

The Branch

The Newsletter of the
**Wiltshire Retired Firefighters
Association**



AUGUST 2013

WRFA WEBSITE UNDER CONSTRUCTION



Work on creating a new website for our association is at an advanced stage and the hope is that it will go live within the next few weeks. JOHN COX has been confirmed as the Website Manager and he has thrown himself into the task of learning how to start a website from scratch. In doing so, he has received valuable assistance from Paul Fisher, one of the IT experts employed at Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service HQ. The webpage used currently by the WRFA on the FRS website will be closed down when we get our own website although people logging onto the FRS site will be able to link easily to ours if necessary. John says of his new responsibility, *“I was looking for a new challenge and this fills the bill nicely.”*



SUPERFAST BROADBAND

The Government's ambitious plan to enable most of rural UK to have superfast broadband connection to the internet has been criticised by the National Audit Office. The project, costing £1.25 billion, is not expected to be completed until 2017 against the original date of 2015. The contract has been awarded to BT and the company is blaming the delays on the need to complete local negotiations. Even more disappointing is the news that the fibre optic cables providing the service will stop short of tens of thousands of properties denying superfast broadband to the people living in such areas.

The companies that bid for the contract unsuccessfully have been highly critical of BT's failure to meet the original terms of the contract. Having won the contract, BT is now accused of “shifting the goalposts”.

“I’VE BEEN HACKED!”

In June, despite having the usual level of security on my computers, I was hacked. I saw what I thought was a genuine BT website warning me that if I didn't upgrade my email Yahoo account it would stop working. So, I clicked on the link and instantly my security system threw up the warning that I had logged onto a false website. I immediately broke the link but in those few seconds the villains got into my software and took over my contacts list, using this to churn out a fake message claiming that I was stranded in the Philippines with my family and needed cash to be sent urgently. Fortunately, as far as I know, no one sent any money although a couple of people nearly did so. Apologies to anyone that was alarmed by this message and well done to the majority that spotted the scam. JOHN CRAIG

2013 AGM & LUNCH

Our Association's Annual General Meeting followed a Sunday Lunch on 14th July held at the Cumberwell Park Golf Club. The weather was brilliant sunshine and so the Chairman allowed relaxed dress immediately. The venue and quality of the food proved to be of a very high standard with many declaring the venue to be "the best yet."

The only sad episode was that Terry Skinner, a guest of member Maurice Betteridge, fell on the steps outside the club and sustained a facial injury requiring his removal to hospital by ambulance. After treatment at RUH, Bath he was released home.

The meeting was used as an occasion to elevate our Chairman, Jerry Willmott, to the position of President which has been held vacant since the death of Peter Thorpe.



Chris Wannell was elected as Chairman and John Cox was elected as Vice Chairman, Neil Wright having stood down from the Executive Committee. John Craig was re-elected as Secretary & Treasurer. New faces on the Executive Committee were Mildred Sunderland, John Gentleman and Dave Ward.



PRESIDENT
Jerry Willmott



CHAIRMAN
Chris Wannell



VICE CHAIRMAN
John Cox



SECRETARY & TREASURER
John Craig

Your other Executive Committee Members

North Area Reps.

Peter Mills, Dave Ward, John Gentleman

Central Area Reps.

Win Huggett, Bruce Bringloe, Mildred Sunderland

South Area Reps.

Ludo Macualay, Jim Betts, Maurice Betteridge (co-opted)

Honorary Auditor

Neil Wright

FRS Liaison : CFO Simon Routh-Jones



SOCIAL EVENTS

GRASMERE HOUSE, SALISBURY

Pictured on the terrace at the March 2012 Sunday Lunch are some of our guests from Hampshire.

This venue is becoming a firm favourite with WRFA members because of the superb venue and cuisine at a very reasonable price.

SEE BELOW!

OUR NEXT GET –TOGETHER

WHEN? 29th September 2013 Noon for 1.00pm lunch

WHAT? Four Course Sunday Lunch

WHERE? Grasmere House Hotel, Harnham Rd. , Salisbury

HOW MUCH? £11.00 (includes 0.75p staff gratuity)

Coffee/tea £2.50 supplement

HOW CAN I BOOK? Booking form by email or post with newsletter

LAST DATE OF BOOKING? 21st September 2013

WRFA WALKING CLUB



The next walk organised by the

club will take place on

Wed. 18th September

Start 10.15am

Black Horse, Bath Rd.

