



The Branch

APRIL 2016

**Newsletter of the
Wiltshire Retired Firefighters Association**



On the occasion of the
90th birthday of
Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II
This Association wishes Her Majesty

**A VERY HAPPY
BIRTHDAY!**

The Manor House, Potterne

At a ceremony on 31st March witnessed by members of the Combined Fire Authority attending their last meeting, the standard of the Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service was lowered at the Manor House, Potterne. Since 1948 the Manor House has served as the Headquarters of the fire service protecting Wiltshire, including Swindon. The future of the 400 year old Grade 2 listed building is still uncertain. It will accommodate a much reduced workforce for a time because the main administrative centre for the amalgamated Dorset and Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Services has been created in Salisbury.

The Fire Control serving both Dorset and Wiltshire is situated on the same site as the Manor House and there are no plans for it to be moved.

After 68 years another chapter closes on the history of the Manor House.



SUNDAY LUNCH 6th MARCH 2016



White Horse Inn , Compton Bassett



49 members and guests thoroughly enjoyed lunch together at the WHITE HORSE INN, Compton Bassett. The three-course meal was delicious and reported by many to be the best of its kind they had eaten for a very long time. The Chef is the joint proprietor with his wife and they are soon to move to Bromham to take over The Greyhound Pub there. No doubt we shall be arranging a visit there in the not too distant future.



Photos by John Craig

PEOPLE & PLACES



OUTSTANDING VOLUNTARY SERVICE RECOGNISED

Only days before he retired, CFO Routh-Jones presented framed certificates to WRFA members Chris Wannell and Len Benwell. The certificates were a gesture of appreciation for the countless hours of voluntary work that Chris and Len have put into maintaining veteran fire appliances and using them to raise funds for the Fire Fighters Charity. Audrey Wannell was also present and her contribution to the work Chris has done was also praised. The ceremony took place at Westlea Fire Station in Swindon.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Our AGM in June will be the time for the election of officers to the Executive Committee of our Association. All the EC members will be standing for re-election with the exception of one of the central area representatives, **MILDRED SUNDERLAND**. Mildred is the widow of Colin Sunderland who started his career in West Yorkshire and rose to become the Chief Fire Officer of Bermuda. The couple retired to Calne in Wiltshire where sadly Colin passed away. Mildred has approached her duties on the Executive Committee with commendable devotion and has brought another female perspective to



Mildred Sunderland

the work of the committee. However, having reached an age when driving herself is becoming more difficult, Mildred feels she should hand over to a younger person. We shall miss Mildred's input to the work of the EC and we thank her most sincerely for what she has done. We look forward to Mildred joining us at as many of our social events as possible.



Health Matters

News of those dealing with health problems



Continued on Page 11

JOHN GENTLEMAN

A few months ago JOHN GENTLEMAN was diagnosed with atrial fibrillation which in plain language means a slow and erratic heartbeat. The cardiologist treating him advised the fitting of a pacemaker to his heart. To use the consultant's turn of phrase when describing the condition of his heart to John, "the plumbing's fine but the wiring needs attention." The pacemaker was fitted and it is now linked to electronic equipment so that John's cardiac performance can be monitored remotely from the hospital.



PETER MILLS

PETER MILLS is undergoing extensive treatment, scans and other tests as an outpatient at Great Western Hospital, Swindon. He is being treated with chemotherapy in tablet form for a bladder condition. The medical investigations will continue in the next few weeks to make absolutely certain of an accurate diagnosis and determine the appropriate treatment. Peter remains cheerful and more concerned about the welfare of others than himself, as is his usual way. He is full of praise for the quality of treatment that he is receiving. We wish Peter a rapid recovery.

JOHN PERRY

John and Maureen Perry are going through very difficult times. John is in Salisbury District Hospital. He was initially admitted some weeks ago with sepsis but since then and whilst an in-patient he has suffered a stroke, contracted the noro-virus, and begun to develop another ulcer on his only leg. He is very poorly.

Not surprisingly, Maureen has recently been diagnosed with depression and is under the care of her GP.

We send our warmest best wishes to both John and Maureen.



OBITUARY



JAMES (JIM) BETTS

Our Association is in mourning for the loss of a very popular and highly respected member, Jim Betts. Jim passed away peacefully at home in Chilmark with his family around him after a long struggle with leukaemia that finally overcame him.

