Gas Explosion in Newbold Verdon

'HE WAS IN OUR DRIVE SCREAMING FOR HELP'

Man is badly burned in blast

by Claire White

A MAN is in Leicester Royal Infirmary with serious burns after a gas explosion at his home today.

Mr. Chris Hughes, aged about 30, was injured when a blast ripped through his house at 9 Grange Close, Newbold Verdon, at 1am.

Windows and frames at the front and back of the house were ripped out in the explosion, believed to have happened in the kitchen.

Neighbours Mr. Clifford Statham and his wife, June, were among the first at the scene.

Mr. Statham said: "We leaped out of bed, went to the window and saw Chris in our drive screaming 'help me'.

Investigation

"There was glass everywhere. He had splinters in his face, his hair was singed and his head looked burned too.

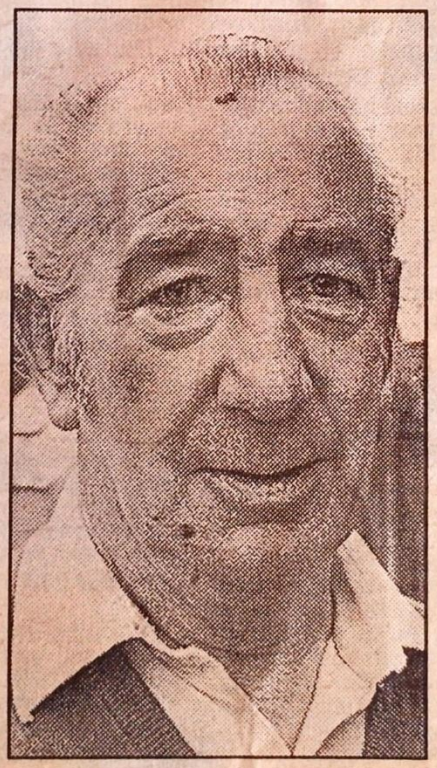
"We ran downstairs and got him a chair to sit on until help arrived."

Officials from British Gas, the Health and Safety Executive, the fire service and the police are today investigating the cause of the blast.

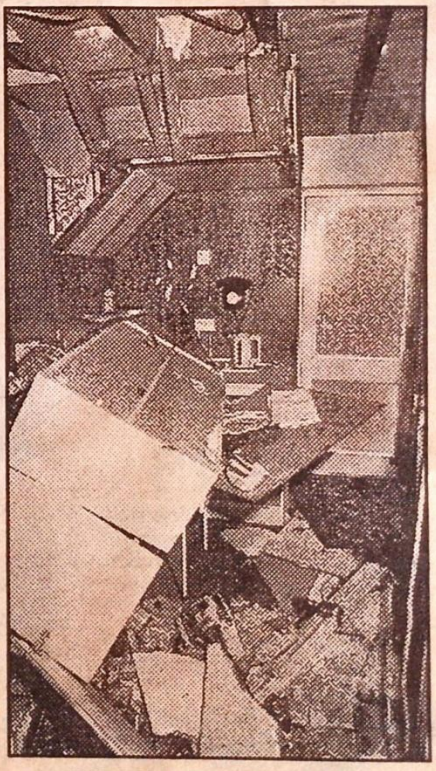
Senior press officer for British Gas Mr. Mike Chalmers, said: "As far as we are concerned there was no fault with any of the internal pipework or any of the appliances. All we know is that there was a build-up of gas and the possible source of ignition was the pilot light on the boiler."

The gas supplies have been turned off and the company are continuing their investigations with Coalville police.

Mr. Hughes's condition was today described as "fair" in Leicester Royal Infirmary.



