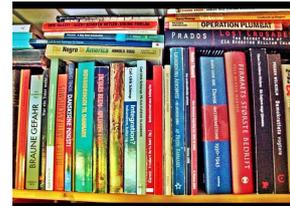




The Book Shelf

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Fire-floats & Fireboats

The history of London's Firefighting Boats
By David C. Pike

In common with many WRFA members I have read and own many books about the history of firefighting and the latest book by David Pike will always have a place on my bookshelf. It is a particularly well written and constructed volume with 250 illustrations.

The title is accurate in that the core theme throughout the book gives the reader a detailed account of what measures have been taken past and present to provide fire and rescue capability on the River Thames in London. However, the author has not limited himself to writing about vessels but has clearly carried out in depth research into the history of fire services protecting London and has allowed himself the freedom to include in the book details of personalities and incidents that are only indirectly related to fireboats. I applaud the author for doing this because it does much to add to the value of the book both as a provider of information and as entertainment.

The book begins in Roman times and concludes right up to date by explaining some of the pressures for change now bearing down on the UK fire & rescue service.

I was interested to read that James Braidwood, head of the London Fire Engine Establishment in the Victorian times and generally looked upon as being the 'Father of the British Fire Service', was slow to introduce steam powered pumps. His firemen continued to use manual pumps long after steam engines had proved their power and reliability. The reason for Braidwood's initial scorn for steam power is believed to be that he taught his firemen to get inside buildings and fight fire at close range. He had fears that the long throw of the water jets pumped out of a steam driven pump would encourage his men to stand outside the burning building and adopt what is called in the modern parlance of fire fighting "defensive tactics". Braidwood was killed at a huge warehouse blaze in Tooley Street leading his men from the front.

Perhaps the most famous of all the fireboats that served on the river in London is the *Massey Shaw*. As is only proper, the full story of the long and distinguished service performed by the *Massey Shaw* and the gallant men that crewed her is recorded in some detail by David Pike. It is particularly pleasing that the *Massey Shaw* is now enjoying a prolonged life as a floating museum in the ownership and care of the *Massey Shaw Education Trust*. She has recently been refitted and restored to pristine condition.

It isn't just fires that get a mention. On 7th January 1928 the River Thames burst its banks and flooded streets and property near the river. Thousands of buildings were affected including several of the LFB's river fire stations. Fourteen people were drowned and thousands injured.

I heartily recommend this book.

JOHN CRAIG

