

# No safety checks after pool roof collapses

NO SAFETY checks have been made on the roofs of 28 Merseyside swimming pools... although some may be similar to a roof which collapsed recently.

About a month ago, main timber roof beams crashed down into a pool at Ilford County High School. Half the roof fell down but, luckily, no-one was hurt as it happened at night.

This Ilford pool was built by a Liverpool firm, Walter Holme, who have also designed and put up 28 school and local authority swimming pools on Merseyside since 1963.

One of the company's newest is the £80,000 pool in Belle Vale, which was opened last year after months of delay. This also has a timber roof.

A company spokesman admitted no checks had been carried out but said he was "perfectly happy" since the

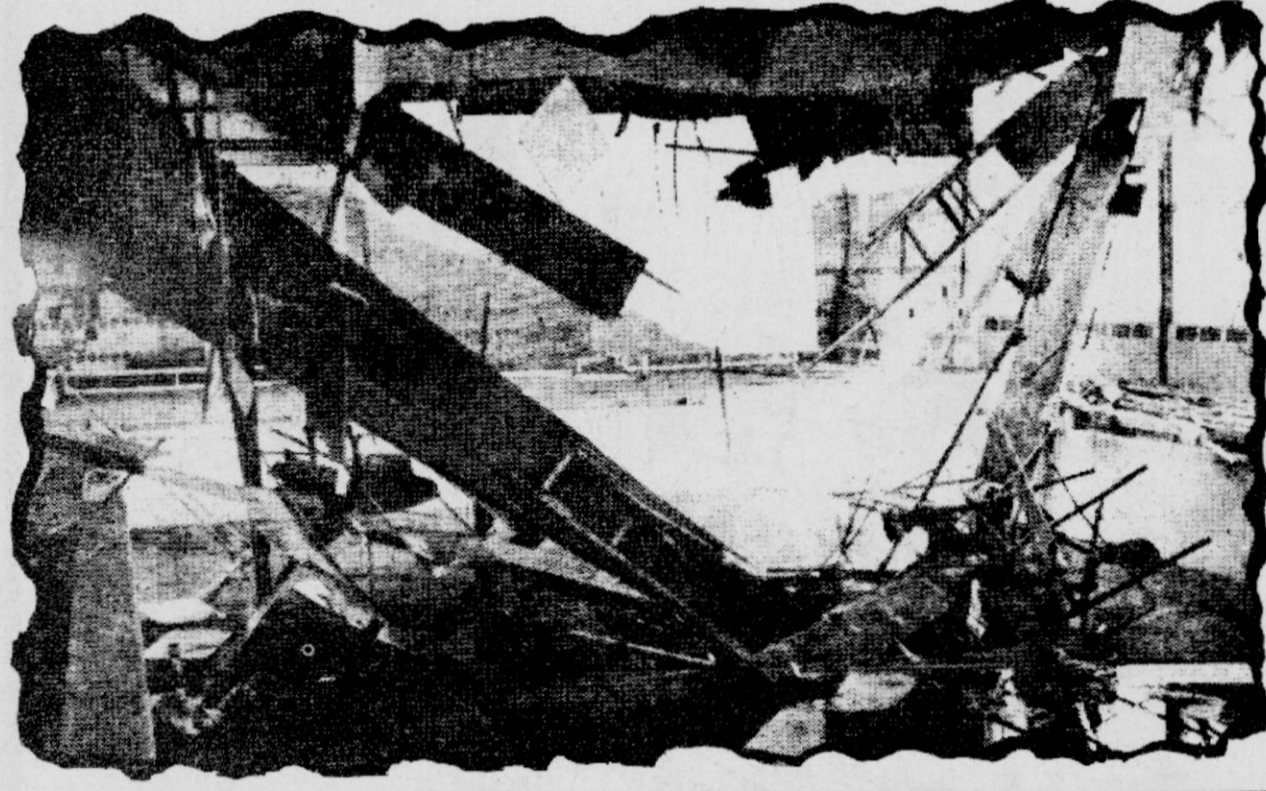
designs weren't the same. He added the company's insurers had told them not to say anything.

But the government's Building Research Establishment are carrying out a full investigation and are taking the collapse very seriously... especially as there doesn't appear to have been any rotting or insect attack on the timber.

