

Folkestone, Hythe & District

Chronicle, Observer, Express and Kent Evening Echo

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SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 26th, 1955.

Destroys Laundry At Sandgate

Building Guttled In Early Morning Blaze

ONE of the biggest fires in Folkestone for many years caused tens of thousands of pounds worth of damage at the premises of the Sandgate Laundries, Wilberforce Road, early on Thursday. Firemen from Folkestone and Hythe with fire appliances had the fire under control in just over an hour.

Most of the roof of the two-story building collapsed and heavy machinery on the second floor crashed to the ground. The building, in fact, was almost completely gutted.

Families in Sandgate watched the firemen fight the flames, which could be seen over a wide area.

HOUSE THREATENED

Firemen also directed hoses to the wall of a house, occupied by the laundry manager, Mr. J. McDonald, only a few feet from the blazing building. People living in timbered houses opposite the blaze left their homes as the flames spread high into the air.

Two firemen fighting the blaze from the ground floor were ordered out of the building by Station Officer W. Chitenden, in charge of the fire engines, just before heavy machinery crashed through the blazing floor.

The fire started in the boiler house and spread rapidly through the large building, which contained a great deal of woodwork.

MASS OF FLAMES

When the fire brigade arrived a few minutes after receiving a call the building was a mass of flames.

"The fire must have been going some time before we arrived," said Station Officer Chitenden. "The flames swept through the wooden floors and partitions and the roof timbers."

Mr. McDonald, who was awakened by the glare of the flames, said: "I rushed out and found the boiler room well alight. I telephoned for the fire brigade but there was little I could do to salvage anything." Mrs. Hodgson, aged 73, of The Ingolow, Wilberforce Road, was also awakened by the glare of the flames.

She and her daughter, Miss Hodgson, threw coats over their night clothes and rushed out to give the alarm. Miss Hodgson telephoning to the fire brigade from a call box.

Employees arriving for work

on Thursday viewed the charred remains of the laundry with dismay. The interior was a mass of charred woodwork, wrecked machinery and burnt laundry.

IN TEARS

Some of the 50 girls employed at the laundry were in tears when they saw the burnt-out building.

The only part of the laundry which was not seriously affected was the new office extension; it was saved by the concrete floor above.

Records and office machinery, although very wet, were salvaged.

The fire occurred at the peak period of the laundry's working week. Thousands of pounds worth of customers' laundry awaiting delivery was destroyed.

None of the company's vehicles was damaged.

BUSINESS AS USUAL

Sandgate Laundries stated yesterday that business will be continued as usual, work being transferred to Kennington Laundry, near Ashford.

Four fire appliances from Folkestone and one from Hythe were sent to the laundry, and an appliance and crew from Dover stood by at the Folkestone station.

Firemen were still at work at the scene seven hours after they were called.

Mr. G. T. George, who lives opposite, said: "I was awakened by the reflection of the flames on the bedroom ceiling. I looked out of the window and saw that the laundry was well alight."

30ft. FLAMES

"I went out immediately to see whether I could be of assistance and soon afterwards the fire brigade arrived."

"Flames were shooting over 30ft. into the air and firemen told me they could see the flames from Sandgate Hill."

"The heat was terrific and firemen had to play their hoses on the side of The Laurels, a brick-built house next door to the blazing laundry."



A chaos of twisted metal and wreckage after the fire at Sandgate Laundries.

Labour Councillor Guides' Talk Walks Out

Sharp Exchanges With The Mayor

A LABOUR member, Councillor A. Sainsbury, walked out of a meeting of Folkestone Town Council on Thursday, during a discussion on the election of aldermen.

THE MATTER arose on a letter from the Folkestone and District Trades Council expressing concern at the failure of the town council to elect to the aldermanic bench members who, by reason of their seniority, would

be prepared to listen to you.

Councillor Sainsbury said he realised it was a matter of law but they should make the best of a bad job.

"You, yourself, have said," he went on, "that in the Council there is too much . . ."

"That is the very thing I wished to avoid," interrupted the Mayor. "It is a fruitless discussion because it has no bearing on the matter. I am very sorry. I must rule you out of

Guides' Talk Day 1

Hythe Pres

PATROL Leader

Hythe Guide

wrote their own theme of internationalism for the Corbridge Thinking Day ceremony at the Church House.

