

# Wiltshire Retired Firefighters Association



## THE BRANCH

Magazine of the  
**WILTSHIRE RETIRED FIREFIGHTERS**  
APRIL 2021

### OUR CHAIRMAN HAS DIED

**CHRIS WANELL, Chairman of the Executive Committee of this Association, passed away on the morning of 8th February, 2021.**

Chris collapsed during the evening of 7th February and was rushed to GWH, Swindon as an emergency. He was quickly diagnosed as suffering from a massive bleed on the brain and Audrey and the family were informed that there was no hope of recovery. Chris died hours later shortly after 7.00am on 8th February.

Chris's unexpected death has dealt us all with a great sense of loss and our hearts go out to Audrey, Heather, Martin and all Chris's family. Please see page 13 for the obituary to a man who is being mourned by so many.



## HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II will be 95 on  
21st April 2021.

The Queen does have two birthdays in the year, the natural one is as stated above in April. Her official birthday is in June

We sincerely wish Her Majesty a  
VERY HAPPY BIRTHDAY



God  
Save The  
Queen



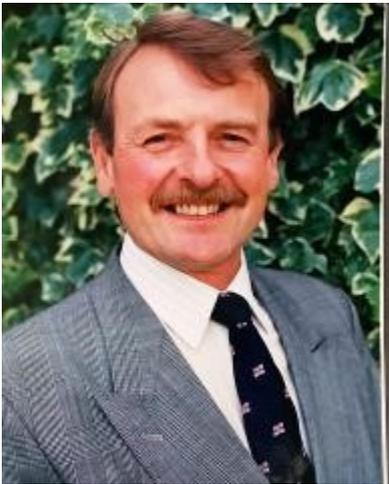
## NEW MEMBERS

### AUDREY WANNELL

The Executive Committee of the Wiltshire Retired Firefighters Association has been pleased to bestow **Honorary Life Membership** on Audrey Wannell.

This honour is seen as fitting recognition to a lady who has given unstinting support to our Association, both in her own right and also as an unfailing supporter to her husband, the late Chris Wannell.

We welcome Audrey with open arms and pledge do all we can to give comfort and support as she adjusts to life in widowhood.



### DENIS TWOMEY

Denis joined Wiltshire Fire Brigade in 1969 as a retained member at Wilton. He then became wholetime at Salisbury in 1972. In 1976 he joined the Avon Rubber Company and from 1978 to 1985 he served in Somerset Fire Brigade. We are delighted to welcome Denis into full membership. He is a widower, his wife Sharon having very sadly passed away in 1999. Denis lives in Salisbury and enjoys D.I.Y and reading. Great to have you on board, Denis.

### MICHAEL GRIMSHAW

Michael Grimshaw is currently serving as an 'on call' crew commander at Chippenham. He is giving service of great value to the WRFA in a variety of ways and is encouraging those he knows who are retiring to consider joining this Association.

In recognition of all that Michael has done and is continuing to do for WRFA the Executive Committee has been pleased to admit him into Honorary Membership. Michael graduated from RAF Cranwell as a pilot officer in the RAF Regiment before taking up his present full time employment in 'civvie-street' as a salesman of electronic switch gear. Michael lives in Tetbury with his partner, Jackie. Welcome into honorary membership, Michael.



**PEOPLE & PLACES**

**Diamond Wedding Anniversary  
60 Years Wed  
Charlie & Yvonne Celebrate**



Charlie & Yvonne Kuhn will celebrate their diamond wedding anniversary on 25th March 2021. Because of the pandemic restrictions celebration activities with family members will have to be deferred until later in the year. We send our heartiest congratulations to Charlie and Yvonne, his bride of 60 years ago.  
Photo by JOHN CRAIG

**JOE NASH TRIUMPHS IN NATIONWIDE  
POETRY COMPETITION**



Joe Nash

WRFA member, **JOE NASH**, recently entered a nationwide poetry competition sponsored by McCarthy Stone Retirement Homes. Joe's entry was entitled *This Land We Know As England* and it was judged to be the best of the hundreds that were entered. See Page 4 to read Joe's poem.

Joe pours out in his poem his great love of England and his appreciation for the land of his birth. During his long career in the fire service Joe served in several parts of England beginning in Wiltshire. He later served in Warwickshire and retired as Deputy CFO of Gloucestershire.