Jim served all his fire service career at Salisbury, reaching the rank of sub officer and running a very efficient and happy watch. As one senior officer commented to me “ *If you were dealing with a particularly difficult incident, the sub officer you would want with you is someone like Jim.*”

When off duty in 1989, he and his wife Lesley were awoken from sleep by neighbours hammering on the door. The Vicarage was burning fiercely and the Vicar’s three young daughters were trapped inside. The fire had already caused a power cut that affected the whole village and Jim had to dress hurriedly in the dark. While waiting for fire crews to arrive from Wilton, Tisbury and Salisbury, although without protective clothing or breathing apparatus, Jim found a short ladder and tried to enter the upper floor to search for the children. The conditions were far too severe and Jim was forced to abandon rescue attempts. He was taken to hospital suffering from smoke inhalation. I met him and Lesley at the A & E Department and his first words were typical of him. “*Please don’t make me out to be a hero.*”. Jim was one of the most modest men I have ever met. Sadly, the three little girls died.

After retirement, Jim joined the WRFA and was elected to serve on the Executive Committee as a south area representative. This really gave him the opportunity to display his compassionate and caring nature. His discharge of the welfare duties associated with EC membership was exemplary.

Jim served for a time with the ambulance service driving patient transport buses, a job that he much enjoyed.

The funeral service was held at Salisbury Crematorium on 4th April and the huge number of mourners that attended the humanist service gave testimony to Jim’s popularity.

Jim is survived by his wife, Lesley, daughters Rachel and Jane, and five grandchildren.

Rest in peace, Jim We miss you very much.

John Craig

From the Last CFO of Wiltshire FRS

At a dinner hosted on 17th March 2016 by Simon Routh-Jones to mark the end of an era, the menu contained the following words from Simon as his retirement was only days away.

I am delighted to share this very special 'End of an Era' dinner for Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service with you all this evening.

This event could not have taken place without the generosity of all our sponsors, our headline sponsor Rosenbauer, together with Bristol Uniforms, Fire Industry Association, Holmatro, PBI, SPS and Supply Plus. Thank you all very much.

On 1st April 1948 Wiltshire County Fire Brigade was born, and tonight we share stories, memories, and I am sure some laughs reminiscing on the past 68 years of our Fire & Rescue service. In

the 68 years that Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service has been in operation, we have shown that a relatively small Service can be a pioneer in many aspects, and Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service have been leaders in the introduction of domestic sprinklers, youth intervention through its Salamander project and Road Safety within the Safe Drive Stay Alive programme., to name but a few. These projects have proudly now been developed further across the country.

I couldn't have imagine when I joined the Service as a probationary firefighter on 19th February 1979 that some 37 years later I would be closing the doors as the very last Chief Fire Officer of Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service. I believe that being a Chief Fire Officer is the best job in the world and I am so proud and honoured to have spent my whole career within Wiltshire. Receiving the Queen's Fire Service Medal in the New Year's Honours was an accolade to each and every one of you who have shared my journey with me.

Thank you to all the dedicated and loyal staff, past and present along with our Partners who have made Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service the outstanding organisation that it has become. We should all be very proud of the part we played.

1st April 2016 is a new beginning and I am sure you will all join with me in wishing the new organisation of Dorset and Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service a safe and successful future.

SIMON ROUTH-JONES QFSM



A domestic sprinkler head

Domestic sprinklers are but one of many projects pioneered by Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service and now being adopted by many Services .

We punched well above our weight.



BLUE LIGHT NEWS

Update on the
Emergency Services



DAILY TELEGRAPH EXPOSES THE PRACTICE OF FIRE CHIEFS CLAIMING PENSION LUMP SUM ON RETIREMENT AND THEN BEING IMMEDIATELY REAPPOINTED.



At the end of March the *Daily Telegraph* ran a front page story that drew attention to the widespread practice of senior fire service managers being allowed to retire, claim six figure commutation payouts and then immediately be reappointed to carry on doing the job they retired from the previous day. The newspaper has made extensive use of the Freedom of Information Act and appears to have also had guidance from the Fire Brigades Union. Although the practice is not illegal, at a time when fire authorities are under intense pressure to cope with severe budget cuts that have in many cases

led to a reduction in front line fire fighter posts, the morality of the practice is being brought into question. The Home Office has commented on the newspaper investigation in terms that make it clear that the Government wishes to distance itself from these now controversial deals struck under the Fire Fighters Pension Scheme. There is no compulsion upon a fire authority to agree to allow a retired fire manager to be reappointed immediately after retiring. In fact, the fire authority in Derbyshire has banned the practice.

POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONERS GEARING UP TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR SOME FIRE & RESCUE SERVICES

Taking political control away from fire authorities and using Police and Crime Commissioners to oversee both Chief Constables and Chief Fire Officers is now well known to be a key element in the government's initiative to enable closer working between the emergency services. To get rid of the Dorset & Wiltshire Fire Authority and replace it with a police & crime commissioner would require the police services in both counties to amalgamate in the same way that the fire & rescue services have been forced into doing so. What will be the government's next move?

FRENCH HONOUR FOR ERNIE

WRFA member, Ernie Lewis, at the age of 89 has been made a **Chevalier of the Order National de la Legion d'honneur** by the French Government.. This is one of the highest honours that France can bestow and it is being awarded to those British ex-members of the Armed Forces that took part in the **D-Day Landings** in Normandy on 6th June, 1944. The tangible symbol of the honour is a handsome medal that Ernie is very proud to possess.

Ernie was a member of the Third Royal Tank Regiment that landed with their Sherman tanks on the beach code named 'Omaha'. He was just 18 years old



He was trained as a driver / gunner . The American troops of the 21st Army Group landed before the tanks and suffered heavy casualties. The Third Tanks were delayed in disembarking from the civilian ferry ships pressed into wartime service to carry military vehicles and when they got onto the beach Ernie tells of seeing the numerous bodies of Americans that had already given their lives scattered over the sands. The Third Tanks fought their way inland supporting the infantry. The fighting was never easy but it got even tougher when the advancing invasion force came up against the Siegfried Line, a barrier of fortifications built to impede tanks. The Germans had deployed their 88mm anti-tank guns that proved very effective and all of the Shermans operated by the Third Tanks were destroyed.



When Ernie's tank was hit, he was very lucky to escape with only a facial wound but he lost some teeth because of it. The survivors of Ernie's regiment were regrouped and issued with British made Comet tanks to replace the Shermans made in the USA. In these new tanks the regiment fought on through Belgium , taking part in the Battle of the Bulge, and then into Germany. They were just 20 miles from Kiel when the Germans surrendered and hostilities came to an end. Before the surrender, the German Panzers were struggling to resist the British tanks because their logistical supply had collapsed and they were running out of fuel and ammunition.

Few will know of Ernie's wartime exploits because he is a very modest man. He is best known



A Sherman Tank

to us as the former Station Officer in charge of Pewsey retained fire station. Despite advancing years, Ernie does his best to attend WRFA social events. He lives in Potterne and is the widower of Margaret Quick-Lewis who has sadly predeceased him.

We offer heartiest congratulations to Ernie on his richly deserved award.



SHOUT magazine

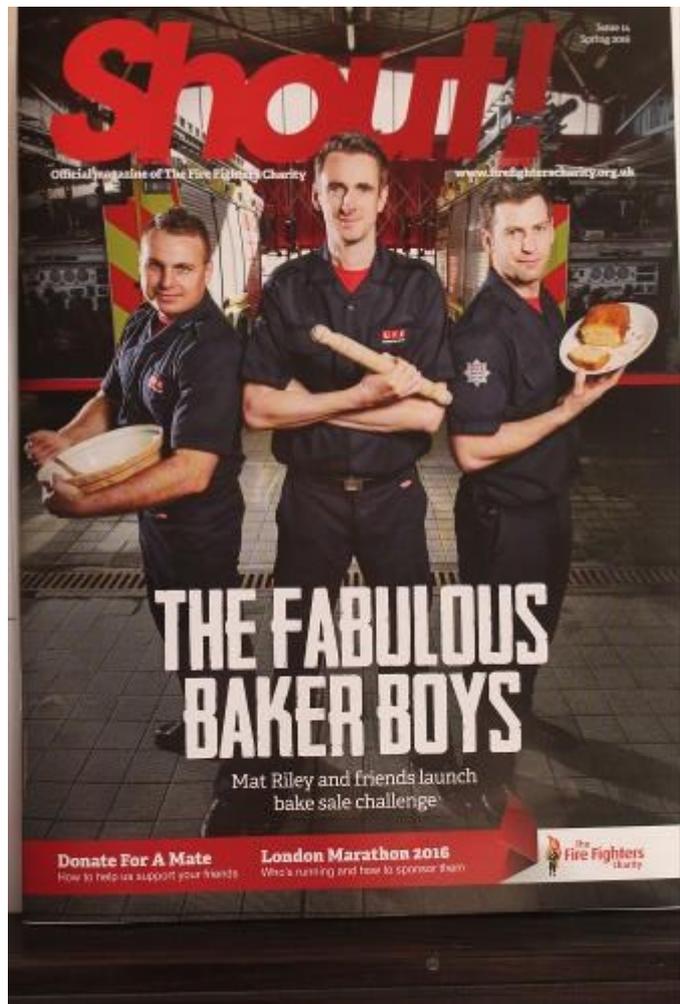
Did you get your copy of **SHOUT** magazine published for retired members of the fire & rescue service?

