

At 8pm on Saturday, September 28, a car was driven through a window of the Spar licensed grocer in the Brixton Road. Gangs of youths entered the shop, emptied the shelves, and then set the store on fire.

At 8.30pm, the owner, Mohammiad Aslam, received a call from the police telling him that his business lay in ruins.

"People took the trolleys from the shop, filled them up and wheeled my business down the street," said Aslam.

**SPECIAL REPORT**  
by  
Andrew Don

He estimated that £100,000 worth of damage was caused.

"I was at home when it happened. The police said I could not see my shop because the area was sealed off."

Aslam hoped to get his shop back on its feet within two weeks but he admitted that rebuilding could be a waste of time. "This could happen all over again," he said. "I have to repair the shop. What else can I do? It's my freehold property. I've tried to sell out in the past because of trouble but no one will buy because of the area."

Aslam said he could get some compensation from his insurance but not everything was covered. "I heard that the Greater London Enterprise Board was trying to get money from the government to help us so I've registered my name.

"I can't sleep properly. I'm still very upset. The whole family is upset," said Aslam.

The Fairdeal licensed supermarket, part of the Mace symbol group, opposite Brixton police station, was smashed to bits. The manager, Mr Issaq, was furious and said: "If I had had a weapon there would have been a lot of busted heads around Brixton. It was a good thing no one attacked me otherwise I would have gone wild.

"All the drinks and cigarettes were stolen and everything was smashed. They took the tills, too. All the trouble started by the

**'People took the trolleys from the shop, filled them up and wheeled my business down the street'**



**IN THE WAKE** of the Brixton and Tottenham riots, retailers on the front-line have been describing the brutal reality of the horrors on the nights Inner London ran riot. They speak of their fears for the future and how they are attempting to return their businesses to some semblance of normality.

police station. They began by throwing bricks. Suddenly, they came rushing down the street. I tried to get the shutters down. Then I ran into another shop and hid. There were about 30 youths. I went back into the shop and found them breaking the place up.

"There was nothing I could do. I feel very angry. If they have something against the police, fine, but they should leave us alone. I'm just trying to earn a living." Issaq spent two days after the riot clearing up the devastation. "We should definitely be entitled to compensation," he added. "But I've no idea how we can get help. We're losing so much business. There's hardly anyone on the streets in the evening now. They're scared."

Nazbat Ali had to close down his Wine House specialist off-licence in Brixton Road for four days. He said business had suffered. "It's quiet now. People are too scared to leave their homes. At 8pm I used to be busy. Now, no-one comes into the shop," said Ali.

The Twilight Stores off-licence in Brixton Hill also closed for four days after the riot. The manager

there said that his window shutters had probably saved his business on the night of the riot.

The manager of Suketu off-licence in Brixton Hill, Natver Patel, escaped the wrath of the rioters but he was so frightened that he considered going back to his native India.

**'If I'd had a weapon there would have been a lot of busted heads around Brixton'**

Patel has had his shop for 13 years. He said he didn't care about losing business. "What's money? It's nothing compared to the safety of my family."

He added: "I am scared this will happen again. I'm keeping on my toes. The atmosphere is very tense. No-one has told us anything about security or how we can get help. I've lost my regular customers, particularly the

old people. A lot of trouble happens at night so I close at 7pm. There's no way I'd stay open later."

Gough Brothers, the Seagrave specialist chain, had two of its shops looted — one at the Kennington end of Brixton Road and the other in Acre Lane.

About £50,000 worth of damage was caused in total. The Brixton Road shop was the one to get off lightest but the experience was nonetheless "absolutely terrifying" for shop manager Le Smith.

Smith had to board up his windows after they were smashed. He was in the shop when the riot began. He trembled as he talked about the incident.

"I've had enough," he said. "I want to forget it. I was dead frightened. Loads of them charged in here, smashed the windows, looted the stock."

"I hid out the back until the police came. They took 10 minutes to arrive. It seemed like a lifetime. I ran upstairs to my wife. She was cowering in the kitchen. I just want to get out of here."

Smith applauded the support he got from head office. "They pu

# Off-licences prime target for looters

## THE TERRIBLE ORDEAL OF RETAILERS CAUGHT UP IN THE VIOLENT RIOTS

us up in a hotel and even put my dogs in kennels," he said.

Helen Fairfax, operations director of Seagram Retail, said Mr and Mrs Smith were now intent on quitting the job. She claimed the manager at Acre Lane, Keith Joseph, felt the same way.

The door of the Acre Lane shop was broken down and 90 per cent of the stock was either smashed or stolen. The floor had to be replaced because of damage caused by split drinks and broken glass. Two cash registers were wrecked.

**'Police took 10 minutes to arrive. It seemed like a lifetime. I just want to get out'**

Gough Brothers' staff in Harlesden, Balham, Bedford Hill and Stoke Newington were put on red alert after tip-offs from the police that these were the next areas likely to be hit. "We've told our staff in those areas that if they see any sign of trouble, lock up and get out. As far as we're concerned our priority is safety," said Fairfax.