Devizes

Details from Phil Appleby

07801723625

WRFA ACT OF REMEMBRANCE

Devizes Town Hall

9th November 2013

Dinner at 6.30pm

Band concert

Act of Remembrance

Conducted by Rev Canon Thomas Woodhouse



HEALTH MATTERS

News of Health Services and our Members who have needed them



JOE NASH

Joe, who now lives in Tetbury, is awaiting the fitting of a pacemaker to his heart. We hope that all goes well with the operation and that he does not have much longer to wait.

TONY REYNOLDS

Tony is under treatment for prostate cancer and so joins the growing list of our members that have been diagnosed with this disease. His treatment involves the insertion of tiny radioactive beads into the tumour and he reports that all seems to be going well so far. We hope a cure results, Tony.

MIC POUND

Mic Pound had an operation to remove his cancerous prostate very recently. A cyber knife computer guided device was used successfully and Mic reports on the high standard of care he received at Southbroom Hospital in Bristol. We hope all continues to go well.



PETER MILLS

Peter has been undergoing extensive medical investigations over recent months. He has further tests and possible treatment to come in the region of his prostate. We wish him a successful end to this lengthy period of time and effort spent on a diagnosis.

JOHN PERRY

John is battling yet another lung infection and is on a course of antibiotics. With Maureen, he is booked into the Fire Fighters Charity Therapy Centre at Penrith for a second course of treatment for him and respite care for Maureen. Both John and Maureen gained so much benefit from their treatment at Jubilee House last year that they are very much looking forward to returning there in August. Jubilee House has , not only therapists on staff, but also fully qualified nurses.

GPs WANT YOU TO PAY TO SEE THEM

A very recent survey has revealed that a majority of Family Doctors would like a system introduced that requires patients to pay a fee of around £25.00 for a consultation with them. They feel that this will act as a deterrent to those bothering the doctor with trivial complaints. Hasn't anyone ever mentioned to these doctors that one of the corner stones of the NHS is the principle that treatment should be free at the point of delivery? The survey was published by the magazine *Pulse*. Apparently, only 36% of the 440 doctors who participated thought that charging a fee was a bad idea. Comments to editor's post box, please.

A THANK YOU FROM DICK AND JEN

Most members will know that WRFA members, Dick and Jen Dickson, are in mourning for the tragic loss of their daughter, Sally-Ann, in a road accident on the A36 near Limpley Stoke. Sally's car was in head-on collision with another car. All our sympathy and condolences flow out to the family so cruelly bereaved. Dick and Jen have asked that the following be published in The Branch.

On behalf of Jen, Mark, Natalie, Charlotte, Sam myself and all our family, I would like to thank those friends and colleagues for their condolence messages and cards, following the tragic death of our lovely daughter, Sally-Ann Emery, who was suddenly taken from us in a road accident on Monday 24th June 2013. Your words and messages have been of great comfort to us at this very sad time and we are truly grateful. Dick.



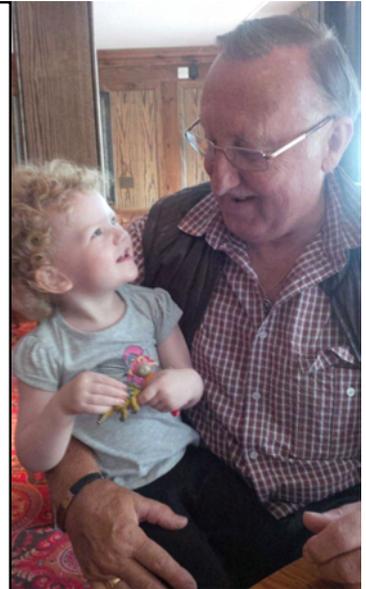
John Craig on hydrant inspection in North Carolina, USA

"I Love you, Granddad"

A picture to which all grandpa's will readily relate
WRFA member, Len Benwell, soaks up the adoration of

Lily, age 2, who had just coaxed him into buying her a toy dinosaur while out on a shopping spree.

Lily's nana is Yve Usher-Benwell, who is also a member of our Association.



KEN BEARD MBE

Ken Beard has at last received his campaign medal in recognition of the time he served on a Royal Navy corvette on the Russian Convoys that Churchill described as "the worst journey on earth". Ken was a gunnery rating and is one of only about 300 still alive that are eligible for this well earned medal. About 3,000 sailors died on the Arctic convoys that took war materials to Russia in World War II. The issue of this medal was delayed by politics.



GOLDEN WEDDING

Marion and Ernie Taylor recently celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary with family and friends. Rather than accept gifts, Ernie and Marion asked for donations to the Fire Fighters Charity and a total of £225.00 was raised. Congratulations!