Joe has long had poetry writing as one of his hobbies. He now lives in Stratford on Avon and his daughter and son-in-law live close by. Congratulations, Joe!



## This Land We Know As ENGLAND

This land we know as England  
Each and every part,  
Every sod, each grain of sand  
Nestles in my heart.  
The rugged hills of Yorkshire,  
Cumbrian Lakes and Fells.  
What could more inspire  
Than the cathedral City of Wells?  
The Cotswolds and the Severn Vale  
With Sabrina flowing by;  
A no more gentle, lovely scene  
Whatever you may try.  
North and South, East and West  
From Devon to The Broads;  
Of all the world's great wonders,  
England strikes the chords.  
Historic Wiltshire's Salisbury Plain,  
Sussex boasts its Downs  
These glorious counties really gain  
The jewel in the crown.  
The village greens of England  
With its hills, its lakes, its Wolds,  
Where around every corner  
Its magical scenes unfolds.  
My life will end in England,  
A peaceful place to rest,  
And where for me this England  
Is far away the best.

**Joe Nash  
2021**





## HEALTH MATTERS



### HAROLD PORTER

Harold lives alone in a retirement apartment in Tetbury and he recently suffered a fall in his kitchen. On his descent to the floor he struck his face on a hard surface and this opened up a nasty gash. By very good fortune, just after this had happened Harold's daughter made a routine visit and so was immediately into first aid mode and taking steps to transport Harold to the NHS Minor Injuries Unit. Once there he received excellent treatment and his facial injury was soon treated to restore his good looks. Harold is making a good recovery. He is 97.



### TONY ANDREWS

Tony recently had knee replacement surgery. The operation was carried out at New Hall Hospital near Salisbury. Tony is now back home and continuing to steadily recover and gradually get the new knee performing to his satisfaction.

We wish Tony all the very best and hope that he is soon completely recovered.



### PULSE OXIMETERS

**Pulse oximeters** measure the pulse oxygen saturation level of the blood. These very easy to use instruments are now being recommended by many doctors as a means of monitoring general health and in addition to thermometers we are advised to add one to our home health and safety kit. Their use involves no pain and readings are instantaneous.

The retail price is around £20.00





**Calling for YOUR help!**



I know that many of you reading this will have benefited in some way from the excellent services provided by OUR Charity, **The Fire Fighters Charity**. The Charity has been hard hit by the pandemic. Fund raising has dropped alarmingly because fund raising events have been banned by law and there has been an understandable desire by the public to show support and gratitude to other charities such as those linked to the NHS. Captain Sir Tom Moore tapped into this public esteem and raised over £36m for NHS charities.

Those of us who once served in the fire & rescue service must now step forward and give our help to the Fire Fighters Charity if we want it to survive these troubles and be there for us when we need it.

The **REGULAR GIVER SCHEME** is one way to help. By giving regular donations by direct debit. If you are already a 'Regular Giver' I should like to ask you to review your donations and if at all possible increase them.

The **FIREFIGHTERS LOTTERY** is another very popular method for making regular contributions. You might be one of the lucky prize winners in the monthly draw. Top prize is £10,000.

Signing up for these two schemes is very easy online. Just log onto the Charity's website at [www.firefighterscharity.org.uk](http://www.firefighterscharity.org.uk) and follow the guidance. If you have no internet access, give the Charity a call on **01256 366566** and ask to be sent the appropriate form(s).

Please don't ignore this plea. Take action now to help the Charity that has been serving firefighters and their dependants for over 70 years.

**JOHN CRAIG (Life Patron)**

**Fire Fighters Charity Services Access  
Telephone Number 0800 389 8820**

Call the above telephone number if you need to access any of the wide range of services available from the FIRE FIGHTERS CHARITY.

Your call will be passed to a clinician who will ensure that whatever your need is the charity will respond in a professional and appropriate manner. The first step in obtaining help is to call 0800 389 8820.

You are just a phone call away from support.



# EYE CATARACTS

As we age it is very common for eye cataracts to affect our vision. The cataract is the clouding of the natural lens in the eye. In the early stages you may not notice that a cataract is developing but gradually your visual acuity will worsen and driving will become more difficult, particularly at night. The headlights of oncoming vehicles will dazzle and distract. In addition, eyesight will generally deteriorate.



