

LONDON FIRES AND FIREMEN.



THE London (Metropolitan) Fire Brigade may be said to have first had official existence on the 1st of January, 1833, when the various brigades of the principal insurance companies were a malga-

ated and placed under one management. These private brigades had been formed, of course, mainly to protect the interests of the various companies, by the extinguishing of fires on, or threatening, property insured by them

—and supplemented the parochial fire-engines (rather over 300 in number), it having been the duty of the overseers and churchwardens of each parish, under an Act passed in the 14th year of George III., to maintain at least one engine for the extinguishment of fires. The staffs of these various parochial engines and insurance companies had hitherto acted each upon its own method and on its own responsibility, and it being seen that such a state of affairs could not last, eight of the principal companies proceeded, at the date we have named, to amalgamate those under their own control. Mr. James Braidwood, at that time the Director of the Edinburgh Fire Engines, was placed in command, and continued the Chief of the Companies' Brigade until 1861, when he lost his life at the great fire in Tooley Street on the 22nd of June in that year.

The duty of the Fire Brigade, at that time, was only to extinguish fires and to save property, and consequently to prevent loss to the insurance companies. The duty of saving life was undertaken by a society constituted in 1836, under the title of the "Royal Society for the Protection of Life from Fire." In 1843 this society had six escape stations in the Metropolis, and by 1866 had as many as eighty-five.

It may be of interest here to note that the first record of a fire-engine is that of one used in Nuremberg in 1657, and described by Caspar Schott. It required twenty-eight men to work it, and is said to have thrown a jet of water one inch in diameter to

a height of eighty feet. The first steam fire-engine of any description was used at a fire at the Argyle Rooms on the 5th of February, 1830; and the first record of the invention of a fire-escape is found in a patent granted in 1766 to one David Marie.

While the duties of the amalgamated brigades of the companies were efficiently performed, the same cannot be said of those undertaken by the parish engines (with the exception of those of Hackney, Islington, Whitechapel, and perhaps a few other parishes). The parish engines were, as a rule, under the charge of the parish beadle, who often neither understood the mechanism of the engines nor kept them in order; and indeed at times women were in command of these parish brigades. Dissatisfaction was not unnaturally felt at such a state of affairs, and at the want of a central authority; and as the outcome of an agitation to place all the then existing brigades under public control, an Act was passed on the 5th of July, 1865, for taking, as from the 1st of January, 1866, the stations, fire-engines, and plant of the Metropolitan parishes, and of the Insurance Brigade, under the charge of the Metropolitan Board of Works.

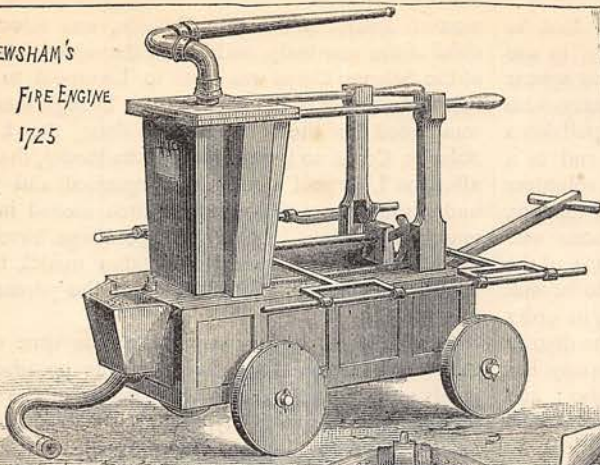
The funds for the maintenance of the stations, men, and appliances were, under that Act, provided for by the levying of a yearly contribution from the insurance companies of £35 for each £1,000,000 they may insure on property within the Metropolitan area (in consideration of the taking over of the expenses, &c., of their Brigade), by a yearly rate of $\frac{1}{4}$ d. in the £1 on the annual value of property rateable for the relief of the poor, by a yearly grant of £10,000 from Her Majesty's Treasury, by various fines (for instance, a penalty not exceeding £1 from any householder whose chimney may be found to be on fire), and by charges for any fires that may be extinguished by the Brigade outside the Metropolitan area.

