



# The Branch

Christmas 2017

**Newsletter of the Wiltshire Retired Firefighters Association**

## UK FIRE SAFETY “IN CRISIS”



As more and more probing questions about the Grenfell Tower disaster reveal disturbing answers experts are applying the label “in crisis” to UK fire safety standards.

There are now four investigations taking place into the disaster, all running in parallel to each other. There is a police investigation looking to place criminal charges where appropriate; there is the public inquiry headed by Sir Martin Moore-Bick looking for the cause of the fire and examining why it resulted in 71 deaths; there is

the Coroner looking into the deaths too and finally, Dame Judith Hackitt is reviewing the building regulations and fire safety from a parliamentary perspective.

A programme broadcast by Sky TV recently delved into many of the issues being covered by the four investigations and produced some shocking information. The investigative journalist making the programme found documentary evidence that appears to show that the manufacturers of the plastic foam cladding materials were allowed to develop a close relationship with the civil servants at the Department of Communities and Local Government. The inference is that the plastics industry gained too much say in the way the building regulations were worded and the dangers of using cladding materials that could spread a fire were ignored.

The TV programme also put the spotlight on the work done in fire testing of building materials carried out by the Building Research Establishment. that was privatised a few years ago. Claims were made on the programme by the insurance industry's Fire Protection Association that the BRE was using the wrong type of test to assess and grade the fire safety of external cladding on buildings.

Mention was also made in the broadcast of the damage done to fire safety standards in the UK by the repeal of the Fire Precautions Act that required fire and rescue services to inspect and issue certificates when satisfactory standards had been implemented and maintained.

Successive governments at Westminster have placed a high priority on environmental protection measures and in doing so have given fire safety a very low priority. If Her Majesty's Chief Fire & Rescue Advisor spoke out against this he was clearly ignored. It remains to be seen how the various investigations will view and report.

### COMPLIMENTS OF THE SEASON

The members of the Executive Committee of the WRFA wish all members and their families a VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS and good health and happiness in NEW YEAR.

Merry  
Christmas

# GOLDEN COUPLES

Three WRFA couples have recently celebrated their Golden Wedding. Warmest congratulations to  
Ken and Gill Power  
Revd Charles and Christine Sutherland  
Chris and Audrey Wannell



Ken and Gill



Charlie and Christine



Chris and Audrey



## Remembrance



### **LEST WE FORGET**

The WRFA held its annual Remembrance Event on 11th November 2017 at the Assembly Room of Devizes Town Hall.

This annual occasion is proving to be increasingly popular with members of our Association.

The event commenced with a delicious two-course dinner served by *Sweetpea Catering*.

There followed a concert performed by *Devizes Town Band*, under their Musical Director, Sharon Lindo. The band is growing in size and increasing its reputation with each successive public performance. Their programme of music delighted the members and guests.

At the conclusion of the concert, the mood switched from entertainment to reverence as the Act of Remembrance led by WRFA member, Canon Henry Pearson, began. He set the tone of the Act by his well chosen words under the heading '*Why we should remember*' and this was followed by John Craig's reading of a poem entitled '*Why We Wear A Poppy*'. The band gave further support by playing Last Post at the beginning of a two minutes silence and Reveille at its end.

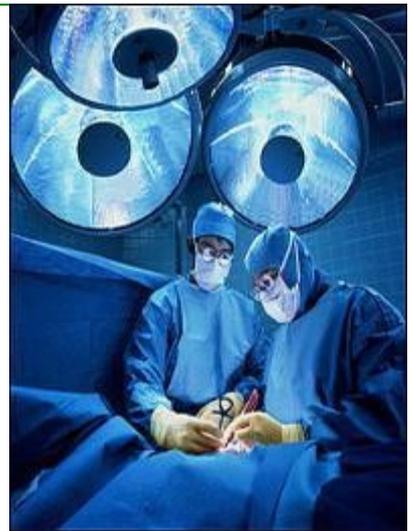
A retiring collection raised £150.00 for the *Royal British Legion*.



## HEALTH MATTERS

Most of the welfare work done by the WRFA is done in confidence.

Those mentioned below have given their permission for publication of their health matters.



### KATE VANSTONE

Kate recently fractured her ankle and is suffering limited mobility for a few weeks while healing takes place. Kate fell from her bicycle on The Green in Devizes and injured her ankle. She wasn't immediately aware that her ankle was fractured and walked on it painfully for four days. We wish Kate a speedy and full recovery.



