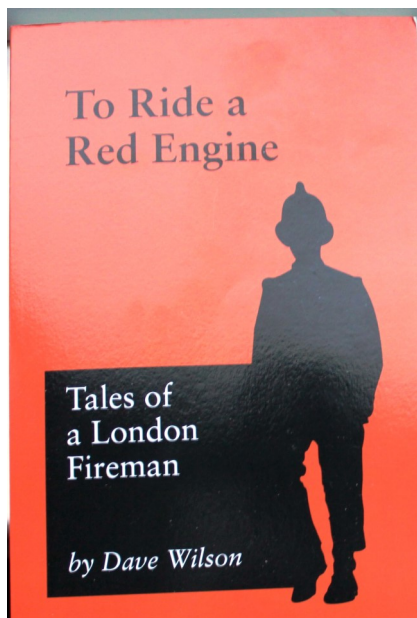


BOOK SHELF

Reviews of Books & DVDs

(25)



TO RIDE A RED ENGINE

TALES OF A LONDON FIREMAN

By Dave Wilson

There have been many former members of the LFB that have written books about their experiences and I think I have read most of them. Over Christmas I dipped into Dave Wilson's book and I confess to having enjoyed it more than similar firefighter autobiographies.

Dave served in central London fire stations throughout the 60s and 70s and broke his service in LFB by joining Berkshire Fire Brigade on a wholetime/retained contract for a few years.

Dave puts into print in a very lucid way how he and his colleagues fought fires in that era and I could readily associate with the methods and tactics applied. Dave dealt with fires before the service became risk averse and there is not a word about "defensive tactics" or dynamic risk assessments before crews could get stuck into a job.

I particularly enjoyed the account of Dave's involvement at the Leinster Towers Hotel fire in Bayswater that provided a daunting task of rescue and firefighting. As the first attending crews arrived they were faced with people shouting for rescue from most of the hotel windows at the front and rear of the four storey building. Every type of ladder available was utilised to rescue over 50 people but this is only an estimate and the number of lives saved could well have been over 70. Dave himself was in the thick of it and carried out several rescues using a hook ladder.

Even more absorbing was the account of multiple rescues from fire carried out in Kilburn when Dave was an Acting Leading Fireman and in charge of the incident during the crucial initial stages. A family was brought out of the upper floors above a burning shop using a 50ft wheeled escape. To pitch the escape Dave was so short-handed he enlisted the help of a member of the public to wind the extending handles on the escape. He received a well deserved commendation by the CFO.

Dave rose through the ranks to become a station officer before an accident on duty curtailed his career.

I am sure that all those that served in the fire brigade during the same years as Dave will thoroughly enjoy his book.

JOHN CRAIG