

More on the Dangers of Combustion.

When I recounted Rick Damon's experience with linseed oil (Comm 1928) to my hurdy gurdy maker friend Chris Allen, he told me of his own alarming experience. He then emailed me this account for FoHMRI.

Julian Goodacre

Here is the tale of how I nearly set fire to the workshop and lost my whole enterprise to the stupidest of mistakes.

I had used some graphite powder mixed with turps as a lubricant in an open glass dish. After a while the stuff dried out leaving a hardish blob of graphite, and I wanted to clean out the pot for another use. I wiped it with a rag dipped in turpentine mixed with just 10% linseed oil that I had mixed to serve as a thin sealant to pine. It sort of worked, but very slowly, so I left the rag in the pot for it hopefully to soften the sticky mess. I messed about with this for several days always leaving the rag in the pot before finally scrubbing it clean and throwing the rag into the stove in the workshop. The fire was more or less out but the stove was still pretty warm

.After a couple of minutes, the stove door few open with a strong whoosh, belching ash, smoke and a jet of fire. A moment later there was a tinkle as the rain cover of the chimney came down to earth.

This amazingly powerful explosion came from a small rag marinated in mostly turps and a small amount of linseed oil and left to part dry. We have all heard those 'tall stories' about spontaneous combustion of linseed oil and we tend to think of it as about as likely as people spontaneously erupting in flames. And anyway it happens to someone else . . .

Well this wasn't spontaneous combustion but is another illustration of how volatile these trusted compounds can be. A slightly bigger rag could have burst the stove, and in any case could have started a fire.

Note to self: this is not the best way to shoot duck.

Chris Allen