The NHS recommends that pensioners have an eye test every two years. These are free to pensioners.

If an eye test identifies that cataracts have formed and are at a stage mature enough to require surgery this can be done free on the NHS. The eye is anaesthetised by drops into the eye and this makes the surgical procedure painless.

The operation is comparatively quick and simple. The surgeon will make a small cut in the tough wall of the eyeball. The cloudy natural lens will be removed and replaced by a plastic implant. This is usually inserted into the lens capsule which is left in its original place in the eye. The cut usually seals and heals by itself. On rare occasions, a patient may need a stitch which dissolves or is removed by a later visit to surgery.



After the operation the healing eye needs a little time to adjust so that it can focus properly with the other eye. Unless there are other complications such as diabetes, glaucoma or age-related macular degeneration patients will normally notice a marked improvement in their eyesight.



Mature Cataract

One day post-op Extracaps

Currently the waiting time for cataract surgery under the NHS varies from 52 weeks to 6 years depending on which clinic you opted for to receive treatment. Private treatment is available to queue jump at a cost of £2,000 per eye.



**FIRE NEWS**  
Updates on the fire & rescue service of today



## Fire Standards Board publish the first FIRE STANDARDS FOR ENGLAND



Suzanne McCarthy

The Chair of the Fire Standards Board (FSB) , Suzanne McCarthy, when announcing the publication of the first Fire Standards for England went on record as calling it “*a monumental announcement building upon and driving professionalism within our sector.*”

These initial Fire Standards have an operational response focus. They outline what frontline best practice should look like.

The four Fire Standards are:

*Emergency response driving*  
*Operational preparedness*  
*Operational response*  
*Operational learning*

The three operational standards are supported by the National Operational Guidance (NOG). Supporting guidance and implementation support is being provided by the National Fire Chiefs Council.

To find out more about these new fire standards go to [www.firestandards.org](http://www.firestandards.org).

## NORTH WALES FIRE & RESCUE HAS A NEW CFO

**Mrs Dawn Docx** has moved from Greater Manchester FRS to take over as Chief Officer of North Wales Fire & Rescue Service. CFO Docx joined North Wales FRS in 2006 in the rank of Assistant Chief Officer with the reference of finance and procurement. She was soon promoted to Deputy CFO and then in 2017 she moved to Greater Manchester as Deputy to CFO Peter O'Reilly.



When the Manchester Arena terrorist bomb atrocity took place in 2017 the fire & rescue service was not allowed to attend for two hours because of policies and decisions emanating from the top level of that FRS. The subsequent inquiry brought strong criticism of the fire & rescue service and also the ambulance service.

CFO O'Reilly left the Service and while acting as interim CFO Mrs Docx gave the public apology for the failures of the FRS.

## FIRE NEWS (continued from page 8)

### CORNWALL FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE APPOINTS FIRST FEMALE CFO IN SOUTH WEST ENGLAND



**KATHRYN BILLING** has been confirmed as Chief Fire Officer of Cornwall after filling the post on an interim basis. CFO Billing becomes one of the seven fire and rescue services in the UK to be headed by a woman.

Cornwall Fire & Rescue Authority is the first in the South West of England to appoint a woman to head its service. CFO Billing started her career 20 years ago as an ‘on call’ (retained) firefighter at Redruth. She progressed to become Area Commander before being given the service top job.

CFO Billing is well known for her strong views about diversity in the service and on appointment as CFO told the press and media that she was very proud to be given the post and feels strongly that the fire & rescue service needs more female CFOs.

### HMICFRS COMMENTS ON PANDEMIC RESPONSE

Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabularies and Fire & Rescue Services has published its analysis on how the fire & rescue service has responded to the pandemic so far. Generally, individual services get a “pat on the back” but the FBU was criticised for its failure to move quickly to encourage its members to assist in dealing with the health emergency. **Dorset & Wiltshire FRS** is singled out for high praise because in the midst of the pandemic the service dealt with a very serious fire at Wareham Forest that lasted for weeks. The report states ....