Camp fire songs and nations added to the presentation.

Co-authors of the P.L.s. Pat Cartwright (Patrol), Elizabeth Kingfisher (Patrol) and Karen Self (Bullfinch).

CANDL

Earlier, the spirit

flame of friendship

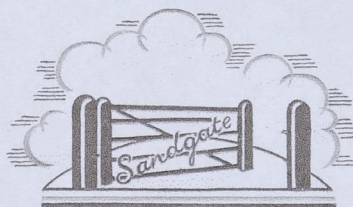
nations was symbolised

by the lighting of 32

candles representing a

unity which there is

in the world.



THE SANDGATE LAUNDRIES

PROPRIETOR · JOHN MATHER

TELEPHONE · 78565

A LAUNDRY OF MODERATE SIZE,
OFFERING THE ADVANTAGES OF
A MODERN WATER-SOFTENING PLANT,
AND EQUIPPED TO CATER FOR THE
DISCERNING FEW

WILBERFORCE ROAD
SANDGATE

August 23rd 1940

Dear Mary

What a mess that we forgot to take your gas mask out of the car, I do not see your ration book but before I post your parcel I will have another look. Your Mother tells me that you did not want to go back when the time came but by now I suppose you are again settled down. It has been quiet down here until yesterday when a convoy came past going to London, then the Germans started shelling from the French coast from some of the batterys they have erected and the flame from the gun mouths could be distinctly seen as well as the shells dropping in the water. I think the convoy got past alright. Last night we heard some shells come over and burst near Dover and one of our guns was firing back at the French coast and we could see the explosion on the other side.

There has not been much damage here really, and not many people been hit. I'm glad that you enjoyed your holiday and I hope that before long you will be able to see John. Unfortunately the end of the war seems to be a long way off and a lot is likely to happen before then which makes it very difficult to know what is the best thing to do. Your Mother has not decided what to do yet. I would much sooner have her here but to tell her to come or even to ask her considering what it may be like is more than I want to do. It is better she should make her own mind up. She can always leave if she finds she cannot stand it, or it maybe that we shall all have to leave before very long. Still things are not as bad as we expected them to be when your Mother left and it may be that we shall be quite alright down here. Please give my kind regards to Mr & Mrs Griffiths and Love to yourself.

Yours

Dad X

9 Jan 1941 Burrow Rd

FWH
5C



GAZETTE 02.03.1955



The smoke-blackened Sandgate laundry, all that remains after the disastrous fire
that swept through the building in the early hours of last Thursday morning.

WILBERFORCE ROAD AND THE DOODLEBUG

Extracts from the diary of Mary Mather (aged 18)

LAUREL VILLA, WILBERFORCE ROAD
SUNDAY AFTERNOON; 20 AUGUST 1944

Sitting reading on the front doorstep in the sunshine. Hear the whine of a distant doodlebug, and get up to watch. The noise gets louder and louder then the doodlebug starts to dive, with engines still roaring. The scream is now on top of us and I run in to find mother. Now the throbbing fills the whole house and I think 'Oh my God, we're FOR it, we're FOR it'. The house shudders and seems about to crumple, then miraculously, to hesitate and recover. Mother, who had been on her knees cleaning the fireplace, is spluttering with a mouthful of soot. (She said afterwards she had been breathing in because we had been told to keep our mouths open when we hear a doodlebug in case of blast.) A voice in the doorway shouts "All right in there?" "Yes, we're OK"

We go out and walk down the hill. There is glass everywhere. Next door to the laundry, the Cotters' windows have been blown out. So have the windows of the corner shop, where Mrs Billings is standing dazed among the wreckage of packages, jars and pots of disinfectant, pickles, floor polish, etc. Mr Billings is already picking bits of glass out of Shredded Wheat cartons. From further up Wilberforce Road, women and children are pouring out onto the road to look at the damage, Some are crying, some laughing, others shouting with relief. Notes are compared "I crouched down by the wall when I heard it coming" "I grabbed the children and pushed them under the stairs". Four-year-old sister Nancy, who had been playing at Linda Buss's house, comes running home and says in an awestruck voice, "Linda's windows have all gone and the glass just missed my feet in the shelter".

