

C. S.

<p align="center"><u>NAVAL AND MILITARY</u> ( Naval ) <u>MISCELLANEOUS</u> (General)</p>
<p>No. 8/46</p>

1946.

Chief Constable

SUBJECT.

1946.

19th January

Previous Paper.

DESTRUCTION BY FIRE OF NAVAL STORES KNOWN  
AS FIRST AND LAST.

MINUTES.

- 1. Minute from Chief Constable of 19. 1. 46
- 2. " H. E. The Governor " 22. 1. 46

(3)

*y.f. S.C. informs me that y.f. authorised this expenditure covering A/W. submitted for signature, pl.*  
*[Signature]*  
*18/2/46*

- 4 Minute from Coroner of —

(5)

*y.f. I submit recd (4) pl.*  
*[Signature]*  
*14/3/46*

(6)

*Pl. attend the verdict or finding as announced in Court.*

*[Signature]*  
*15/iii/46*

Subsequent Paper.

*Coroner*  
*re: (6) pl.*  
*[Signature]*  
*15.3.46*

*Act.*

*The verdict is on (A.C.)*

~~H.G. J. S.~~  
19.3.46

PA.

A.C.S. (10)  
(Red 1) § 7.

What was done about the slowness of  
the Fire Brigade on the scene of the  
fire, & the breakdown of the pumps?

A.B. L.  
26.6.46

(11)

H.C.S.  
So far as I am aware the questions were not  
raised during the Enquiry

~~H.G. J. S.~~  
26/6/46

PA  
A.B. L.  
27.6.46

12. Memo. from Ch. Constable of 18/12/50

PA.

B. J. P.

P O L I C E   N O T I C E .

UNLAWFUL POSSESSION.

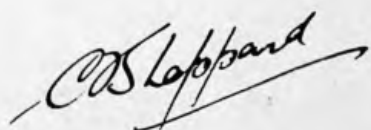
DUE TO A MISUNDERSTANDING CERTAIN ARTICLES WERE GIVEN AWAY FROM THE R.N. PROVISION STORE ON ROSS ROAD (commonly known as the "First & Last"), AFTER THE FIRE IN THIS BUILDING ON SUNDAY 13th JANUARY 1946.

THESE ARTICLES ARE THE PROPERTY OF THE LORDS COMMISSIONERS OF THE ADMIRALTY.

IT IS HEREBY NOTIFIED FOR GENERAL INFORMATION THAT THESE ARTICLES REFERRED TO, MUST BE RETURNED AND ARE TO BE HANDED IN TO THE POLICE STATION BY NOON ON FRIDAY THE 18th JANUARY 1946.

ANY PERSON FOUND IN POSSESSION OF ANY SUCH ARTICLE PROVED TO BELONG TO THE ADMIRALTY SUBSEQUENT TO NOON ON FRIDAY 18th JANUARY, WILL BE PROSECUTED.

Stanley,  
15th January, 1946.

  
Chief Constable.

P O L I C E   N O T I C E .

(14)  
A  
200.

ON THE ADVICE FROM THE NAVAL OFFICER IN CHARGE, IT IS NOTIFIED FOR GENERAL INFORMATION THAT ALL GOODS DAMAGED OR UNDAMAGED, TAKEN FROM THE R.N. PROVISION STORE, COMMONLY KNOWN AS THE "FIRST & LAST" ARE THE PROPERTY OF THE ADMIRALTY.

ANY PERSON OR PERSONS FOUND IN POSSESSION OF THESE GOODS WILL BE PROSECUTED.

Stanley,  
13th ~~December~~, 1946.

*January*  
*CB*



Chief Constable.

(It is requested that, in any reference to this minute the above Number and the date may be quoted.)

19th January, 19 46.

From The Chief Constable,

To The Honourable,

The Colonial Secretary,

Stanley.

Stanley, Falkland Islands.

Reference: Fire Incident - R.N. Provision Store,

I have the honour to submit the following report on details in connection with the above.

2. At approximately 1230 hrs. on Saturday 12th January, the civilian storekeeper Mr. R. Rumbolds demonstrated to the newly employed assistant namely Mr. C. Ford, the method of breaking the electric light switches. This was reported in the first instance to me by N.O.I.C. and later by Mr. Rumbolds himself and was accepted as a definite proof that all three switches were pulled out i.e. in the OFF position.

