

1901-9-30 Manchester Guardian

CANAL BURST AT BIRMINGHAM

SERIOUS DAMAGE TO PROPERTY: NARROW ESCAPES.

An arm of the Birmingham and Wolverhampton Canal burst at Birmingham early on Saturday morning, and caused great destruction of property, but fortunately no loss of life. There were, however, several marvellous escapes. In Newhall-street, which is in the centre of the city, and not far from the Town Hall, the canal terminates in a wharf, and during the past week some excavations have been going on there. It is surmised that these weakened the embankment, which gave way. The water poured out with terrific force, widening the breach every second. The excavations were soon filled, and the water carried walls and buildings before it. It rushed into Fleet-street, thence into Newhall-street, flooding Messrs. Elkington's works on the way, along Charlotte-street and Lionel-street, and flooded the streets and cellars for a considerable area around. A caretaker at the Midland Loan Company's premises was awakened by the rush of the water, and by means of a whistle summoned the police. The ordinary means of escape were, cut off, and he and his wife and six children were rescued through the bedroom window, and they had scarcely left the house before it was washed down. A number of other exciting rescues took place. In one house the police found a man asleep in a downstairs room upon a bed which was floating on the water. As soon as possible the escape of water from the canal was stopped by the closing of lock gates, but not before damage amounting to several thousands of pounds had been done. The macadam of streets was torn up and footpaths destroyed, and all day on Saturday and yesterday Corporation workmen were engaged in filling up holes and carting away debris. Two fire engines were also continuously employed in pumping water from flooded cellars and factory basements. At many places of business work was stopped and the electric supply to the jewellers' quarter of the city was cut off owing to the water having entered the cable tunnels. The electric lighting works of the Corporation suffered considerably, as the whole of the basements and ground floors were submerged. Cellars of public-houses did not escape, and barrels of beer floated about and were destroyed.