

TO THE MASTER, WARDENS AND MEMBERS OF THE COURT OF ASSISTANTS OF
THE WORSHIPFUL COMPANY OF CORDWAINERS.

Report of Mr. F. W. Mander, M.A. the Clerk, dated the 28th
May, 1941, as to the destruction of the Company's Hall.

G E N T L E M E N, It is with feelings of considerable emotion
and in full anticipation of the difficulties of my task that I
have prepared this report.

The facts themselves can be stated shortly.

On the night of Saturday, May 10th there were on duty at the
Hall one Fire Watcher, ^{and three} one A.R.P. Warden ^{In addition} and one Police Officer
were constantly visiting the Wardens' Post.

At about 10.30 p.m. warnings were sounded followed almost
immediately by bombs, both H.E. and Incendiary.

These bombs continued to fall in ever increasing numbers
for a considerable time.

The Hall was not hit, but further damage was done to the
windows, window frames and doors by blast.

Bombs still continued to fall until about 3 a.m. on the
morning of Sunday, May 11th when fires were observed in debris
created by previous raids to the North of the Hall, in the Midland
Bank premises about 100 yards to the West of the Hall, in the
premises of Messrs. Smith & Lister at a similar distance to the
East of the Hall and in Scott House immediately to the South
of the Hall on the opposite side of Cannon Street.

These fires closed in upon the Hall and except for the back stone staircase, the strong rooms and the wine cellars, the building was completely gutted.

The personnel in the building left when it became too hot to remain, having first collected such ^{of the beadle's} ~~few~~ personal belongings as they were able to.

I may state that every regulation made or adopted by the Authorities had been carefully complied with immediately on being made, if not already in force by anticipation. Since the 3rd September, 1939 the Hall has never for a moment been left at some cost to the Company and at ^{no} so small cost to the convenience of of the Company's Staff and my personal staff. I have taken my share in these duties and to my own knowledge the Authorities have supplied no protection whatever in the way of clothing or helmets for these fire watchers who, at considerable personal risk, have performed their duties fearlessly.

It was quite impossible to approach the Hall on Sunday the 11th May, but I was able to get into communication with the Master and arranged a meeting with him to do so on the Monday. An inspection showed that the strongrooms and cellars remained intact. The Court will recollect that the more Valuable portion of the Plate had already been removed and it was decided to move as soon as possible the remainder of the plate to the strong rooms of Messrs. Carrington & Co. at 130, Regent Street. This has since been done. As to the Company's wine, the Court will recollect that this consists of some 3,500 bottles of Port and beyond that

merely a day-to-day supply of wine. It was decided not to touch it and it remains in the Cellar. The Curriers Company have decided to adopt the same policy.

As to the Company's Deeds and older records, these have been removed to safety or as near to safety as possible. I regret to say that the Company's more recent records were destroyed with the fireproof safe in which they were kept.

A temporary office, of one medium sized room was lent to us through the kindness of the Secretary of the Early Closing Association, Mr. Walter Rose and I have been inspecting other offices for our new accommodation. Subject to the approval of the Court I have taken three rooms with the use of two other smaller ones at No. 7, New Square, Lincoln's Inn. I have obtained the use of a Strong room at the Law Society's Hall. The rooms are within ten minutes' walk of the site of the Company's Hall and accommodation is available for the holding of Court or other Meetings. The inclusive rent will not exceed £300 per annum and may include furniture.

It may be thought that no great difficulty has been met with, but that is by no means so. It must be first remembered that to move about in the City may entail diversions of anything up to 3 miles and no vehicular traffic is permitted to pass. It is by no means easy to approach a damaged building. The policy of the Corporation appears to be:- Do not allow the Citizens to approach damaged buildings to salvage any portion of their property, they can

claim compensation, entirely forgetting the sentimental value attached to some effects and the doubts and difficulties in claiming and obtaining compensation. It may be said that no goods would have been salvaged from the Company's Hall but for the co-operation and help of the Demolition Squads and the Police Force, who have been almost universally helpful.

Before closing I must again return to the night of 10th-11th May because I have omitted to state and purposely so that the Hall was destroyed "by enemy action." I think it would be more correct to say "as a result of or following upon enemy action". It seems clear that the fire at the back or North side of the Hall, did not cause the fire within the Hall nor did the fire on the South side of the Hall cause the fire although it may have contributed to the fierceness of it. The fire which destroyed the Hall was caused by the two fires started on the East and West sides of the Hall each at least 100 yards from the Hall and on the opposite sides of Friday Street and Old Change respectively, The reason for not stopping these two fires was because of complete lack of water, the Authorities through want of foresight having almost entirely overlooked a reserve supply. The enemy selected his night well for his attack, there was a full moon, a clear sky and the river at dead low tide. By an unlucky chance for the City one of the earliest bombs destroyed the main water supply, the fire Brigade could obtain no water from the river, the Authorities appear to have provided no reserve and the fires burnt at their will.

...the river Thames on its boundary and a vast underground lake
beneath it it may yet be hoped that the Authorities will in the
near future take some steps for a reserve supply of water in case of
further failure of the regular supply. /