The Spring edition of this excellent publication should have dropped through your letter-box a couple of weeks ago.

If you have missed receiving your copy contact the **WRFA** secretary

JOHN CRAIG

Who will get you a copy and have your details added to the Charity's mailing list.



REGULAR GIVER SCHEME

The start of the tax year is a particularly good time to join the **REGULAR GIVER SCHEME** so that you can make regular donations to our Charity and, if you are a UK tax payer, gift aid your donations. If you require more details, contact **JOHN CRAIG**, secretary & treasurer of the **WRFA**.

NEED HELP FROM THE FIRE FIGHTERS CHARITY ?

Just call the **HELPLINE 0800 389 8820**

Monday to Friday 8am to 5pm



Social Events



Sunday 8th May 2016
Rose & Crown Hotel
Harnham Road, Salisbury



Three Course Lunch for £21.00

BOOK NOW!

Booking form with this newsletter (hard copies only)

Or download from website www.wrfa.org.uk

NOTE YOUR DIARIES, PLEASE !

26th June 2016

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING & Three Course Lunch

Venue to be advised

Lunch for Ladies Only

Saturday 22nd October

The Lamb on the Strand , Near Seend, on A361



WRFA REMEMBRANCE EVENT

Thursday 10th November

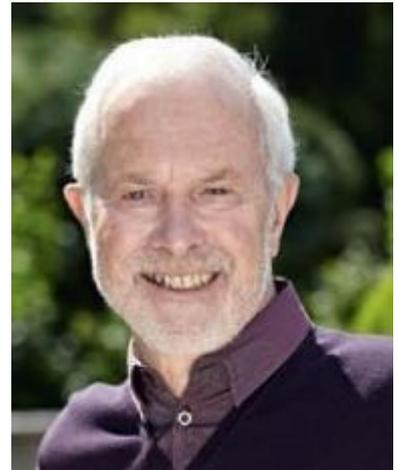
Devizes Town Hall

Two-course dinner ; Band Concert ; Act of Remembrance

MORE NEWS OF HEALTH MATTERS

GLENN FOREMAN

As this newsletter has gone to press, news has arrived of Glenn Foreman. He has been admitted to Salisbury District Hospital in intense abdominal pain. His illness is centred in the bowel but until all the tests are completed an accurate diagnosis will not be known. Because of Glenn's heart condition, it is hoped that the treatment he is given can avoid surgery and that his illness will be cured by medication. We wish you a rapid recovery, Glenn.



TONY ANDREWS

As this newsletter has gone to press, Tony has just arrived at the Fire Fighters Charity therapy centre, Harcombe House, in Devon. He has been suffering from back pain for some time and has paid a chiropracter for treatment that has done no good at all. Tony has therefore placed himself in the hands of the physiotherapists serving the Fire Fighters Charity.

Back pain is debilitating and demoralising and we wish Tony well and ask that he keeps us informed of his progress.

JOE NASH

Joe had a hip replacement operation performed at Royal Gloucester Hospital on 14th April. Early indications give much optimism that the replacement of his worn out joint is going to lead to a much better quality of life for him and for Grace.

Joe was in a lot of pain for a long while before the operation and this plus the limited mobility he suffered meant that he and Grace could not support many WRFA social events. The couple are hoping that this will change for the better now. We do hope so, Joe. Get well soon!



ANN FITZGERALD

Ann has just returned from a period of 'top-up' physiotherapy treatment administered by the staff at the Fire Fighters Charity Therapy Centre at Harcombe House. She reports very positively on this second period of rehabilitation treatment that is strengthening her legs and taking pressure away from her knee joints that had been so painful to the point of making it difficult for Ann to walk. In order to build on the work done at Harcombe House, Ann has registered at a gym in Swindon. Ann, we wish you continuing improvements in health.



