OF WATER

The body of the fireman who died while fighting the fire at the Scottish Television studios in Hope Street, Glasgow, was recovered in six feet of water at 7 p.m. last night, more than 20 hours after he went missing.

Five hours earlier the body of Station Officer Archibald McLay, aged 35, of Central Fire Station, was discovered in the sub basement of the building, where the fire is believed to have started. He was submerged in water, and two fire brigade crews were sent into the flooded area to recover their colleague.

It then took the firemen five hours completely to drain the basement. A lifeline was used to pull Mr McLay's body to the surface. More than 10 firemen, some with tears streaming down their cheeks, carried the body from the building.

Mr McLay, who lived in Allison Street, Strathbungo, Glasgow, was married and had two young daughters, Margo, aged 14, and Irene, aged 10.

SIXTEEN INJURED

One fireman said later:- "We cannot say yet whether or not he died through suffocation or drowning. A post mortem examination will be held tomorrow." Sixteen firemen were injured during the fire, which started at 4-30 p.m. on Monday and was not extinguished until 1-45 p.m. yesterday. Seven, including Mr James Watt, Glasgow's Deputy Firemaster, were taken to hospital.

STV expect to return to normal broadcasting today. Commercials were televised last night and, although Scottish programmes relied on transmission from STV's Edinburgh studio, only one programme, "Raw Deal," was cancelled.

Mr John Loch, an official of Scottish Television, said the company expected everything to be back to normal within the next three months, although there might be "a bit of juggling" with programmes and more use made of the Edinburgh studio.

Mr Loch added:- "The cost of the damage, including lost advertising revenue, could be as much as £100,000. At present we are not certain, but the figure of £50,000 is not far off the mark."

"Scotland Early" was transmitted from Edinburgh last night, and "Scotland Now" was broadcast in part from Edinburgh and in part from the STV studio C in Hope Street, which was not affected by the fire. Only 97 of the 400 staff at the Hope Street studios were working yesterday, and the interviewing and reporting staff were transferred to Edinburgh.

Mr Loch said:- "We have had offers of help from television companies throughout the country and from Strathclyde University and the Alhambra Theatre. The "Scotland Now" programme was broadcast from Hope Street using film processed on videotape by B.B.C."

"We should be back to normal by the end of the week. In the short term we guarantee all programmes to our viewers. However, we might have to use our Edinburgh studio more since studio A has been damaged by the fire." Mr Loch said that the fire has not affected the introduction of colour, due next month on STV. No colour equipment was damaged, in the fire, which is thought to have been caused by an electrical fault in the basement.

Asked if STV will start a fund for the dead fireman's relatives, Mr Loch said the company will take a "very sympathetic position towards the dead man's relatives."

The Glasgow Herald, Thursday 6 November, 1969

MOPPING UP ENDS TODAY AT STV

Firemen will complete mopping up operations at Scottish Television's studios in Hope Street, Glasgow, today, three days after the fire that cost the company an estimated £100,000. Two fire appliances were on duty yesterday pumping out thousands of gallons of water from the basement where the fire started.

A Scottish Television official said last night:- "The firemen have been carrying out a wonderful mopping up operation. They will be back tomorrow to finish the job." Staff whose offices were destroyed in the fire were moved into undamaged rooms. ➤



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FUND

"Programmes were back to normal today," the official said. "For the next three months there will be some juggling and more use made of the Gateway Theatre, Edinburgh."

STV staff are contributing to a fund for the wife and two daughters of Sub Officer Archibald McLay of the Central Fire Station, who died in the fire. A post mortem examination carried out yesterday on Mr McLay showed that he died of drowning. His body was recovered 20 hours after the fire started. Sixteen other firemen were injured in the fire, seven requiring hospital treatment.

Representatives of every fire brigade in Scotland are to attend Sub Officer McLay's funeral tomorrow at the Western Necropolis, Cadder Road. Mr George Cooper, the city Firemaster, said last night that a full service parade of firemen would accompany the cortege from Queen's Park Fire Station, Allison Street.

The Glasgow Herald, Saturday 8 November, 1969

TRIBUTE TO STV FIRE VICTIM

More than 200 Scottish firemen joined with family, relatives, and friends yesterday to pay their last tribute to Sub Officer Archibald McLay, who died on Monday fighting the fire at Scottish Television, Hope Street, Glasgow. Mr McLay, who was 35, was buried at the Western Necropolis after a small private service at his home above Queen's Park Fire Station.

Mr George Cooper, the city's Firemaster, led a full service parade of firemen at the burial service. Mr Donald Liddle, Lord Provost of Glasgow, Bailie James Anderson, convener of the city's police and fire brigade committee, and Sir James Robertson, chief constable, were also present. Scottish Television was represented by Mr William Brown, managing director, and, on behalf of the staff, Mr Arthur Montford, sports commentator.

Earlier a police squad car escorted the cortege through the city. At the front were two fire tenders, one carrying the coffin and the other bedecked with floral tributes from every fire brigade in Scotland as well as one from London firemen.