Photo courtesy Dorset & Wiltshire FRS

*“In addition to the challenges of the pandemic , Dorset & Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service responded to its largest fire in recent history in Wareham Forest. This incident lasted over eight weeks . This incident needed over 1,000 firefighters and the use of considerable resources across the service. We were impressed by how the service worked with its neighbouring fire & rescue services and with the National Fire Chiefs Council , as well as accessing and using national resilience assets during this incident. This gave the service assistance and support, as well as helping it so seamlessly manage the demands of the pandemic.*  
**HMICFRS**

The photo shows just some of the resources used at Wareham Forest.



## WRFA SOCIAL EVENTS



### Work in progress

Our Association in common with all others has had its normal programme of social activities completely ‘banjaxed’ by the restrictions imposed in order to fight covid-19.

All members are reassured that the Executive Committee will move as quickly and positively as possible to reactivate our social events because we know how much they are being missed.

Keep an eye on the website [www.wrfa.org.uk](http://www.wrfa.org.uk) for announcements of when our first post-lockdown event will be. It is likely to be a lunch somewhere in the centre of Wiltshire and the Annual General Meeting will be contained within the event.

We hope to see you soon!

## DRIVERS FOR ‘MARTHA’



‘**Martha**’ is the name affectionately given to the 1943 K2 Hand Operated Turntable Ladder restored by the late Chris Wannell and now owned by his family. ‘Martha’ has been very active since “retiring” from an operational life first with the NFS, then with Essex Fire Brigade and finally with Somerset Fire Brigade.

After being restored by many hours of work and also much money ‘Martha’ has been at service at weddings, parties such as school ‘proms’ and funerals. She has also been proudly displayed at very many fetes, fire station open days, vintage vehicle rallies etc.

Much of this activity has been done to raise money for the FIRE FIGHTERS CHARITY and at a conservative estimate this has put about £100,000 into the Charity’s coffers.

Chris Wannell’s widow, Audrey, is now overseeing the assembly of a list of drivers that she and the insurance company approve as ‘Martha’s’ drivers now that Chris has answered his last call. Martha’s good work will continue to the benefit of the FFC.



# Dare Devil Yve's WING WALK IN SEPTEMBER

## Call is out for sponsors



We have long been in awe of the many escapades that **YVE BENWELL** has successfully completed in the past in order to raise cash through sponsorship for various charities.

Every time Yve completes one of these ventures we wait in anticipation of her thinking up another test for her fortitude and endurance. Is there nothing this brave lady won't tackle to get us to open our wallets, purses and cheque books? So, what has the gallant lady come up with this time? Another "fun run" or perhaps another parachute jump? No, its to be a WING WALK.

*"This will surely confirm that I am completely mad!"*, says Yve because she has signed up to do a sponsored wing walk on 15th September to raise much needed cash for **PROSPECT HOSPICE** in Swindon. The hospice needs £9m a year to keep going and most of that sum has to come from donations.



Yve is a member of the WRFA Executive Committee and she is appealing to all WRFA members and our friends and families to sponsor her for her bravery in allowing herself to be lashed to the upper wing of a Boeing Stearman aircraft at Rendcomb Airfield near Cirencester and we hope that she will still be on the wing when the plane lands. <https://prospecthospice.enthuse.com/pf/yvonne-usher-benwell> is the link you need to sponsor online or send a cheque made out to 'PROSPECT HOSPICE' to Yve at 46, Berton Close, Blunsdon SN26 7BE

Let's hope the string with which they tie Yve on is good stuff. We wish you a happy landing , Yve, and lots of success with the fund raising.



## Bookshelf

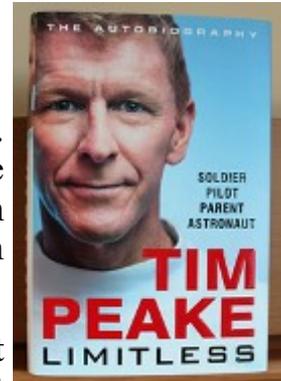
### Book Reviews



## ‘LIMITLESS’

### Author Tim Peake

This is the autobiography of Tim Peake, a truly amazing man. Tim takes us from his school days, through his time in the military as a helicopter pilot, when he was stationed for a time in Wiltshire, to his travel into space where he spent six months on the International Space Station (ISS).