### KEN POWER

Ken recently had an operation at SDH, Odstock to replace an artificial knee joint with a new one. However, the surgery was aborted when the surgeon found fluid in the joint that needed to be



identified. This meant that Ken went home for a few days with a hole in his left leg where he should have had a knee!

Thankfully, on 29th November, the aborted operation was recommenced and Ken got his new knee at last.

We wish him a rapid and as full a recovery as possible.

### PETE WIXEY

Pete was discharged recently by the Fracture Clinic at GWH, Swindon after they declared his broken wrist as healed. However, he suffered much pain in the limb and consulted his GP. After an X-ray taken at Cirencester it was discovered that his fracture had not healed and he was given further treatment to immobilise the wrist.



## HEALTH MATTERS (Continued)



### JOE BABER

We were all concerned that Joe collapsed at his home in Poulshot towards the end of October. Yvonne called an ambulance and he was taken into RUH, Bath . After tests there he was discharged to the BUPA Care Home in Market Lavington.

At the time of going to press, Yvonne is hoping he will recover enough to return home but a comprehensive care package will be needed. . There has been an outpouring of good wishes for Joe from all who worked with him in the Wiltshire Fire HQ and later at the Brigade Training Centre.

### CYRIL MOSELEY

Cyril recently suffered a heart attack. Hospital treatment fortunately revealed that his heart has not suffered too much lasting damage and he is home now and making a good recovery.

We wish him continued good progress and much benefit from the rehabilitation programme upon which he has embarked.



### LEN BENWELL

Len was taken ill on 27th November with a severe chest infection. The GP is treating him with very powerful antibiotics and also steroids.

We wish him a rapid recovery and hope that he is well enough to enjoy Christmas with Yve and the family.



### FRANCES MILLS

Frances has been into hospital recently for surgery on her hand.

The recovery process is proving slower than expected and she is seeking further guidance and treatment to get her recovery back on track.

We wish Frances a swift resolution to whatever is preventing the operation from being a total success.

## CHAPLAINCY PROPOSAL

At the October meeting of the Executive Committee serious discussion took place on whether the WRFA should form its own chaplaincy. This debate resulted in the decision to recommend to the AGM on June 10th 2018 that the WRFA does establish a chaplaincy team. There is common misconception that chaplains are appointed to evangelise within an organisation like the WRFA. This is not the purpose of a chaplaincy. The role of a chaplain is to provide a strictly confidential sympathetic listening ear to anyone connected with the organisation that has appointed him/her. Members of the clergy are trained and experienced in providing such pastoral care which is why they are used as chaplains. The Executive Committee members feel that setting up a chaplaincy provides another valuable element to the WRFA welfare structure. Three members of the clergy have volunteered their services. See below.



### **Revd. Canon Henry Pearson**

Canon Pearson knows the fire & rescue service very well having served as a retained firefighter in Debenham, Suffolk, and also supported the members of that service as its chaplain. He later moved to Marlborough and served as Assistant Chaplain in the Wiltshire Fire Brigade. In retirement, Canon Pearson is living with his wife, Judith, in Marlborough. He has in recent years presided over the WRFA annual Act of Remembrance.

### **Revd. David Wakefield**

David is well known to many of the WRFA membership because before becoming a clergyman he served in Wiltshire Fire Brigade reaching the rank of station officer before resigning to take up fulltime work within the Roman Catholic Church. David is very busy carrying out pastoral care for his church in Devizes and regularly arranges pilgrimages to Lourdes, France. He has recently experienced a life-threatening illness and survived it in terms he describes as miraculous. David is married to Liz. They live in Devizes.



### **Revd. Gary Gotham**

Gary is also well known to many WRFA members. He is the minister of St. Andrew's Methodist/URC Church in Devizes and it is at that church that the fire service carol service has been held in recent years. Gary is married to Marie and they live in Devizes.



## ABOUT MONEY !

### 3% PENSION RISE IN APRIL



The good news is confirmed that the Government has agreed to increase the State Pension by 3% and the occupational pensions and widows pensions of public servants by the same amount. The rise will kick-in at the beginning of April 2018. This rise is generated by the so called *Triple Lock Formula* that the Government ran into political opposition when it considered ditching it and the *Winter Fuel* payment. The formula links the pension increases to the formula used to calculate inflation. It guarantees an increase in pension of a minimum of 2.5% unless inflation at the beginning of September is calculated as more and this year it was running at 3%.

