

# On Her Majesty's Service

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# ABBHEY'S DISASTER ZONE!

## Defence site clean-up will 'fall short'

THE Ministry of Defence research site at Waltham Abbey could become an environmental disaster zone if closure plans go ahead.

Clean-up provisions, included in proposals which would see the site shut by 1990, fall well short of what would be needed for a clean bill of health, it has been claimed.

The land may be left an unusable "no-go" area for years to come, unless decon-

By Alastair Agnew

tamination is complete and effective.

Unions at the site, who are gearing up to oppose any pull out, say there has been a major oversight in the ministry's planning.

A ministry study on the future of its Abbey operations (RARDE) has come out in favour of shifting the work to Fort Halstead in Kent, along with research currently done at Wescott in Buckinghamshire. Ministry staff estimate £1.9 million a

year could be saved by consolidating all three operations at the Kent site.

The ministry believes it would cost £3 million, spread over three years, to decontaminate the Powdermill Lane site. But the unions already have pressed for a study from the Nature Conservancy Council to establish the full environmental requirements of such a clean-up.

Scientific and industrial staff say a proper clean-up may prove much costlier and could make the shift uneconomic.

"If they can't decon-

taminate, they can't shift," Bill Warren, a spokesman for the Transport and General Workers' Union, said.

"We are talking about 300 years of work there. The ground is so contaminated they would have to dig a lot of feet up, not just the top. Trees would have to go, and wildlife."

Mr Warren said there had been no environmental consultations with the NCC in pre-planning.

"They (ministry staff) looked astounded when we

asked them. They hadn't even talked about it."

The unions have been given until the end of next month to make submissions on the closure plans. A final decision will come from Government ministers in November.

Feeling at the plant already is running strongly against the move. This had been expressed at a meeting when everyone "from the cleaners up to supervisors" were opposed, Mr Warren said.

Although industrial staff are against moving on the grounds that they do not want to leave the Abbey, the environmental aspects will be a major fighting point.

Scientific staff could be considered more "mobile" but they also have fears about the decontamination.

"We're not being bloody minded but it has to be looked at," Mr Warren said. "Nobody from the public would be able to go onto the site."

RARDE operates a second and smaller Waltham Abbey site at Sewardstone Road, adjacent to the Royal Ordnance PLC factory which itself will be shut by 1989. The ministry report detailed a second option to move this operation to the Powdermill Lane location.

But the complete pull out from the Abbey appears to be the favoured option. A ministry spokesman said there was "a good deal" of research scattered between Waltham Abbey, Wescott and Ford Halstead and to consolidate on a single location would greatly improve effectiveness and efficiency.

There are 150 employees at Waltham Abbey. The spokesman indicated transfers would be offered if the shift went ahead, but this could not be guaranteed for the entire workforce.

"It's really too early to say."

## OWNER FOILS THIEF

A ROBBER was foiled in a £1,000 jewellery snatch in Waltham Cross.

The man walked into Valen Jewellers in the High Street last week and asked to see a tray of rings. He then attempted to snatch them, worth £1,020.

But the shopowner, a Mr Delin, grabbed hold of him. There was a struggle and the man was beaten off, running out of the shop without the rings.

Police have issued a description of the man. He is about 20 years old, 6ft, coloured with a slim build, short black hair and wearing a blue jacket, jeans and trainers.

Any witnesses to the incident last Tuesday afternoon should contact Det-con Pam Harwood at Cheshunt CID.

## Shop raid

## Firemen fight toxic spill



A LORRY seen spilling out toxic chemicals along the M25 near the Abbey was pulled off the road by police and cordoned off as fire crews rushed in.

Seven drums containing potassium nitrate tipped over inside the lorry and the chemical leaked out as the vehicle drove along the

M25 on Monday morning.

Amazed police spotted the leaking lorry and immediately pulled it over into Honey Lane, calling in rescue fire services to hose it down.

Fire crews with protective clothing and masks put the drums upright and washed out the isolated vehicle.

The Westermann lorry from the Midlands was

carrying 17 200-litre drums of the chemical, which is used for cleaning boilers.

Assistant divisional officer from Harlow police station Chris Hall said:

"The chemical is nasty. If it is mixed up with fire it is pretty serious, but we have been able to deal with it."

The chemicals were on their way to a company in Bangladesh.

## DRUMS TOPPLE IN LORRY