

FIRE INQUIRY. - December 3.

A magisterial inquiry was held into the circumstances surrounding the cause or origin of the fire which destroyed a house in John-street, owned by Charles Williams, and occupied by James Patrick Simmonds, on the night of the 1st instant. Charles Williams, saddler, said: "I am the owner of a house and butcher's shop in John-street, lately occupied by J. P. Simmonds. He rented it from me at 13s 2d per week. I purchased the property about 12 months ago. Simmonds was the tenant when I purchased it. All rent has been paid up to date. The house and shop were burnt down on November 1st, at 7.30 p.m.. The building and shop were insured for £200 in the Yorkshire Insurance Company. Simmonds took out a policy with that company for £100 on his stock-in-trade, and furniture, in April, 1912. Simmonds saw me about some improvements to the shop, two or three months before the fire. I told him I would not make the improvements at his present rent. The improvements would cost about £20. We made no final arrangements about the improvements. He did not see its about the matter between October 22 and the date of the fire. I did not make the improvements."

Robert Sellars, draper, said: "On Saturday, the 1st of November, at about 7 p.m., I was at my house in John-street. I employ a man named Jas. Evers, and about 7 p.m. Evers came into the yard and said Simmonds's house was on fire. I ran into Simmonds's yard, and saw the place was on fire. The fire was in the one bedroom at the back. The house was all closed up at the time. The whole room was in flames when I got there. A man named Patrick Farrell and Evers were there at the time. I went to my shop and secured my books, as my shop is next but one to Simmonds's. I then broke into Williams's shop, which is between my shop and Simmonds's. I called out, 'Fire !' I saw Simmonds going towards the railway about 10min before Evers gave me the alarm of fire.

Patrick Farrell, labourer, said: "I live in John-street. There is a small shop between my place and Simmonds's, on Saturday, November 1, my family were away. I was about at home from 1 p.m. to about 4 p.m., then I went to Simmonds's verandah. Simmonds was asleep in one of the front rooms. I sat down in a chair on the verandah and fell asleep. After some time Simmonds woke me. We had a talk for about half an-hour. Then we walked as far as the Royal Hotel and back. I went to cut some wood.

Simmonds went away down the street. This was 5 p.m. He was quite sober. at the time. I was cutting wood for some time. I looked over to Simmonds's place and saw a light in one of Simmonds's back bedrooms. I thought it was a lamp. I went into the house and came out again and then saw the light was getting bigger. I thought the lamp was too high and I went over and saw that the whole room was on fire. The door was shut. I gave the alarm of fire. I have no idea how the fire started. Simmonds was not there at the time. I went to my own place and removed my furniture. It was not insured. If I had gone the first time I saw the light I think I could have put it out.

J. P. Simmonds said: I am butcher, at John-street, Rosewood. The shop was attached to my residence. I have carried on business in Rosewood for about 24 years, on and off. I have been about five years in the shop that was burnt down. On Saturday, 1st of November, there was an excursion to Sandgate, and my wife and family left that morning by the excursion train, I was alone about the house that day. I was in the shop till 1 p.m. I had no fire in the house after the one about 6 a.m. before the family left. After I stopped work, I dressed and lay down and went to sleep. I woke about 5 or 6 p.m. Farrell was on the front verandah when I woke up. Farrell and I went up the street and returned. I went to the front bedroom to get my coat. I did not go into the back bedroom. It was about 7 p.m. when I left home and went to the Rising Sun Hotel. After I got there, I heard some one call out 'fire.' I went up the street. Someone said, 'There is a fire at your place.' I went there. I could see the fire from the hotel, but could not tell where it was. The rooms were all open when I got there. Some of the furniture was in the street. I did not light any light when I went in to get my coat. I left no fire or light of any sort, when I left at 7p.m. My furniture, piano, and stock were insured in the New Zealand Insurance Company for about seven years for £100; I think the piano was valued at £20, and the rest at £80. I also insured in the Yorkshire Insurance Company for the same amount. The agent fixed up the different amounts. I told the agent of the Yorkshire Insurance Company of the policy in the New Zealand Insurance Company. I estimate my loss, by the fire, at about £200, besides loss of trade. The insurance companies have not paid the policies.

I have made claims- they did not reply. I was perfectly sober on the 1st November. When I left the house I closed all doors and windows. I can form no idea of the origin of the fire. There was no light or fire in the back bedroom during the day. I was not in the back rooms at all that day. At the time of the fire I owed about £200. I had fair prospects of paying this off from my business. My banking account at the time was in credit. My butchering plant was worth £100. I had four horses worth about £37, a cart worth £6, harness £5 and saddle £5, two head cows £13, shop fittings £80. On October 22 I got a notice from the inspector to comply with the Slaughtering Act. I had a notice last June about the same thing. I did nothing on that notice in June. There were some improvements done to the shop and yards. My employee was at Sandgate on November 1. I cannot say what my book debts are, but I consider they are worth about £200 of good debts. Evidence was also given by James Evers, C. Ward and Const. Taege. The inquiry was then closed and the depositions forwarded to the Crown Law Office.