On the same night as the Brixton riot, staff at the Gough Brothers shop in Clapham sensed trouble and barricaded their door with three chiller cabinets and boarded up the windows to make it look as if the shop was no longer in business. The Superdrug store across the road was damaged.

Gough's Clapham staff went to Brixton to try to help. They went into the Acre Lane shop and saw a gang of rioters heading towards the off-licence. As staff escaped

out the back door, the gang smashed in the front door.

Fairfax said: "I didn't go to Brixton because I thought, being a white woman, I'd be asking for trouble. So I went there the next day and asked staff how they felt and discussed what we should do for the future. Fortunately, the staff all escaped unhurt."

Seagram is adamant that rioters won't scare the company away from Brixton. Police have said that shops with outside roller shutters were not badly damaged, so Gough Brothers has installed them. Tough laminated glass is also being adopted.

Both Gough shops are now back in business but staff have been told to close at 6pm.

Tottenham's riot was mainly confined to Broadwater Farm. Off-licences got off lightly here, but the managers, convinced there will be a repeat performance, have installed metal frames to protect their business.

Josson, an independent off-licence in Bruce Grove, has been

boarded up. Metal grating has also been installed although the shop was not hit during the riot.

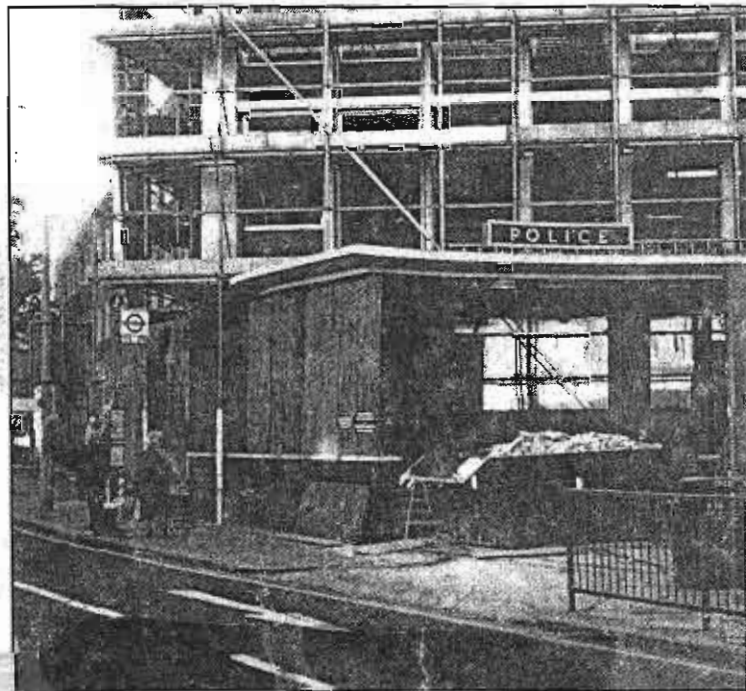
The worst hit off-licence owner was Mr Patel, of Bucky's off-licence, in Moorfield Road, close to Broadwater Farm.

"I was here when the riots happened," he said. Thugs smashed down the door, as he cowered behind the counter. Nothing was stolen because they were thwarted by metal grating inside. Patel would not go into details. He said he was too frightened to talk.

Mr Singh of the the Cyprus Supermarket off-licence, said there were rumours that the rioters would strike again. He has secured his shop with outside rollers in accordance with police advice.

Like many of the off-licensees in Tottenham Singh was unwilling to give his full name or talk in details about the riot.

"This place is like a time-bomb and the whole thing could easily blow up again," said Singh.



RETAILERS are increasing finding themselves in violent situations. The recent riots have demonstrated once again that today's violent society puts retailers under more pressure than ever before.

Bill Banning, chief executive of the Association of Independent Retailers, believes his organisation can help with practical advice. He has been kept particularly busy since the riots.

"It is a matter of great concern," said Banning. "Retailers are worried about how they can make a recovery and they're scared of a repeat performance."

"We're getting calls from people in areas where riots have not taken place but where the atmosphere is similar."

"They ask us what they can do to protect themselves. In our view, there should be more



● Bill Banning

involvement from the local authorities and the police. Insurance companies have also got to be a little more sympathetic.

"If a retailer called me now the first thing I would do is to get him into our organisation and then we would advise him how to increase his security at no great cost. We have experts in this business we can consult. We'd put one in touch with him. Then we'd approach his local authority and see what it could do to help."

"Retailers should get together so we can meet. Let's face it, it's very difficult to protect the individual. It needs to be taken on collectively."

Banning said that in Handsworth there were shopkeepers who would never recover. "They lost everything," he said. The insurance companies wouldn't touch them. There are off-licences that are completely out of business, he added.

Membership of AIR is £50 per annum plus £7.50 VAT. Anyone interested should telephone (0905) 28165/612733 or write to Drinks Marketing and we will forward your letters.