



The Faculty of Actuaries in Scotland
Edinburgh

28th August, 1944

To The Institute of Actuaries

The Members of the Faculty of Actuaries have learned with great sorrow that Staple Inn Hall has been destroyed by enemy action. They wish to convey to the Members of the Institute of Actuaries their most profound sympathy in their great loss.

The ancient dignity of the Inn has always been faithfully maintained by the Institute. The secluded calm of its precincts has ever been a source of strength and refreshment to actuaries throughout the world, who owe the Institute a debt of gratitude for the care they have taken of the heritage with which they were entrusted.

The Actuaries of Scotland wish to express to their brethren in London a sense of the admiration with which they regard the fortitude of the people in London throughout the trying years of war. If at the present juncture the Faculty can render any assistance to the Institute, they will feel themselves highly honoured.

J. G. Kyd

President.

THE OLD HALL OF STAPLE INN

MEMBERS and Friends of the Institute have heard—in many cases with the characteristic rapidity of bad news—that, on an evening in August 1944, the Old Hall was smashed. The Council has decreed that some record of the tragedy be published in the *Journal*.

Though destruction came suddenly in a single incident, the Hall and the Inn had not been quite unscathed by earlier German attacks from the air. In April 1941 incendiary bombs fell in the Courtyard and on some of the house-roofs; the resulting fire was put out within half-an-hour. Less than a month later, more incendiary and some high-explosive bombs came down and the dome of the Clock Bell was damaged. All persons within the precincts were evacuated in the small hours, as it was believed that one of the bombs was of the delayed-action type. At daybreak residents were readmitted, the bomb being considered to have exploded underground.

During the earlier flying-bomb attacks on London some plain glass in the Old Hall was broken by incidents some distance away, but nothing serious occurred.

The tragedy itself is described in words taken substantially from a statement made by the Porter of the Inn, thus:

August 1944. Direct hit with flying-bomb at 7.30 in the garden near the Goldfish pool. The section of No. 1 overlooking the garden completely collapsed. This included the Actuaries' Committee Room. Very little furniture was saved; the A.R.P. managed to get the carpet out, but with very great risk. The roof of the Actuaries' Hall just caved in; the oak beams are now resting on the floor. The A.R.P. say the basement is still intact.

My night porter and I were standing at the entrance to the Inn when we heard the engine of the flying-bomb stop, and just managed to get in the Lodge. There was a terrific crumbling of falling brick and glass; we thought that it was the front of the building that had collapsed and could see nothing for a few minutes. To get to the garden was like climbing up a mountain; we saw that No. 10 was a mass of ruins—it was here where the old lady was killed. She was going to the basement for cover and caught the full blast. She had worked in the Inn for forty years. Being so near to the bomb, we never heard any explosion. But my wife and little son who were in the garden shelter said the explosion was terrific. Some American soldiers helped to get them out from one of the exits; they were unhurt.

The locks on all the doors of the entire building were wrenched off and some of the party walls in Nos. 8 and 5 had collapsed.

The old lady, Mrs Hollingshed, had mentioned only a few weeks before that she expected to end her days in the Inn's service. So, in dread fulfilment of her words, she did.

Many of the treasures of the Institute still lie buried and probably shattered. They include:

- (1) The figure of Napier, the bust of Dr T. B. Sprague and the bronze commemorating Sir George Francis Hardy.
- (2) The mounted plaster replicas of the Gold Medals awarded to Mr G. J. Lidstone, LL.D., and Sir William Elderton, C.B.E., Ph.D. (Oslo).
- (3) The Reading Desk presented by Mr A. D. Besant.
- (4) The Council Table and Chairs given by the late Mr W. P. Phelps.

(5) The Mace Staff of Staple Inn, a Pewter Plate in case, Pewter Ink Wells and a framed Notice of Assessments. (Some of these had been deposited in the Hall by the Prudential Assurance Company.)

The Institute has recovered its Seal and, slightly damaged, the Memorial Tablet to those who fell in the first German world conflict. But 'their name liveth for evermore'.

Generous offers have come, from Members and from Actuarial Bodies, of help towards the replacement of the Institute's treasures (should they be really lost) or in commemoration of the general tragedy. In due course, the details of the gifts will be made known; meanwhile, the Institute can only say words of simple thanks.

One further treasure escaped because, owing to the war situation, it had not been completed. A few weeks before the destruction of the Hall, the President and the Hon. Secretaries met there Mr and Mrs Levine, Mr Joseph (Architect) and the representative of a firm of craftsmen to discuss the details of the Lectern that Mr Levine wished to give to the Institute. He desired that the Lectern should be in the Hall in time for the delivery of the Presidential Address in October 1944. The little party dispersed believing that all was set for the fulfilment of the donor's gracious wish and the old door closed for the last time behind most of those who had planned so happily. In any case, the Lectern, which was designed in harmony with the Council Table, will be a link between the lost and the new homes.

This issue of the *Journal* contains reproductions of four of the photographs taken just after the tragedy. For those who were not familiar with the Inn, it is worth while to indicate briefly what the pictures show:

No. 1 is taken from the north-east corner of the Courtyard leading from Holborn. The entrance to the Institute can be seen in the background. The archway on the left led to the garden on the south side of the Hall; the torn roof is seen collapsed upon the broken walls.