BOOK SHELF

Reviews of books

Recently published



THE ASHES OF LONDON

Author : Andrew Taylor

If you are interested in the Great Fire of London of 1666 and also enjoy a crime mystery story, this book is a “must read” for you.

Andrew Taylor is an award winning author that clearly has a gift for writing historical fiction. His work begins by taking the reader into the heart of London as much of it is being consumed by fire. I have to write this review carefully so that I do not divulge too much of the plot. The story is an enjoyable “who-dunnit” and I must not deny the reader the pleasure of trying to work out who carried out the murders and what was their motive.

What I can divulge is that the body of a man is discovered in the smouldering ruins of St Paul’s Cathedral but it was not the fire that killed him.. He was stabbed. Then, a second body is found and the plot thickens.

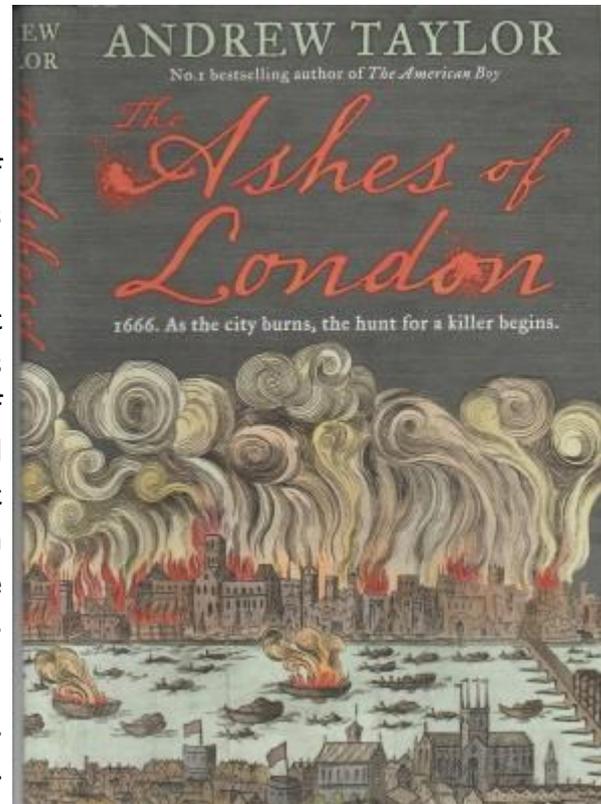
James Marwood is a government informer. King Charles II is on the throne and even before the Great Fire he had a multitude of problems with which to cope. His government was profligate and causing the nation to live beyond its means. The population was afflicted by plague and London was not a particularly healthy place to live. The city was being made subject to divisive internal dissent.

Against this background, a fire breaks out in Pudding Lane and spreads unchecked for days destroying a significant part of the capital.

Marwood is given orders to try to track down the murderer(s) and with much reluctance he sets about the detective work. This leads him into treacherous waters and into contact with a determined and vengeful woman.

Some historical accounts of events such as the Great Fire can be somewhat dry and boring because they are dominated by facts and figures. This book takes the reader on a path of discovery about what life was like in 17th century London without it being in the least bit dry.

Published in hard back at a recommended price of £14.99



Published by Harper Collins

A DRAMATIC FIRE RESCUE ? THWARTED BY FATE

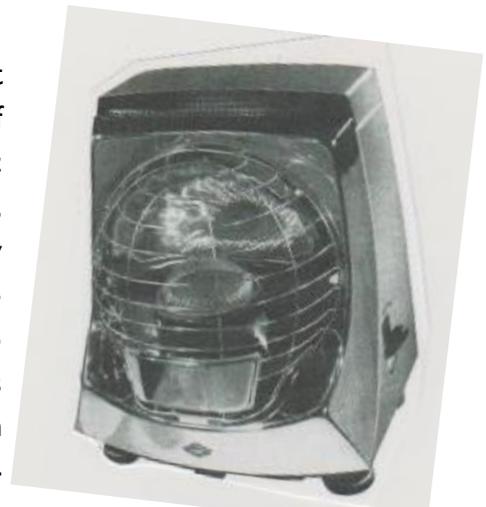
By John Gentleman QFSM



John Gentleman

When I joined the Wiltshire Fire Brigade in 1959 at Swindon, probably like many aspiring young firemen, I often wondered if I would ever have the opportunity to play a key role in a dramatic rescue sometime during my career. In those days, the newly opened Swindon Station was 'B' Division Headquarters and a Mobilising Control for ten stations in the north of the county. Only one appliance on the station was equipped with radio on the joint Police/Fire scheme and its use was strictly limited to urgent operational traffic.. Standby communications was the nearest public telephone box using a bag of pennies kept in the glove box of each appliance or a 'Fire Flash' call through the telephone exchange operator. The two front-line appliances each carried a pair of one-hour Proto oxygen breathing apparatus sets . This then has set the scene for an incident that could have so easily led to the dramatic rescue of a young child but, in the event, fate denied the crew from Swindon's White Watch a once in a career opportunity of a fire rescue.

