



The Branch

September 2019

Newsletter of **WILTSHIRE RETIRED FIREFIGHTERS ASSOCIATION**

PRIME MINISTER DELAYS DEALING WITH CARE CRISIS

Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, has announced that he is delaying bringing forward a plan to deal with the **social care crisis** because he wishes to achieve a consensus to any such plan before bringing it forward. While attending the G7 summit in Biarritz

Mr Johnson stated *“Social care is a huge issue facing the country. We do have to address it. We are working very hard on it.”*

During the campaign for leadership of the Conservative Party Mr Johnson said that it was “inequitable” that some families had to raise thousands of pounds to pay for care, while others had all or some of the bills paid by the state.



No one disputes that social care is in deep trouble and No.10 Downing Street has long been promising to produce a solution.



WHO SHOULD PAY FOR TV LICENCES FOR THE ELDERLY?

Prime Minister Johnson has taken a tough line with the BBC concerning the dispute over who should cover the cost of the TV licences for the over-75s. Mr Johnson claims that the BBC has reneged on the deal that the corporation should fund the free TV licences for the elderly in return for inflation-proofed rises in the licence fee for those that have to pay. The BBC is disputing the terms of the agreement with the Government and claims that its plan to make only those over-75s who are on benefits get the free licence was never forbidden by the deal struck with the Government.

If the BBC win this argument with effect from June 2020 pensioners over 75 who are not on benefits will have to pay the £154.50 licence fee. The BBC is claiming that if it has to meet the cost of the free licences it will close down a number of its services including BBC News, BBC Two and BBC Four.

FIRE SERVICE HIGH EARNERS PENALISED BY TAX CHANGES

Some of the high earning managers in the UK fire & rescue service are feeling the financial pain imposed by a change in the taxation system.

In common with many others at the top end of their professions it is now not possible for more than £10,000 annually to be paid into pension savings without incurring tax. The limit begins to bite once a salary of £110,000 is paid.

This imposes a perverse incentive for taking posts that pay such salaries and it has caused a significant number of NHS doctors to refuse to work extra shifts creating a real problem for hospital management.

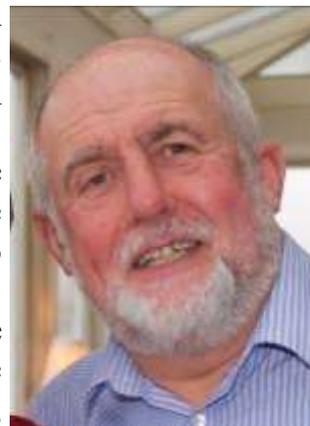
In the police service it is reported that senior officers are refusing promotion in order to avoid the tax penalty. In the armed forces, senior ranks are also mounting a united protest to the MoD and the Treasury about the tax issue.

The Home Office Fire Pensions Board has oversight of the pension schemes within the UK fire & rescue service. The board is chaired by Malcolm Eastwood CBE, COSTJ, QFSM, (see photo) who is no stranger to members of the WRFA. As soon as Malcolm was made aware of the tax issue he began to take steps to represent to the appropriate members of the government and the civil service how much damage is probably going to be caused by this tax system, not only to the fire service but to the public service in general.

Baroness Ros Altmann, a former minister with responsibility for pensions has stated, *“the pensions system right now is having very negative consequences on public sector staff who feel penalised. The problem is that no one has been alerted to this unless they had a financial adviser. People haven’t budgeted for it.”*

George Osborne introduced the pension and tax changes when he was the chancellor.

It is understood that the government is assessing the impact of pension allowance rules on the delivery of all public services.



RECORD INCOME TAX RECEIPTS SWELL TREASURY COFFERS

As austerity’s effects continue to damage the nation in a myriad different ways the Treasury has announced record breaking tax receipts for the tax year ending in April 2019. In the tax year 2015/16 there was a 5% rise in income to

£177bn. That sum has now been exceeded by the last tax year with tax receipts raking in **£191bn** which is an astonishing 6% increase on the previous year.

