

MAN FOR TRIAL

CHARGE OF ARSON

Tweed Heads Hotel Fire

CORONER'S INQUIRY

As a sequel to the fires which occurred on June 6 in a bedroom of the Hotel Pacifique, Tweed Heads, the finding of the Coroner was that William Frank Jaks did maliciously set fire to the premises, and he was committed to stand his trial at the Quarter Sessions to be held at Lismore on June 23. Defendant reserved his defence. Bail was granted, self in £100, with one surety of £100, or two of £50.

The inquiry was conducted at Tweed

The inquiry was conducted at Tweed Heads Police Court yesterday morning by the District Coroner (Mr. W. F. Britz). William Frank Jaks (46), a French polisher, who had been charged in connection with the fires, was present in court. Mr. A. A. R. Hynes (Messrs. Hynes and Elliott, Murwillumbah) appeared for Jaks.

Sergeant J. H. Deane deposed that at 12.45 a.m. on June 6 he received a telephone message from George Turner, licensee of the Hotel Pacifique. In company with Constable Martin, he went to the hotel and in one of the bedrooms saw where the head of an oak bedstead, mosquito nets, bedding, etc., had been burnt. A built-in wardrobe at the opposite end of the room had also been on fire, and was considerably charred inside, where there was a quantity of partially burnt clothing, subsequently identified by Jaks as his property. There was a considerable amount of water lying about the room, also burnt material outside the room in the passage.

About two hours later, witness said he saw Jaks on the stairs of Gill's Buildings. He was drunk, and in answer to witness said he was looking for the railway station. He said he had come from Casino, having arrived by service car after the train.

He also said he had been down at the "pub," where there had been a fire, but he did not know how it happened. The publican had told him to clear out. Jaks was then taken to the Hotel Pacificque and subsequently to the lock-up. He was shown a quantity of burnt fabric, which he identified as portion of his clothing. At 9.15 a.m. that morning, Jaks was shown the two distinct fires and, after being cautioned, was charged. He could give no explanation of the occurrence, saying: "It's got me beat."

Corroborative evidence was tendered by Constable Martin.

INTERESTED IN FIRES

George Turner, licensee of the Hotel Pacificque, stated in evidence that Jaks arrived by service car at 10.45 p.m. on June 5. He asked for a drink, and was served in the bar. They engaged in conversation of a general character, reference being made to the fire which had occurred at the Hotel Coolangatta on the previous Saturday night. Jaks also mentioned in a casual manner that a man named Kelly was not responsible for the Murwillumbah fires. Witness knew that a man named Kelly had been so charged some seven or eight months ago. Jaks then decided to stop for the night, and he was shown to his bedroom by witness.

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Witness said it would be difficult to say whether Jaks was drunk, because of his foreign accent. About 12.15 a.m. witness heard a noise and smelt smoke. He went to room 26, where he saw his barman, A. Skinner, throwing water on a bed and a set-in cupboard, which were on fire. Witness threw the bedding out of the window, also some burnt clothes from the wardrobe. Jaks was present, but appeared to be in a dazed condition owing to the smoke. He said it was an accident. The damage was £25, of which his share, as lessee, was £15. The building was the property of Samuel S. Stanley (Brisbane), and was insured in the London and Lancashire Co. for £7500, with an additional £1000 for loss of profits. Witness's lease had eight years to run from September next. His stock in trade was insured in the Yorkshire Insurance Co. for £3700.

In answer to Mr. Hynes, witness stated that Skinner and Jaks were the only two persons present in the bedroom. Jaks, who had been at the hotel on a previous occasion, was orderly and well behaved, and they had had no quarrel. He had wanted more drink before he went to bed, but witness had refused to serve him.

AWAKENED BY FIRE

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Alexander Skinner, barman, said he had retired at 9 p.m., but was awakened by a noise in the room next but one to his own. Later, he smelt smoke, which he thought was caused by a cigarette, but on hearing a door open, a reflection showed through his door, which was ajar. He went to room 26 and found the bed and wardrobe on fire. He threw two jugs of water on the flames. Mr. Turner threw the burning mattresses out of the window. He also threw more water on the burning materials.

In answer to Mr. Hynes, witness said that Jaks appeared to be very drunk and stupid. Jaks port and belongings were still in the burning room, and both he and his luggage were in serious danger of being burnt, as he did not seem to realise what was going on.

The Coroner found that on June 6 William Frank Jaks did maliciously set fire to the building.