

DRUMCOLLOGHER FIRE TRAGEDY.

Inquest on Victims.

Evidence and Verdict.

In the Drumcollogher Courthouse yesterday the inquest on the forty-eight victims of the cinema fire was resumed before Dr T. Hannigan, Coroner, and a jury, of which Mr M. Geary, P.C., was foreman. The building was crowded for some time before the proceedings commenced, but contrary to expectations the enquiry was cut short, only two witnesses having been examined, although statements were taken by the Civic Guards from sixty persons who were at the fatal performance.

Mr John J. Power, State Solicitor, assisted by Chief Superintendent Burke, Limerick, and Superintendent Slavin, Newcastle West, represented the State.

Mr B. J. O'Meara, solicitor, Cork, appeared for Patrick Christopher Downey, the cinema operator.

Mr J. P. Lavan, solicitor, Newcastle West, for Mr Wm. Forde, lessee of the hall.

Mr J. J. Maguire, B.L., Chief Inspector of Factories, and Mr K. Donnelly, Inspector of Factories, represented the Ministry of Industry and Commerce.

The Coroner, at the opening of the proceedings, said the evidence of the lessee, William Forde, and the operator, Patrick Christopher Downey, had already been taken. The jury had viewed the bodies of the victims of this appalling and gruesome tragedy.

Mr Power said he had looked into the statements of the various witnesses, and had decided to subject to the Coroner's judgment the order in which the witnesses should be called. At a stage of the proceedings the evidence would become of a duplicatory character, and it would be then for the Coroner and jury to say what course should be taken.

Sergeant John Long was examined by Mr Power, and stated he had been stationed at Drumcollogher since 20th September, 1923. He knew Mr Wm. Forde since that time. Mr Forde kept a garage up to lately, and about five weeks ago witness heard he was going to start a cinema show in the way of a travelling cinema. Witness interviewed him with regard to the necessary precautions to be taken to comply with the law. Witness specially mentioned to Forde about water and blankets, especially wet blankets, and buckets of sand, and he spoke about exits. Witness pointed out where exits could be put in his own garage so as to make the place safe in case of fire. Witness also referred to the position in which the machine should be put, and showed him a position for it. He also told Forde that all halls holding cinema shows for more than six performances in a year should be licensed. He told Forde the law and regulations on the matter. Witness knew the operator, Downey, before the tragic occurrence, and had an interview with him. He spoke to Downey on two occasions—once on the evening before the tragedy. His first conversation with Downey was with reference to the safety of the cinema machine. Witness understood Downey to say he found it very hard to find anyone to operate the machine properly. The hall in question in Church street was known to witness, and he produced a plan of it. Witness proceeded that on the night in question there was an electric bulb suspended to the table, but it was not being used. He

it to the bottom of the staircase.

Were you scorched or burned?—I was scorched, but I felt no burns on me. I had no burns on my body.

Witness added that at that time a number of people were caught on the stairs, and witness pulled about 14 of them off it. There were some shouts that all the people were out, but the last people had left the stairs 20 seconds before the flames burst through the door. His impression was there were no stragglers, and, he added, "I thought the hall was clear. Downey made an attempt to get back into the hall through the flames, but I stopped him." Witness added that he kept on helping in the work of rescue in the dreadful catastrophe until he collapsed.

In reply to Mr Lavan, witness stated that it was the sixth entertainment of its kind, to his knowledge, that had taken place in the hall. These entertainments used to be held there by Mr Hurley, of Charleville. All those performances by Mr Hurley, he thought, took place within two months. He did not warn Mr Hurley with regard to the hall. He had no reason to believe that Mr Hurley did not comply with the law, as he was an experienced man, and he took no precaution to see if he provided water and sand in his performances. He could not say if Mr Hayes, of Kilmallock, held any entertainments, but he might have.

In reply to further questions, witness stated that on the first occasion Forde exhibited, the films were properly covered up in boxes. He did not know if he had any authority to interfere officially. He had, however, informed them of the police and County Council regulations. When he found Downey had 11 years' experience as operator—six in the Coliseum, Cork, and about the same number of years in the Assembly Rooms, Cork—he had no doubt as to his ability to perform properly. He agreed there was a small partition in the hall which if it had been knocked down would have given access to the lower door with a drop of 12 feet.

Mr Lavan—Do you think if that partition had been burst open when the fire occurred that all would have escaped?—I do; but they might have been injured in falling.

Witness admitted that the machine was perfectly safe; but what he thought happened was that somebody lit a cigarette unknown to him and carelessly threw away the match that set fire to the film. Forde was deformed, being a hunchback, and he did not expect him to give much assistance to the people in the hall.

