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Limerick Leader

Vol. 75, No. 13986

WEDNESDAY, JULY 24, 1963

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GOLDEN
AMBER
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One of Ireland's finest stores gutted BIG FIRE AFTERMATH Over £200,000 worth of damage caused

LIMERICK was talking to-day about the disastrous fire—the fourth biggest in the city since 1948, when Roche's Stores was destroyed—which swept through Messrs. A. E. Goodwin and Co. Ltd., William Street, last evening.
So rapid was the spread of the fire that the whole premises from William St. to Thomas St.-Catherine St. was engulfed in flames 10 minutes after the alarm was raised.

Damage estimated at £200,000 was caused when some of the most valuable glassware, chinaware and jewellery were destroyed.

Hundreds of sightseers, including many holiday-makers, visited the scene and watched the Limerick Fire Brigade damping down the still smouldering embers.

Portions of William St., Catherine St. and Thomas St. were kept cordoned off and traffic had to be diverted by other routes.

Despite the intensity of the flames and the speed at which the fire spread, adjoining business premises which were thought to be extensively damaged in the rear, escaped with minor damage.

This morning, 30 employees were told to report for work and toiled throughout the day salvaging what goods they could. Safes recovered to-day were found to be intact and their contents in good condition.

One glasscase containing some £1,500 worth of goods was taken from the building intact and stored in Messrs. Todds.

To-day, the Mayor of Limerick, Councillor Mrs. Frances Condell, called on the Goodwin family and expressed her own personal sympathy and the sympathy of the citizens on the disaster.

The Mayor paid a very high tribute to the Limerick Fire Brigade for their great work in succeeding in confining the blaze, and to the Gardaí, under Chief

Supt. E. Reynolds, who worked so quickly in cordoning off the streets and diverting traffic.

E.S.B. and P.O. officials also worked very quickly and very efficiently in cutting off power supplies and re-routing telephone lines damaged in the fire.

Hundreds of pounds worth of goods are still stored in the cellars and some of these may be intact. Meanwhile, tons of debris have to be removed before these can be salvaged.

The story of the fire

At approximately 6.40, Garda Donal Danagher, stationed at William Street Garda Station, and on patrol duty at the time, saw smoke coming from the roof. Without hesitation, he rang the Fire Brigade and took measures to have the area cordoned off. The Brigade was on the scene in a matter of minutes, but the fire had taken a firm hold by then and spread from end to end of the premises in minutes.

Flames reached 100 feet into the sky and loud explosions shook the centre of the building as glassware exploded from the intense heat. At about 7 o'clock the plate glass windows burst with a loud

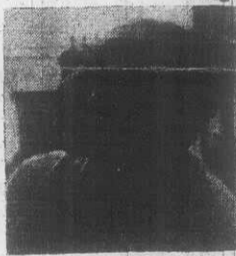
roar and shattered pieces were flung into the air.

Further explosions followed as roof after roof collapsed in the four-storey building. By 7.30 it was obvious that the brigade had the fire under control and had saved the block of buildings surrounding the area.

Mr. James Counihan, Home and Colonial, William Street, was also one of the first to spot the fire and also notified the Fire Department.

Mayor's tribute

The Mayor, Councillor Mrs. Frances Condell, today expressed the highest praise for the work of the Chief of the Limerick Fire



"Busman's Holiday" . . . Mr. Mattie Watt, a Scottish fireman on holidays in Limerick gave a willing and helping hand to the local crew in putting out the fire.

Brigade, Mr. P. J. O'Sullivan, B.E., and his assistant, Mr. T. McInerney.

The brigade men were so efficient throughout and the equipment was so adequate that there was no chance at any time of the situation going out of control.

All did an excellent job in confining the outbreak.

64 years with firm

A retired employee who watched, much saddened, in William Street, the flames engulfing the premises, was Mr. Paddy Fitzgerald, of 22 Garvey's Range, Limerick.

He retired last year after 64 years with the firm and has a proud memento of association in a silver pocket watch, suitably inscribed, which was presented to him by his fellow workers.

At one stage, soon after the outbreak, there was a danger that the electric wires of the public lighting system in Little Catherine Street would become ignited and thus sever, causing potential danger to onlookers in lower Catherine Street.

However, E.S.B. officials were fully alert to the situation and had the power throughout that district cut off.

ENJOYED HIMSELF

One man who enjoyed himself was Mr. Matt Watt, a native of Aberdeen and a member of the Scottish Fire Fighting Division, who manned one of the hoses.

Mr. Patrick Minogue, Thomas Street, said that at about 6.30 he noticed smoke coming from the premises and he sent two of his children to notify the Brigade.

Mr. Jim Gough, who has a small confectionery business in Little Catherine Street, told a Limerick Leader reporter to-day that he was talking to the Manager, Mr. O'Brien, around

twenty minutes past six and said goodnight to him. Shortly afterwards the fire occurred and Mr. O'Brien did not know about it until he was notified at home.