Then we see a great plume of smoke rising over the Coastguard houses, and there is rush down the little hill, over the road to the seafront, where there is a gap in the barbed wire that runs along the beach. Not far out is a blue-black stain on the water, which is slowly spreading out and merging into the green of the sea. Two NFS lorries scream to a halt, and we are told to stand back.

The crowd disperses and we go back up Wilberforce Road. Girls are coming out of the laundry, some holding their heads where pieces of ceiling had dropped on them. My father is out too, and is laughing at the mess in Mr Billings' shop. His face drops when he turns round and notices the damage to the laundry roof! Miss Francis, who lives opposite Laurel Villa, is just emerging, looking very dishevelled. Aged 83, she is our fire warden. Now, wearing her tin hat, she totters over to see if Mother is all right. It seems she had been sitting in her garden and the first-floor veranda had collapsed on her. Chunks of plaster are sticking to her jacket. Mother and I then set to clearing up the mess in the kitchen so we can sit down and have a cup of tea. Feeling quite limp with relief that we are still here and OK, I get out my diary, sit at the kitchen table, and am writing when.....

Later

More excitement! It acts like a drug and we are all out on the road again! A lorry has come with poles and barricaded Wilberforce Road off! Men in uniform are telling people to stand back from the corner house whose walls are cracked and bulging. A crowd has gathered and remarks are bandied about with much laughter. "What an 'ell of a mess' 'Talk about the wreck of the Hesperus'. Cars on the main road stop and more people crowd up under the poles to see what is going on. Boys are swinging on the horizontal barriers and playing tag as they dodge in and out of the uprights. Then more men arrive in a van and tell us all to move away, as emergency work is started on the house.

Further up Wilberforce Road, there is the sound of glass being shovelled into dustbins and of hammers nailing temporary weather shields over broken windows. And above all is the sound of laughter and the excited chatter of people who have just come through it, now boasting about narrow escapes, comparing damage, swapping anecdotes. I feel a bit sorry that we have nothing to boast of, as our only damage was plaster from fallen ceilings!



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13 April 2008**

The Secretary
The Sandgate Society

Dear

I have been turning out old pictures and papers and come across the enclosed which you may find of interest. They are:

- a) Two pieces of old Sandgate notepaper,
- b) Two photographs of the Sandgate Laundry in Wilberforce Road after it was burnt down in 1953,
- c) A booklet of inter-war photographs of Sandgate & Folkestone

My father, John Mather, bought the broken-down little Sandgate laundry in 1933. He was originally a cotton-worker in Lancashire who came south during the depression. He built the laundry up so that it became a substantial employer in Sandgate.

During the war he was in a reserved occupation, doing the laundrywork for the Shorncliffe Camp military personnel. We lived in the house next to the laundry - Laurel Villa - and from there controlled the Sandgate air-raid siren which was powered from the laundry boiler. The ARP post was also located in our house.

When the laundry was burnt down, production was transferred to evening shifts at the Metropole Laundry, Dymchurch Road, Hythe. My father, who had other laundry and dry-cleaning businesses, subsequently took over the Metropole Laundry, renaming it Sandgate Laundries. This was amalgamated with Kennington Laundry in the 1980s, and the Dymchurch Road site transformed into small industrial units - but still named SANDGATE LAUNDRIES!

Behind Laurel Villa, in the undercliff area, was the romantic Encombe House with its secret passageways, Spanish arches and spacious grounds. It had been built, we understood, by the Prince of Wales before WW1 for his mistress Lily Langtree. True or not, the courtyard had a mosaic of the Prince of Wales feathers and motto 'ich dien'. During the war, we had permission from George, the gardener, to use the sunken tennis court, and pick fruit from the orchard which, like the hanging gardens of Babylon, dropped through a series of terraces, down the centre of which flowed an ornamental stream. All gone now of course.

I have happy memories of Sandgate and the various things that took place in the hall at the back of the the Congregational Church (now FHODS): the Band of Hope (run by Miss Reynolds of the sweet shop), and the Brownies (run by the redoubtable Miss Finmore); also, of course of Fred Moore and the Scouts; the Chichester hall; and the Sunday School at the Methodist Church - run by another redoubtable lady, Mrs Godfey.

I hope this may be of some interest for your archives,

Yours sincerely