

The Times Issue 11 January, 1907

Page 10 column c

"INQUEST. – At Marylebone Coroner's Court, yesterday, Mr. Schröder resumed his inquest on MARY ANN WOOLGAR and FRANCES JOHNS, both spinsters, who lost their lives during a fire at 10, Bentinck-street, W., on December 17. At the opening of the inquest Mr. Peyton F. B. Beale, of Bentinck-street, W., who gave the alarm by telephone, said he had to call the exchange nine times before he could get a reply from the operator at the National Telephone Company's office, and 90 sec. elapsed before he received an answer. The Fire Brigade station was 500 yards away, and within two minutes after they received the alarm the firemen were on the scene. Mr. W. Compton-Smith appeared on behalf of the National Telephone Company, and in cross-examination by him Mr. Beale said he was not aware that his call went through at 7 28, and he only knew that he was aroused about 7 25. Herbert Henry Boreham, clerk in charge at the National Telephone Company's office, Market-street, Paddington, said he received a note from the operator who took the call referred to as follows:- "7 28 a.m. call from 580 Paddington for Fire Brigade, Bentinck-street, Manchester-square." At 7 50 Mr. Beale asked to be placed in communication with the witness, and complained that at 7 30 he rang eight times without getting an answer. The witness said the operator answered the call as soon as it was made, and Mr. Beale was put through at 7 28. Answering Mr. Compton-Smith, the witness said the company made every effort to deal promptly with fire calls, and as a matter of fact there was a clock and a notice showing Fire Brigade numbers immediately over Mr. Beale's number. There were five men in the exchange, and they had no difficulty in answering calls. If a subscriber kept putting his receiver on to the bracket and ringing, he would not be able to hear the operator's voice. The operator who answered the call gave similar evidence, and said that when he got on to the line the bell was actually ringing and he could get no answer from Mr. Beale. He thought 30 sec. elapsed before the Fire Brigade were communicated with. There was no delay in getting an answer from the Fire Brigade. Another operator gave similar evidence, and said he thought the operator who took the call answered it about 20 sec. after the exchange indicator dropped. Superintendent Emmanuel, of the London Fire Brigade (who with Lieutenant Sladen, was present on behalf of the Fire Brigade), said the alarm was received at 7.33 am. In summing up the coroner said the evidence had shown that immediately the Telephone Company received the call they acted and did everything in their power, and no more could be done. There was no doubt whatever that the Fire Brigade acted most promptly. The jury returned a verdict of "Accidental death" in each case."

times015.doc