

Fire Damages Cutlery Plant Explosions rip through two workshops

Employees of a Sheffield cutlery firm were called urgently from their homes on Saturday night to clear charred debris of stock and machinery after a serious fire and two explosions had ripped through two floors at a cutlery works.

The fire caused damage estimated at "many thousands of pounds." It began at the rear of the Sidney Street premises of Leppington (Cutlers) Ltd., and appeared to spread downwards from assembly shops on the second floor, which were completely gutted. No-one was in the building at the time.

Polishing shops on the first floor were also extensively damaged, but a thick arched concrete ceiling prevented flames reaching valuable stores on the floor beneath.

The disaster would have been more serious still if a passing taxi driver had not spotted the flames shortly before 7 p.m. and taken immediate action.

Appeal

As it was, a substantial number of export consignments were destroyed in the blaze as well as 50 electric motors and 300 highly priced bone china handles.

Last night the firm made an urgent appeal for temporary cutlery workshops so that important export orders might be completed with minimum delay.

Firemen wearing special breathing apparatus brought the flames under control within ten minutes of their arrival, but a Fire Brigade official said immediately afterwards: "We were only just in time. In another ten minutes the whole block of buildings, including a garage and some private houses, might have been ablaze."

Mrs. Ada: Humpherson, of Sidney Street, said there was nobody about when she came to her front door and found the street filled with smoke. "It was terrifying," she said, "the fire was going for all it was worth and I thought our houses would go up any minute."

Stopped

She ran to neighbour, Mr. Dennis Ward, and together they stopped a passing taxi, but the driver had already raised the alarm.

Two fire tenders and 11 men from Sheffield Fire Brigade H.Q. in Division Street were required to deal with the blaze. They were led by Assistant Chief Fire Officer S. Lambert and Station Officer H. Hibbert.

Among the first on the scene were Mr. Colin Maskill, works manager, and Mr. W. Drew and his father, Mr. H. Drew, both mineral polishers at the works. Mr. Maskill said work for 30

to 40 employees would be seriously affected for several months.

"Men will have to come in on Monday to help clear up," he said, "But I can't say what's going to happen after that. We can absorb the assembly workers' elsewhere but we need space urgently for polishing shops. I don't know what we'll do about the women employees," he added.

Tragedy

Mr. Ronald G. West, managing director of Leppington (Cutlers) Ltd., was sun-bathing in his garden at Knowle Lane, Bent's Green, when he was called to the fire. Inspecting the damage he said: "This is a real tragedy for us. It couldn't have come at a worse time. We're right at the peak of our export season and we are rushing to finish quite a number of foreign orders.

"Next -Tuesday I was going to Vienna with my co-director, Mr. H. L. Moore, to tour Europe with a view to prospects in the Common Market. That will have to be cancelled.

"We have had a long run of bad luck," he went on. "In 1958 we modernised our equipment and made every machine individually motorised. Since that time we've had three fires. The last one was in May."

Last night the cause of the fire was still unknown.



One of the gutted workshops at Leppington (Cutlers) Ltd