

LONDON, FRIDAY, JANUARY 19, 1940

SABOTAGE SUSPECTED IN ARMS EXPLOSION

WORKS VISITED THIS WEEK BY DETECTIVES

SCOTLAND YARD WARNED OF NAZI PLOT

5 DEAD, 30 HURT: MIXING SHED BLOWN TO FRAGMENTS

The possibility that sabotage was responsible for three explosions yesterday at the Royal Gunpowder Factory, Waltham Abbey, Essex, was discussed last night at a conference between Scotland Yard officers, local police and factory officials.

Information of a suspected plot by Nazi agents to cause explosions at factories had been received some time ago.

Detectives, it was also disclosed last night, had spent a week investigating a suspected sabotage conspiracy at Waltham Abbey factory, where three previous attempts had been made to cause damage.

Five men were killed and 30 injured by yesterday's explosions, the first of which occurred at 10.45 a.m. in a mixing shed.

The shock was felt 25 miles away. Houses in the district were rocked, doors were torn off their hinges and thousands of panes of glass were shattered.

DETECTIVES REPORT ON EXPLOSION

DAILY TELEGRAPH REPORTERS

A preliminary report on three explosions which occurred at the Royal Gunpowder Factory, Waltham Abbey, Essex, yesterday morning was submitted to the authorities last night by Scotland Yard officers who took charge of investigations into the affair.

Chief Insp. Salisbury and a squad of detectives had been at the factory for nearly a week investigating a suspected sabotage plot.

It is understood that three previous attempts had been made to damage the factory. Hundreds of workers have been interrogated by the detectives in the past few days.

Information was received at Scotland Yard some time ago of a suspected plot by Nazi agents to cause explosions at a number of factories.

Explosion At Waltham Gunpowder

Five Men Killed: Many Injured

TOWN AND DISTRICT SHAKEN: SHOP-FRONTS WRECKED

Scotland Yard Investigate Sabotage Theory

THREE ENFIELD VICTIMS

Five men were killed, three of them Enfield men, and about 30 were injured when two terrific explosions occurred at the Royal Gunpowder Factory, Waltham Abbey, on Thursday morning last week.

The explosions, which occurred in quick succession at 10.45 a.m., were heard and felt over a wide radius.

Plate-glass windows in Waltham Abbey shops were smashed, ceilings in private houses collapsed, while scores of glasshouses in the surrounding neighbourhood were wrecked.

Windows of hundreds of houses were broken. The effects of the explosions were felt in many places in Enfield. Windows rattled, curtains were blown about, and at one A.R.P. post the inside curtain was blown as high as the roof.

It was seen that a section of the factory was ablaze, flames shot high into the air and were visible above the tree tops. Then a dense pall of smoke rose and covered the district, and hung about for some long time.

Hundreds of people rushed into the streets, and many thought that the terrific noise was due to gunfire or exploding bombs. There were many cases of people preparing to take shelter in their dug-outs and public shelters.

The factory has its own fire brigade and hospital within the gates. The firemen and ambulance workers attended to the casualties and no outside assistance was called in, but air-raid squads, demolition squads and ambulance parties stood by.

The first announcement of the explosions were made by the B.B.C. in the one o'clock news bulletin. It was then referred to as an explosion at a factory on the northern outskirts of London, but at 9 p.m. the B.B.C. announced the name of the factory.

Sabotage was suspected, and officers of Scotland Yard were carrying out investigations immediately after the occurrences.

It was also revealed that a week before detectives had visited the factory and that the authorities had received anonymous information that "accidents might happen."

It has since been declared that the sabotage theory has been discredited.

Certain windows in the Abbey Church were damaged, and morning service had just terminated.

