

On Her Majesty's Service

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Chest 'find' recalls tragedy
of 1829 ago
Powder mill explosion of
1843.

Chest "find" recalls tragedy of long ago

POWDER MILL EXPLOSIONS OF 1843

Seven men killed when buildings were wrecked

ARE there living in Waltham Abbey any descendants of the seven men who lost their lives in the horrifying explosions at the old powder mills in August, 1843, when 4,000lb. of gunpowder was ignited?

The question posed itself last week with the discovery of an old newspaper used as lining for an ancient chest in a house which was being demolished.

While working on the demolition of a house in Erith, Kent, an Enfield Highway resident, Mr. P. G. Millin, of Hertford Road, was about to break up the chest when he noticed a series of artist's impressions of the explosions on a page of the old, yellowed newspaper.

"I recognised the old powder mills immediately from pictures I had seen before," Mr. Millin told a reporter.

The page on which the drawings were reproduced

was from the Illustrated London News, dated August, 1843

STORY OF DISASTER

An account of the disaster states that four wooden buildings, 80ft. by 30ft., were completely destroyed in a series of explosions.

The first explosion took place in a corning-house in the middle of the afternoon. Seconds later, the press-house and washing-house, separated from the corning-house by a brick buttress, also blew up.

A few minutes later, the next corning-house, about 200yds. away, shared the same fate. A fourth explosion moments later destroyed a second press-house and washing-house.

Poplar and willow trees growing around the first corning-house were snapped in half and thrown several hundred feet.

Seven men were killed instantly. Five of them were blown across the river. The dead men were Thomas Sadd, Edward Essex, John Newland, John Dudley (or Budley—both names are given in different paragraphs), James Lock, Samuel Brown and James Cole.

HEARD IN LONDON

The explosions rocked Waltham Abbey, Waltham

Cross and neighbouring places, and were clearly heard in parts of London, including Hyde Park.

Five women collecting wood a quarter of a mile away from the powder mills were thrown to the ground by the impact and temporarily blinded by the glare from the first explosion.

It was estimated at the time that the explosions caused £12,000 worth of damage.

At an inquest on the seven workmen, the jury returned a verdict of accidental death. To their verdict, they added a rider to the effect that they considered every possible precaution had been taken for the safety of employees at the mills.