OBITUARY

MARGARET QUICK-LEWIS

Margaret Quick-Lewis was born on 19th June 1936 in Preston, Lancashire. She passed away suddenly at home in Potterne on 14th June 2013.

At the age of 21, she joined the Lancashire Fire Brigade as a control operator and rose through the ranks there until in 1964 she was appointed as officer in charge of the West Sussex Fire Brigade control in Chichester. Margaret became one of a group of fire service control and communications officers that regularly were called upon by the Fire Service College to act as visiting lecturers.

In 1969, Margaret won a Winston Churchill Scholarship that enabled her to spend a year working with the Chicago Fire Department in the USA. She was presented with her certificate the same year by HRH the Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother.



In 1974, Margaret transferred to Wiltshire Fire Brigade and became responsible for the control and all brigade communications. She was the first uniformed female officer to be appointed in Wiltshire Fire Brigade. During her service in WFB, Margaret managed the introduction of pocket alerters for retained fire fighters and the introduction of fireground portable radios. She was heavily involved in the development of the bespoke control centre within the grounds of the Manor House Fire HQ at Potterne that went live in 1983.

Margaret was a keen golf player in her younger days and became very proficient at the game. She even travelled overseas to play golf. She was also an active member of Devizes Soroptimist Group and was elected as their President for two years.

In 1980, Margaret was married to Ernie Lewis, former station commander at Pewsey and they set up home in Blounts Court, Potterne. Margaret retired in December 1989 after completing over 32 years in the fire service.

In recent years, Margaret suffered several health set-backs including a broken hip and dementia. I always found Margaret to be a very caring person, a good team member, but never afraid to speak her mind.

Margaret's requiem mass was held on 3rd July 2013 at the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Devizes. Members of the Wiltshire Retired Firefighters Association attended to pay their last respects including myself, Jerry Willmott, John Craig and John Gentleman. **JOHN COX**

DEALING WITH BEREAVEMENT

It's a sad fact of life that all of us are likely to have to cope with bereavement at times in our lives. The impact that the loss of a loved one has will vary according to circumstances but if you are struggling to cope with bereavement, there is help at hand through the **FIRE FIGHTERS CHARITY**.

By telephoning the **Helpline on 0800 389 8820** you will be able to speak to a beneficiary support officer. The helpline is open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm.

A bereavement break at one of the charity's therapy centres is probably what you will be offered. Further information is available from the WRFA Secretary/Treasurer, John Craig

Kate Vanstone Retires



After an outstanding length and quality of service, KATE VANSTONE, has finally retired from the Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service. For 39 years she served as personal assistant to the Chief Fire Officer. Her service finally ended on 15th June. Kate has served CFOs George Clarke, Dennis Robins, John Craig, Neil Wright, Andy Goves and Simon Routh-Jones. Kate needed an abundance of patience, tact and diplomacy in order to fulfil her duties and she had all of these qualities in abundance.

In 1987 when things were somewhat different at the Manor House, Potterne, but the first green shoots of equality and diversity were appearing in Brigade policy, pump competitions were in vogue before it became “too dangerous and risky” under health and safety to perform fire fighting drills at pace and against the clock. Led and inspired by Kate Vanstone, the ladies on the staff of Brigade HQ threw out a challenge to the officers based there.



“Water on!” The fiercely contested pump competition at Brigade HQ, won by the ladies in great style.



The challenge was enthusiastically accepted and the competition rules required a crew of four to get a jet to work from open water and the first team to knock down a target with their jet would win the bottle of champagne and claim the honours. The girls needed little encouragement and accepted a tough training regime. The officers expected a walk-over in their favour. On the day, the lawns at the rear of the Manor House were the venue for one of the most keenly contested pump competitions in British Fire Service history! The ladies appeared in immaculate white overalls with red fire helmets making them look much more “with-it” than the drab fire kit worn by the male officers. Cheered on by the staff of the BHQ and fire control, the competition started. Light portable pumps roared into life; delivery hose was run out with amazing alacrity, The ladies smacked home their branch and called for “water on” and their nozzle crackled with high pressure water discharge while their male competitors stood somewhat embarrassed with a dry hose line. “Kerpow” - down went the target and the ladies had won a convincing victory to cheers heard for miles around.

This is but one of the many anecdotes attached to Kate’s very long and successful career but it illustrates so well how Kate has influenced life at the Manor House. Kate loves to “have a go” and keeps herself fit and active. She has needed to be flexible and tolerant for her bosses all had very different personalities and priorities to which she had to adapt.

If anyone was experiencing a sad time in their lives and having problems, Kate was the first to offer a shoulder on which to cry and a discreet ear in which to pour out their woes. Kate might have been christened with “loyalty” as her middle name because she was always loyal to those at all levels with whom she worked.