3. On questioning Rumbolds and, from enquires of N.O.I.C. and B.S.O. I am informed that no other person, including P O Rogerson, who has duplicate keys, that no person or persons entered this building after 1230 hrs. on Saturday 12th, and that Rumbolds was the last to leave, locking the door-lock and the padlock attached.

4. However at some time during the following day N.O.I.C. informed me that on inspecting these switches he was almost sure that the Left-hand one of the three appeared to be in the ON position i.e. pushed in. I inspected these switches and considered that at some convenient time I would, accompanied by an electrician from the E. & T. Dept., make a closer inspection. This I did and took down the switches taking them to the Supervisor E. & T. Dept. for views. He stated that it was a possibility that one was made or ON. Later when questioning the Supt. Power House Mr. T. Hennah as to the possibility of a short circuit being registered prior to the outbreak of the fire, which was not, he, after carefully examining the metal parts of these switches, concluded definitely that one had been made or ON. This switch controlled the lighting of the "Slop Room" (windows facing North) and from appearance it seems the most likely place for the fire to have started.

5. I therefore am of the opinion that some persons or person entered this building after 1230 hrs. on Saturday, or early Sunday morning, presumably during darkness, hence the one switch being made and the aforementioned person or persons were responsible for the outbreak of fire.

6. At about 0235 hrs. on Sunday 13th January, Constable Fleuret noticed a reflection to the East of the town. He was then returning from patrol which had included Sullivan House and actually he was coming down the slope by the Battle Memorial. He increased his pace toward the East on considering the possibility of it being a fire, reporting by tel. to me at the same time preparing the maroons. The exchange operator switched on the Siren. The maroons were fired at approximately 0245 hrs. The warning was supplemented by telephone calls to numerous persons concerned. On reaching the scene of the fire I noticed that the East-end half of the building was well alight and flames were up to about ten feet above the roof level. I inspected the glass of all windows, not yet affected by the heat, none of which had been broken.

7. The East-end trailer pump started to deliver a good pressure at about 0340 hrs. and continued until it went permanently out of action by 0330 hrs. However the West-end pump which was in action about 0320 hrs. continued until 0400 hrs. when it temporarily broke down. At about 0330 hrs. the Govt. pump was in action and ~~was~~ intermittently in and out of action. The fire, despite all continued in the West-end of the building and ~~was~~ eventually almost doused by 0430 hrs. This may have been affected earlier had it not been for the break down of the two A.R.P. pumps between 0400 and 0420 hrs.

1a

8. At about 0330 hrs. an attempt was made to salvage goods from the West rear of the building. Some ten minutes later quite a lot of goods were passed out and placed on the ground to the rear. A constant watch was maintained by two Constables. One Constable was on the road to keep watch for any goods that may have been salvaged there. This watch was maintained until 0815 hrs. that was until after the arrival of the Naval working party, when I instructed the the duty Constable to leave, first informing B.S.O. also Rumbolds of my intentions.

9. I can definitely state that up to 0815 hrs. there was no looting and that subsequently to this time, any articles taken away from the building or its near vicinity, must have been given in the first instance by the Naval working party and/or the Naval personnel. Such unfortunately was the case and, I was unaware of this given away of goods at the time of my publishing Notice (A) attached copy.

10. Later during Sunday forenoon N.O.I.C. informed me that all goods would be removed, the partly damaged to be stored in the Nissen Huts, the worse damaged, dumped in Port William. The giving away of articles was stopped, it was when the mention of looting was made.

11. N.O.I.C. suggested some time later that as an unknown quantity of the salvaged stores had been actually given away after the fire and without his authority, could a notice to the effect be published due to this misunderstanding. This was done immediately; broadcast and signed copies were placed on Police Notice Board, P.W.D. and two copies placed on the standing part of the burnt building. In addition the notice was published in the Weekly News. Copy of notice (B) attached.

12. A quantity of goods have been returned alleged to have been given away by Naval personnel, also articles were found in the near vicinity and collected by the Police. I do strongly suggest that although some looting may have taken place subsequently to 0830 hrs. Sunday 14th which was then the responsibility of the Naval working party, most people were given the impression that it was all fair game, knowing that it had been offered and given away.

13. I have delayed the forwarding of this report due to the proportions of the incident and, I submit as follows my own assumptions.

(a) Cause of the Fire. Unknown - pending the official enquiry.