### ELECTRONIC PAY SLIPS ARE HERE

Those WRFA members that receive their pension from the Fireman's Pension Scheme (including widows) through Wiltshire Council will have been notified by letter that paper pay slips are stopping and you are advised to register to receive an electronic pay slip through your computer, laptop and tablet by registering with the payroll section of Devon County Council. Some of us had trouble doing so because the letter failed to mention that if



you use *Google* as your primary search engine the link advertised will not work. It must be understood that Devon County Council is contracted to provide this service by Dorset & Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service.

**If you have no means of obtaining access to the internet, you can continue to obtain a paper pay slip and P60 form but you must write requesting this to Devon County Council, Pay Roll Section, HR ONE, Great Moor House, Bitton Road, Sowton, Exeter EX2 7NL. Quote your National Insurance number in your letter.**

Telephone contact with the relevant person dealing with this matter in Devon is **01392 383000**

To register for an electronic pay slip use <https://devon.rpowered.com/signon.rx>

### AUTOMATIC TAX FINES TO BE SCRAPPED

HMRC is to discontinue applying a £100 automatic fine to people that file their tax return too late. The policy change is aimed at not penalising folks that miss the deadline in error and targeting the resources of the HMRC on those that make a habit of filing late and not playing by the rules. Last year 840,000 tax payers were fined £100 for filing late.





# SOCIAL EVENTS



**Christmas Lunch**  
**The Bear Hotel**  
**Devizes**  
**16th December 2017**



**Raffle in aid of the FIRE FIGHTERS CHARITY**

## ROYAL MARINES CHRISTMAS CONCERT

A group from WRFA enjoyed attending the Town Hall at Cheltenham on 28th November where the Band of the Royal Marines performed their Christmas Concert. The WRFA members reported that the concert was superb and thoroughly enjoyed. The second half of the concert was devoted largely to music on a Christmas theme but there were touches of the Royal Marines military music magic throughout the evening.



## NOTE YOUR DIARY!

**SUNDAY LUNCH**  
**THE BELL HOUSE HOTEL**  
**High Street, Sutton Benger**  
**Sunday 25th February 2018**



**Watch for booking form on website soon**



## **WRFA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

In February 2018, nominations will be invited for those wishing to stand for election to the **Executive Committee** of our association. This is early warning of this so that members can give serious thought to accepting nomination. The election of officers will take place at the Annual General Meeting that is to be held on 10th June 2018 at the Devizes & District Conservative Club.

The following are the posts on the committee that will be up for election or re-election. The names in italics are the officers currently in post.

**Chairman** : *Chris Wannell*

**Vice Chairman** : *John Cox*

**Secretary & Treasurer** : John Craig

**North Area Representatives** : *John Gentleman, Dave Ward, Peter Mills*

**Central Area Representatives** : Louise Fielding, Les Fielding,  
(One post currently vacant)

**South Area Representatives** : Mo Betteridge, Tony Andrews  
Ludo Macaulay

**Representatives with county wide reference** : *Two vacancies*

The Executive Committee (EC) only meets in February, May and October unless an extraordinary meeting is called. The average length of a meeting is 90 minutes. The meetings usually commence at 1.00pm.

In addition to the formulation of policy, the EC members are the principal means of the welfare support being delivered to members and the family of members. This typically involves hospital visits, home pastoral care visits and a variety of other tasks that come under the heading of 'welfare & benevolent'.

*Further information may be obtained by contacting the secretary & treasurer, John Craig, on 01380 726343.*

The WRFA is a successful association that is proud of the progress being made in assisting and supporting its members. Serving on the EC is a privilege that gives the satisfaction of being involved in shaping its policies and playing a valued part in carrying these forward.

If you are interested in standing for one of the posts mentioned above, now is the time to start looking for a nominator and a seconder.

## NEWS OF THE BLUE LIGHT SERVICES



### WARNING ABOUT SMOKE ALARM FAILURES

Fire authorities and local councils have become concerned at the high incidence of domestic smoke alarms failing to detect fires. Statistics gathered by the fire authorities show that in 2016 /17 40% of domestic fires were not detected by battery powered smoke alarms.