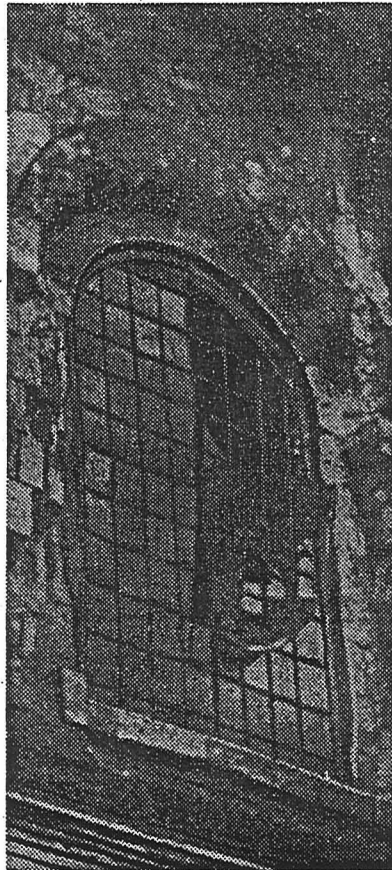
A relief fund has been opened by the Vicar of Waltham Abbey, the Rev. A. V. G. Cleall, M.A.

Hundreds of relatives assembled outside the gates of the factory, which was closely guarded by the police.

The bodies of three of the victims had not yet been found

The two that were identified were shattered almost beyond recognition, but their identity labels were intact.

Up to the present no list of the injured persons has been issued.



A damaged window at the Abbey Church.

Worst In 40 Years

The explosion is the worst which has occurred at the factory for 40 years.

On Friday morning the chairman of the Waltham Abbey Urban District Council, Mr. L. Monk, J.P., accompanied by Mrs. Winston Churchill (wife of the First Lord of the Admiralty and Member for the Division), Sir James Hawkey, Commander Thompson, and Mr. H. J. Chapman (Clerk to the Council), made a tour of inspection of the district.

Mrs. Churchill visited the homes of some of the injured men, and expressed hope that they would make a speedy recovery.

The "Gazette" understands that a large number of men have been temporarily suspended and the Ministry of Supply stated that work will not be available for some weeks for men in certain sections of the factory.

As many of the displaced men as possible are, however, to be employed on reconstruction work, and others who wish to do so will be taken on at other ordnance factories.

Official Inquiry

An official committee of inquiry is being set up by the Home Office and Ministry of Supply to go into the whole matter, but it is expected the report will confirm the theory that some unknown miscalculation or accident occurred during the nitro-glycerine drying process and detonated the large quantity of explosive in the shed.

Despite the shelving of the sabotage idea, there is to be a tightening up of safety precautions at all factories en-

THE VICTIMS,

ALBERT GEORGE LAWRENCE
32 Albury Road, Enfield Wash;
married, with four children.

A. KELMAN, 6 Brecon Road,
Ponders End; married with three
children.

JOHN EDGAR ROBINSON, 29
Bowood Road, Green Street, En-
field Highway, married, with
three children.

J. PARKES, 189 Charlton Road,
Edmonton; married, with one
child.

C. F. PURKIS, 51 Forest View
Road, E.17; married, with one
child.

Mr. Robinson, who came to Enfield from Stoke Newington, had resided at Bowood Road for a year. He had been employed at the factory since shortly after the war.

A neighbour said to a "Gazette" reporter that Mr. Kelman had been out of work for a long time and that he was taken on at the Gunpowder Factory just after the war.

Mrs. Purkis said she had been told by the police that no trace could be found of her husband, who had been working at the factory for sixteen months. Recently, he was transferred to the department where the explosion occurred.

When told about the explosion, Mrs. Purkis said: "I had a premonition that he was one of the victims."

INQUEST ADJOURNED

SEARCH STILL BEING MADE FOR THREE VICTIMS

Only evidence of identification was given at the inquest at Walthamstow on Monday on two of the five victims.

The two men were Albert Kelman, aged 33, of Brecon Road, Ponders End, and John Edgar Robinson, aged 35, of Bowood Road, Enfield.

Mrs. Doris Kelman identified her husband and said he had been employed at the factory since just before Christmas. He had always enjoyed his work there, and used to say that he was quite content.

Mrs. Rose Robinson said her husband was happy in his work at the factory. He had no enemies there, and was employed as a truckman.

The Coroner, Dr. P. B. Skeels, adjourned the inquiry until February 7th.

Search is still being made among the debris for further remains of the other three victims.

