

# **The Surrey Comet – 10 April 1909**

## **Albany Club gutted**

### **Disastrous Early Morning Fire at Kingston**

#### **The Banquet – and After**

A serious fire broke out just before three o'clock on Wednesday morning at the Albany Club, as a result of which most of the upper part of the building now stands practically in ruins. The club premises, as is well-known, consists of a charming old one-storeyed house, situated in wooded riverside grounds near the foot of the Canbury gardens. A Masonic dinner had been held at the club on the evening before.

The flames spread with extraordinary rapidity, and the whole building was in danger of being gutted, but through the firemen's efforts the outbreak was confined to the first floor. No cause is yet assigned for the fire. When Mr. Bryant, the manager, who, with Mrs. Bryant and their daughter, sleeps in an annexe, made his round of inspection at 1.30, everything appeared safe. Subsequently, however, Mrs. Bryant noticed the reflexion of the flames on her window and roused her husband. About the same P.C. Mumford's attention was attracted to the burning house, and he immediately gave the alarm from Latchmere road.

#### **Flames through the roof**

It was seven minutes to three when the call was received at the Kingston fire-station. By this time the flames were already bursting through the roof, and could be seen by Supt. Drury and his men before they started. Turning out very smartly with the horsed escape and streamer, They found on their arrival that the upper part of the building was well alight. The steamer proceeded straight on to the tow-path and drew water from the river, the hose being carried up the staircase in the centre of the building, and here the men remained until the flames were subdued. The hydrant from the escape carriage was worked from the road, but the pressure of water was so low, and the quantity obtained so small, that it was of very little use.

The Surbiton steamer, with Supt. Hards in charge, shortly put in an appearance, and a few minutes later Supt. Ive and the Teddington firemen dashed up on their engine, having been called from the Holmesdale-road alarm on the opposite side of the river. The operations of the fire-fighters were directed by Chief Officer F.J. Bell, who arrived close upon the heels of the Surbiton section. Fireman Mould, of the Kingston, sustained a nasty injury to his hand while descending the staircase, cutting it on a piece of glass which had fallen and embedded itself in the handrail.

The building is old, and it burned almost like tinder, but two hours' steady work sufficed to extinguish the flames. The steamers then took their departure, but a staff of men was left for the purpose of "cooling down". Subsequently they were busily engaged in pulling down the loose rafters and similar debris.

#### **A Sorry Spectacle**

It was a sorry spectacle which the fine old mansion presented later in the day. The right wing, consisting of the billiard room and chambers above, had fortunately been saved by the firemen, but the rest of the house was in a deplorable state. Of the roof nothing remained but a skeleton of charred rafters, and in places these has either fallen or been pulled down by the firemen to prevent a further collapse. All the upper rooms, with the exception of those in the right wing, were completely burned out, and little but the walls was left standing, while the ground-floor suffered severely from water and falling debris. In the dining-room the remains of the banquet were still on the tables, and it was indeed a scene of desolation which met the eye. The table ornaments and utensils lay half buried in the plaster which had fallen from the ceiling, while here and there stood solitary remains of the feast in the shape of wine glasses, still full of Champagne, which had escaped the avalanche from above.

One stout oak table had given way under the weight of the huge pieces of plaster and other debris which hit it amidships, so to speak. Chairs were overturned on the floor, which was covered thickly with rubbish, and just under an ante-room stood what was once a grand piano. For several hours the instrument had been

subjected to a shower bath from the floor above, and was, to all appearances, irretrievably ruined. A mass of debris lay in the hall and on the staircase, and the rest of the rooms were in a state of confusion. Considerable damage was done to several valuable oil paintings in the lower rooms.

The damage, which will probably run into several thousands of pounds, is fortunately covered by insurance.

*Every Householder should have a "Climax" hand fire extinguisher, British made throughout. Price 35s.*

*Surrey agents, Cotton Bros, Esher – (Advt)*

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