Mr O'Meara—Downey did what he could to get back into the hall to get people out?—There is no doubt whatever about that.

Witness added that Forde was a resident of Cork, and only visited the district Sunday afternoons. Though he had been previously there looking after a machine, Downey did not show him a portmanteau in which films had been brought to the hall, nor did Downey explain it was a special portmanteau for carrying such things.

A Juror—Were you in the hall all the time while the performance was on?—I was there before it started, and all the time until the accident occurred.

And you have sworn that men who were giving the performance were sober?—I did not swear that, but I said the operator appeared to me to be perfectly sober. When I left him, as a matter of fact, I made enquiries about him, and I found the only drink he had before going to the hall was a bottle of soda water.

Do you know that there is a rumour that Downey left the hall before the first performance ended, as he got thirsty?—I don't know, but I know that during the showing of the first film Wm. Quirke, who is now dead, took the handle of the machine and

LIMERICK HARBOUR BOARD.

Senator J. P. Goodbody presided at a meeting of the Limerick Harbour Board yesterday.

The other members present were—The Mayor (Councillor P. A. O'Brien), Alderman P. O'Flynn, G. R. Ryan, C.E.; J. Fitzelle, B.C.; M. Gough, B.C.; S. J. K. Roycroft.

The officials present were Mr J. F. Power, Secretary, and Capt. C. Hanrahan, Harbour Master.

The Secretary read the minutes of the joint committee of the Corporation and Harbour Board relative to the erection of steel standards across Sarsfield Bridge and along the quays to the Power Station in O'Curry-street, supporting a cable which is to convey a supplemental supply of electricity from Ardacrusha to the city. The committee agreed that the height of the standards at Sarsfield Bridge be 100 feet, so as not to interfere with navigation.

Mr Ryan enquired if everything had been agreed on.

The Secretary replied in the affirmative. Mr Ryan—Is the Harbour Master satisfied?

Harbour Master—Yes. I discussed the whole matter with Dr. Sothman.

The report was adopted.

Mr Gough referred to the coming election of Harbour Engineer. He said that in all probability there would be a large number of applicants for the position in view of the inducement offered, £600 per year. He thought all applications for the position should be referred to the Committee, who drafted the advertising, as they knew what exactly the Board required. If, he said, they got thirty or forty applications for the position and that a selection had to be made from them, it would take a month.

The Chairman—Indeed it would.

Mr Gough suggested that the Committee "boil" them down to six or ten.

The Secretary said the Committee referred to had ceased to exist, as it was not a Standing Committee.

Alderman O'Flynn said he would not forego his right to vote for any of the candidates.

Mr Ryan said the question did not arise at all.

Chairman—It does not, and it is time enough to deal with this matter when the applications are before us.

The matter was not further discussed.

The Secretary said this was the time to advertise for coal contracts, but he thought the time inopportune.

The Chairman said they would not dream of advertising now.

Secretary—Oh, no.

The Secretary reported that since last Board meeting 7 traders, 5 overseas, and 1 tug-boat arrived in port.

The meeting then adjourned.

Limerick Board of Health's Sympathy.

The following resolution, already briefly reported in the "Chronicle," was passed at the meeting of Limerick County Borough Board of Health at their meeting on the 9th instant:—

Proposed by the Chairman (Councillor J. Reidy), seconded by Alderman O'Flynn, and unanimously resolved—"That words are incapable of expressing our anguished feelings and sorrow at the direful calamity that has befallen the people of Drumcollogher through the appalling conflagration which occurred there on Sunday evening last. Such a holocaust has caused un-

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Lady Violette
Athshannon (Price)
Also ran—Ma
Remember Me,
Carlovina.

Winne

Betting—4 to 1
Orb, 6 to 1
Carlovina, 8 to 1
Violette and oth

KILL

Say (John Do
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Also ran—Lis
Free from Care,
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Betting—2 to 1
Free From Care
Nimue, 10 to 1
Falloch, 20 to 1
Won by 5 len

BROWN

Saucy Jack (V
Westgerion (V
Bonnie Kate (V
Also ran—Riv
stone, Maid of A
Train

Betting—6 to 1
Westgerion, 4
Saucy Jack, 10 to 1
of Athlone, 50 to 1
Won easily.

ANGL

Polecat (Quirk
Short Skirt (M
Elphenor (Sow
Also ran—Be
Spear, Ballyvoy,
Winner

Betting—3 to 1
Ballyvoy, 5 to 1
and Lady Wembl
Port Nelson, 50 to 1
Spear.