The figures for mains powered smoke alarms are a little better showing that 21% of fires went undetected by the smoke alarm.

These disturbing figures have caused fire service chiefs to emphasise advice that calls for more than one smoke alarm to be fitted in domestic premises, preferably at least one unit per floor of the building. Testing of the alarms should be carried out regularly and batteries changed regularly too. 93% of UK households now have at least one smoke alarm.

### BURGLARS GETTING AWAY WITH IT IN WILTSHIRE

In the last three years, burglaries in Wiltshire have risen by 44%. The number of break-ins reported to the police reached 1,600 in 2016/17. Suspects were caught in only 5% of cases.

According to National Crime Statistics there was a rise of 9% in crimes overall.

These statistics have been brought to the attention of local press and media by the Police Federation.

To try to counter this disturbing trend six additional police constables will be in service in Trowbridge by March 2018. There will also be an additional five Police Community Support Officers appointed on the same time scale.



### CHARITY STRENGTHENS PSYCHOTHERAPY SERVICE

**New Lead Being Appointed to head psychotherapist team**



**Dr Jill Tolfrey**

The Fire Fighters Charity has announced that it is seeking to appoint a professional psychotherapist to lead its team of psychotherapists providing services at the three therapy centres run by the Charity.

Dr Jill Tolfrey, the CEO of the Charity, announced the new appointment when in April she launched the Three Year Strategic Plan for the Charity.

The Charity has been pleased by the success of its mental health awareness campaign. The need to provide services to help clients overcome post traumatic stress disorder is now well recognised and appointment of the Lead Psychotherapist will further demonstrate the determination of the Charity to boost the quality of the work it is doing. **IF YOU NEED TO CONTACT THE HELPLINE FOR THE CHARITY RING**

**0800 389 8820**

## OBITUARY



### **REGINALD (“Reg”) BYRNE**

One of the last surviving firemen who served at Swindon’s old fire station in Cromwell Street until it moved to Drove Road in October 1959 has passed away after a brief stay in hospital. Reg would have reached the grand age of 96 on Christmas Day this year. He was held in high esteem by all who served with him.

Reg joined the NFS in Swindon as a Fireman/Mechanic after Army service in World War 2. In April 1948 he became a member of Wiltshire Fire Brigade and served with distinction until his retirement from the Brigade in 1974. Reg was one of those unique characters with practical skills who could turn his hand to anything and if a new challenge presented itself he would research it to widen his knowledge and abilities. Many times he would carry out minor repairs to keep equipment and vehicles on the run.

In addition to a serious interest in photography, including doing his own developing, he became very expert in the field of television and electronics. His skills were much in demand not only by his family and friends but also his colleagues. Although he hung up his boots in 1974 Reg was far from idle in retirement and put his skills to good use well into his 70’s as a technician at a local school.

As the youngest recruit fireman at the new Swindon station, still wet behind the ears, I regarded Reg very much as a father figure, always ready to give sound advice, encouragement and pass on the benefit of his experience. In retirement I would occasionally meet up with Reg in the local supermarket and we would reflect on our time in the job. Those of us who served with Reg will remember him with fondness and respect. Rest in peace, Reg.

***John Gentleman QFSM***

# OBITUARY



## **ROBERT WILLIAM (“DAN”) GURNEY**

**Born 13th December 1940 : died 31st August 2017**

Our Association is mourning the loss of another stalwart member, ‘Dan’ Gurney, who passed away in Great Western Hospital, Swindon on 31st August.

He was born on Friday 13th 1940 in Coventry when that city was taking a pounding from the Luftwaffe.

He left school in 1955 and started work at Armstrong Sidley. He later changed job and became a compositor at a printing firm.

In 1959, ‘Dan’ left to join the Royal Air Force and initially served for five years in the RAF Regiment. He was posted to Cardington and then to Bridgenorth before being sent to Catterick to be trained in crash/rescue and firefighting.

As a military fireman he moved from fire section to fire section seeing service at Lyneham and Benson.

A high point of his career as an RAF firefighter was when he was posted to serve with the Queen’s Flight.

In 1964, ‘Dan’ was demobbed from the RAF at RAF Benson and the next day he began serving in the Fire Section back at RAF Lyneham. He was then a member of the Air Force Department Fire Service operated by the M.O.D.