The good news is that Kate has joined our Association and we look forward to seeing her and ‘hubby’ Graham at many of our future social events.

We wish Kate a very long, healthy and happy retirement which she so deserves.

New Members

In the past few weeks, we have been delighted to welcome into membership not only **Kate Vanstone**, but also **Dave Smith**, **Chris Tubey**, and **Andy Wright**. Some information about Dave appears on the next page.

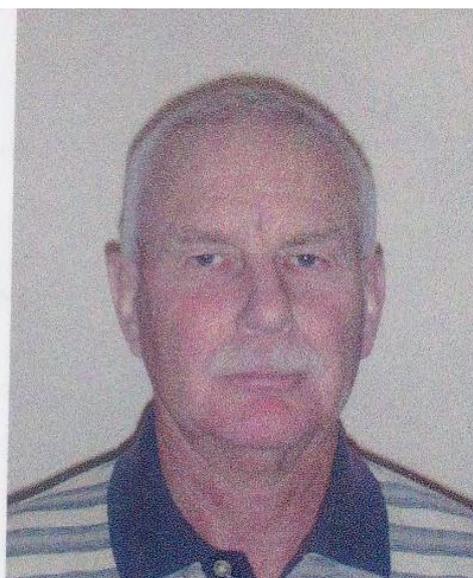
Application forms are available on request.

Do you know of someone eligible to join who has not yet done so? If so, please provide the Secretary/Treasurer with their details.

DAVID SMITH

David recently retired from his post as Station Officer and Clinical Team Leader with South West Ambulance Trust. For many years he commendably served in both the ambulance service and the fire/rescue service. David served in a retained capacity at Marlborough Fire Station, retiring in the rank of sub officer.

Although a very quiet and modest man, if you can draw him into talking about his dual careers in the emergency services, he has some stories to tell that are well worth listening to and maybe we can encourage him to write about some of these in greater detail for future editions of 'The Branch'. David relates that one of the 'shouts' that he found personally most challenging was being part of the ambulance service response to the Hungerford Massacre when Michael Ryan ran amok in Hungerford and district shooting many innocent



people. At what must have been at considerable personal risk, David and a colleague managed to rescue a victim that Ryan had shot through the neck. Using all their skills, David and his colleague kept the man alive and transported him to Swindon hospital. Sadly, he later died there. David was later chosen to be presented to Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher when she wanted to meet and thank personally the emergency service personnel drawn into the awful massacre.

When wearing his other hat (helmet) as a fire fighter, David remembers well the Polly Tea Rooms fire in Marlborough in 1966 and the other major blazes in the High Street such as Dible & Roys, the one above Lloyds TSB, and Jessie Smith's butchers shop.

In the Great Drought of 1976, David was attending a course for the ambulance service in Southampton but he was on call with Marlborough fire station during what should have been his weekend rest period from the course. It was an exceptionally busy time for the fire service with the hot weather stimulating a multitude of calls, many of which David attended, robbing him of precious time with his family.

David lives with his wife, Helen, in Pewsey and we look forward to their company at many of the social events held by this Association. We wish David and Helen many happy years of fellowship with the WRFA and congratulate David on his outstanding record of public emergency service.

WE HAVE ROOM FOR MORE!

Do you know of anyone that is not yet a member of this Association that is eligible to join?

Applicants must have served in any fire brigade or fire service for at least five years. They do not have to have been operational staff; ex-support staff are very welcome too. Widows or widowers of former fire service members may also apply.

They do not have to have served in Wiltshire or be domicile in the county now.

Application forms are available from John Craig 01380 726343.

Jerry Willmott: A Review of the Past and A Determination of the Future

This year was my 24th as Chairman of the Wiltshire Retired Firefighter's Association or whatever it was called in 1989, and what a different organisation it was then? In a recent conversation I described the difference as being as marked as that between Black & White films and Technicolour, and in retrospect that is very much what it feels like.

The objectives and intentions, to do well by our membership, were the same all those years ago but the means whereby those objectives might be met and the intentions fulfilled were not. When compared with today and for many years, external support and involvement, together with technical and financial resources, were sadly and demonstrably lacking, notwithstanding this, however, dear Peter Thorpe had, virtually single handedly, kept the spirit of The Association alive and solvent (just). It was a privilege therefore, on my retirement, to be asked by Peter to join and shortly afterwards to be elected as Chairman of the Association. Thereafter, working with Peter as the hardworking Secretary/Treasurer we were able, with others on the Executive Committee (EC) to work to maintain and develop the Association's spinal cord which today powers and guides "The WRFA". Powers and guides it, that is, in what I believe is its continuing pursuit of equality and democracy within the membership and the organisation itself, regardless of fire service rank or connection, and endeavour on their behalf and on behalf of the great and increasingly diverse fire service family, retired and serving that we have become.



