

DESTRUCTIVE FIRE AT SULHAM-STEAD.

TYLE MILL BURNT DOWN.

On Saturday night the Tyle Mill, Sulhamstead, one of the largest flour mills in Berkshire, was totally destroyed by fire, notwithstanding the efforts of Brigades from Newbury and Englefield, seconded by the employees, police, and neighbours. What was the cause of the outbreak will probably never be discovered, for at the time the mill was locked up, the electric current was cut off, and nobody was within the building. The most reasonable hypothesis is that the fire started in one of the purifying rooms at the top of the mill. Here corn is cleansed before being ground, and the dust—termed stive dust—that collects is very inflammable. All day the sun had been shining on the roof, and it is possible that the rays, concentrated through a window on to the dust, generated such heat as to cause ignition.

Adjoining the mill was the residence of the owners, Mrs. Langford Smith, widow of the late proprietor, and Mr. Swain, whom she had taken into partnership. Mrs. Smith herself was away from home, and the only occupants were Mr. Swain and two maid-servants, Margaret Rolfe and Ada Bradley, by whom the discovery of the fire was first made.

The mill was shut down at 5.15 on Saturday evening, by William Lock, who gave a last look round before going home, and the doors were locked at 5.35 by Mr. Money, the foreman. At 9.20 the two girls went upstairs and began preparing for bed, when they were startled by the noise of breaking glass. Looking out of their window, they saw flames bursting from the roof of the mill, and immediately gave the alarm, and Mr. Swain, who appeared in answer to their cries, telephoned to the fire brigades of Newbury and Englefield.

In the meantime a large crowd of villagers had hurried to the scene, and efforts were made to save some of the furniture of the house. By the time the fire brigades arrived the flames had got a hold over the entire block of buildings. From the first it was doomed and the attention of the firemen was directed to saving what they could of the house. Deputy Chief Constable Robotham, who had received early news of the fire, was by this time on the spot, and, with the assistance of Serjts. Goddard, Elsbury, and Taylor and several of the local police, maintained order among the large crowd that had collected. By midnight the fire had been got under control so far as the house was concerned, but the mill was still a blazing furnace, the flames shooting up to a tremendous height. The building was three stories high, and as the machinery, much of it new, crashed through the floors brilliant displays of fireworks resulted.

The firemen worked hard all night and most part of Sunday, and it was not until all danger of another outbreak was over that they left the blackened ruins. So far as the mill is concerned the destruction is complete. Only the lower portion of the walls remain; the glass of the windows lies melted into shapeless masses, while inside the rooms are choked up in the ruins of machinery twisted out of all shape and rendered fit only for the scrap-heap. Of the house only the roof and attic were burnt, but the rest of the building is badly damaged by water. Every room is covered by cinders and other debris, but, while there was much destruction of furniture, several pictures are still on the walls and the telephone remains uninjured.

The damage, estimated at £15,000, is covered by the Royal Exchange Fire Office. Messrs. Cooksey and Walker, of the Market-place, Reading, are acting in the interests of the owners and occupiers.

Although eleven miles distant from the outbreak, the Newbury Brigade, with their motor-engine, were at work on the scene within half an hour, thus showing the immense value of the Brigade to a wide area. In this instance the value was the greater by reason of the inability of the Reading Brigade to assist. Owners of property at the reading end of the Kennet Valley have in the past somewhat decried the value to them of the Newbury Fire Brigade, but the Sulhamstead fire should change their views.

To the EDITOR of the "READING MERCURY."

DEAR SIR,—May I through the medium of the Press convey my very sincere thanks to the Newbury and Englefield Fire Brigades, the County Police, and the kind neighbours and friends for their valuable assistance during the disastrous fire which occurred at Tyle Mills on Saturday night? I regret I cannot personally convey my appreciation and thanks to each individual one.

Yours truly,
T. EVELYN SWAIN.

From the Reading Mercury Saturday 18 July 1914

From the Reading Mercury Saturday 25 July 1914

ENGLEFIELD.

THE TYLE MILL FIRE.—The Englefield Fire Brigade received a second call on Thursday, July 16th, at about 6.30 p.m., flames having begun to issue from the debris of the mill, and endangering the safety of the house. The brigade, under Mr. W. Palmer, second officer, immediately proceeded to the scene, and their efforts, continuing up to 11.30 p.m., rendered everything satisfactory. The members of the brigade will have occasion to remember the Tyle Mill fire, as, in addition to the call above mentioned, they were at the fire after the original call, from 10.30 p.m. on the Saturday evening, until 3 a.m. the following morning, returning at 9 a.m. the same morning, and working all day again until 8 p.m.