We await seeing the manifestos of the political parties who will soon be asking us to vote for them at the forthcoming General Election.

FBU'S LEGAL VICTORY COULD COST THE GOVERNMENT £4bn YEARLY FOR PENSIONS



For several years successive UK governments have preached at all who have ears that more must be done to improve equality and diversity. The fire & rescue service has come under particular scrutiny in this respect.

It is therefore somewhat ironic that the government has been found by the law courts to have acted in a discriminatory way relating to pensions for firefighters and judges. A case was brought to court by the **Fire Brigades Union** that argued that a change to the fire service pension scheme in 2015 was discriminatory on the grounds of age, race and equal pay. The FBU won the case and when the government tried to appeal the judgement made in December 2018 the Supreme Court refused to allow an appeal.

In effect, the FBU has grabbed the government's own policy and used it beat them with it in court. The case is now being referred to as *the McCloud Judgement* and it is being described as a landmark ruling that has impact not only on fire pension schemes but on many others.

The matter now rests with the Industrial Tribunal to produce the legal remedy. It is not clear how long the IT will take to announce its decision. Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Liz Truss, has said that she fears the outcome could add £4bn to the government's pension financial obligations.



Matt Wrack

The General Secretary of the FBU, **Matt Wrack**, has commented , *“We never gave up our fight for justice, and we are delighted that our perseverance has paid off. This ruling proves that the government has discriminated against thousands of younger firefighters. They must now rectify the damage they unnecessarily caused. “*

One can only ponder on the embarrassment and shame that this ought to have caused within the corridors of Whitehall. No doubt the minister who signed off the discriminatory policy was acting on the guidance of his civil servants alleged to be experts in the field of pensions. In the usual way that the civil service deals with failure it is to be expected that the persons responsible will be rewarded with promotion, pay rises, honours from Her Majesty and even a knighthood or two. It is very unlikely that Matt Wrack's name will ever appear in one of the Honours Lists for as long as the civil service acts as a filter to them.





HEALTH MATTERS

**Reports about members who are
“under repair”**



PATRICK GILLIAM-HILL

Patrick is one of the WRFA’s oldest members at 97 and he is making a good recovery from a leg ulcer that took many months to respond to treatment.

We hope that he continues to avoid further serious health problems and we send best wishes to Patrick and his wife, Pauline. They live in West Lavington.



MAURICE BETTERIDGE

Maurice (‘Mo’) has been in hospital recently to have a heart pacemaker fitted. He is now home again in Ludgershall but struggling with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. We are keeping in touch with Mo and his son, Nigel, who lives in Spain and will do all we can to help. Mo hopes to take advantage of the therapy services provided by the FIRE FIGHTERS CHARITY.



CHRIS WANNELL

Chris is now home and slowly recovering from surgery on his spine. Initially he was in intense pain but this has now lessened considerably. He is feeling benefit from the treatment but still has some way to go to improve his balance. He has acquired a mobility scooter to assist him in getting around. Rumours about his scooter having ‘blues & twos’ fitted are false! Get well soon, Chris.



PAUL JAYCOCK

Paul has recently had a knee replacement operation. The surgery was performed at New Hall Hospital , near Salisbury. Paul reports that he is making a good recovery and we wish him a return to full health and vigour as soon as possible. Paul has recently accepted the invitation of co-option onto the WRFA Executive Committee and he is already making a very valuable contribution to the work of the EC.

PEOPLE & PLACES



SPONSORED PARACHUTE JUMP

On 21st July two intrepid ladies successfully completed a parachute jump from 15,000. **Yve Benwell** and her daughter **Michelle** raised the magnificent sum of £4,109.00 in sponsorship and this has been donated to the **Prospect Hospice, Wroughton.**

Yve is a member of the WRFA Executive Committee and we are proud of her. Congratulations to both Yve and Michelle.