Probable Cause - by some person or persons unknown who entered the building after dark Saturday/Sunday 12th/13th January. (vide Para 5).

(b) Loss of Stores etc. Mostly destroyed by fire and/or sea water and some lost by alleged looting, although as the amount given away cannot be checked therefore the looting becomes <sup>more</sup> apparent, than an established fact.

*C. Sheppard*  
Chief Constable.

From His Excellency the Governor

to the Honourable the Colonial Secretary.

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Under Section 24 of the Stanley Fire Brigade Ordinance, 1898, I hereby direct and empower Dr. J. E. Hamilton to hold, with or without the aid of a jury, an inquiry with or without closed doors, into the origin or cause of the fire which broke out in and destroyed the building known as the First and Last on the night of Saturday/Sunday the 12/13th January, 1946.

*[Handwritten Signature]* 22/1/46

Original handed to Dr. Hamilton by  
His Excellency the Governor 22/1/46.

First and Last Naval Stores fire.

Herewith list of Witnesses, Summing up and Coroner's Verdict for the information of His Excellency please.

*J. Hamilton*Fire at First and Last Naval Store.

Coroner.

## List of Witnesses.

Name.	Occupation.
Aldridge, Richard.	boy labourer.
Barnes, Ivy C.	housekeeper.
Blyth, A. John.	Asst. engineer generating station.
Cobbold, Robert S.C.	Commander, R.N. N.O. i/c.
Fleuret, Douglas.	Constable.
Ford, Charles. W.	Carpenter.
Fuhlendorff, Elizabeth A.	Housewife.
Hirtle, Robert C. (Enoch).	A.B., R.N.
Jacobsen, Magnus K.F.	Navy.
Mercer, Alexander.	Superintendent, Electrical and Telegraph Department.
Miller, Donald H.	Clerk.
Norris, James.	Constable.
O'Sullivan, Fairport T.J.	Clerk.
Pallini, Harry W.	Labourer.
Parsons, Frank D.	C.E.R.A., R.N.
Peck, Desmond D.B.	Foreman.
Petterssen, John S.P.	Rivetter.
Reeves, Charles R.	P.O. Writer, R.N.
Rogerson, Sydney S.	Stores P.O., R.N.
Rumbolds, Robert H.	Clerk.
Sheppard, Alice R.	Housewife.
Sheppard, Charles F.	Chief Constable.
Skilling, Charles R.	Labourer.
Williams, John B.	Lt. Cmdr (S), R.N. B.S.O.
Hennah, Thomas H.	Engineer, Generating Station.



(4a)

Time of Origin.

Constable Fleuret passed the First and Last on patrol about 12.30 and saw nothing to report nor any person there.

Mrs. E.A. Fuhlendorff was roused by a squall about 2.10 and got up to shut the window but noticed nothing although there was a clear view of the building from her window but when she was wakened by a maroon about 2.45 she could see the glow in her room and when she looked out saw that the East end of the First and Last was well alight.

About 2.30 Constable Fleuret saw a glow in the sky which was that of the fire. He hastened to the Police Station and roused the Chief Constable. The siren was sounded about 2.42 and the first maroon was fired at 2.45.

D.H. Miller appears to have been first at the fire, having run down from the Falkland Club when the siren sounded, and he got to the fire about 2.45. He had seen the glare from the Club and thought it was the Falkland Islands Company's offices. R.C. Hirtle was the next to arrive, having also been roused by the siren. He left his home about 2.50 as he approached, from the S.W., he could not see the glare.

It is clear that by 2.30 the building was burning fiercely. At 12.30 there was nothing visible and as late as 2.10 there was nothing to attract Mrs. Fuhlendorff's attention.

The time of origin must have been sometime between 12.30 and 2.30. I consider that, since nothing was seen at 12.30 and since the fire was burning so fiercely at 2.30 that the glow could be seen at Italy, a mile away, the time of origin was between 1 and 2 a.m. on the morning of the 15th.

Site of Origin.

D.H. Miller gave it as his opinion that the fire started inside the building some yards from the East wall and more or less in line with the East porch.

