

OXFORD STREET BLAZE:

A sudden blaze, at the height of the afternoon rush hour, turns an Oxford Street gown shop into a five-storey inferno in a matter of minutes. The women were on the second floor, when the blaze started - two others ran up to help them, and were trapped.

Thanks to passers-by who organised rescue work, the four were saved, after a thirty-foot jump on to a stretched-out canvas blind. Bruised and burned, but alive, they were through their terrifying ordeal just in time - for the building was now a furnace in which no one could have survived. Racing through the packed London streets, fire engines reached the scene - but so quick was the outbreak they would have been too late to save the trapped women if the public had not played its part.

Stocks of dresses and packing material flare up like a bonfire, and a hundred firemen work against time to conquer the blaze before it spreads to the next-door shops. The whole of Oxford Street from Tottenham Court Road to Oxford Circus is closed to traffic as thousands of gallons of water are poured into the building from every angle.

Within a few minutes of the fire breaking out, and before the firemen arrived, three Pathe cameramen were on the spot. An extra pair of hands was needed for rescue work, and lives are more important than pictures - so one of them left his camera and joined in. The other two captured these dramatic scenes of a blaze in one of the busiest shopping streets in the world - a blaze that might have turned into tragedy, but the resourcefulness and courage of an ordinary London crowd.