GOLDEN WEDDING

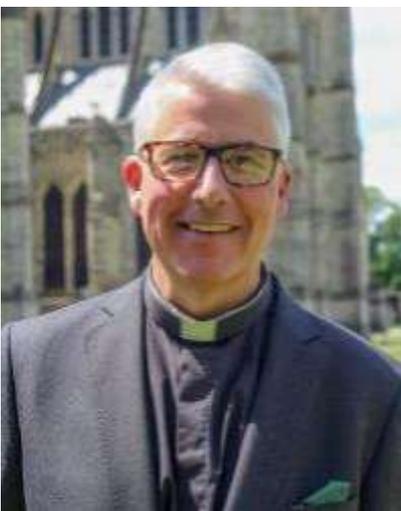
Glenn and Angela Foreman celebrated their Golden Wedding in August. They chose a hotel in Bude, Cornwall as the venue for the celebration. Glenn has suffered ill health for many years and feels that he must have a 'guardian angel' to have enjoyed such a long time married. We know he has a 'Guardian Angela' and we congratulate the happy couple and wish them more years together.



PROMOTION FOR THOMAS

The Revd. Canon Thomas Woodhouse has been appointed Chaplain to the Queen's Chapel of the Savoy, a prestigious post that has required him and the family to move to central London from Dorchester where he was the Rector from 2014. Before that he was the Vicar at Wootton Bassett. He has been Chaplain to the British Fire Services Association for over 20 years.

We congratulate Thomas and wish him happiness in his new place of service.



Summer Canal Cruise

WRFA Trip On The Kennet & Avon



On the 22nd June 2019 a party of WRFA members boarded the **KENAVON VENTURE** canal boat at the Wharf in Devizes for a three-hour cruise on the Kennet & Avon Canal. The weather was perfect and the on board licensed bar did a roaring trade slaking our thirsts. Delicious fish and chips were served as part of the deal. We had live entertainment provided by **PETE ALLEN** on the clarinet.



OUR SOCIAL LIFE



“Lest we forget”



**REMEMBRANCE
EVENT**

**9th November 2019
Devizes Town Hall**

Lunch at 1.00pm followed by
Concert by Devizes Town Band
Act of Remembrance

**Latest date for booking 1st November
Booking form with this newsletter or download
from Social Events page on website.**



**CHRISTMAS FESTIVE
LUNCH**

**Sunday 15th December 2019
Shaw Country Hotel
Bath Road, Shaw, Melksham**



Convenient parking



WRFA WALKING GROUP



(Left to Right) : Colin Hill, Roger Tombs, Phil Appleby, Pauline Murphy, Eileen Appleby, Heather Hill, Kate Vanstone, John Murphy

A contingent from our WALKING GROUP has just accomplished a short break out of county. They rendezvoused at The Fountain Inn at Okehampton and over the next few days trekked enjoyably over some very attractive parts of Devon. One of the first of these began at the village of Sticklepath and followed the River Taw to Belstone.

Next day they tackled a walk starting at Meldon Dam taking in a magnificent viaduct constructed for rail traffic but now used as a cycle track. This led the intrepid walkers to the Lydford Gorge, a National Trust site. They found the views along the way absolutely stunning and enjoyed in particular seeing some waterfalls, the last of which is named *'The Devil's Cauldron'*.

After a night's rest the party went onto Dartmoor and this culminated in some of the group scaling to the top of Haytor where they planted flags and laid claim on the peak for England.

The very successful venture was concluded by a visit to Exeter where they saw many sites and buildings of interest before finally arriving at the Cathedral.

This report is an abbreviated version of a much more detailed one compiled by Colin Hill a copy of which is available to view on our website 'www.wrfa.org.uk'.

New members to the Walking Group are welcome. Anyone interested should contact Phil Appleby (phil.appleby@hotmail.com) or Colin Hill (colin.hill@sky.com)

NEW ALPs FOR DORSET & WILTS

Three powerful new machines go on the run



Dorset & Wiltshire FRS has recently enhanced the fleet with the purchase of three Aerial Ladder Platforms that are state of the art machines. Two have a reach of 32metres in height and the third is an astonishing 42 metres. The latter is based at Westbourne (Dorset) and the others are at Drove Road Swindon and Salisbury. All three were built by Rosenbauer. (Photos by John Craig)



Taking the weight of four firefighters in the cage with ease.



