

Firefighters Memorial Day – 4th May 2022

Remembering Sidney Charles Tropman - Late of 383 Lug Trout Lane,
Catherine de Barnes, Solihull

Died 28th July 1942 aged 39 at Dockers Paint Works, Rotton Park Street B16
(off Icknield Port Road)

Buried in Brandwood End Cemetery - Section 24, Grave No. 7943



The Firefighters Memorial Trust

Incorporated by Royal Charter

Patron: HRH The Princess Royal

Founder - Chairman: Colin J Livett BEM • Founder - Life President: Gerry D Clarkson CBE QFSM

'The night they bombed Dockers'

(Caption taken from The Brew 'Us Bugle 3 July 2002 article by Norman Bartlam)

Date: 28th of July 1942

Description:

In the early hours of 28 July 1942 a severe bombing raid on the west and south of the city resulted in the destruction of part of the **Docker's paint factory on Rotton Park Street** and the loss of life of four firefighters, who were killed when a wall collapsed on them as they were working in the ruins of the bombed works.

The Docker's fire brigade had been joined by staff from the neighbouring factory of Wiggins'. The four fatally wounded men were from the Wiggins' team. Author L G While in his booklet 'Raiders over Rotton Park' names them as Bill Griffin, Bill Russell, Harry Norgrove and Bill Field.

Two nights later in a follow up raid Bill Fitzpatrick was on duty at Wiggins' when an incendiary bomb fell nearby, and he died later in hospital from his injuries.

The factory was essential to the War effort as it was a key manufacturer of camouflage paint. A Docker's publication produced in 1951 recalls: **'Dockers' supplied vast quantities of paint for munitions, camouflage and transport, and aircraft and dope finishes.** The staff was depleted considerably but the switch from peace-time production to war essentials was made smoothly and effectively'.

The minutes of the Docker's Board meeting after the bombing include: 'A letter from the Ministry of Aircraft Production expressing appreciation of the gallant behaviour of the Fire Brigade and others who assisted on the night of the blitz was read and noted. The members of the Board also recorded their appreciation.

The death of the five National Fire Service men who were killed by the fall of a wall when fighting the fire was noted with deepest regret, four of whom were Messrs. Henry Wiggin's employees. Mr. Cooper reported that he had arranged for us to pay £25 to each of the wives of the deceased men'.

In the days before instant communication many people living away from the neighbourhood of the factory didn't know what happened until they arrived at work. One such worker was Bert Tredwell, himself a Docker's fireman, but not on duty that night. He cycled from his home in Cotteridge and was devastated by the sight he saw as he came to the top of Icknield Port Road.

'I just couldn't ride down the street because there were so many hoses; it was a tremendous shock to see a fair amount of people running about. I immediately reported and was given a job at once.

By then the main fire was out but there was a lot of smouldering wreckage which the firemen were working on and we were told to keep clear as much as possible to leave them to get on with it. In fact we weren't allowed to go too near because the walls were down.

It was a shock to hear that four men had been killed, and there was an overwhelming feeling of 'thank God I wasn't there at the time'. We all thought what are we going to do now. We were given instructions to save what ever we could. Our department was on the ground floor and it wasn't completely damaged except that the upper floor from above was now in it! We had to scramble through it to see what could be salvaged.

There was feeling that the extra firemen brought in didn't know where the most dangerous and inflammable parts of the factory were, nitrated cotton was most inflammable and could have easily gone up, but the Standard building, where most of the damage occurred was safer than other buildings on the site'.

Docker's had the capacity to produce 3,500 gallons per week of what was described as 'anti-gas paint'.

The bombed part of the factory was the newest part of the factory complex, built only six years earlier for the manufacture of paint for Standard cars, hence its name The Standard Mill.



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