The Chief Constable, who arrived at the fire about 2.52, stated that by that time the building was well alight at the East end from top to bottom and flames were rising about 10 feet above the roof, that the base of all the flames he saw was inside, and that the origin of the fire seemed to be in the middle line of the building about 10 feet from the East wall. Lt. Cmdr. Williams, B.S.O., stated that the fire was inside the East side and that there were no signs of the fire being outside the building. Rumbolds said the fire was at the East end rather to the North side. On arrival at the fire the Chief Constable inspected the windows by means of a torch but found no glass broken although the windows nearest the fire, i.e. at the East end were cracked by the heat.

It is true that he uses the phrase "windows not smothered by the fire", but it is reasonable to assume that these windows were those in which the glass was cracked by the heat.

Hirtle did not see any flames when he approached from the S.W. and must have been able to see both the South and the West sides. When he came to the North side he noticed that all the windows were shut "as no smoke was coming through them" but the flames were showing a bit at the sides of the East porch.

Skilling stated that there was no fire coming out of the doors and windows when he first saw the fire, that the doors and windows were unbroken, and that windows had to be broken to get hose in.

Miller stated that flames were coming out of the door at the East end but this might have been when he was waiting for water to come to his hose, i.e. some little time after his first sight.

Cause.

There are only two possible causes -- (a) accident, (b) arson.

1) Accident.

From heating apparatus. Rumbolds stated that no fire had been lit since he had been employed in the building, i.e. several months. There was an electric radiator in the office which he

stated/

46

stated specifically had been disconnected in the morning (forenoon) as the room had been too warm. Besides, the office was in the West end of the building and the fire started in the East end.

From the electric circuit. This was put in by Force 122 when the building was used as a billet. A. Mercer stated that the material and work of Force 122 were very good, the men being trained electricians. This is supported by the B.S.O.'s statement that no trouble with the electric wiring was ever reported to him and by Rogerson's evidence that he had no trouble with the wiring or fuses since he took over in June, 6 or 7 months.

Although the blowing of a fuse would not have been noticed at the power house a short between live wires would have been and indeed was when the fire had made such progress that the live wires began to short in the fire. (Hennah and Blyth)

Electrical defect is therefore ruled out.

From spontaneous combustion of clothing stores, but the evidence of Rogerson, Rumbolds and the B.S.O. negatives this hypothesis, as stores, if damp were opened and dried and the remainder had been in store for a considerable time.

Accidental ignition from outside, e.g. sparks or burning soot.

There was a fresh wind at the time of the fire, but there is no evidence of any fire outside the building until it had broken through from the inside and the evidence of the B.S.O., Hirtle, Miller, and the Chief Constable all negative the suggestion.

Smoking was forbidden in the building and there is nothing to show that this rule was ever evaded.

Accident is ruled out.

(b) Arson.

Peck stated that he had in conversation with the Chief Constable given it as his opinion that "the paraffin I heard the gang talking about" was the probable cause of the rapid spread of the fire and that it was "Harries' gang" (which was engaged in clearing up the site). Jacobsen stated that when he began shovelling away the rubbish near the back stairs of the First and Last on the morning of Monday the 14th of January he noticed a distinct and strong smell of paraffin and remarked on it to his mate. Skilling stated that he was told to burn damaged clothing from the fire and noticed that most of the blue webbing belts, towels, short underpants and handkerchiefs "had a lot of paraffin on them. You could smell it strong. I thought it was funny. This would be about 10 a.m. There was no paraffin sent to help the burning until after dinner, i.e. 2 p.m."

He said that all the stuff being burnt in the morning "had a stink of paraffin". "The garments were soaked with a mixture of paraffin and water and you could not mistake the paraffin", and that "you might get 4 or 5 armfuls like this in a lorry load."

When he got home his sleeves were soaked in paraffin so much that his wife spoke of it.

He considered that the fire started in the N.E. room.

When the Coroner was examining the site of the fire Rumbolds arrived and he stated that there had been some paraffin in a drum in the building and that it was this paraffin which was sent down to help in the burning of damaged clothing.

Skilling (supra) said that this paraffin was not sent down until after 2 p.m. and that in the forenoon he was burning clothes wet with paraffin.

The Chief Constable produced in Court some handkerchiefs which had been sent to be washed by the B.S.O. He had formed the opinion that they smelt of rum, and on examination the Coroner considered that the smell closely resembled that of rum. Rum was kept in the building (Rogerson, Rumbolds).

4<sup>c</sup>

The front and back doors had to be broken in to allow access (Miller, Hirtle, Humbolds) and Rogerson sent for his keys which were at the Rose Hotel (W. Reive)

Summary.