On the 1st of July, 1867, after the Brigade had been eighteen months in the hands of the Metropolitan Board of Works, the staff and appliances of the Royal Society for the Protection of Life from Fire were also taken over.

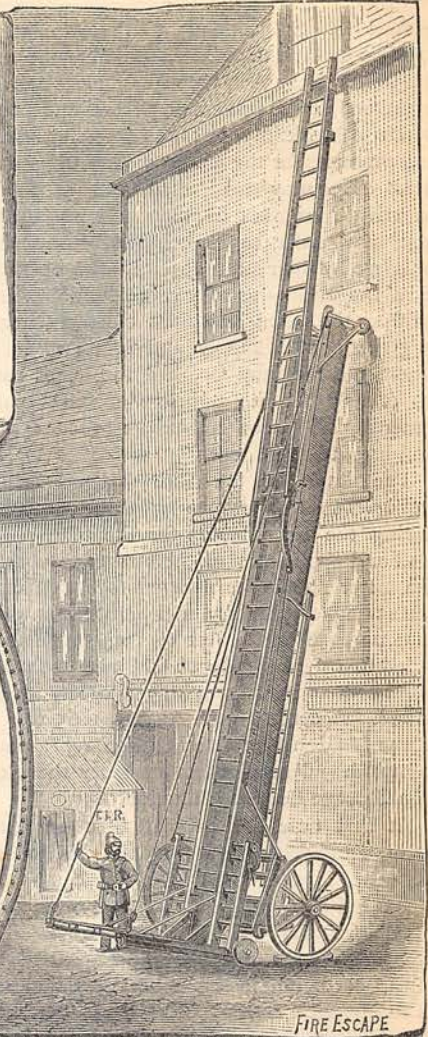
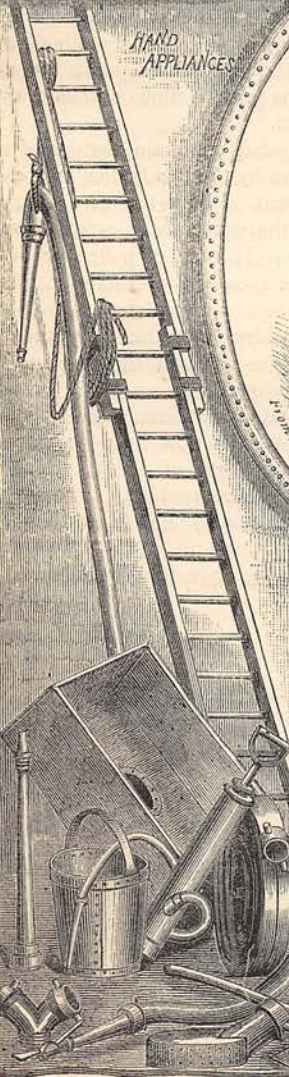
At the present moment, the staff of the Brigade consists of a chief officer (Captain Shaw, C.B.), four superintendents, about sixty engineers, 420 firemen, and 68 coachmen and watermen. There are fifty-two fixed, five movable, and four floating stations; some 150 fire-engines of various sizes, 135 escapes and scaling-ladders, and about 170 miles of telegraph lines. In the past year (1880) rather over 21,000,000 gallons of water were used in extinguishing 1871 fires; and out of 160 persons whose lives were endangered by fire, 127 were absolutely saved, and fourteen more persons taken out alive, though they died afterwards.

On the occurrence of a fire, the power of the officer in charge of the Brigade is very large indeed; in fact, his judgment and will override those of all other

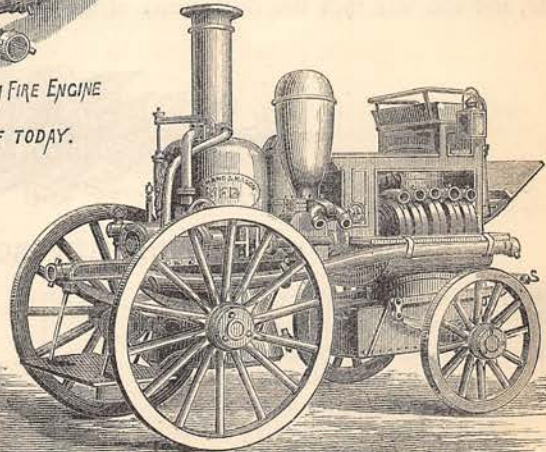
NEWSHAM'S
FIRE ENGINE
1725



HAND
APPLIANCES



STEAM FIRE ENGINE
OF TODAY.