Getting the floodlighting to work



The cage is designed to have a stretcher fitted to it easily



GROWING CONCERNS ABOUT TIMBER FRAMED DWELLINGS

Some recent serious fires resulting in the total destruction of buildings recently built using a system based on timber frame construction has raised questions about the very obvious lack of resistance to fire spread. The above photo of a four-storey apartment building in Worcester Park, London is one of the most recent total loss fires. This followed closely on the loss of a similar building in north west England and a motel in Bristol.

The firefighters trying to contain such fires faced serious problems because the internal structure offered so little fire resistance that they were forced to adopt defensive tactics and simply try to contain fire spread to the building of origin.



In a letter published in the *Daily Telegraph* 12th September the writer comments on these very costly fires, giving the opinion that the timber frame construction is widely used in the USA for dwellings but usually sprinklers are fitted in such risks.

It is also a fact that in many modern blocks of flats the “stay put” policy is taught to the residents so that they don’t

evacuate in the event of a fire other than in their own apartment but “stay put”, relying on the fire service to deal with the fire and confine it to the apartment of origin. This policy begins to look flawed and possibly life threatening except in buildings with high standards of fire separation internally.

The Grenfell Tower disaster has already raised serious questions about the UK Building Regulations in relation to external cladding. These more recent fires point to other issues that raise yet more concerns about whether the building regulations are overdue for a review.



ROYAL VISIT TO HARCOMBE HOUSE

Duke of Cambridge recently visited Harcombe House
Therapy Centre



© The Fire Fighters Charity 2019

The Duke of Cambridge visited the **Fire Fighters Charity** Harcombe House Therapy Centre near Chudleigh in Devon in September. He was hosted by the Chief Executive, Dr Jill Tolfrey, and the Chairman of the Trustees, Mr Andrew Lynch. The Duke wanted to see for himself the work being done to support members of the fire & rescue service who are regaining their physical and/or mental health. He is displaying a genuine interest in all the emergency services since he himself gave his services as a helicopter pilot for an air ambulance charity in East Anglia. To have such an important members of the Royal family taking such a deep interest in the work of our charity is a great boost to morale for us all. Of course, the Duke's support is in keeping with that of Her Majesty the Queen who is our patron.



JOHN CRAIG
Life Patron of Fire Fighters
Charity &
Secretary/Treasurer
of
WRFA writes



In recent years I have lost count of the number of times I have been asked the question, **“how do I get in touch with the FIRE FIGHTERS CHARITY because I need help?”** This question has been asked with surprising frequency and at differing hours of the day and days of the week. I have even had a phone call at 11.30pm just as Margaret was starting to read me my bedtime story. The call was a plea from a WRFA members in dire need of support and reassurance.

This has left me in no doubt that there is a need to improve the links between those eligible for the services of our wonderful charity and the charity itself.

I was therefore delighted to learn recently of a new initiative taken by the management of the Fire Fighters Charity aimed at reaching out to potential users of the services of the charity. Under the title **‘KEEPING IN TOUCH’** envelopes that contain a credit card size card and a database application form have been produced in large numbers.

The application form is easy to complete and when it has been posted back to the Charity head office in Basingstoke (no stamp needed) or completed online the applicant’s name and contact details will be entered on a database making future requests for help from the Charity much quicker and easier to process. It also enables the Charity to keep in regular contact with the applicant to give an update on matters of interest and relevance.

I have sent out nearly 200 of these envelopes



with a covering letter of explanation. In the letter I urge the recipient to not delay in applying to go on the database. HAVE YOU RECEIVED ONE OF THESE PACKS FROM ME? If you have not, please contact me 01380 726343.