Tim was born in Chichester in 1972. His love of flying began at a young age when even then it was rotary wing aircraft that captured his imagination. His adventures started while still at School. He joined the school's Cadet Force and became an Adventure Scout. He joined Operation Raleigh's Alaska Expedition where his resolve and determination was tested. When kayaking he saw humpback whales, sea lions and sea otters popping up beside him.

He joined the Army Air Corps and gained his commission after a twelve month course at Sandhurst. He went on to gain his 'wings' flying helicopters and flew operational missions in Northern Ireland during 'The Troubles' and in Bosnia. He also had an interesting deployment in Kenya.

He accepted a posting to Fort Rucker, USA where he learnt to fly the fearsome Apache attack helicopter, later to return to the UK which had just bought its first Apaches. Tim became an Apache instructor and later test pilot for this aircraft and many others.. He attended the Test Pilot Course with some fast jet pilots and as part of their training they flew each other's aircraft. It was noticeable that helicopter pilots could fly fixed wing jet aircraft after just about five minutes familiarisation but the jet pilots took much longer with helicopters, struggling to get them to hover! Apache pilots not only have to use each limb doing separate actions, they have to train their eyes to work independently also!

Tim goes on to talk us through Astronaut selection and training processes (8,000 applicants for just four vacancies). After many years of training and preparation Tim got his first flight to the ISS and undertook his 'extravehicular activity' or 'space walk' as we know it; experiences he describes in some detail.

What a man; what a life.

I am happy to recommend this book to all who may admire the courageous and adventurous.

*Published by Century, Penguin Random House UK  
Hardback ISBN 9781529125573  
Paperback ISBN 978152912558009 February 2021*

**Review by  
Colin Hill**





# OBITUARY



## CHRIS WANNELL 1941 : 2021

Chris Wannell's unexpected death from a brain haemorrhage on 8th February has plunged his family, his many friends and all members of this Association into very profound grief because he was a man who always went the extra mile to give of his services and talents in so many ways and to so many people.

At the funeral service held at St Bartholomew's Church in Royal Wootton Bassett on 26th February Revd Canon Thomas Woodhouse delivered a eulogy that really brought home just how blessed we who knew Chris were to have known him.

Chris was born in Chippenham in October 1941 and his early years were not easy due to an unstable home life. Until he met and married the love of his life and soul mate, Audrey, Chris was not really happy. With Audrey's support Chris made a great success of his life in industry, local politics (he was Mayor twice), the fire brigade and as an outstanding fundraiser for The Fire Fighters Charity.

(continued on page 14)





Continued from page 13

On the day of the funeral the sun shone brightly and the unusual cortege consisting of four vintage fire engines and a fairground tractor, all with polished paintwork and brass gleaming, toured the streets to give the townsfolk a chance to say farewell to Chris. A great many turned out to clap for Chris who had done so much for the town. His coffin was carried on 'Martha', the 1943

turntable ladder that Chris had rescued from a scrap yard and preserved to be used as a fundraiser for charity. At a conservative estimate Chris and 'Martha' raised £100,000 for the Fire Fighters Charity mainly from street collections at Christmas in Royal Wootton Bassett and Swindon.

Chris's commitment to the fire service began with him joining the AFS and then becoming a wholetime fireman at Swindon and Chippenham. He left in 1978 to become retained at Wootton Bassett and he rose to become the officer in charge there retiring on age limit at 55. Chris became a member of the this Association and served with distinction, putting his experience and knowledge to good use when he was elected as our Chairman. We miss him very much. **R.I.P Chris**

## OBITUARY



**CHRIS STRANGE** died peacefully at home in Tisbury on 24th February 2021. He had been fighting cancer for over three years. He was born on 19th December 1950. Chris joined Wiltshire Fire Brigade in 1976 at Tisbury and served with such distinction that he rose to take charge of the station in 1988. The brigade lost an outstanding station commander when he was forced to retire in 2000 after sustaining an injury in the course of duty at a plane crash. The funeral took place at Salisbury Crematorium at 3.45pm on 24th March. The Tisbury station personnel paraded for a two-minute silence on 29th March to honour Chris.

Our heartfelt sympathies go to Lynn and all the family.  
**Rest in peace, Chris.**



## DISCLAIMER

THE BRANCH is published by the Wiltshire Retired Firefighters Association. Views and opinions published in it are not necessarily shared by the Dorset & Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service