HELP: Mr. Statham



WRECKED: The kitchen

Gas blast rips home apart

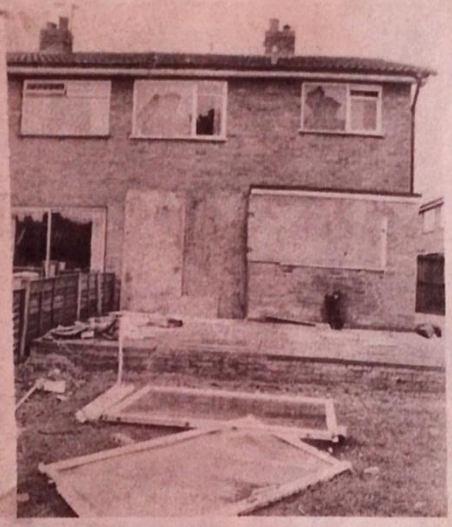
A 29 YEAR-OLD man is recovering in hospital this week after being burnt in an explosion at his Newbold Verdon home.

Christopher Hughes (29) suffered severe burns when the blast ripped through his semi-detached house on Grange Close, Newbold Verdon shortly after 1.00am on Monday morning.

Debris was strewn over the back garden as the suspected gas explosion gutted the kitchen and caused severe damage to numerous rooms in the house.

Although the sound of the blast was heard by some residents on an adjoining street, the man's immediate neighbours were at first unaware of the damage that the explosion caused.

Mr Cliff Statham and his wife who live in the connecting house thought at first that his neighbour had fallen out of bed.



Investigating

"We heard a thud, and then heard him cry for help. We then looked out of the window, saw him lying on the lawn outside and went outside to help."

Mr Hughes, a fork lift truck driver at Caterpillar in Desford is being detained in the burns ward at Leicester Royal Infirmary where his condition is described as fair.

Officers from the fire brigade, police and gas board are investigating the cause of the explosion.

Gas blast: Police to quiz man

COALVILLE police are still waiting to interview a man in hospital with serious burns after an explosion in his Newbold Verdon home.

Mr. Chris Hughes, aged about 30, is described as fair in Leicester Royal Infirmary after a gas blast ripped through his house early on Monday of last week.

Inspector Trevor Felstead who is investigating the explosion said: "Inquiries are still continuing as to the cause of the blast and Mr. Hughes will be seen by us as part of our investigation with the other emergency services."

British Gas investigators found no fault with any of the internal pipework or any of the appliances.

Gas Explosion - Man Suffers Burns

A 30-year-old man was taken to hospital with burns after a gas explosion in his house in Grange Close, Newbold Verdon.

Officials from British Gas investigated the cause of the blast and it was revealed that the gas taps on the cooker had been turned on full but not lit. They do not know what ignited the gas.

The explosion was reported at about 1am on Monday morning and all emergency services attended. The blast caused considerable damage to the windows and the kitchen area of the house and the occupant was taken to the Leicester Royal Infirmary.

Man blew up his home

In a desperate suicide bid a Newbold Verdon man blew up his own home because he couldn't live without his girlfriend, a court heard.

Father-of-one Christopher Robin Hughes, formerly of 9 Granger Close, Newbold Verdon, was given two years probation after being convicted of arson and being reckless as to whether life was endangered in May last year.

Prosecutor Mr Willie Bach told Leicester Crown Court how Hughes went to his local pub and drank eight or nine pints of beer before returning home and switching on all the gas taps in the kitchen.

He said Hughes, who had attempted suicide weeks earlier by taking an overdose, was out for two hours and on his return 'phoned his brother in a desperate state.

Hughes (30) then lit a match in the kitchen causing a massive explosion in which the majority of the ceiling collapsed and all the windows at the back of the house were blown out. Brickwork throughout the house was also dislodged.

Next door neighbour Mrs June Statham then saw Hughes standing in her driveway screaming, his normally fair hair having turned black in the explosion.

Hughes, a picker at Caterpillar Tractor in Desford, spent six weeks in hospital after the blast which caused £20,000 damage.

He later told police he realised that Mrs Statham and her family may have been in danger.

Mr Mark Wyatt, defending, said his client had not been able to cope with his live-in girlfriend leaving him in 1988 and taking their six-year-old son with her.

