



The Branch

April 2022

Magazine of the Wiltshire Retired Firefighters Association

UKRAINIAN FIREFIGHTERS KILLED IN LINE OF DUTY

Reliable information coming out of the Ukraine War indicates that members of the Ukrainian fire & rescue services are in the thick of the action doing all they can to save lives and protect property. At least 12 firefighters are believed to have been killed in the line of duty and it seems likely that more will lay down their lives before the conflict ends.

We salute the bravery and devotion to duty of the firefighters and wish protection for them and indeed to these qualities displayed by the Ukrainian nation in general.



Putin's War & Invasion (from front page)



Despite President Putin claiming he would only target military facilities he is alleged to have committed war crimes because of the large number of air strikes against residential blocks and even a maternity hospital.

Here the firefighters of Kyiv are heavily committed to rescue and firefighting after missiles and/or bombs hit a high rise block. Many members of the public owe their lives to the firefighters of Ukraine.



A Fire & Rescue View





ABOUT HEALTH

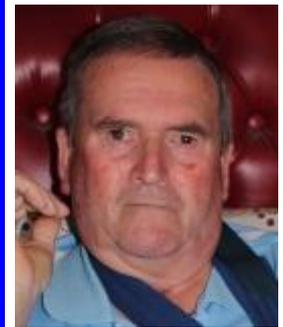


MICK PINNEGAR

Mick Pinnegar was at home with Sue in Royal Wootton Bassett in the late evening of 1st February when he suffered a heart attack. Sue made a 999 emergency call and set off a most concerning chain of events. Remarkably, Mick survived the under performance of the South West Ambulance Trust and Great Western Hospital and is now home. For full details turn to page 6

PETER WIXEY

Pete was home in Latton on 21st February when he fell and sustained injury that required him to call 999 . Like Mick Pinnegar, the response from the ambulance service and also Great Western Hospital was of great concern. When Pete was eventually admitted to hospital after waiting in the ambulance for nearly 24 hours he was diagnosed with a heart condition. Turn to page 7 for full details.



GLENN FOREMAN

Glenn continues to have multiple chronic health problems. He had to be admitted to SDH recently and was fearful that he would not be discharged in time for his 75th birthday with his family around him. Fortunately, the hospital did manage to discharge him to home in time for the celebration. Belated happy birthday Glenn, and many more to come.



DICK CHEW & WIN HUGGETT

Dick and Win have been laid low recently by the Covid bug. The degree to which the virus affects people varies very much and unfortunately Dick and Win are amongst those who have felt quite ill .

They do not feel they will be recovered enough to attend the Spring Lunch and they will be missed. Get well soon, you two.



More ABOUT HEALTH



YVE BENWELL

Yve has recently had surgery on one hand and is home recovering from it. She has the advantage of being given first class recuperative care delivered by Len and we hope to hear that she is back on top form very soon. Sadly, Yve and Len will not be able to attend the Spring Lunch and we shall miss them. Yve is in recovery from covid19 and is waiting to test 'negative'.

JO RIDDIFORD

Like Yve Benwell Jo is also in recovery from a surgical procedure on her hand. To be precise the operation was on a bone in her thumb. The treatment was delivered at The Circle, Bath. The recovery is likely to take up to six weeks during which Jo will be unable to drive. Before the surgery Jo returned from a skiing holiday with bruises following an on piste accident that was not her fault. We send Jo get well wishes.



ROGER TOMBS

Roger caught what he thought might be a flu like affliction that made him feel very poorly. He eventually got hold of a lateral flow test and it delivered the bad news that he was 'positive' for covid19. We hope that Roger is soon testing 'negative' and coming out of 'Covid Jail (isolation)'.

JOHN CRAIG

On April Fool's Day John began to experience symptoms similar to a cold or flu. He managed to get hold of a lateral flow test kit on the following day and it showed him to be 'positive' for Covid19.

John immediately went into isolation and Margaret did too although she is not showing any signs of the infection yet. John will do his best to maintain a good service as our Secretary & Treasurer working from 'Covid Jail'. Supplies of lateral flow test kits from pharmacies are now a problem.





JERRY WILLMOTT

Our WFA president is unwell. He is afflicted by a mystery illness causing intense pain in his main joints. This is restricting his movement very much. Blood tests are being carried out. The illness struck soon after Jerry had his Spring Booster vaccine jab and he is quick to point out that he does not regret having had the vaccination. We hope to hear that effective treatment is in progress.

PAT WILLMOTT

We were sorry to learn that weeks ago Pat had a fall and cracked a couple of ribs when she landed against a table. It has been a slow road to recovery but she is getting better. Both Jerry and Pat had very much wanted to attend the Spring Lunch in Salisbury but in the event they had to drop out for ill health reasons. Get well wishes have been sent to both Pat and Jerry.