An added strength that we enjoyed then, as now, was the very positive support of the Chief Fire Officer and all members of the Brigade. It was a great joy when, on Peter Thorpe's relinquishment of his years of Secretarial duties, honourably performed, the Association, at an AGM, unanimously agreed to create the new position of President and equally unanimously to recognise Peter's contribution by electing him to become the first holder of that position. Simultaneously with those decisions we, the Association membership, were fortunate in our selection of the then recently retired John Craig as our Secretary & Treasurer and since those momentous changes, the renewed "Executive Committee" has powered ahead. We have assumed an independence from National interference, thus freeing up, for our own use, our own financial resources from rather opaque national investments. We have used those resources to further support our own members individually and collectively, we have, and are still, widening the representation of the membership of the guiding Executive Committee thus ensuring that the many and varied interests and components of the fire service community that is our Association are represented and fully sharing in its governance.



The late PETER THORPE
First President of the
WRFA

I believe that we have done much and come far, our indefatigable (I hope) and far sighted Secretary, our very experienced Welfare Officer, our imaginative Webmaster, our unbiased Grants Sub Committee and our ubiquitous and totally devoted Area Representatives, have, I know, served you well. I also, together with my EC colleagues, acknowledge that we have not always got everything right; our much extended geography alone must mean that we cannot satisfy everyone all of the time. However, we are aware of this and we know that there still remains much to do but just as importantly I believe that we, through our AGM approved and very robust constitution, have put in place a team, structures and safeguards that are constructed to ensure quality of ownership, stewardship and access to all and in this we are the envy of many other would be similar organisations.

With full and active member participation and under the strong guidance of your new but very experienced Chairman, Chris Wannell, I believe we have the potential to fulfil what I know to be the principal and overriding objective of the WRFA, the deployment of **your resources** to best serve the individual and collective needs and wishes of **all our membership**.

Thank you for the confidence that you have shown in me and for the support that you have given me over many years and thank you for the great honour that you have done me by electing me as your President. I assure you that I am fully conscious of my responsibilities and promise that I intend to continue to play a full and active part in the Association's democratic and representative processes. **Jerry Willmott CBE, QFSM**

FROM KEN SEAGER

Ken Seager, the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the FIRE FIGHTERS CHARITY has written to the WRFA Secretary stating that he is in awe of what our Association is doing for retired members and expressing the hope that others will emulate us.

BLUE LIGHT NEWS

Flashes from the world of flashing blue lights



FBU BALLOT FOR STRIKE ACTION

The Fire Brigades Union is balloting its members over strike action. This time the grievance has been sparked by a letter from the Fire Minister, Brandon Lewis MP, concerning the Government's proposals to make changes to the **fire pension scheme** in which the Minister is alleged not to have answered some questions that the FBU has posed that are considered to be of crucial importance. Matt Wrack, General Secretary of the FBU, has accused the Government of issuing incomplete and misleading information and has appealed for negotiations to be reopened so that a workable solution can be agreed.

FIRE FIGHTER DEATH

Firefighter Stephen Hunt was killed while attending a 12 pump fire at a hairdressing salon in central Manchester on 15th July 2013. Stephen was working with a colleague who was injured but not fatally. Two teenage girls have been charged with manslaughter and are believed to have started the fire. Stephen is believed to have been overwhelmed by a massive heat build-up. This Association has sent condolences.