Won by a leng

FRENCH

Sadir (Hamill)
Game Hen (Bu
Somme Web (V
Also ran—New
Train

Betting—5 to 1
Sprig of Fish, 4 to 1
Barn, 100 to 1
Won by half a

APPREN

Portland (Joe
Bachelor's Fare
The Gled (P. I
Also ran—Ma
Empress Forest, 1
Rumour, Thomas
Winner tra

Betting—3 to 1
Scarlet Satin, 5 to 1
garret, 6 to 1
Marten's Light.
others.

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Also ran—Peni

business proceeded that on the night in question there was an electric bulb suspended over the table, but it was not being used. He also spoke to Mr Brennan, owner of the hall, and spoke about rules and regulations for cinema shows, and told him it was also necessary to get a licence from the Co. Council. Mr Brennan asked what was the cost of the licence, and he told him he thought it was £1. On Sunday, the 5th, witness left his duty at Church Street Hall at nine o'clock (new time), and reached there at a quarter past nine. He met Downey, the operator, before he reached the hall. Downey spoke to him, and he was perfectly sober and all right in witness's opinion. Sergeant Long added that he took up duty in the hall with Guard Davis, and described the general position of the hall. Mr Forde was standing at the table near the door issuing tickets and taking money for them. At that time witness did not notice the films on the table, but about 15 minutes afterwards, when the performance was in progress, he saw the films. He thought there were about four or five of them, and they occupied about half the table at the furthest part of the door. The machine was about three feet from the door and about 15 feet from the end of the hall.

Witness saw two candles on each corner of the table near the door. They were lighted and stuck on the table. They appeared to be used to enable Forde to see what money was taken and to distinguish coins. The candles were roughly three feet from the films.

Mr Power—Did you put out one of the candles?—Yes, as it was burning low at the time. Forde had left the table at the time.

Was there only one bulb in the hall that night, and was that in the centre of the hall?—Yes.

Was there anything to protect the films when you saw them on the table?—No; there were no cases or covering.

Was there a Mr Benson near you at the table?—Yes; I had my back to the centre of the table.

Were you or Mr Benson smoking?—Neither of us was smoking. I have never smoked in my life. Witness estimated there were 150 people in the hall at the time.

While witness and Mr Benson were near the table a man named White stood near them for a few moments. No youngsters were near the table at the time. About ten o'clock witness's attention was attracted. He felt heat behind him, and he turned round and saw one roll of film ablaze on one side. It was a separate film by itself, more towards the door. It was the side of it nearest the partition, and furthest from witness that went on fire. He did not see any youngsters or people sitting or standing between the partition and the table. He could not say where Forde was at the time. He was not at the table, but he was sure Downey was operating the machine at that moment. The leads to the machine were suspended about three feet from the table, and if anything hit against them they could be likely to hit the table. Witness took off his cap to extinguish the blaze. Witness was trained as a fireman in the Aldershot Command, and he had experience of putting out fires.

Mr Power—What happened?—Before I could reach the flames somebody struck the film with his cap and spread the flames on the other films.

Did the people stampede to the door?—The stampede was going on at the time. Mr Benson and I were carried in it through the door; I was carried backwards through the door, but I managed to carry the burning film with my feet to the door and kicked

performance ended, as he got thirsty?—I don't know, but I know that during the showing of the first film Wm. Quirke, who is now dead, took the handle of the machine, and turned it for a while. I imagine, however, that if he left the hall I would have seen him coming in. I doubt if he ever left the hall. I was taking no interest in the film, and neither was Mr Benson, but I was interested in what was going on.

Another Jury asked if it were stated in evidence that Forde left the hall at the time the accident occurred.

The Coroner said Forde had nothing to do with the operating of the machine. He thought the jury now had sufficient evidence to enable them to return a verdict.

Mr Power said he had a great deal of evidence available, but if it were not needed he would not put it forward. He would, however, like to call one more witness, who would give some facts in connection with the outbreak of the fire. He would like to add that the relatives of the deceased could be comforted in the knowledge that the victims were all suffocated and dead before their bodies were burned.

John O'Brien stated he was at the pictures on the night in question, and was standing about fifteen or twenty feet from the table on which the film was placed. Before the fire he saw a candle on the table. When the performance was on about twenty minutes he looked towards the door.

Mr Power—What did you see happen?—I saw a candle fall on the table, and I delayed a moment or two. I then saw the film take fire. That was immediately the candle fell on the table.

The Coroner—You are of opinion that it was the falling of the candle set fire to the film?—I have no doubt about it.