No. 2 gives a good impression of the interior as it was after the fall. The details of the roof-timbering are clear and the picture suggests that the main members might be used afresh. One recalls however that, some years ago, the roof was found to be badly infested by the death-watch beetle. Extensive repairs were made and steel girders inserted. In referring, on 26 February 1923, to the completion of the work, the President, Mr W. P. Phelps, mentioned that the roof was believed to be more than 340 years old, and expressed the hope that it would not give any more trouble for another 340 years (*J.I.A.* Vol. LIV, p. 217). The photograph suggests a gallant, if unavailing, effort to hold together, despite the utmost malice of the alien enemy.

No. 3 shows the remains of the lovely garden that lay on the south side of the Hall, and, in the background, the ruins of the Hall itself. This picture may be studied in association with that forming the frontispiece of the *Year Book* for 1930-31. Other illustrations of Staple Inn appeared thus:

1929-30 *Year Book*. The interior of the Old Hall.

1931-32 *Year Book*. The North Quadrangle.

1933-34 *Year Book*. The frontage to Holborn.

No. 4 provides a view similar to, but closer than, No. 3.

It is not proposed at this time to say anything about the history of the Inn, whether generally or in relation to the long occupancy of the Hall by the Institute. Much information can be gleaned from references in the *Journal*, for example, the Presidential Address by Mr Day in *J.I.A.* Vol. xxvii, enriched

as it is by a frontispiece showing the interior of the Hall before it was cleared of bookcases. Also, there are books and articles, notably one by Mr H. E. Raynes in the *Post Magazine and Insurance Monitor* for 16 September 1944.

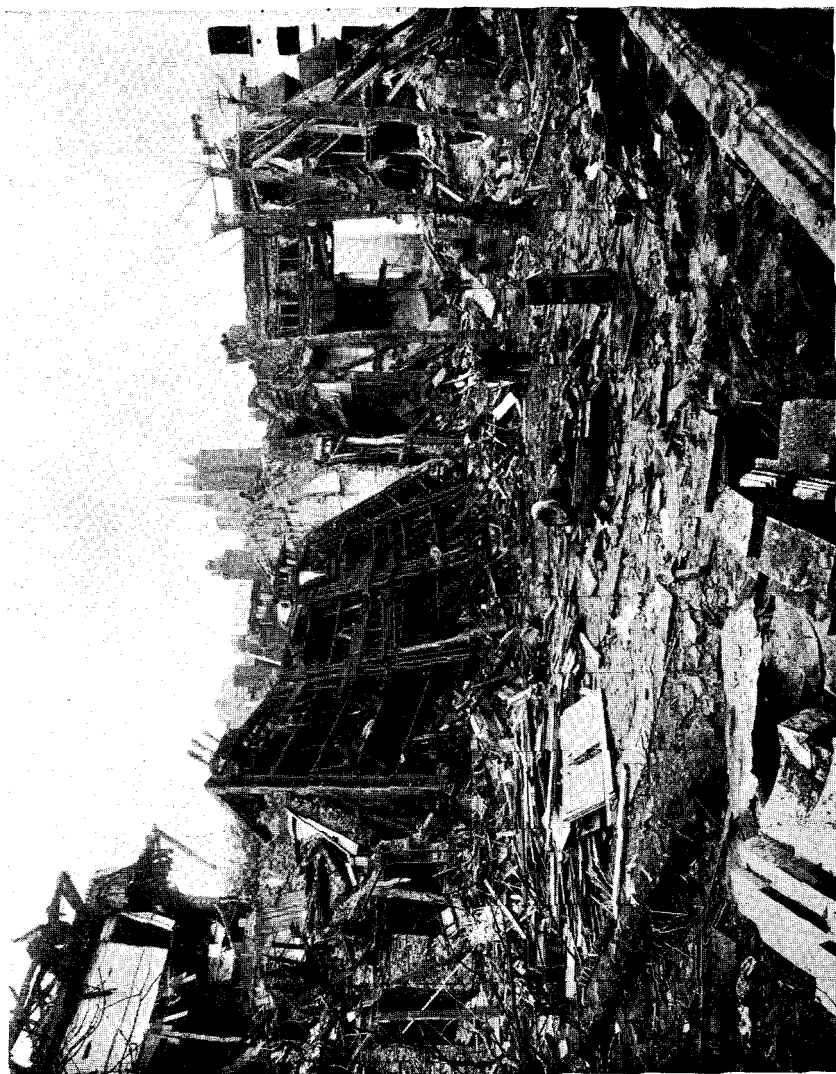
There is another illustration to these notes: it records the spontaneous tribute of the Faculty of Actuaries to the bereft Sister-Body in England and is reproduced in simple acknowledgment of imperishable kindness. The Institute has received, with deep appreciation, many other messages all couched in gracious words. They have come from Actuarial Societies of the British Empire, the United States of America and liberated Europe, as well as from individuals, both members and outside friends. Together, they are one cumulative and almost frightening expression of what the Old Hall was and the Institute of Actuaries has been and remains. It is a hard and confident challenge to those who have the privilege of her membership now and to those who in years to come will share it with a new outlook and an equal loyalty.

R. C. S.

March 1945







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