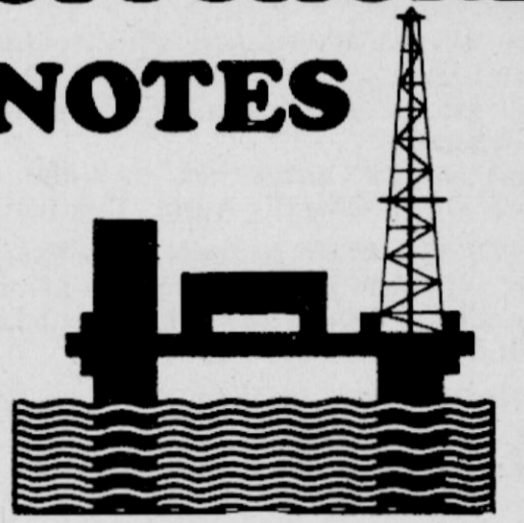
This is the first major timber roof collapse to have been reported for many years.

Holme's have won orders for pools from authorities throughout the country, because their prices are comparatively low. They manage this by using set designs and pre-fabricated structures on many of the pools.

Right: Collapsed roof over pool at Ilford school.



## OFFSHORE NOTES



BY OIL SLICK

"I THINK the future of Merseyside," says Merseyside's director of industrial development, James Gorie, "will largely depend on what can be got out of the oil situation, particularly if oil is found in the Irish Sea."

As 18 members of Merseyside Chamber of Commerce's building group gallop off to Aberdeen to assess the type of work involved in providing facilities for the offshore oil industry, they might like to assess the past activities and techniques of some of the companies now clustering around the oil honey pots in the North Sea.

Highland Fabricators is an oil rig construction firm with the contract to build platforms for British Petroleum. It is jointly owned by Wimpey's (Britain's second largest construction company) and Brown and Root, the huge Texan engineering firm.

This American company developed a taste for drilling holes when they landed the US National Science Foundation's contract to bore a three-mile hole to study the mantle of the earth, in 1962.

While the scientific benefits were of little use, new skills acquired in the drilling might have been applicable to future oil ventures.

So, despite their bid being almost twice the lowest bid, and despite the Science Foundation's panel rating them least qualified of the bidders, Brown and Root won the contract.

Once work started the estimated cost was revised upward from 20 to 127 million dollars.

Which was less rewarding than the 1.2 billion dollars contract in Vietnam which they shared as part of the RMK-BRJ combine. This combine was charged by the Federal General Accounting Office with squandering hundreds of millions of dollars - including losing accounting control of 120 million dollars - and with failing to stop the nightly looting of their equipment and supplies by the local population.

Such apparent incompetence might have cast doubts on the lucrative military installation contracts that came their way (Guam, Spain, Texas, etc) - except for the close friendship between Lyndon Johnson and George and Hermann Brown. So sweet was this friendship in its early stages that the US Bureau of Inland Revenue took an undue interest, until told to mind their own business. Unfortunately we shall never know the results of their investigations because the records were removed from a fire-proofed store to a less protected place which sadly burst into flames soon after.



Cromarty Petroleum is the British subsidiary of another American company, D.K. Ludvig's National Bulk Carriers. Cromarty Petroleum's detailed application for an oil refinery at Nigg has been accepted by Ross and Cromarty County Council's planning committee.

Not that NBC has always been known for efficient pre-construction planning. In the late fifties, when they were facing difficulties in re-negotiating leases with Japanese shipyards for building their supertankers, NBC decided on a deep water harbour in Grand Bahama.

After spending 3-4 million dollars, NBC obtained the leases on their terms and stopped the construction. Speculation has it that it was all a gigantic bluff to scare the Japanese into renewing the leases.

The somewhat implausible reason given by the general manager of the NBC subsidiary, Bahama Shipyards, was: "We discovered that the mechanical plans we had drawn up just didn't suit the island's geological structure."

But Grand Bahama didn't get the harbour for free; NBC received 2,000 acres of harbour-side industrial land in exchange for building the harbour. This land was sold to US Steel, whose subsidiary - Bahamas Cement Co - now graces the tropical seafront.

One of the law firms used by NBC boss Ludvig was Mudge, Rose, Guthrie and Alexander, one of whose senior partners was Mr Richard M. Nixon.

## Smyth and those arrears

THE HAPHAZARD payment of insurance stamps by Bill Smyth, Liverpool's Liberal housing chairman, has begun to take its toll on his former employees.

Until April this year Smyth was running the Prime Heating and Plumbing Company and, as reported in Free Press 16, the DHSS have twice investigated irregularities in his National Insurance payments.

Malcolm McAdam left Prime Heating to work for another firm in April. When he went off sick for a week, his benefit was cut by 77p.

The DHSS said this was because Malcolm's card for 1972-3 had eight stamps missing. Smyth later paid the contributions following the official investigation, and eventually Malcolm received a cheque from the DHSS for 77p.

But now Malcolm has had another letter from the DHSS. This time they say his card for 1973-4 has two stamps missing.