SHEILA HUDSON

Sheila is very poorly with chest infections. The symptoms resemble those of Covid but tests for that infection have shown that she does not have it. Sheila's doctor is treating her with antibiotics with the intention of preventing the infection becoming pneumonia. Sheila is another who very much wanted to attend the Spring Lunch but was prevented from doing so by illness. Get well soon, Sheila.

THE FRAYLINGS HAVE MOVED

Not directly connected with health matters but it will be of interest to some to learn that **Stuart & Julie Frayling** have moved house.

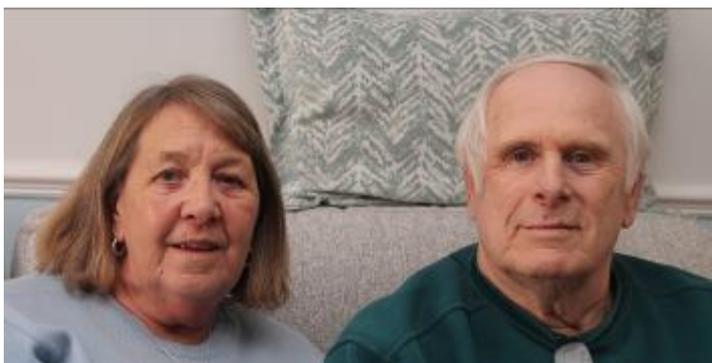
They have downsized from a large house in Little Somerford to a smaller property in Great Somerford, near Malmesbury. We wish them much health and happiness in their new home.



MICK PINNEGAR'S HEART ATTACK

A life threatening event made worse by serious gaps in NHS services

Mick Pinnegar was a retained member of Wiltshire Fire Brigade based at Royal Wootton Bassett for 35 years. He still lives with his wife, Sue, in the town. In the late evening of 1st February 2022 Mick felt very unwell and he recognised that he was very probably having a heart attack . Sue dialled 999 and reported Mick's situation to the call taker at South West Ambulance Service control.



Having fed the details into the computer the female call taker asked Sue if she had access to a defibrillator, adding “*you might need one*” . This distressed Sue very much but at least it convinced her that the ambulance service now appreciated that Mick was very probably suffering from a life threatening condition and both she and Mick expected a rapid and appropriate response to the 999 call. When no help of any kind arrived after about 30 minutes Sue made a second 999 call and another lady call taker told her that the incident was in the system and showing clearly on her computer screen.

There followed **8 hours** of extreme anxiety for Mick and Sue. It took that long for an ambulance to arrive. Mick reports that he felt he was dying and he and Sue said their ‘good byes’ to each other in what must have been a very emotional time that they will never forget.

The ambulance took Mick to GWH, Swindon where he was diagnosed as having a heart attack for which he was given a surgical procedure to insert a stent. After being given a very short time of a couple of days to recover a doctor signed Mick off for discharge home even though he was very breathless and complaining of still feeling unwell. Once home Sue was so concerned about Mick's condition the GP was consulted but he simply said that there was nothing he could do and Mick should be in hospital! Not wishing to rely on getting an ambulance Mick and Sue got a neighbour to take Mick back to GWH where he was readmitted and found to be suffering from pneumonia. He was treated as an in-patient until he was sent home again on 18th February. Mick has since been found to have an irregular heart beat and further cardiac investigations are in progress.

There is a co-responder car equipped with defibrillator at Royal Wootton Bassett fire station but it was not sent to Mick's aid. Mick has made a formal complaint to the ambulance service and awaits a response .

PETE WIXEY HAS ACCIDENT AND SUFFERS POOR SERVICE FROM AMBULANCE SERVICE AND GWH, SWINDON



PETE WIXEY

Pete Wixey lives at Latton, north of Swindon and he retired as a Leading Fireman at Cricklade. He lives alone and has for many years been disabled and needing crutches to walk after surgery at GWH, for a hip replacement was followed by a serious infection.

Shortly after Mick Pinnegar suffered his problems with NHS services recorded on the previous page, Pete was doing some gardening when he lost his balance and fell causing injury. This was at 15.15pm on 21st February. Pete was in such pain he knew he needed to go to hospital and so he dialled 999. Needing to go to hospital is one thing but actually getting there and being admitted is quite another.

Pete did not get an ambulance to attend until about 10.00am on the 22nd February, the day after his fall. ***He was taken to GWH, Swindon and then was kept waiting for admission for nearly 24 hours during which he lay on the bed in the ambulance.*** Once admitted it was found that in addition to his injuries sustained when he fell his heart was actually in atrial fibrillation and he was kept in hospital for three weeks to receive treatment to correct his heart rhythm.



