
Bitesize History - Disasters

Furniture Works Fires

Written in 1897



LOCHWINNOCH has been very unfortunate in its industrial experience. It has within recent years been the scene of several disastrous calamities. Fully three years ago, to go no further back, Mr Joseph Johnstone's cabinet factory was burned; two years ago his works, which had just been set in working order again, were blown down; and last Monday morning Calder Cabinet Works, occupied by Messrs Hunter, Hamilton, & Crawford, were the scene of a very disastrous conflagration, which has thrown about 150 men out of employment. I am, however, glad to hear that many of these men have since secured employment in Glasgow, Beith, and elsewhere. An account of the fire will be found elsewhere in our columns, but I cannot leave the subject without again pointing out the urgent necessity of steps being taken towards the appointment of a volunteer fire brigade, and the provision of adequate hose. It is most remarkable that an industrial community like ours is not more efficiently equipped in this respect, and I venture to say that were the meeting to consider the celebration of the Diamond Jubilee to be held to-night instead of last Friday night, the establishment of a fire brigade, and the purchase of hose would have received a very large measure of support. Is it too late for the committee to consider the suggestion?

Dam Breached 1831



On Monday night, about 11 o'clock, the inhabitants of Lochwinnoch were dreadfully alarmed by the intelligence that the large dam at Muirshiels had given way, in consequence of the accumulation of water by the thaw. The water covering 500 acres, it may be easily imagined that the impetuosity of this vast sheet, when relieved from its barrier, would carry destruction to every obstacle which came in its way.

Mr Robert Caldwell, writer, had part of his garden wall, and a large bean-stack, carried away. A house at Burnfoot, belonging to Mr MacDowall of Garthland, and occupied by his overseer, was entirely swept away, the inmates with difficulty escaping, in a state of nudity, with their lives.

On the opposite side of Calder water, part of the buildings occupied by Messrs. Buchanan & Co's work people were likewise carried away. The people were roused from their sleep, and fled with their children in their arms, in the same state in which they left their beds. The workers in the Old Mill, Messrs. W. Wright & Co. will be thrown idle for a considerable time, as it will be a work of no little difficulty to repair the breach made in the dam.

It is impossible to describe the effect which this disaster produced in that quarter - furniture of every description has been swept away, and it is almost miraculous that no lives, so far as we have been able to learn, have been lost on this occasion.