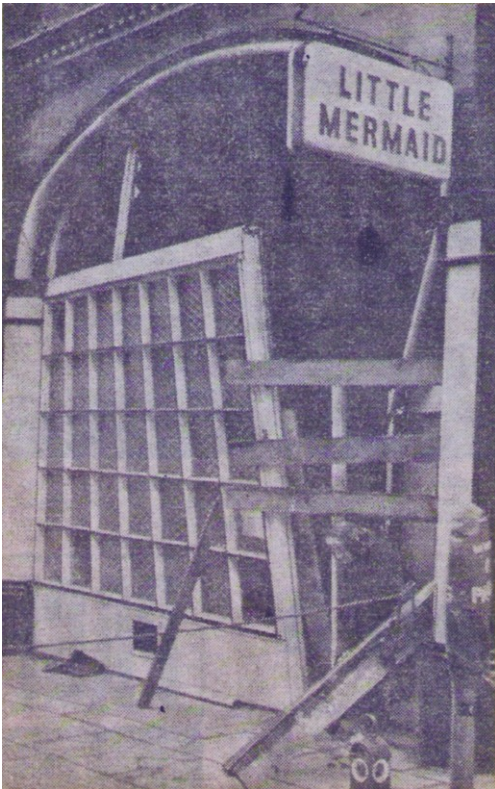


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City fireman badly hurt in cafe blast

By Gerald Beasley

A SHEFFIELD fireman was critically injured in a blast which rocked a city-centre cafe today, the badly damaged front of which is pictured left.



Fireman Frank Mallinson, 28-year-old father of two and a member of Sheffield Fire Service for nine years, received extensive burns and a broken arm.

He received emergency on-the-spot treatment from colleagues before being taken unconscious to Sheffield Royal Hospital.

A bulletin from the hospital's intensive care unit today said his condition was "critical."

Mr. Mallinson was helping to fight a blaze at the Little Mermaid cafe in Norfolk Street.

He was on the mezzanine floor when the blast was sparked off.

A brigade spokesman said later that Mr. Mallinson, who was wearing breathing apparatus, took the full force of the explosion, which blew two other firemen down some nearby stairs. They were shocked and stunned, both were uninjured.

Other firemen who were in the basement, struggled up stairs into the flame and smoke-filled section where Mr. Mallinson was lying, and carried him to safety.

They applied artificial respiration until the ambulance arrived.

The explosion completely wrecked the mezzanine section, which is used as a stock room, and blew out a large half-moon shaped glass window, sending slivers of glass hurtling into the street.

The force of the explosion also ripped the main wooden-framed glass window from its fixings and left it sagging over the pavement.

Firemen confined the outbreak to the cafe, but broke into the premises of the Sheffield College of Hairdressing, situated above, for a safety check.

The fire was spotted by a patrolling police constable.

Just over an hour before, the cafe, a favourite late-night haunt, had been packed with customers. It is generally open until about 2.30.

Mr. Brian Hull, the 29 year-old owner - he took it over 15 months ago - said he closed last night just before midnight.

"But we are now in the quiet season: that is why I closed much earlier than usual," he said today.

Mr. Hull of Oldham Way, 1 Topley, Sheffield, said the cafe would be closed for a "considerable time."

"There is a lot of repair work to be done," he said.