The evidence points towards the following conclusions

- (i) The fire started between 1 and 2 a.m. on the morning of Sunday the 13th of January, 1946.
- (ii) It started inside the building in the slop room.
- (iii) It was started by some person who entered the building but not by breaking in the front or back door and almost certainly not a window and poured paraffin and possibly ran on clothing to facilitate ignition.

Appendix.

1. Note on the Electric Switches.

There were three switches which controlled all the lighting in the building.

They were collected from their position on a wall by the Chief Constable who produced the metal parts in Court and stated that the porcelain parts fell to pieces in his hands.

Humbolds, and Ford both stated that the switches were all in the "off" position when they left the building a little after midday (on the 12th).

The Chief Constable considered that the shaft on the East switch, which controlled the slop room lights, was marked by heat in such a way as to show that it had been in the "on" position during the fire.

C.S.R.A. Parsons would not form an opinion on this point when he examined the switches and the Coroner was doubtful.

Omnr. Cobbold stated and repeated that the left (or East) switch was in the "on position" when he saw it on the wall after the fire and said that he did not consider these switches could have been tampered with after the fire as the porcelain was so damaged (confirmed by Chief Constable's evidence *supra*).

As there were subsidiary switches in the building (Hirtle, and one produced in Court by the Chief Constable) it is possible that a person wishing to ignite the slop room would put the East or left hand switch in the "on" position and when he finished his task used a subsidiary switch to extinguish the light.

Verdict.

The fire at the First and Last Naval Stores on January 13th 1946 was due to an act or acts of incendiarism by a person or persons unknown.

*J. O. Hamilton*

Coroner.

13th March, 1946.

To:- Hon. Colonial Secretary.

From:- Chief Constable.

18th December, 1950.

Ruins of "First and Last".

Sir,

I have to report approaching Mr. Arthur Biggs regarding the above as instructed in your memo. of the 16th instant.

2. I informed Mr. Biggs of the nature of the complaint and inspected the site with him at 1.30pm this day. Mr. Biggs holds the naval authorities responsible for the condition of the property which was burned during their occupation of the premises some five years ago.

*Has he applied to them to clean it up? I presume he was compensated.*

3. I had to agree that there was nothing which would constitute an insanitary condition at the site but pointed out to him that the legal definition of a nuisance was anything which caused annoyance, inconvenience or injury to health. He said that he had received no previous complaint that it was a nuisance. He agreed that it was most unsightly but pointed out that this could be said of a great number of other properties.

4. I asked him what he would do to improve matters and so abate the nuisance. He said he could not afford the time himself or the money to pay for the clearing of the site but that he would in due course remove some of the timber.

*Quite true, I have no doubt.*

5. I told him that I could ask him to abate the nuisance and in the event of his failing to do so, it was my duty as sanitary inspector to the Stanley Town Council to report the nuisance to the Town Clerk.

6. From a police point of view, there is no real ground upon which proceedings could be taken to deal with this as an indictable offence, neither is it a "statutory nuisance" under the Public Health Acts. I very much doubt the efficacy of a report to the Council whose approach to this and similar problems should be through something approaching the Town and Country Planning Act. In these circumstances, I should be grateful for your guidance should Mr. Biggs make no real effort to tidy up.

7. I would suggest that, pending the growth of some civic pride, consideration might be given to the sending of a communication to the Council inviting their comments on a proposal that they should introduce some bye-laws which would help to produce a cleaner and tidier Stanley and instancing such cases as the "First and Last".

I am, Sir,  
Your obedient Servant,

*A. Denton*  
Chief Constable.

*P.T.O.*

J.E.

may not be reverse, which is the reply to  
a memo I sent to the C.C. about the site of  
the "First and Last", after J.E. had mentioned  
this matter to me.

3) The only line seems to be that suggested in  
paragraph 7, but I am very sceptical of it  
achieving any result. So am I; wait and

see how the new Chairman regards his responsibility.

If it is the Navy at fault I suggest they

be required to clear the site, <sup>rather</sup> pay for this to be  
done but I have an idea that compensation was  
paid and that they will wash their hands!

MC. 25/XII

We might turn our prisoners in to the job!!

A.C.S.

file a note to my discussions with the

new Chairman of the Town Council, when

elected

PA. 

20 DEC 1950