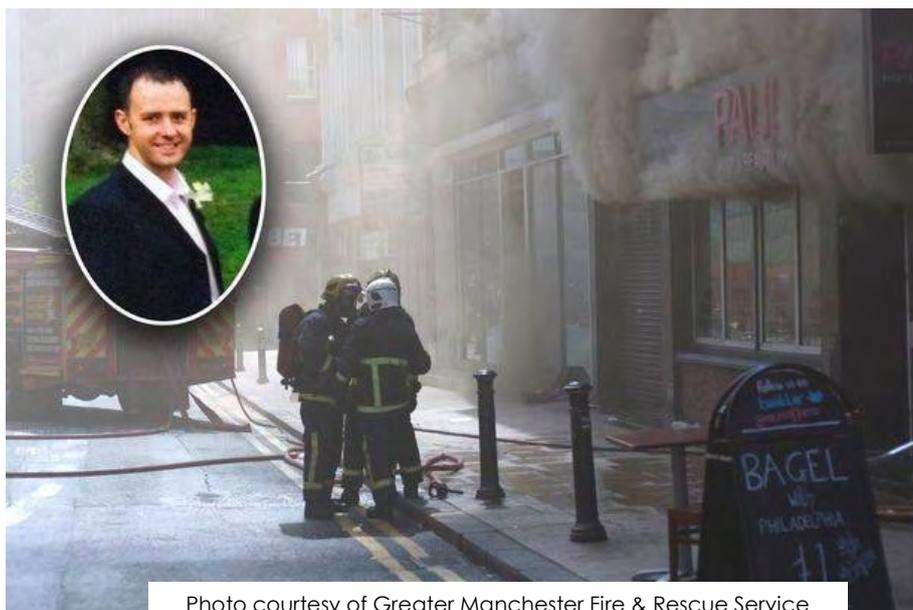


Photo courtesy of Greater Manchester Fire & Rescue Service

IS THIS AMBULANCE TRUST TO BE TRUSTED?

The South Western Ambulance Trust, that now incorporates Wiltshire within its area, has been strongly criticised by the West Somerset Coroner. This arose from an inquest into the death of a man who drowned after his vehicle left the road and ended up upside down in a ditch filled with water. Paramedics that arrived first at the scene carried out a risk assessment and refused to enter the water filled ditch. A policeman who arrived minutes later plunged into the water and removed the casualty to the bank. However, by this time, it was too late to save the man from drowning. The coroner was highly critical of the ambulance trust paramedics for not acting in the same way as the police constable.

AMBULANCE SENT TO WRONG PLACE

The death of a 14 year old female air cadet is being blamed on the delay in the East of England Ambulance Trust answering a 999 call. The ambulance was sent to RAF Wyton when the casualty was at RAF Brampton. The ambulance trust has accepted that the girl's death from an asthma attack may have been partly due to the delay in paramedics arriving.

Recently, the East of England Ambulance Trust's computer system for dealing with calls went down for nearly a day and there is no back-up. Control staff were reduced to pen and paper systems in the old fashioned way.

The trust has been criticised recently for poor 999 call response times.

POLICE CHIEFS STOP CAR CHASES

In fear of being sued the Police Chiefs of UK are stopping car chases, according to the Police Federation. This ban is being imposed stealthily so as not to encourage villains into



avoiding capture by speeding off in a vehicle. If true, this would appear to be another case where our litigious society is having an impact on the way that the emergency services approach their duties.

Are we just one step away from police 999 calls being attended at normal road speeds?



Helpline Number
0800 389 8820

REGULAR GIVING

Our charity is facing challenges and the **REGULAR GIVING SCHEME** provides a very valuable way that members of the WRFA and their families can help. By committing to donate a sum of money regularly, usually monthly, members can provide the charity with a steady income source. If you are already signed up to the scheme, when did you last review the amount pledged and can you raise it? If you are not in the scheme, please ask for a form. **John Craig**

WANT TO BECOME A TRUSTEE?

The Fire Fighters Charity is seeking applications from suitable candidates to become Trustees of the Charity. **Retired members of the fire service community are eligible for this voluntary service to the charity. Those appointed will be deemed to have the knowledge, skills and personal attributes needed to serve on the Board of Trustees and therefore help shape the policy of the charity and oversee the day-to-day management of its affairs. No salary is paid to Trustees but out-of-pocket expenses may be reimbursed.**
To apply, please visit www.firefighterscharity.org.uk Or write for an application form to The Fire Fighters Charity, Level 6, Belvedere, Basing View, Basingstoke RG21 4HG.

HERE'S WHAT THE FIRE FIGHTERS CHARITY CAN DO

- The charity takes a 'whole person' approach to supporting its beneficiaries.
- Rehabilitation ; a residential programme of tailored exercise therapy, physiotherapy and health education to help you recover from illness or injury
 - Mental & Emotional Wellbeing ; Helping you deal with life's events
 - Support during times of financial hardship or bereavement
- Support with employment issues, housing needs, disability or need adaption.



NEED A HELPING HAND?

Ring
0800 389 8820
Monday to Friday
9am to 5pm

Applying for the assistance of the Fire Fighters Charity is very easy. At the head of this page is a Helpline number that you may phone to speak to a Beneficiary Support operator. You can be certain of a confidential and sympathetic reception and guidance will be given on the next step in tapping into the charity's services. If you would like to speak to someone about your needs before contacting the Helpline, you are welcome to contact **JOHN CRAIG** or any of the Executive Committee members of the WRFA.
Remember, to gain the support of the Fire Fighters Charity, the first step is yours in making your need known. In the past year, 4,500 people did just that and the charity came to their assistance.

