

Firefighters

The Industrial Revolution, and its attendant fire and extreme heat, increased people's dread of fire both in the housing estate and in the factory. In 1903, a fire tore through two workshops and, in 1913, a huge blaze threatened to reduce the factory to ashes: "In just a few hours, the fire spread to a huge surface, the disaster became inevitable and terrible: half the factories were on fire; the buildings, the equipment, the machine room, everything was burnt to a cinder, twisted, leaving behind nothing but a heap of materials which, bravely, the firemen were still trying to save from the fire's clutches." *Le Progrès*, 26 March 1913.

Faced with this constant threat, the Société d'Électro-métallurgie created its own company of around twenty firefighters. The town of Dives' own company, which was older, was first headquartered on the place de la République, and then on the avenue Pasteur, and had around twenty volunteer firefighters, including many factory workers, who would respond to any calls made by the siren positioned on the roof of the town hall.

They intervened in case of fires, but also of floods. Some neighbourhoods could be affected by a dam bursting, a spring tide or the obstruction of the canal.

Legend

The factory firefighters, photograph, 1906, Robert Ledorze collection.

Legend

The town firefighters, 1930s, Fernand Destin collection, digitised by La Fabrique de Patrimoines en Normandie.

Legend

The town firefighters' headquarters, avenue Pasteur, around 1960. It is now the firefighters' retro-museum. Un fleuve pour la liberté collection.