

Reference to Papers.

7th January, 1911

I beg to report that at about 12-30 a.m. 3rd inst, I met Superintendents Stark and Ottoway of the City Police, and Divisional Detective Inspector Wensley, "H" Division, at Arbour Square Police Station; the whereabouts of two men wanted for the Houndsditch murders had been located and a conference was held as to the best means of effecting their arrest. It was known that they were desperate men and would not be taken alive. We decided to establish a blockade of the house, No. 100 Sidney Street, where they were believed to be, rather than sacrifice valuable lives in attempting their capture by rushing the place, which must inevitably occur by the latter plan and which would also have afforded opportunities of escape in the confusion. Consequently 200 men of the City and Metropolitan Forces established cordons and every avenue of escape from front or rear was guarded by armed police. Armed Constables were also placed in the front room of No. 111 Sidney Street, which, with yard adjoining, is occupied by Mr. Dickholtz, a carman, and which house is immediately opposite 100 Sidney Street. Armed Constables were also placed in the doorways of houses where practicable in Sidney Street.

Superintendents Stark and Ottoway, with Chief Insp. Willis, "City", and Divisional Detective Insp. Wensley, "H" Division had in the meanwhile secured the removal of the other residents of 100 Sidney Street. These arrangements were complete by 4 a.m.

At about 7-30 a.m. it was resolved to call upon the men to surrender, and some gravel was thrown up at the window of the room they were believed to be in, and a volley of bullets was the reply. They fired through the window below

into the gateway of 111 Sidney Street, where the City Superintendents, Insp. Wensley, myself, Sergeant Leeson, and other officers were standing. Leeson was shot in the chest and dropped saying, "I'm done". A doctor was sent for, who attended at great risk.

The firing from the house continued, and Supt. Stark, City Police and myself discussed the situation from all points of view. It was palpable that these men dominated the situation, there was no approach to the house but by the front door, the roofs were of the kind known as gable and unapproachable. It was equally plain that any attack by the front door would have resulted in a great sacrifice of life. Their weapons were far superior to our revolvers, of which at this time we only had a few. It was therefore decided that Military aid be sought as more effective weapons were required.

Having obtained authority of Major Wodehouse, Assistant Commissioner to do so, I proceeded to the Tower of London and requested Military aid, which was granted. Lieutenant Ross, 2 Non-commissioned Officers and 17 men being furnished, they were placed in positions of vantage and replied to the fire of the men in the house, which had the advantage of drawing their fire and thus exhausting their ammunition and preventing any possible escape from the front, also the possibility of wounding them and securing their arrest.

After P.S. Leeson's wound had been dressed, it was deemed necessary to remove him to the London Hospital. To do this, he had to be taken up a ladder on to the roof of a workshop, across same and down another ladder into a yard where the ambulance was. While this was being done, the men in the house kept up a hail of fire on the roof, and it is a wonder that the officers engaged, and the Doctor who attended Leeson, escaped death.

About 1 p.m. the house was observed to be on fire.

Dense volumes of smoke rolled upward for a considerable time. How the fire originated is not known. It is not thought to be due to the firing, but that the men inside caused it, possibly with the idea that means of escape might be afforded by the smoke and confusion attendant on a fire. I sent for the Fire Brigade, who were in readiness to prevent the fire spreading. The upper floors of the house were first burned. It will be proved that the men were on the ground floor up to the last prepared to shoot, as they did, I am informed, when a fireman attempted to bring a hose in through the back. It was soon after this - about 2-30 p.m.- that the last shots were heard, when presumably they shot themselves. It would not have been safe to allow the firemen to approach the house before this time.

It will be borne in mind that it was open to these men at any time to leave the burning house, and surrender by coming into the street without their weapons and putting their hands up in the usual manner as a sign of surrender, or as a fact at any time during the morning.

The large numbers of Police employed outside the cordons which consisted of 200 only, was due to the immense crowds that assembled outside the area cut off, and which necessitated their presence to avoid crush and accidents.

Amongst the occupants of 100 Sidney Street removed during the night, was a woman named Betsey Gershon who had been sheltering and feeding these men. She at first denied their presence but eventually admitted it. She was arrested by the City Officers and will be dealt with by them.

There was a number of men, women and children in the house at 100 Sidney Street, also in the adjoining house. A considerable amount of loss of goods and chattels has occurred which I presume will have to be made good. In this matter the City Authorities may be willing to help defray the cost.

