

# NEW ZEALAND DISASTER: BALLANTYNES FIRE

WRITTEN BY JORDAN OATES - 7RO

**The 'Ballantynes' Fire was a department store that caught on fire in 1947. The Ballantynes store is a well-known disaster in New Zealand. The Ballantynes shop was a department store in Christchurch before it went up in flames. The store has now been replaced in a more modern form on its original location which is Cashel Street, Christchurch Central, Christchurch 8011.**

## THE EVENT:

The 'Ballantynes' store went up in flames on the 18th of November 1947. 73 years after the tragedy it's still considered to be the worst fire disaster in New Zealand. The Ballantynes shop is known to be one of the best department stores to shop in, in New Zealand. The store was stocked with Christmas supplies and was ready for a very 'Merry' Christmas in five weeks. The store was a three-story building made out of timber, which helped spread the monstrous fire. Many people died in that fire, which made it very hard to celebrate Christmas.



**The funeral for all the people who lost their lives in the tragedy.**

## SOCIAL ACTION- WHAT'S BEING DONE:

The public played a big role in putting the fire out. The public made sure that the firemen stayed hydrated and nourished while they were working hard to put the fire out. Putting the fire out was a team effort. When they rebuilt the Ballantynes department store they made sure to add fire alarms and more fire exits. It is now required that the workers check them at least twice a year. The workers have also practised an escape plan in case a tragedy like that happened again. The workers now know that if they have spotted smoke or any flames to call 111 or the fire station, not to just keep working. The firemen in Christchurch are also more trained and would be ready for any fire to come.

## THE CAUSE:

The cause of this disaster is still a mystery. No one knows exactly what caused the fire, but there are lots of theories. Smoke was first spotted in the basement by an employee, but no one made the decision to evacuate the building. One of the two main theories is that the fire was caused by a cigarette being carelessly dropped onto the ground in the basement. The cigarette was not put out properly which then caused flames. The building was made out of timber also helped the fire spread between the three floors. Another theory is that it was just an electrical fault. They found no conclusive evidence to support either theory.



**Firemen trying to put out the flames in the 'Ballantynes' store.**

## MY OPINION:

This fire was atrocious! I strongly believe that they should have been more prepared. Someone should have gone to investigate when they first saw smoke in the basement at 3.31 pm. The number of people that died was awful. They should have had more fire exits and definitely fire alarms. Someone should have thought of the employees on the 2nd and 3rd floor and warned them about the fire. It makes me feel really despondent that this many people lost their lives from someone who made the wrong decision, to keep working after someone spotted smoke. Overall I hope it never happens again because it was a really sad time.

## THE EFFECT:

The effect of this tragedy was expensive. They lost so much stock in the burning flames and it cost them \$6,000,000 to rebuild the department store. But this is only half the effect. So many lives were lost. 41 employees died in the Ballantynes fire. 20 people were missing, and 2 people were severely injured. A lot of miscommunication happened on that day. No one went to warn the workers on the top floor, who had just come back from their lunch break, about the fire. By the time they found out, it was too late. The unlucky people who were on the 2nd and 3rd floor were stuck, and had no way of getting out. Most of the workers were overcome with smoke, which affected their health long term.



**The ruined store a few days after the fire was put it out**

## BIBLIOGRAPHY:

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