

Recovery of 39 Bodies

SEARCH TO CONTINUE

Searchers amongst the rubble and twisted wreckage of Ballantyne's building yesterday recovered the charred remains of another 11 victims of the disastrous fire on Tuesday afternoon. The total number of bodies recovered is 39, bringing the death-roll to 40, as a young woman died in hospital on Tuesday night from injuries she received when she jumped from a third-storey window.

Forty-one persons are listed as missing, and of these 19 are definite. The other cases are unchecked.

The building was not considered safe for searchers yesterday morning, and a conference of engineers decided that part of the building fronting Colombo street should be demolished. After demolition work was finished the search continued until dark.

A large body of soldiers, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel F. L. Davies, did most of the clearing and searching work yesterday, and they were kept on the job until midnight. They worked in relays on the strongroom, entry to which was forced during the afternoon. The strongroom door was buckled, and a hydraulic jack was used to force an entry. Records and machines were in good condition, but the heat caused a small outbreak of fire, and some papers were charred. Water was played on the strongroom, and late last night the contents had been removed by the soldiers.

At one time it was thought that there might be some persons who had taken refuge in the strongroom, but no bodies were found.

Few firemen were on duty at the building yesterday afternoon and last evening, but the brigade did not receive its well-earned rest, as engines had to be sent to three calls. Soldiers manned hoses and played water on the smouldering ruins, while City Council and Public Works Department employees cleared away the rubble so that the police could continue their search.

Sixty soldiers to-day will co-operate with the police in a thorough search of the building in an endeavour to find all the bodies so that an inquest can be held.

Tramway Board workmen were busy replacing overhead wires last evening, and street lights were burning on the east side of Colombo street. The City Engineer (Mr E. Somers) said yesterday that it might be possible for trams to run through Colombo street to-day.

Throughout the day large crowds assembled at all the cordons. Even when there was heavy rain last night, and when there was little that could be seen except the rays of searchlights, the crowds stayed in the streets.

The Minister of Labour (Mr A. McLagan) and the Leader of the Opposition (Mr S. G. Holland) made a special air journey to Christchurch yesterday. They visited the morgue and saw the bodies of victims, and attended a conference with representatives of the firm, Government departments and the City Council.

The Press, Nov 20, 1947. p.6.

Government to Set Up Commission to Enquire into Fire

Parliamentary Reporter.

WELLINGTON, This Day.

The Government is to set up a commission to make a full investigation into the whole of the circumstances of the tragic fire in Christchurch on Tuesday. This was announced in the House of Representatives yesterday by the Minister of Internal Affairs (the Hon W. E. Parry), who said that the commission would be given all the powers necessary for a complete investigation of the whole matter.

The normal provisions of the Fire Brigades Act, 1926, empowering the Christchurch Fire Board to arrange a coronial investigation did not altogether suit the circumstances of this case in view of its magnitude, and for that reason the Government had decided to make it the subject of a full investigation by the commission, added Mr Parry. He would take an early opportunity during the next few days of announcing further particulars concerning the commission.

The Star-Sun, Nov 20, 1947. p.3.

Tragedy Dims Enthusiasm For Wedding

Joy and enthusiasm over the wedding of Princess Elizabeth has been completely overshadowed by the city's disastrous fire on Tuesday.

The Government has decided that there will be no celebrations and with some official exceptions, the flags of the city were to-day flown at half-mast.

Normally, Government buildings would have been draped with bunting and strings of flags, but in deference to the atmosphere of grief only single flags will be flown. As the Government officially represents the Crown, these will be at full mast.

Interest in the Royal wedding has been greatly reduced, and one woman said to-day that she had heard only one person make any reference to it, even to listening to the wedding broadcast.

The Dean of Christchurch (the Very Rev A. K. Warren), said that the bellringers of the Christchurch Cathedral had made arrangements to ring a peal in celebration of the wedding. This was to have been recorded for re-broadcasting, but in view of the city's tragedy, it had been cancelled.

Churches have offered special prayers, and at the Durham Street Methodist Church a special intercessory period was observed at a farewell to Dr Irving Benson, of Melbourne.

"I do not think the people are even thinking about the wedding," was another opinion. "The great tragedy of the fire has overshadowed everything."

The Star-Sun, Nov 20, 1947. p.3.