Mr. Donal O'Donovan, of Danus, said that he was passing his car at 8.40 when he noticed smoke pouring from the roof of the building and he remarked to himself: "The whole block a gonner."

Early on the scene were Limerick Corporation officials and Mr. M. O'Sullivan, Civilian Defence Officer for Limerick, who helped in directing operations.

Mr. P. J. O'Sullivan, Chief Fire Officer, and Mr. Thady Moloney, Assistant Chief Officer, worked indefatigably with their tireless fire crews. Many citizens joined in the attempt to salvage as much goods as possible and at one period a regular chain had been formed to take out boxes of merchandise.

The showrooms were considered one of the finest in the country and had developed a very high-class trade over the years.

The Company stocked one of the finest selections of glassware and china in Ireland and was also noted for the quality of its paintings by national and local artists. Many of these paintings were stored in rooms overhead and all were completely destroyed.

Mr. Peter Goodwin, Director, told reporters to-day that the firm had no immediate plans for the future.

The origin of the fire will probably be never known.

WENT ON FIRE AGAIN
When the top portion of the premises of Messrs. Bryan Green began to smoulder again today the Limerick Fire Brigade sent down the engine as a precautionary measure. The fire was extinguished in a short time.

Mr. O'Brien told reporters to-day that very little goods were salvaged from the fire. He said that when he was notified about the fire, while having his tea, he immediately returned to the premises and found them "a blazing inferno."

Residents in flats in the area took the precaution of removing essential goods in case the fire enveloped the block.

SUDDEN OUTBREAK
There was a sudden outbreak of fire on the roof of Mr. Bryan Greene's premises after lunch to-day and two couples had to be evacuated from their flats as a result.

Extensive damage was caused to the top flat occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Michael Casey and they were obliged to seek alternative accommodation.

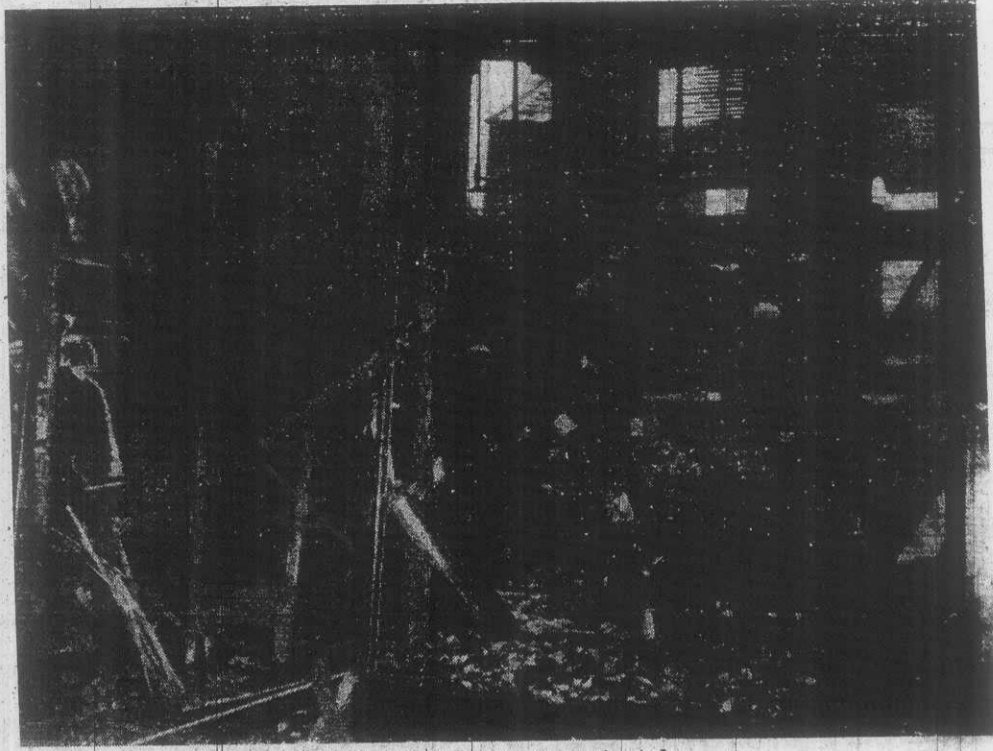
The flat underneath, occupied by Mr. Thomas Guerin and his sister, Mary Ann, was badly damaged by water and they were obliged to seek alternative accommodation.

Other major fires in Limerick since 1948 were: Roche's Stores (1948); O'Callaghan's Tannery (1950); Messrs. J. H. Roche, Flour Millers (1957); Messrs. Todd and Co. and the Playhouse and Income Tax Office, O'Connell Street (1959); L.A.W.S. (1961) and J. & L. E. Goodbody's (1962).

Workers, shifting salvaged crates of china from the damaged premises to-day.

The fire at its greatest . . . Flames leap high into the sky from the roof on the Thomas Street side.