The silver bells on the fire appliances were covered with black velvet as a mark of respect and a button on the uniform of every fireman was covered with black binding.

Firemen stood to attention beside their machines as the cortege passed South, Marine, and North West fire stations. At Western Necropolis more than 200 firemen stood at attention in the heavy rain to form a guard of honour as the pall bearers, colleagues from the southern division, walked slowly to the grave.

A piper, Fireman James Brown, of North West fire station, played the lament "Flowers of the Forest," as the parade ended.

FIRE Magazine April 1970

10 INJURED IN 21 HOUR FIGHT TO CONTAIN BASEMENT FIRE

A detailed report has now been received from Firemaster G. P. Cooper, Glasgow Fire Brigade, on the 21 hour fight to contain the fire which broke out on November 3 at Scottish Television's premises in the Theatre Royal, Glasgow. As previously reported in FIRE, Sub Officer Archibald McLay, aged 38, died during fire-fighting operations. His death was due to drowning after falling, in dense smoke and intense heat, through a hatch opening into a sub-basement.

Firemaster Cooper, the Deputy Firemaster and the Assistant Firemaster were among 10 officers and men who had to receive hospital treatment. Their injuries were principally heat and smoke exhaustion, damage to lungs, burns to eyes, and lacerations; some of the injured were incapacitated for several days.

HIGH EXPANSION FOAM

During the course of the fire the brigade used 2,060 gallons of high-expansion foam concentrate and generated an estimated 14 million cubic feet of foam. Twenty six Glasgow appliances were in attendance, plus three each from Central and Western Areas and two from Lanarkshire Area.

Two P500 generators, two P125s and one Jet-Ex 15 were in use, drawing water from street hydrants via three pumps; five water jets were also in operation, including one from a hydraulic platform; 50 sets of breathing apparatus were used.

It is estimated that the five jets applied about 160,000 gallons of water, of which about 85,000 gallons accumulated in the sub-basement where Sub Officer McLay's body was found. ►



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The Theatre Royal, one of the oldest and largest theatres in the city, was of traditional design with roof heights varying from 30 ft to 80 ft. It measured about 280 ft by 170 ft. The basement and sub-basement were under part of the stage, to a depth of about 20 ft. and were used for tv transmission areas and a control room. Lately the sub-basement had been used for rehearsal purposes and for the storage of cardboard box files in a cubicalised section. The hatch to the sub-basement had been made to allow control equipment to be lowered.

Firemaster Cooper reports that Scottish Television appreciated the high risk assessment of the structure and its occupancy function and had accepted a brigade recommendation to install an automatic fire detection (heat rise) system.

EASILY ADAPTED

“This was preferred at that time in lieu of sprinkler protection on the basis that it could be installed more quickly without upset to the function of transmission and was more easily adapted to cope with the complex diversity of layout of the old theatre building. “At all times when alterations took place this installation was amended to satisfy the protection of the ever-changing conditions”, continues the Firemaster. The system was installed and maintained by AFA Ltd.

Hose reels and portable fire extinguishers were also provided in the building and there was a fire and security staff.

At 16-12 an alarm was automatically received at North District Fire Station to the Theatre Royal. The alarm indicator board at the security desk in the theatre showed the outbreak to be in the sub-basement.

Standing instructions from management to the security staff in the event of fire included initiating an organised attack on the fire and providing a guide for Fire Brigade personnel to the scene of the incident.

What happened on November 3, says the Firemaster, was that one security officer went to the sub-basement and used three portable extinguishers on the fire before its growing intensity and the heat and smoke forced him to retire. The conditions also prevented him from reaching the nearest hose reel. Although there were sufficient security staff on duty to form an organised attack on the outbreak, no assistance reached the man who was fighting the fire.

The first appliance arrived at 16-15 (after travelling seven-tenths of a mile) and the officer-in-charge was guided down a stair that gave access only to the basement. He was then taken down a second stair to the sub-basement, but at the wrong end of it for an immediate attack on the fire. By now the security officer who had tackled the fire could not be traced and search parties were organised. One team of fire-fighters, wearing BA, found a third stair to the sub-basement, but were unable to penetrate beyond the basement landing.

Senior officers had arrived and one led a BA team into the sub-basement where they located the fire area. With their jet they extinguished the fire there. But they could still hear the crackle of fire above them and although they played the jet on the ceiling it appeared to have little success. By this time conditions in the sub-basement were critical because of smoke and heat; visibility was nil.

This team retired as their BA cylinders were getting low, and they were replaced in the sub-basement by a second team led by another senior officer. By now the fire was above sub-basement level and, a plan of the building now being available, it was decided that this team should go into the basement. They found it divided by many partitions and were unable to locate the fire owing to deteriorating conditions which soon forced their withdrawal. Both these senior officers were taken to hospital, one for an eye injury and the other for a knee wound.

THE STRATEGY

It was by now about 17-00 and because of the worsening conditions it was decided to bring into operation high-expansion foam units and to increase the appliances and personnel to cope with the developing fire situation. Pumps were made six at 17-05 and at 17-16 a second emergency tender was ordered on.