Much Excitement in Royal Wootton Bassett



Some of today's Royal Wootton Bassett fire fighters pose beside the glass case displaying the old fire pump. Days later, these same men were dealing with the serious blaze at the Cross Keys Pub only yards away from the old fire pump

The 18th century Newsham fire pump that was probably the first fire engine used to protect Wootton Bassett has been restored and put on display in a glass case underneath the Town Hall in the High Street. The unveiling of the display was done ceremoniously on 6th July by the Mayor of Royal Wootton Bassett, Mrs Linda Frost. Our WRFA Chairman, Chris Wannell, had a guiding hand in arranging the ceremony that included a blessing performed by the Rev. Canon Thomas Woodhouse, who is the local Vicar, the Rural Dean and also the National Chaplain to the British Fire Services Association.

Canon Woodhouse conducted his blessing with due reverence and then adopted an unconventional method of applying the holy water by using a giant toy water gun.



The Chippenham Morris Dancers bring a truly English touch to the occasion and raise appreciative applause from the crowd.

The Chippenham Morris Dancers attended and, having taken steps to avoid dehydration in a local pub, despite the hot weather danced with great skill and enthusiasm to entertain the crowds assembled for the ceremony. They performed against a background of preserved old fire engines displayed for the occasion.



Canon Woodhouse spraying the Holy Water over the audience to the ceremony to ensure that the blessing fell upon more than just the fire pump.



CHRIS TAKES A BREATHER

Having played his part in the unveiling of the old pump, our Chairman, Chris Wannell, takes a few minutes to rest his legs perched on the rear pump platform of his 1930s vintage Leyland Cub Major Pump.

Photos by John Craig



THE CROSS KEYS BURNS

Within days of the ceremony to unveil the Newsham historic pump mentioned above, the Cross keys pub, just a few yards away, was badly damaged by fire. The pub was closed for renovation at the time of the outbreak. The roof and first floor were the most severely damaged. The pub was used extensively to provide refreshment to those attending the many repatriation events in the town.

Photo by kind permission of Wiltshire Fire & Rescue

Where is the Fire & Rescue Service Going?

**At a time of rapid and radical change,
the fire & rescue service looks for
direction and indication of a sound way
forward** by John Craig



Rarely has the fire and rescue service been subjected to the need to accept rapid and radical change in the way that it is now being required to do. Most of this change has been forced by the financial crisis facing national and local government. The budget cuts imposed on the public services, including the fire & rescue service, are severe and there is no reason to believe that we have seen an end to the austerity.

Fire and rescue authorities are so far being left to find their own salvations to the cuts and so it is not surprising that different solutions are being proposed to the problems created by the need to save massive amounts of money and yet still provide an effective public service. The “buzz word” resilience seems to have been relegated in the FRS and replaced by terms such as inter-operability. This not only seems to refer to fire and rescue services working more closely together but there is even a strong nudge being given to the three blue light services seeking greater inter-operability. The Knight Review published by Sir Ken Knight shortly after he relinquished the post of Chief Fire & Rescue Adviser, raises the issue of inter-operability. In an interview given to ‘Fire’ magazine, Sir Ken highlights the fact that the NHS ambulance trusts have now got trained HART teams that not only match the capabilities of the FRS in many emergency situations but actually exceed them by including paramedic skills.

However, I find it somewhat ironic that Sir Ken should be throwing his weight behind inter-operability at the very time that in our county, the joint emergency service control is being ‘junked’ and separate police, fire and ambulance controls are being reinstated. On the face of it, the strong pointers towards merger, amalgamation and interoperability contained in the Knight Review are being largely ignored by the Wiltshire & Swindon Combined Fire Authority.

That stated, I am well aware that mergers and amalgamations do not always produce savings. One very accomplished and experienced member of our Association once carried out a study into the amalgamation of eight fire brigades into three in Wales and his paper produced the conclusion that protecting the principality from fire had *doubled* as a result of the amalgamations rather than producing savings. This revelation so annoyed the Civil Service that he was warned off further circulation of his paper even though its accuracy



has never been challenged. The bureaucratic fog created by amalgamations can often be used to mask increases in expenditure in the hope that no one will ever be astute and industrious enough to produce comparisons as our member did.

Although he clearly urges fire & rescue authorities to go for amalgamations, Sir Ken does not hold the view that re-nationalisation is the answer. He states this in his published interview in *Fire*. Sir Ken expresses the opinion that a recreated NFS would be “too big” and that leaves us with the only conclusion that regionalisation or sub-regionalisation is the preferred approach to creating some sort of order out of the chaos towards which the FRS is drifting. He further urges the fire authorities to move in this direction themselves by reaching consensus rather than waiting for Central Government to step in and force it upon them.