authorities. Subject only to the stipulation that he must do as little damage as possible, he may, to use the words of the Act, "take any measures that appear expedient for the protection of life and property, with power to break into, or take possession of, or pull down any premises for the purpose of putting an end to a fire." He may take command of any volunteer or private brigades he may find present at the fire, and may order to be removed "any persons who interfere by their presence with the operations of the Fire Brigade"—he may cause "the water to be shut off from the mains and pipes of any district, in order to give a greater supply and pressure" in the district where the fire may be, and the water company has no remedy for the stoppage of its operations; and generally all police constables are under his orders and have to assist him.

The duties of the Fire Brigade being only to extinguish fires and to save life, it was arranged during the negotiations for the taking over of the staff and appliances of the insurance companies that the latter should be allowed to establish a force for the saving of property, and permission was given for that purpose in the Act of 1865—it being also provided that the Brigade should aid such a force and hand over to its custody any property that might be saved. Accordingly in August, 1865, the Committee of the London Fire Offices (then representing twenty companies) determined to consider the establishment of a Salvage Corps for London.

At that time the only staff in existence for the salvage and protection of property in the case of fire was the Liverpool Salvage Corps, then under the command of Major Faulkner, and which had become noted for the efficient performance of its duties. Information was obtained with regard to the working of this corps, and in December, 1865, the establishment of the London Salvage Corps was determined upon. Mr. W. Swanton, who for the last seventeen years of Mr. Braidwood's life had been his confidential assistant, and who was then the chief officer of the

western district of the Fire Brigade, was selected as chief of the new body, and before the actual formation of the Salvage Corps was sent to Liverpool to study the organisation of the staff there. Though this corps was noted for the work it had done, the London Salvage Corps so improved upon its model, that soon after the Liverpool staff was reorganised and placed under the charge of the officer then second in command in London. Other Salvage Corps have since then been formed upon the London model, that of Glasgow also taking its chief from the parent establishment.

In addition to saving property at the time of fire, the Salvage Corps takes charge of the premises and goods until handed over to the custody of the owner (or otherwise disposed of), and assists to arrange the rescued property with the view of its sale or valuation, &c. It also has a staff for periodically visiting and inspecting the wharfs and larger warehouses of the Metropolis (on behalf of the Associated Fire Insurance Companies) with the view of suggesting methods and appliances for their better protection against fire, and its permanent staff at the present time consists of over seventy officers and men.

Considering the somewhat conflicting nature of the duties at times carried on by the two bodies, it speaks much for the management of both the Fire Brigade and the Salvage Corps that since their establishment there has not been a single case of police or other interference between the men of the different staffs—both corps having always worked harmoniously together. When we consider, too, the magnitude of the interests at stake (the value of the property insured within the Metropolitan area amounted in 1880 to over £613,000,000, and the rateable value of house-property within the district is now over £27,000,000 per annum), that the protection of all this property, and the persons of its owners, from fire, is the duty of these two bodies, we can readily appreciate their importance to the Metropolis and understand the enthusiasm with which their efforts are always greeted.

W. J. W.



THE LADY ROSALIE.



HE wind crept softly over the sea,
 With stealthy tread, so treacherously,
 And its steps gleamed white
 In the shimmering light
 Of the silver moon;
 And the sea was crooning a lullaby
 Of a maiden bright,
 Fair to the sight.
 As a sunny noon:
*"O sweetest of sweet maidens she!
 Sweet is the Lady Rosalie!"*

"Each night she comes and stands by me,
 And tells me all her misery,
 With questioning eyes,
 And 'plaining cries
 Like caged bird's song:
 'O sea, sea, sea! O cruel sea!
 Bring him to me!
 Why tarries he
 So long, so long?'
*O saddest of sad maidens she!
 Sad is the Lady Rosalie!"*