● Councillor Smyth takes a tough line on council tenants who are late paying their rent.

# Casino firm leave nothing to chance

THE WHEEL of fortune hasn't been running smoothly for the directors of Price Casinos Ltd, the Liverpool gambling firm.

They have so far been refused permission to open their select money-spinning club in the Holiday Inn Hotel, in Paradise St.

But the stakes are high, and there's loot to be won, so the chances are they will appeal against the decision.

The directors of the casino are Mr Joseph Price, an antique dealer, from 1 Towers Avenue, Maghull, and Mr Sydney Lever, of 41 Rockbourne Av, Liverpool, who is already a director of a company called Grand Club.

These two, and Mr John Ferguson, general manager of the Holiday Inn, certainly tried hard. They told council officials and obstinate councillors a most moving tale, and even offered the prospect of a flourishing Liverpool... if only they could have their little casino.

Take this sickening rubbish from Ferguson to Mr K.M. Egan, City Solicitor. "Liverpool can only benefit from the casino by attracting parties of business people to the city from all parts... subsequently traders in the town would have the spin-off of

increased revenue, also with increased business follows increased employment."

Yes, with a few twirls of the roulette wheel the unemployment problem's cured.

Some councillors even fell for this twaddle, including Liberals from the upper echelons of the party. Among them was Lord Mayor Joe Wilmington, taxi-fleet owner Carl Crawford, and almost, but not quite, Bill Smyth, the acting leader.

A former councillor also appeared on the scene. His name is John Mass, former Tory member for Anfield, who is friendly with a number of Liberals.

Mass took it upon himself to lobby councillors on Holiday Inn's behalf. He was a director of Price Casinos from October 1973 to March 1974.

For permission to open a casino, Holiday Inn were willing to part with the princely sum of £500.

And yet Holiday Inn (Ireland) Ltd got a remarkable bargain with their lease from the corporation. A bargain so ludicrous that even the District Valuer was worried... and said so.

For their prime site, Holiday Inn pay only £10,000 a year for seven years and then £12,250 for the next 21 years.

On top of this they are guaranteed car parking space in the corporation's conveniently built multi-storey car-park alongside.

Holiday Inn argued they couldn't pay more as hotels weren't profitable. Some corporation officials supported them, pointing out the lease was restricted to hotel usage.

But the District Valuer refused to accept this give-away lease, and it went to the Department of the Environment.

On March 18, 1970, European executives of Holiday Inn flew to Liverpool to sign the lease. But it wasn't until the next day that the corporation received a letter from the ministry. It said that because the developer had refused, at this very late stage, to change the agreement "WITH SOME RELUCTANCE the Minister has agreed to give his consent."

A casino would have added thousands of pounds to the value of the site. But despite this, Holiday Inn offered a miserly £500. A sum which could be made at the gambling tables in a few minutes by the prospective tenants, Price Casino.

## Outfitters out...



WORKERS IN THE outfitting trades at Cammell Laird's shipyards in Birkenhead voted unanimously to continue their strike on November 12.

They also demanded that their shop stewards be allowed to negotiate for them, instead of the emergency committee of the Confederation of Shipbuilding Engineering Unions, headed by the well-known former UCATT official, Bill Crichton.

The strike began when stagers were given a £3 to £4 rise, putting them on a par with some boilermakers and ahead of some of the outfitters.

Management's latest offer, which Crichton took to the Nov. 12 mass meeting, was only an interim award from next June. Stewards from some sections, like crane drivers, said it was totally unacceptable whatever the mass meeting decided.

But if the management are trying to split the trades, they've no need to bother splitting the stewards and the negotiators. Stewards are not only banned from the talks, they say they are not even told about developments.

For some reason union officials have asked the stewards to lift the blockade on one of the three ships they are holding. This would have given away a strong bargaining counter and, naturally, the stewards refused.

This was probably one of the things that led a Cammell Laird boss to moan that the "authority of trade union district officials" was being flouted.

Maybe he's one of those who need constant reminding about where that authority comes from.

Left: Not a scene from the Thirties but Laird workers in the Seventies

## LAWLESS

AT LEAST one Liverpool landlord is trying to trick tenants out of their home by sending notices to quit disguised as legal documents.

Beilin Estates, of Tower Building, Water St, are the firm trying to take advantage of unsuspecting tenants.

Their notices to quit are written in legal language, complete with ornate printing.

They demand "quiet and peaceable possession" of the premises "with the appurtenances thereto". But don't be fooled. They have no more force than any other notice to quit.

If Beilin Estates or any other landlord want you out, they have to go to the courts for an eviction order.

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