MATCH COST HIM HIS JOB

AND A £5 FINE

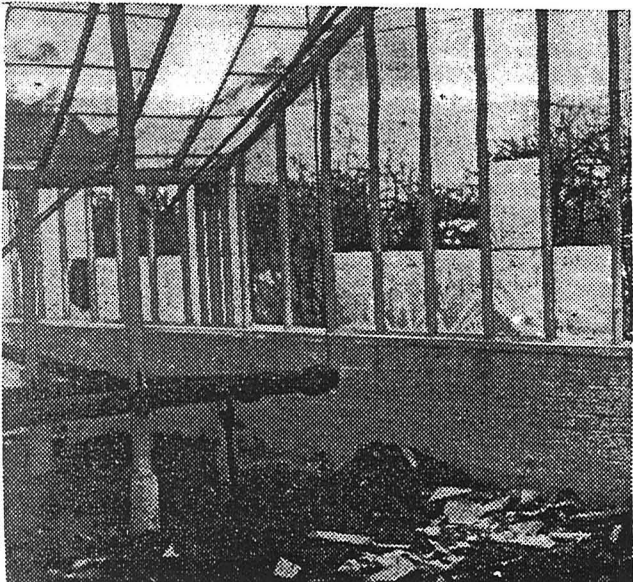
At Waltham Abbey Petty Sessions on Tuesday, Arthur James Stocker, James Street, Bush Hill Park, an employee at the Royal Gunpowder Factory, Waltham Abbey, pleaded guilty to having in his possession while at the factory an inflammable substance on January 11th.

Charles Henry Belsher, gateman and searcher at the factory, said that on Thursday, January 11th, between 2 and 2.30 p.m. he searched defendant who was going on duty. He found a piece of wood (produced) in the lining of defendant's overcoat, and told him to stand aside while he searched another man. Witness then asked defendant where the piece of wood was, and defendant replied: "I threw it over the fence." Witness searched the spot indicated and found the piece of wood, which was a match. There were notices all over the factory prohibiting workers from taking matches into the factory.

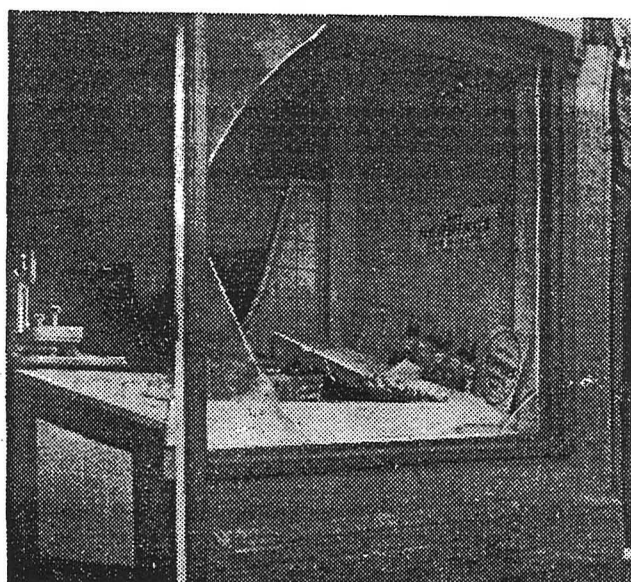
"ACCIDENTAL" SAYS DEFENDANT.

Defendant said the match was in his pocket quite accidentally and he had no intention of taking it into the factory. He certainly would not try to smuggle it inside.

The Chairman: How long have you



Some of the 2,500 panes of glass which were broken in nurseries near the factory, belonging to Mr. B. F. Meering, Clay Hill.



A shattered shop window in one of the streets in the town.

Weekly



Herald

And Enfield Highway and Ponders End Advertiser

FRIDAY, JANUARY 26, 1940.

Registered at the General

FOUR LOCAL VICTIMS

Of Waltham Abbey Explosion

Inquest on Two Men Opened

Of the five victims of the Waltham Abbey Gunpowder Factory explosion on Thursday in last week four were local men, three from Enfield and one from Edmonton.

The sympathy of the whole district goes out to their widows and families.

