



Night Blaze at Aylesbury Grammar School

WIDESPREAD DAMAGE AS FLAMES SWEEP BUILDING

Within a few hours of Aylesbury Grammar School's Speech day ceremony last Thursday, disaster befell the school. A fire, probably caused by an electrical fault, started in the main hall of the school, caused extensive damage and proved to be one of the worst local fires in recent years. The front main block was burnt out and the roof was seriously damaged, but little serious structural damage was caused to the building, and it is hoped to have the complete school in shape again by the end of the Easter holidays next year.



The insurance assessors have not yet announced the financial extent of the damage, and a list is being supplied to them of the articles destroyed including portraits of the school founders which cannot be replaced, memorial tablets, honours boards and trophies.

A woman who is unknown to the authorities telephoned the Fire Brigade at 10.39pm. She had been asked to do so by Mr Burnham or 129 Walton Road, Aylesbury, who lives opposite the school and is employed by International Alloys Ltd. She said that although there were no flames visible, there was smoke coming from the roof in the centre of the building, and she could hear a crackling noise which indicated the fire had taken hold. Another man living opposite the school said he had passed at 10.20pm but had noticed nothing.

Four or five members of the Old Aylesburians' Badminton Club were playing in the school gymnasium when told by a

man that the roof was on fire. They reported the fact to the headmaster, and the caretaker who lives nearby.

In two minutes

The Fire Brigade arrived at the school at 10.41pm, only two minutes after receiving the call and found the main hall on fire. There was a lot of smoke and working conditions were bad.

One or two firemen were affected by the smoke and heat, but after a 'breather' outside they were able to return to the work of fighting the fire that had spread considerably along the roof void, over the ceiling. The fire was held in most places by close boarding in the roof but where the boarding was burned through flames showed in the night sky.

The Chief Fire Officer for Bucks, Mr E. G. Hobbs said the following day; *'The over side of the lathe and plaster ceiling was also burning. The substantial construction, and the fact that the roof void extended the full length of the school without any breaks, caused the fire to spread very rapidly in both directions'.*

Firemen had to get into the roof through two openings in the ceiling and they were being constantly bombarded by tiles falling, without warning, through the roof. There was a high wind and as it was blowing towards the Hazell, Watson and Viney printing works oil store, Hazell's Fire Brigade was alerted and stood by until the school fire was finally extinguished at 12.20am. Fire appliances and men attended from Aylesbury, Wendover and Whitchurch, and the emergency proved the high efficiency of the Fire and Police radio system.