Workers, shifting salvaged crates of china from the damaged premises to-day.



Firemen spray the smoking debris in the gutted premises to-day.



The fire at its greatest . . . Flames leap high into the sky from the roof on the Thomas Street side.

SHORTAGE OF SKILLED LABOUR A PROBLEM

SHORTAGE of skilled labour is still holding up housing in Limerick and an expected 50 houses which were to be handed over by a contractor in June are still under construction.

This was revealed at last night's meeting of the City Council during a discussion on housing, when the City Architect, Mr. P. O'Callaghan, said that contractors were unable to get their full quota of skilled tradesmen.

The discussion was initiated by Ald. S. Coughlan, T.D., who asked why were not the 50 houses promised handed over in June. People were crying out for houses and he would like to know the present position. In other words, who were responsible for the delay?

The City Architect, Mr. P. O'Callaghan, said that he was responsible physically for the delay. He represented the delay from the very beginning of the scheme. The contractor had told him that his minimum requirements at the start would be 30 carpenters and 30 masons, but he could get no more than 18 men. The scheme was supposed to be finished this month, but nothing had been handed over. The shortage of skilled labour was the cause. The contractor had stated quite clearly that he had got all the materials on the site and he (Architect) had done as much as he could, and he could go no further than he had gone.

He had hoped to have some 15 houses for the present meeting, but that had fallen down.

Mr. O'Callaghan said that the contractor, in order to keep building moving, was obliged to switch carpenters from one job to another.

The Mayor, Mr. Frances Condell, asked why it was that there was more availability of skilled labour at Shannon Airport than in Limerick.

The Architect said that he understood that the skilled men were receiving higher rates of pay at Shannon.

Ald. Coughlan—That is the tragic situation.

Ald. J. Carew said that he was not in favour of any other buildings in Limerick while there was a waiting list for houses. It would appear that there was big money available for schemes such as hotels, etc., and for that reason housing contractors were left without skilled labour to provide housing for the working classes.

The shortage of houses was not the fault of the City Manager or officials, but it was due to the fact that they could not get skilled labour to finish the houses as quickly as was desired.

Ald. Carew then asked what was the position with regard to the Watergate scheme.

The Architect said that nine solid months of work had gone into the preparation of the scheme and that scheme would have to be examined in detail by the Local Government Department. That would take some time. The first major discussions about the scheme would take place shortly and these would embrace all the aspects including the social

aspects.

Ald. Coughlan—And they will hold it up as long as they can.

Ald. Carew—Do you anticipate any further delays on the technical side or any other reason for a hold up?

The Architect said he could see no further reasons for a hold up, and pointed out that they were starting a major re-development of the centre of the city and it was a very important problem and they had to take the precaution of not making the mistake of creating a bigger social problem than they had at present. It was not purely a matter of throwing up big buildings here and there as quickly as possible.

He did not think, however, that there would be any undue delay.

Mr. P. O'Sullivan said that there was only one contractor in the Tank Field and he was carrying on two schemes. He thought the schemes should be divided up.

The Manager said that the schemes were submitted for public tender and were awarded in the customary procedure.

There was no further discussion.

NEWLY-WEDS LOST GIFTS

Many sad features are connected with the big fire. One that will arouse much sympathy is the loss suffered by a newly-married couple, Mr. and Mrs. Dermot Gloster, who both hail from Limerick and are now living in London. Their many wedding presents, which were brought to Messrs. Goitwin yesterday afternoon from Patrick Street, Limerick, for packing and subsequent dispatch by air to London, were completely destroyed in the fire. Mr. Dick Smith, father of Mrs. Gloster, said to-day that they had prepared an inventory of the presents, and this occupied two pages of foolscap. He praised highly the action of Messrs. Goitwin, who to-day promised to issue a cheque to have the gifts replaced.

It is thought that the total amount of gifts was about £800 but nothing can replace the sentimental value.

Mr. Gloster, son of Mr. V. St. Gloster, is a well-known tenor.

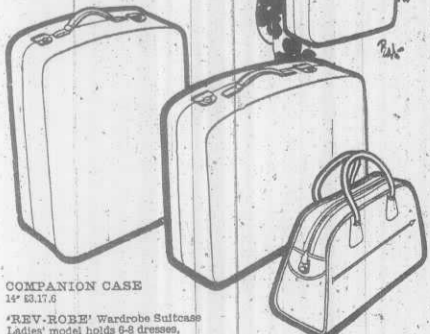
DEATH

HOWARD—July 24, 1963, at St. Luke's Hospital, Dublin, James and Margaret Howard, 62 Hennessy Avenue, Limerick; deeply regretted. R.I.P. Requiem will arrive at St. Munin's Church this evening at 7 o'clock. Requiem Mass tomorrow (Thursday) at 10 o'clock. Funeral at 3 o'clock same day to St. Laurence Cemetery. (C)

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