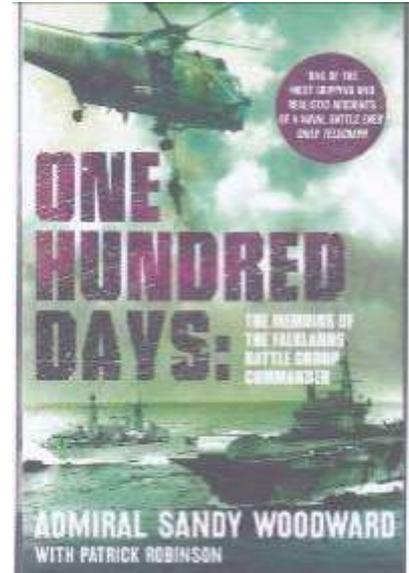
If you have received one, did you take the action requested? The Charity staff tell me that of the 200 that I sent out only about 25% of the forms have been returned so far. This is disappointing and I wonder how many of those who have neglected to go on the database will in the future be calling me with the question “how do I apply for help from the Fire Fighters Charity? “

If you have any questions about this ‘KEEPING IN TOUCH’ approach , please don’t hesitate to contact me. JOHN CRAIG



Read Any Good Books Lately?
BOOK SHELF
Where members share their recommendations

ONE HUNDRED DAYS
Memoirs of Falklands Battle Group
Commander
Author ADMIRAL SANDY WOODWARD
Reviewed by John Cox



On 5th April 1982, three days after Argentina invaded the Falkland Islands, British armed forces were ordered to sail 8,000 miles to the South Atlantic. It soon became obvious that they were sailing to war. With no advantage in the air or on land and the vast distances involved, many felt victory was at best unlikely, and at worst, impossible. As the Battle Group Commander, Admiral Sandy Woodward was the man in charge on the front line. In this

acclaimed account, he takes us from day 1 to day 100 of the conflict; through the tragic losses of ships and men to the defeat of the Argentinean Navy and the retaking of the Islands.

The availability of the aircraft carriers, *HMS Hermes* and *HMS Invincible* together with the *Sea Harriers* were key to our success. If this war had occurred two years later, it is unlikely that we could have retaken The Falklands. The Government defence Review of 1981 planned for the reduction in destroyers and frigates, as well as numerous other surface ships. More importantly, *HMS Hermes* would have been sold to the Indian Navy and *HMS Invincible* to the Australian Navy.

Admiral Woodward states:

“I have tried to write this book as if I were telling a story to a close friend. To help me in this task I selected Patrick Robinson, who was obliged to sit very quietly, very patiently and to do a great deal of listening. I chose him because he has never served in the Royal Navy.”

Admiral Woodward later became Admiral Sir John Woodward, Commander-in-Chief, Naval Home Command.

‘*One Hundred Days*’ is an engrossing and authoritative retelling of those dramatic events, as well as a candid and revealing insight into what it is to lead our country to war. It is a very frank account of modern naval warfare.

I heartily recommend this book.
Published by Harper Press

ISBN 978-0-00-743640-8

John Cox



The Royal Foundation Launch of **SHOUT**

HRH Duke of Cambridge recently launched a new initiative to give support to those finding themselves in a mental health crisis.

The Duke chose the FIRE FIGHTERS CHARITY therapy Centre at Harcombe House, Devon as the place to announce the launch formally.

The new service is called **SHOUT** and is not to be confused with the quarterly magazine of the same name published by the *Fire Fighters Charity*.

Access to the SHOUT service is via text. **The number to text is 85258.**

The service is available 24/7 to provide comfort, reassurance and counselling. It is a completely confidential service.

It is particularly aimed at helping members of the ‘blue light services’.

The Duke of Cambridge until recently was a member of the emergency services himself. He flew an air ambulance in the East of England. He can therefore speak from personal experience of the stresses that are encountered by those who serve in the police, fire, ambulance and other rescue services.

Dr Jill Tolfrey, Chief Executive of the Fire Fighters Charity has expressed how pleased the Charity is to be working in close harmony with the Royal Foundation.

SHOUT has cost the foundation £3m so far and has taken several years to turn the Duke’s initiative into a fully operational service.

DISCLAIMER

THE BRANCH is published by the Wiltshire Retired Firefighters Association
Views and opinions published in this newsletter are not necessarily shared by the
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