TROWBRIDGE AMBULANCE STAFF SUSPENDED

On top of all the other problems being faced by the South West Ambulance Service Trust at present it has been made public that five members of staff at Trowbridge ambulance station have been suspended and an investigation has been started into allegations of bullying.

The names of those under investigation have not been disclosed. The press has been told that the station has become known as 'the Mafia Station' within the service.

HORMONE REPLACEMENT THERAPY (HRT) PROBLEMS

HRT used to be regarded as a treatment for females in the menopause but further experience has shown that HRT can be of real benefit to ladies who have passed through middle age and are in more advanced years.

The risks of heart attacks and breast cancer are also now seen to be acceptable by many doctors when weighed against the benefits. This change in policy has created a shortage of HRT as demand exceeds supply. A postcode lottery for getting HRT now exists throughout the NHS.

The Cost of Living Crisis

Just when it seemed that we could look forward after lockdowns to a more stable and prosperous future, President Putin threw a huge spanner in the works by invading a neighbouring sovereign nation and throwing the world economy off track again. The demand for fossil fuels such as natural gas and oil is very high. Much of it is bought from Russia, and is now caught up in sanctions causing a major contributing factor to the cost of living hikes that are already happening.



The Government warns us to brace ourselves for even greater financial pressures that will impact on every household in the UK and beyond. It is clear that for those on low incomes there will be tough times ahead and no doubt efforts to cut costs will be essential to many in order to avoid going into debt. The drop in standard of living is forecast to take us back to the 1950s

The WRFA is an apolitical body and we do not wish to make comment in this publication that might be viewed as a political view. We are concentrating on doing everything possible to help our members through the difficult years that are ahead of us. Even at this early stage of the crisis we are aware of some of our members who are suffering stress from financial worries and we wish to do all that we can to help. However, we lack a bank balance large enough to do anything other than keeping the association in sound financial health. We cannot help members from WRFA resources who are in financial difficulty. What we can do is advise and point those in need towards organisations that can assist once a genuine need has been verified. Applications for such assistance will be dealt with **in complete confidence**.



The **FIRE FIGHTERS CHARITY** has the means to assist members suffering financial hardship. Access to the Access To Services telephone line (used to be called 'Helpline') can be made by calling **0800 389 8820** A call to this possible source of help can only be made during office hours , Monday to Friday.

The **MEMBERS WELFARE FUND of the British Fire Services Association** is ready to receive requests for financial help to deal with particular needs. There are many WRFA members who have been pleased to receive a cheque or cheques from MWF helping them through a sticky financial period.



Peter Mills

The access to this help is through one or other of the two local representatives of the BFSA Members Welfare Fund.

They are **Peter Mills** and **John Craig**.

Telephone

Peter Mills 01672 520466

John Craig 01380 726343

Applications dealt with in strict confidence.



John Craig

BT & VIRGIN TO SCRAP TELEPHONE LANDLINES “Ageism gone mad”

In the *February 2022* edition of *The Branch* on page 5 our octogenarian member, Charlie Kuhn, expressed his concern and frustration at the way that the world has gone digital leaving many like him behind who don't have or wish to have a broadband connection or other cyber links. Charlie's piece attracted supportive comments from other WRFA members who object to the ageist attitudes of many businesses and services that have become blatantly ageist.



Charlie Kuhn

Two of these are BT and Virgin who have taken the decision to disconnect landline phones they provide and connect them to the broadband. This is going to be of great inconvenience to their customers who do not have broadband, many of whom are pensioners. In fact, it is more than just an inconvenience but it will place some at risk.



Esther Rantzen

Dame Esther Rantzen has been quick to take up the case of those elderly folk being subjected to this outrageous ageism by the two companies. Dame Esther set up her '*Silver Line*' system to provide the elderly living alone with a means of having regular, supportive contact by telephone with a friend. It is known that 55% of the Silver Line users don't have broadband and will lose their landline.

This is causing great distress and Dame Esther reports the comment of one Silver Line user as "*I'm not afraid of death ; I am afraid of dying alone and not being found.*" Those of us with emergency service experience should also be alert to the risk of an elderly person being unable to dial 999 after they have lost telephone service due to the BT "upgrade". In fact, there has already been a case of this happening when a pensioner's home was seriously damaged by fire but she had lost her means of telephoning the fire & rescue service.

There are also concerns for the thousands of folk who have alarms and pendants reliant upon a landline connection. It seems that BT & Virgin adopted a policy of ditching landline phones dreamed up by managers in their 40s and the needs of the elderly were given little if any consideration. Dame Esther has called this "*ageism gone mad*".