The incident in question involved a drip-feed paraffin heater that back in the early mid-sixties were in common use as a means of heating and had become notorious for starting fires in domestic property. A semi-detached house was occupied by the Carters, an American family of three, the husband serving at the nearby RAF Fairford. They had a son of about three whose name escapes me but who I will refer to as 'Colin'. One morning in 1965 our return journey from a previous incident in the early hours took us along Swindon Road, Stratton, a district of Swindon on the north-east side of town. We were observed by an acquaintance of a retained member of Swindon station on his way to work at about 0800am. He subsequently related that within a



Drip-feed paraffin heater

couple of minutes of the appliance turning out of the end of the road, a woman in a distraught state ran from a nearby house where a fire had broken out on the ground floor and it became clear someone was still inside. I was booking the return of my crew with Control when the fire line rang and the operator began taking details from an agitated caller reporting a house fire in Swindon Road. This was a classic 'Fire in the High Street,' situation because there are three such addresses in the Swindon area alone; the one I had just travelled along, one in the town centre and one linking a village closely associated with Swindon on the south side of town. The operator managed to get the caller to confirm the address was in Swindon but they rang off before the caller's number could be obtained. As the operator put the bells down (for the town centre address) the fire line rang again and it was the telephone exchange supervisor who stated the call

A Dramatic Rescue ? Thwarted By Fate (continued from page 13)



Mac Jackson

just taken had come from the Stratton address. On route, I thought we could be on our way to a false alarm because we had passed along this very road only minutes before. However, I was due for a surprise.

On turning into the road it could be seen a house was well alight with a sheet of flame issuing from a ground floor window. On pulling up we were advised a young child was still upstairs in the house and as I rushed to open the front door the fire was spreading up the staircase. There was a jerry can warming up nicely at the foot of the stairs and I managed to drag it clear (it later was found to contain paraffin).

Leading Fireman Mac Jackson and Fireman Stuart Ashby (a burly ex-matelot) had donned the Proto sets. They were forced to make entry through an upstairs window at the rear of the house while the fire was tackled from the front. The BA team took considerable heat punishment searching and they eventually located little Colin Carter in a rear bedroom. In trying to escape the fire he had crawled into the gap behind the head of his bed. Unfortunately, it was clear there was nothing could be done to save him. The crews took the loss of life badly. It transpired that sometime after Mr Carter had left for work, his wife went into the lounge and found the paraffin heater enveloped in flames. In a state of panic she ran from the house to seek help leaving the internal and front door open. Had the internal door been shut we may have been able to make an entry from the front. When Mr Carter



Proto Oxygen
Breathing Apparatus

returned home it was no easy task trying to explain how we were not able to save his son.

This incident was particularly poignant for me because little Colin was a similar age to my own son and I had an overwhelming feeling of guilt and failure at being unable to save him. Whilst this fire was not my first fire fatality, it was my first as a Watch Officer and my feelings were compounded by the nagging thought that had we been detained at the earlier incident just a few minutes longer we might well have been passing along the road when Mrs Carter ran from the house. Had this happened, we might well have effected what would, in the circumstances, have been a dramatic rescue. Colin would now have been in his fifties, possibly with a family of his own in the USA. We will never know but I am sure that fate dealt a cruel blow to the Carter family that day. The memory of this incident ,along with others, stayed with me throughout my career and into retirement. Such memories never really leave you because they surface every so often as sometimes painful reminders, and I suspect I am by no means alone in this. It is something we learn to accept as being part of the job. Talking of fate, it might have intervened further on that day had it not been for the alert telephone exchange supervisor.

DISCLAIMER

Views and opinions published in **THE BRANCH** are not necessarily shared by the Dorset & Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Centre or the Dorset & Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Authority.

Editor. JOHN CRAIG OStJ QFSM FIFireE