In 2000 ‘Dan’ retired aged 60.

In 1961 ‘Dan’ met Janet and they married in 1963. They had a son, Craig, who was born in 1966.

In retirement, ‘Dan’ and Janet lived near Swindon and enjoyed many of the activities arranged by the WRFA.

‘Dan’ was a keen student of military history and he tried to attend the cenotaph service in London every November to honour the fallen in battle.

‘Dan’ was honoured to be awarded the Fire Brigade Long Service and Good Conduct Medal.

‘Dan’ will be sorely missed by his many pals in the WRFA.

May he rest in eternal peace.

**John Craig**

## WRFA & NARF (DORSET) MEETING



Left to right : **TONY BOYER, JOHN CRAIG, CHRIS WANNELL, JERRY WILLMOTT, RICHARD FRAKE, STU PEARCE**

On 31st October 2017 a meeting took place in Salisbury attended by the top three members of the committees of the WRFA and the Dorset Branch of the National Association of Retired Firefighters.

NARF (Dorset) was represented by Tony Boyer (Chairman), Stu Pearce (Vice Chairman) and Richard Frake (Secretary).

There was no agenda or minutes taken and the purpose of the meeting was to informally learn more about each other's organisation and structure and explore opportunities for mutual support.

The meeting was conducted in a very amicable atmosphere and all parted feeling that it had been time well spent.

## NEW MEMBERS



Janet Gurney

The Executive Committee has been delighted to welcome two ladies into membership recently.

JANET GURNEY (left) is the widow of Bob ('Dan') Gurney whose obituary is published in this newsletter. Janet has long been a supporter of the WRFA alongside Dan and now she is a full member in her own right.

JANE BURTON has been made an Honorary Member because of her well known and applauded support for the Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service, the Fire Fighters Charity and the wider fire service "family" that includes our Association. Jane is a busy lady who serves as a councillor on the Devizes Town Council. Her son is a serving members of the FRS at Swindon. We mourn with Jane the recent death of her husband, Richard.



Jane Burton



## QUESTIONS ABOUT RANK TO ROLE

The Whitehall generated initiative some years ago under the general heading of 'Rank to Role' appears to be beginning to unravel if placed under detailed scrutiny.

Sarah O'Connor is an academic with a particular interest in the fire & rescue service and in order to gain a PhD has delved into the way the service has accepted, or not accepted, the attempt by Whitehall to change the nature of the service by insisting officers and junior officers are called by other titles related to 'managers'.

Of course, such a change involves a lot of time and money and one could be forgiven for asking the question, "why bother" ?

Sarah has had an very interesting article published in the November 2017 edition of *Fire* magazine in which her research points to the fact that 'rank to role' may have had less influence than originally anticipated.

The article points out that chief fire officers and their principal officers have tried to embrace the concept of 'rank to role' and much of it has been forced upon the lower ranks.

My own view is that no doubt many a CFO has toed the line knowing that although he is unconvinced of the need for it, if his service stands out by not adopting 'rank to role' bang goes all hope of a mention in the Honours List.

Sarah points out that the lower ranks have never really got on board with 'rank to role'. They had it shoved down their throats but they are really opposed on the grounds that it is an attempt to attenuate watch culture and break links with tradition and the past. More importantly, Sarah draws attention to the lower ranks having strong doubts about 'managers' being brought into the service without gaining fireground experience before they start 'managing' operational situations. To quote Sarah,

*One insightful view proposes that amongst the push and pull between firefighters and management "it is no good being a leader if nobody wants to follow".*

You might be reading about Sarah's report and saying to yourself, "fine, I agree with this lady, but is anybody going to do anything about it?" You could also question why, if the initiative is running off the rails, Her Majesty's Chief Advisor on FR didn't speak out and see this foreseeable resistance coming?

To back up Sarah's research, I understand that at a meeting of the London Region of the Fire Brigades Union and overwhelming vote was taken in favour of reverting to the use of the titles of Leading Firefighter, Sub Officer and Station Officer. Very bravely, because it will incense Whitehall, Dany Cotton, London's Fire Commissioner has accepted the vote and agreed to implement a revert back to the old ranks. She warns that it will take time (and money) to do this but it will be done.

Somehow, I don't think Dany Cotton or Sarah O'Connor are on the Whitehall Christmas card list!

**John Craig**

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