Witness added that at that time a picture had finished, and the people were waiting for the new film.

Mr Power—Before the candle fell, how far was it from the film?—I could not say, sir. I did not understand the danger at all.

Did the candle roll after falling?—I would not say it did.

Mr Power, addressing the jury, said there were two persons obviously responsible for the safe carrying through of the performance, Messrs Forde and Downey. They invited the public to an entertainment not carried out under proper conditions. If they were negligent, and had not taken all the precautions necessary, and as a result lives were lost, then they were guilty of manslaughter.

Mr Lavan said the jury must take into consideration the inexperience of Forde, who knew nothing about the cinema business. One would have thought, he said, that the sergeant who had such experience in regard to fires would have told Forde of the danger that might arise through having lighted candles adjacent to the films. Forde was ignorant and blameless, and left the whole thing in Downey's hands.

Mr O'Meara submitted that Downey took reasonable precautions, was not guilty of negligence, and was far from being guilty of gross negligence. He was asked by Downey to express what sympathy he could with the afflicted. Downey himself had suffered acutely, and at the fire saved a life at the risk of his own. He had lost his position, and he had a wife and little child to support. He would be known in future as "Downey of Drumcollogher," and it would be difficult for him to get a job in this country.

Mr Power protested against the idea of trying to throw the onus on the Civic Guards, who had no power under the Act to stop the performance. They could only take legal proceedings.

The Coroner said the first duty of the

fallen the people of Drumcollogher through the appalling conflagration which occurred there on Sunday evening last. Such a holocaust has caused universal sympathy. That we hereby extend our heartfelt sympathy to the Very Rev. Canon Begley P.P., to the relatives of the victims, and to the people of the district. That we now adjourn as a mark of respect to the memory of the victims, and that our Secretary be and is hereby directed to forward a copy of this resolution to Most Rev. Dr. Keane, Lord Bishop of Limerick; the Very Rev. Canon Begley, P.P., and the Press."

Limerick Subscriptions.

Several Limerick subscriptions have already been sent in for the Drumcollogher relief fund, including £100 from Messrs James Bannatyne and Sons, Ltd.

GARRYOWEN FOOTBALL CLUB.

At the annual meeting of the above Club, at Cruise's Hotel, the following officers were elected for the ensuing season:—President, Mr Michael Keyes; vice-president, Mr F. O'Sullivan; treasurer, Mr M. Costelloe; secretary, Mr W. Harvey; captain, Mr J. McNamara; vice-captain, Mr S. W. Christy.

RESULT OF DRAW.

At the A.B.C. Carnival, in aid of St Vincent de Paul Society funds, the lucky number ticket draw for a prize of £5 took place on Sunday night, the winning number being 2099.

The jury was to find the cause of death, and in that case it was only too obvious. The poor victims were simply burned to death. It was also within their province to enquire into the cause that might have led up to death. It was not actually necessary for them to find anyone guilty, nor to blame anybody. They were always wiser after the event, and in this dreadful tragedy some of the best and finest people in the parish had been taken. As he had said before on behalf of the jury and himself their sympathy and grief went out to the relatives and friends in unbounded measure.

The jury, after deliberating for three-quarters of an hour, returned the following verdict:—"We find that all those who lost their lives at the cinema performance on Sunday, 5th September, 1926, did so through asphyxiation and burning, which was caused by a lighted candle falling on exposed films on a table, which ignited the hall. We find that the operator, Mr Downey, was guilty of negligence in having the films exposed on the table, and that there was carelessness on the part of the promoter, Mr Forde, in leaving a lighted candle on the table. That we tender to the bereaved relatives our heartfelt sympathy, and we pray that God may give them strength to bear their affliction."

Subsequently Forde and Downey were arrested by Sergeant Long, and charged at the Civic Guard barrack, before Mr M. Geary, Peace Commissioner, that they did feloniously kill and slay William Savage, Church-street, Drumcollogher, on the 5th September.

Superintendent Slavin, Newcastle West, prosecuted, and Sergeant Long, in a short deposition, asked for a remand to next District Sessions at Drumcollogher on the 1st October, which was granted.

Bails were measured in one independent surety of £100 in each case.

Messrs J. P. Lavan, and B. O'Mara, solicitors, represented the accused.

Quadruple (R)
Furation (H W)
Also ran—Pen
Girl, Nonchalant
Winner

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Also ran—El
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Winner

Betting—100
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froi, Sweet Lav
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Box, Heatherdo
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Winner

Betting—5 to
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Won by three

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Betting—6 to
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Also ran—Sir
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