

Royal Commission to Inquire into and Report upon Matters concerning the Fire at the Premises of Messrs. J. Ballantyne and Company, Limited, City of Christchurch, on the 18th day of November, 1947

GEORGE THE SIXTH by the Grace of God, of Great Britain, Ireland, and the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith :

To our Trusty and Well-beloved the HONOURABLE SIR HAROLD FEATHERSTON JOHNSTON, King's Counsel, of Wellington, a past Judge of the Supreme Court of New Zealand ; ALEXANDER WELLINGTON CROSKERY, Esquire, of Wellington, Secretary ; ARTHUR JAMES DICKSON, Esquire, B.E., A.M.I.C.E., M.N.Z.I.E., M.R.San.I., of Auckland, City Engineer ; and CHARLES ALEXANDER WOOLLEY, Esquire, of Wellington, Fire-brigade Superintendent : GREETING.

WHEREAS on the eighteenth day of November, one thousand nine hundred and forty-seven, a disastrous fire occurred at the premises of Messrs. J. Ballantyne and Company, Limited, situated in Colombo and Cashel Streets, in the City of Christchurch :

And whereas a number of persons lost their lives and extensive damage to property occurred by reason of the said fire :

And whereas it is expedient that a full inquiry be made into all the circumstances concerning the fire and the resultant loss of life and damage to property :

And whereas it is desirable that inquiry should be made into such other matters arising from the said fire as may be necessary to enable consideration to be given to the adoption in the future of such measures as may be deemed advisable in the public interest :

Now know ye that We, reposing trust and confidence in your integrity, knowledge, and ability, do hereby nominate, constitute, and appoint you, the said—

Sir Harold Featherston Johnston,
Alexander Wellington Croskery,
Arthur James Dickson, and
Charles Alexander Woolley

to be a Commission to inquire into and report upon the following matters :—

- (1) The cause and origin of the fire ;
- (2) Whether all possible means were taken to warn the staff and the members of the public in the premises of the existence and seriousness of the fire, and whether all possible steps were taken to provide for their safety and escape ;
- (3) Whether any special circumstances contributed to the rapid spread of the fire and, if there were such circumstances, whether the fire hazard could have been reduced by the installation of fire-prevention equipment or by any other means ;
- (4) Whether the structural design of the building and the fire-protection and egress arrangements complied with all relevant statutes and regulations, and with all relevant by-laws in force in the City of Christchurch ;
- (5) The adequacy and administration of all existing relevant statutes and regulations and all existing relevant by-laws in force in the City of Christchurch in regard to (a) fire protection and fire-prevention in such buildings, and (b) the construction and design of such buildings in relation to the safety of the public ;
- (6) The desirability of applying to existing buildings any present or future statutes, regulations, or by-laws providing for adequate means of egress from buildings in case of fire ;
- (7) The desirability of occupiers of business premises instructing their staffs in the principles of fire-prevention, evacuation drill, and the elementary principles of fire-fighting ;
- (8) The effectiveness of the operations conducted and the equipment employed by the Christchurch Fire-brigade to combat the said fire ;
- (9) Whether, as the result of the evidence submitted, the Commission has any, and if so, what recommendation to make as to the principles which should in the public interest be adopted for protection against fire in existing buildings generally of a type similar to the Ballantyne building ;
- (10) And generally upon such other matters arising thereout as may come to your notice in the course of your inquiries which you consider should be investigated in connection therewith and upon any matters affecting the premises which you consider should be brought to the attention of the Government ;

And We do hereby appoint you, the said

Sir Harold Featherston Johnston

to be Chairman of the said Commission :

And for the better enabling you to carry these presents into effect you are hereby authorized and empowered to make and conduct any inquiry under these presents at such time and place as you deem expedient, with power to adjourn from time to time and place to place as you think fit, and so that these presents shall continue in force, and the inquiry may at any time and place be resumed although not regularly adjourned from time to time or from place to place :