I listened to a speech delivered at a conference in the 1990s by the then most senior Whitehall civil servant dealing with fire matters. He expounded his personal opinion that the fire service should be re-nationalised and a civil servant, not a fire officer, should be placed at its head. Although that view was never actioned by the Conservative



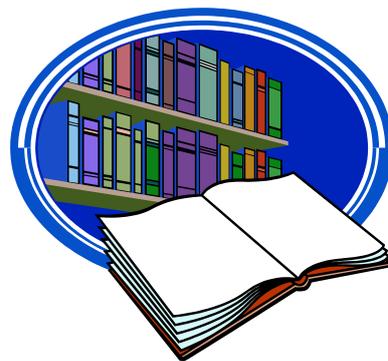
The badge of the wartime NFS. Will we see it back again?

Government of the day, I would not be surprised to learn that the plan referred to in that speech was never put through the shredder and still exists somewhere in the files carefully tended and preserved by the ‘Sir Humphreys’ in Whitehall. I suspect that Sir Ken’s recommendations to fire and rescue authorities are issued as a warning of what might happen to the FRS if the Civil Service ever gains greater control and influence over it. After all, look what a mess the Civil Service is making of administering the National Health Service. Do we want that to happen to our service ?

One former colleague who worked for a time within the Civil Service has told me, the fire & rescue service has few friends at Whitehall. Do we really want to see the FRS fall under the control and influence of those that care little for it, its values or those now serving or who once served in it? **JMC**

Book Shelf

Where books are reviewed



The Esperanza Fire

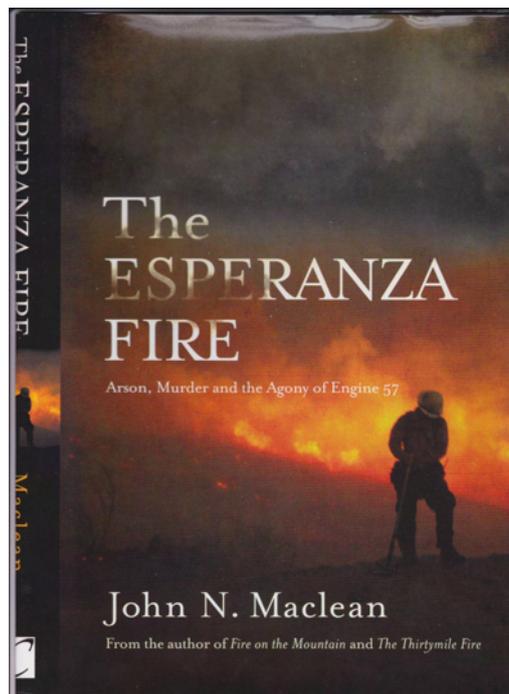
Author : John Maclean

I was midway through reading this book about a tragic wildfire in California in 2006 when the news broke of the even worse wildfire disaster in Arizona that claimed the lives of an entire unit of 19 expert fire fighters. This served to heighten even further my interest in this book. It tells the story in great detail of how the crew of Engine 57 were overwhelmed by the wildfire that was started on 26th October, 2006 in the San Jacinto Mountains. Engine 57 crewed by five experienced men was a part of the US Forest Service fire fighting attack upon the fire. By the time the fire was eventually brought under control, the crew of Engine 57 were dead, 41,000 acres of forest and about 30 houses were burned.

Maclean describes in carefully researched detail how the fire was fought and investigated. He goes on to tell of the criminal proceedings that followed the fire and the deaths. The Esperanza fire was the first time in history that an entire Engine crew lost their lives at a wildfire.

I recommend this book for many reasons, not the least of which is that reading it pays tribute to those fire fighters who have given their lives in the line of duty.

JOHN CRAIG



Published by Counterpoint Press

ISBN 978-1-61902-071-9

Read any good books lately?



THE BRANCH is always happy to receive information about books and publications that members have read recently and who hold views they wish to share with others. The subject matter of the book review does not have to be fire related.

It would also be useful and interesting to learn about the experiences of members that have begun using books downloaded electronically instead of the more traditional paper books.

DISCLAIMER

This newsletter is published by the Wiltshire Retired Fire Fighters Association and not the Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Services. The views and opinions published in it do not necessarily reflect those of the Association, or the Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service.

Editor: JOHN CRAIG johncraig7@btinternet.com Tel: 01380 726343