They were:

John Edgar Robinson (35), 29, Bowood-road, Green-street, Enfield Highway.

Albert George Lawrence (29), 32, Albany-road, Enfield Wash.

Albert Kelman (33), 6, Brecon-road, Ponders End.

J. Parkes (33), Charlton-road, Edmonton.

The other victim was C. F. Purkis, Forest View-road, E.17.

Mr. Robinson was a married man with three children. He came from Stoke Newington and had lived at Enfield about a year. He had been employed at the factory a few months and volunteered for the job at which he was killed because it brought him an extra 2s. 6d. danger money.



ALBERT KELMAN
(one of the victims)

Mr. Kelman was married with three children. He had lived in Brecon-road about three years and was a popular member of the Ponders End section of Enfield Municipal Tenants' Association.

Mr. Lawrence was married with four children, and Mr. Parkes leaves a wife and two children.

Thirty people were injured in the explosions which, as reported in our last issue, were felt for miles around and which smashed windows, brought ceilings down and did other extensive damage.

COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY

An official committee of inquiry sat on Friday to investigate the explosions.

During the afternoon the Home Office and Ministry of Supply issued a statement expressing the opinion that, "on the information at present available, there is no reason to suspect that these explosions were caused by sabotage."

Nevertheless, there was intense police activity and a tightening up of safety precautions not only in the London area but throughout the north and north-west of England.

SCOTLAND YARD INVESTIGATIONS

At Waltham Abbey Chief In-pr. Salisbury, of Scotland Yard, assisted by officials of the War Office, and heads of departments of the factory, continued his investigations. Many workmen were questioned.

It is common knowledge in the district that police inquiries have been taking place during recent weeks into an explosion which occurred a month ago.

The official investigation at the time failed to produce evidence of sabotage and the explosion was held to have been caused by an accident.

SYMPATHY

On Friday Mrs. Winston Churchill visited Waltham Abbey to express her husband's sympathy with residents affected by the explosions.

Accompanied by the Chairman of the Urban District Council (Mr. L. Monk) and the Clerk (Mr. H. J. Chapman) she drove round the district which had suffered most from blast. She found the work of repair in full swing.

On the same day Mr. Bartle Bull, M.P. for Enfield, obtained special leave from the army and went round the part of his constituency affected. He also visited Waltham Abbey.

RECONSTRUCTION WORK

It was announced on Saturday by the Ministry of Supply that work at the factory would not be available for a few weeks for all the men previously employed there.

They are making arrangements to employ on reconstruction work and on tasks which are not affected at the factory as many of the displaced men as possible, and are also inviting others who wish to do so to undertake employment at ordnance factories elsewhere.

INQUEST OPENED

Only evidence of identification was given at the inquest at Walthamstow on Monday on the two of the five victims who had been identified.

The two men were Albert Kelman and John Edgar Robinson.

Mrs. Doris Kelman identified her husband and said he had been employed at the factory since just before Christmas.

She last saw him alive at 6 a.m. on Thursday when he left for his work.

The Coroner (Dr. P. B. Skeels): He had always enjoyed his work?—Yes, he was quite content.

Mrs. Rose Robinson said her husband was employed as a truckman at the factory. He was a healthy man and was happy at his work.

The Coroner adjourned the inquest until February 7th.

HEARD 35 MILES AWAY

Mr. E. A. Cowing, formerly of Enfield, and now living in Leicestershire, writes to the "Weekly Herald" that he heard the two explosions very clearly, the distance being about 35 miles. He had been told that doors and windows shook.

SECOND WAR TRAGEDY

Mr. John Parkes is the second war tragedy in his family. His father was killed while serving in the Army in France in the last war. He was 36. Mr. Parkes leaves a widow and two children—a boy aged 11 and a girl aged 4. He had worked at the factory only since the outbreak of war. Previously he had been a tailor's presser. The family had lived in Edmonton for about two years.

ENFIELD COUNCIL'S SYMPATHY

A resolution of sympathy with the relatives of the men who lost their lives was passed at Enfield Council meeting and members and officials stood in silence.

Cr. Partington expressed a hope that dependents of victims would be treated generously.