He said Hughes, now of Desford Lane, Thurlaston, has since sold the house which was jointly owned and given his ex-girlfriend most of the profit.

"This was not a malicious act - it was a genuine attempt at suicide," said Mr Wyatt.

Judge Christopher Pitchers attached a condition of psychological treatment to Hughes probation order.

He said: "I am satisfied the purpose of this terrible incident was to kill yourself. If I thought you deliberately intended to endanger property or life you would have been sent straight to prison."

Heartbroken Man Blows Up His Home

A heartbroken Newbold Verdon man attempted suicide, by causing a gas explosion in his home, after splitting up with his common law wife.

On Tuesday Christopher Robin Hughes (29) of 9 Grange Close, Newbold Verdon appeared before Market Bosworth magistrates charged with causing damage to the property at 9 Grange Close and being reckless as to whether the life of June Statham or Clifford Statham was endangered.

The court heard that on 14th May, Hughes went to his sister's home in Leicester and mentioned taking his own life.

He then went back to his home on Grange Close where he turned on the gas taps before going drinking at the local pub.

He later returned to his home and telephoned to his brother, again threatening suicide. He eventually put the phone down on his brother and struck a match.

Hughes was next seen screaming for help and was taken to the Leicester Royal Infirmary where he was detained for a number of weeks and given psychiatric help.

There was extensive damage to the house and several windows in the neighbouring house, belonging to June and Clifford Statham, were broken from flying debris.

The case was adjourned and Hughes was released on conditional bail.

Hughes will reappear on 24th October.

JUDGE GIVES MAN PROBATION FOR HOUSE BLAST

Suicide bid blew up kitchen

by John Marsden

DEVASTATED Christopher Hughes tried to blow himself up after his common-law wife left him, a court heard.

The gas blast in Newbold Verdon destroyed a kitchen and could have put neighbours' lives at risk.

Judge Christopher Pitchers heard how Hughes went drinking before staging the suicide bid.

The defendant switched on a kitchen gas supply and lit a match.

Mr William Bach, prosecuting, explained how the blast at number nine Grange Close:

- Shattered glass in the patio, kitchen and bathroom.
- Blew out 60 per cent of the kitchen ceiling.
- Slashed the value of the £69,950 house by £19,950 and dislodged brickwork.

Admitted arson

Hughes (29), whose address was given to the Crown Court in Leicester as Desford Lane, Thurlaston, admitted arson, being reckless as to whether lives were in danger.

Mr. Bach said Hughes and his common-law wife had lived with their child at Grange Close.

In October 1988 she left him, with the child, and between then and the explosion in May 1989 Hughes had attempted suicide.

And Mr. Bach said on May 14 Hughes went to a pub and drank five or six pints.

He went home for a while and then went out again and drank a further two or three pints.

Then he returned to Grange Close and switched on oven gas taps before again going out and returning at about 11.20pm.

Hospital treatment

He telephoned his brother and talked about taking his own life.

Mr. Bach said: "He put the telephone down, went into the kitchen, struck a match and the gas ignited at once."

A neighbour in bed next door heard the explosion and looked out of the window.

He said Mrs June Statham saw him screaming with his head bent over and his normally fair hair blackened. She dashed outside to help him.

The court heard Hughes needed six weeks' treatment in hospital.

Judge Christopher Pitchers said he accepted that the blast was a genuine suicide attempt.

Hardworking man

He made a two year probation order with a condition that Hughes has medical treatment – either as an out-patient or an in-patient as doctors request.

Mr. Mark Wyatt said Hughes and and his ex-common law wife had jointly owned the house.

He had sold it and given all but £2,000 of the money to her.

He said: "By 1988 this defendent had regained his good character after offences in the 1970s and had established himself as a hardworking family man."

But after the break-up he made a serious suicide attempt with pills.

And Mr. Wyatt added: "This offence was a genuine attempt at suicide."

He said Hughes was in hospital for six weeks.