

A transcription of the interview with Percy Nudds about the Low Moor Munitions Explosion, which appeared in the Forster Society's booklet about Low Moor in 1972.

"The Low Moor Chemical Works was making picric acid during the war. On Monday the 21st of August 1916, a lady came into my shop which was situated at the corner of Cleckheaton Road and New Works Road for some sweets. Though hard to get in wartime, I had a few chocolates in stock and as I weighed them out, she asked me if I knew that the Low Moor Chemical Works were on fire. I said I did not know and when she had paid for her sweets I went out with her and saw from behind my shop, the flames coming from the chemical works which was situated just off New Works Road below the New Begin of the Low Moor iron works.

As soon as I saw the fire, I realised that it was out of hand and that a major explosion was almost inevitable for one of the magazine's, of which there were several was well ablaze. My customer asked me what she should do, and I advised her that if there was time she should go and tell her uncle the manager of the gas works. For my part, I told her, I was going into my shop to take all the money out of the drawers and with what stock I could carry I would get away on my cycle as quickly as possible, but I was certain that the explosion was inevitable and that a great deal of damage would result.

I got on my cycle and had just reached Moorland Terrace when the magazine blew up. Everybody was very frightened, for it was a tremendous bang and large pieces of stone, slate, iron piping and metal were falling everywhere. Every house had its windows blown in, its doors hanging off and slates stripped from the roofs. Strangely I did not feel much of the blast as I was protected by the houses which were close together. My mother was visiting Undercliffe Cemetery with her sister when she heard the first explosion and she said it once that it was from Low Moor. Asked how she knew, she said it was from that direction and Low Moor people knew it would happen sometime, anyhow .

People were running up and down hardly knowing what to do. I got on my cycle and went up Salroyd Road. There was a wedding at the Wesleyan Chapel and the couple were just coming out. The Chapel itself was damaged so their wedding certainly set off with a bang . I continued on the road and I got right to the top, where attached to one of the houses, was a very large greenhouse. Just as I was passing this the second explosion happened. This being about 30 minutes after the first one. I was showered with glass from the greenhouse and I had to shake myself free from it. I went to the fields near there and whilst I was there the third explosion occurred. This was the gasometer which had been punctured in many places by the falling debris. The gas escaped in a huge cloud which exploded and burst into flames high in the air. We could feel the enormous heat from it as it blazed, though we were more than half a mile away. People were coming to the fields from Wesley Place and other streets and many of them had been injured. These we helped and attended to as best we could.

I decided to look for my father at our house in Oakenshaw. The police were stopping people from going down Cleckheaton Road but I went via the bridges. I met my father at about 5:00pm. I went to my shop having dodged the police cordon to do so and when I got there I found the back of my wooden shop, which faced in the direction of the explosion, had been blown completely away. The water pipes had burst and all the chocolates and cigarettes in the shop were ruined. I turned off the water at the mains and returned to my father with whom I went to look for my mother. We walked into Bradford by the roundabout way through Bierley and found my mother at my aunt's house where we stayed the night.

The following morning, we returned home on foot for though a few trams were running they were at wide and uncertain intervals of time. None of us who lived in the area could live in our houses for they were so badly shattered. A lot of people came from neighbouring areas to see the damage and as the milkman, who sold his milk by measure out of a can had few customers, I offered to take it and sell it by the glass to the people who came to look after their homes or see the damage that had been caused. At the weekends, for a few weeks, thousands of people, some on foot and many by horse and trap, came to inspect the damage.

The explosions ceased for a while after the third one but then started up again. Magazine after magazine went up and Sharp's Dyeworks nearby was set on fire and a number of people were injured there. Just as one of the explosions happened the fire brigade came down New Works Road. When it got to the works and before the men could get off, the engine was blown up and the men were nearly all killed. Chief Inspector Scott in charge of the brigade had both legs broken. All the fire engines followed on later. The railway which passed close to the chemical

works was very severely damaged and no trains could run either way. The railway company sent a fire fighting unit by rail and they helped people in fighting the fires.

Some of the people in the houses were badly cut by debris and flying glass and one young lady living in Railway Terrace, was washing herself when the window was blown in, cutting her face very badly indeed. This resulted in her losing an eye. One of the railway men arrived at his damaged home in Railway Terrace and found a man inside. Asked what he was doing there, the man stated that he was seeing if there was anybody injured. Actually, he was looting, and he was handed over to the police. One of the huts we had in our hen run at Oakenshaw had a 6 foot length of iron piping from the chemical works right through it. This hut was more than half a mile from the centre of the explosions.

It was some weeks before we were able to live in our houses because materials and glass were almost impossible to obtain and there was a desperate shortage of Labour. It was a very bad time for all of us.

Quite a lot of Belgian refugees worked at the factory and like all the workers there they were stained deep yellow by the picric acid. Quite a lot of people would not work there, for the acid made them look so bad and they were afraid of damaging their health. The chemical works never reopened during the war. The site is now occupied by a chemical firm but very little if any chemical is made there."