The strategy was, continues Firemaster Cooper's report, to attack the fire by direct application of foam via the access stairs to the basement and sub-basement; to prevent the spread of fire, by convection of superheated gases to the flies and roof, with a blanket of foam 15-20 ft deep on the ground floor; and to check the penetration of fire through the proscenium wall with jets in the auditorium.

A massive application of foam was needed to replace that constantly being broken down by the intensity of the fire. “By 20-00 the situation was very much in the balance and additional appliances were called as a precaution against the possibility of a further fire spread. ►



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Within a few minutes there was a dramatic change in the situation and there were signs that the building might become totally involved; a further make-up of appliances was requested at 20-05.

"As a precautionary measure the building was surrounded by 12 standby branches in readiness for any break-out of fire from the basement. By 20-25 the gravity of the situation appeared to be increasing and a further message was transmitted to 'make pumps 15'."

WINDOWS BREACHED

By 21-00 there was every sign of a sufficient heat build-up on the ground and upper floors to produce a flashover. First floor windows were breached and cooling jets were applied. TLs were positioned for possible developments in the upper floors and roof. A disused doorway, formerly the theatre stage door, was forcibly opened and, after a BA team had explored, foam was introduced through this doorway to the basement.

General conditions improved and the Firemaster led two officers into the upper floors to assess the situation. During this reconnaissance a blast of hot gases from the basement welled up and caught the team in its upsurge. The two officers were taken to hospital after collapsing in the street, but the Firemaster refused to leave the fireground; some time later he was forced to go for treatment as his condition had deteriorated.

About 22-45 the Assistant Firemaster took two officers, with a line of hose, into the basement. They found a large amount of standing foam with pockets of fire in distribution. He left the two with the hose while he went back to employ a further jet into the basement. Although it was possible to work without BA in the basement a BA team joined the two officers with the jet, in case of any emergency or change in circumstances.

DRAMATIC CHANGE

"About 23-00", continues Mr. Cooper, "there was again a dramatic change. Fire suddenly broke through on the ground floor and flashover conditions in the upper reaches of the building once more appeared to be developing. As a precaution the basement working crew was withdrawn."

As the basement crew made its way towards clearer atmosphere, it was realised that one member was missing. The officer-in-charge went back, but could find no trace. He reported an opening in the basement floor. The Deputy Firemaster instigated a roll-call and, later, a full-scale search of the building.

BA teams re-entered the basement and put a ladder through the floor opening into the foam-filled sub-basement; it rested on debris unseen in the intense smoke conditions. "A BA operator descended to explore the area corresponding to the opening, but to no avail", says the Firemaster.

Meanwhile the fire conditions deteriorated further and all personnel were withdrawn except for those working on the ground floor with good routes of escape.

At this time two BA operators went into the basement again on their own initiative. They were seen by a Station Officer who followed them down and ordered them out. They found that the basement fire had developed intensely and that an approach to the floor opening was impossible. The stairs were then plugged with foam.

By 23-30 arrangements were made for the emergency supply of more foam concentrate and at 00-17, the ground floor foam blanket having been re-established, a team again went into the basement. They found serious fire still prevailing and withdrew.

At 00-36 relief crews arrived from neighbouring brigades; at 01-10 the Deputy Firemaster was taken to hospital and detained overnight suffering from the effects of intense smoke. Foaming was continued throughout the night and at 07-23 the Firemaster resumed command. By this time the Assistant Firemaster was unfit for duty due to the effects of smoke and heat on his lungs and eyes. Fire-fighting continued but it was not until 10-40 that an entry into the basement was attempted.

FILLED WITH FOAM

It was found that a large area of the ground floor had collapsed, the basement was completely filled with foam and there were only smouldering pockets of fire at ceiling level. The sub-basement contained about five feet of water. The Firemaster wirelessly the fire under control at 12-35 and at 13-33 the "stop" was relayed.

Sub Officer McLay's body was found in the area below the floor opening. His BA distress warning device had not been operated. The mouthpiece of the set was not in his mouth. A bruise suggested that he was concussed when falling and unable to call for help.

Subsequent investigations suggested that the fire might have originated about two hours before the time of the alarm at 16-12. ►



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The supposed cause is considered to be a dropped light, possibly a carelessly discarded cigarette, which ignited cardboard files. Statements to the CID by members of the staff showed that ample evidence of smoking was always to be found on the floor of the sub-basement. No one admitted being in the area on the day of the fire, except two nonsmokers.

In his general observations, Firemaster Cooper makes these points: "Those first few minutes of an early attack on the fire were lost and could be conceived as vital in this incident, being sufficient to allow the fire to develop into a major incident....."

"Had the fire not been successfully confined, the entire building would almost certainly have been involved and would, having regard to congestion and the density of surrounding age-old property, have resulted in a fire development of the most major proportions....."

"The fire was fought with tenacity and courage by all personnel in a manner of which the Fire Service can be justly proud. The prolonged tactical operation with high-expansion foam injection was rewarded in the confinement of a difficult, complex and intense fire development which, unfortunately, was marred by the loss of a colleague....."



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