No doubt someone will end up getting a knighthood out of this adoption of new technology in the UK telephone system. It was in 1877 in a house in Devon that Alexander Graham Bell installed the first landline telephone. I wonder what he would think of this lack of consideration for the needs of the elderly?



**FIRE
NEWS**
Update on
fire & rescue
matters



**GRENFELL INQUIRY :
Civil Servant Tearfully Admits To Personal Failures**



Brian Martin

The barrister heading the Government’s legal team at the public inquiry into the Grenfell Tower fire preceded the actual questioning of the Government’s witnesses by giving an astonishing apology for the failures and omissions that he knew were about to be uncovered when witnesses gave their evidence.

One of the most important of these was the head of the technical policy for building regulations, **Brian Martin**. In shouldering much of the blame for the fact that the building regulations were inadequate to prevent the 72 deaths on the night of the fire in 2017 in his evidence Mr Martin included the words *“over the last few months I’ve been looking through evidence and documents and when you line them in the way we’ve done in the last seven days (at the inquiry) it became clear to me that there were a number of occasions where **I could potentially have prevented this happening.**”*

Mr Martin declared his remorse by stating that he could not express how sorry he was. He was questioned about warnings he had been given **that the building industry, confused by government guidance, was using dangerous cladding**. He responded by answering that he had not realised the severity of the risk at the time. Mr Martin tried to explain his failing by stating that he was carrying the responsibility for the government policies calling for **deregulation** of the building industry and he was doing so with an under resourced department. As far back as 2001, Mr Martin was told about fire tests on cladding panels which caused “a raging inferno” but he failed to realise the significance of the test results. He told the inquiry *“it just got missed”*.

Mr Martin was asked about warnings issued to him about a number of fires involving cladding on tall buildings abroad. At the time Mr Martin reassured other government officials that it should not happen in Britain because building regulations here banned the use of combustible materials.



Reduced to tears

In fact, the building regulations imposed no specific ban on combustible cladding panels. Again, by way of explanation, Mr Martin admitted that he had become entrenched in a position where he focused on his role of improving the government guidance for which he was responsible but he failed to realise how big the problem was. Further questioning of Mr Martin only served to uncover a catalogue of errors and misjudgements that he made and that led to the building industry fitting thousands of high rise buildings with dangerous cladding panels and believing that the building regulations did not prevent them from doing so.

The inquiry then called to the witness stand Brendan Lewis MP who had been minister responsible for building regulations in the years running up to the disaster. He was asked to defend his decision not to increase the regulation of fire safety despite warnings. Mr Lewis decided the fire safety industry should regulate itself and the inquiry was told that he had ideological and practical concerns about increasing the role of government. **This meant that instead of fire & rescue services or a building regulator having control over safety, builders and building owners were allowed to regulate themselves.**



Brendan Lewis

The government at the time of Grenfell Tower had an explicit policy of getting rid of as much “red tape” as possible. It is understood that Mr Lewis will not be the only politician called to give evidence at the inquiry. In fact, he was followed by **Lord Barwell**, former housing minister, who gave evidence on 4th April. His lordship’s evidence shone an interesting light into the relationship between the politicians who make government policy and the civil servants who advise the policy makers.



Lord Barwell

Lord Barwell told the inquiry that at the time of the Grenfell Tower fire the government “**had a completely false picture of the level of fire safety**” in England. “**No one said it was life critical**”. Just these few words have disturbing impact because the fact that both politicians and civil service had, in effect, ‘lost the plot’ on how to keep the nation safe from fire is astounding. There had been fatal fires like that at Lacanal House in London in 2009 that killed six but the legislators were focused on cutting red tape.

Within the civil service in those critical years were civil servants who had held very senior rank in the fire & rescue service and had been knighted and appointed to bring their expertise and experience of fire into Whitehall. Hopefully, men like **Sir Ken Knight** will be called to give evidence to the inquiry and we shall hear what advice and guidance he and other former fire chiefs gave. Lord Barwell made the point in his evidence that he would have been horrified if any civil servant within his department had been scared to come to him and say “**this is what we think you should be doing**”.



Sir Ken Knight

Surely the inquiry will also want to hear what the National Fire Chiefs Council advised as the fire service was marginalised.

Opposition Grows To PFCC Plan in Cumbria

The Police & Crime Commissioner for Cumbria wants to see his role expanded to make him the Police Fire & Crime Commissioner for the county but objections to the plan are being voiced. There has been a public consultation on the matter that closed on 21st March . The Fire Brigades Union has strong objections because democratic accountability will be reduced in its opinion. The FBU is also worried about plans it thinks a PFCC would carry out to close Frizington, Arnside and Staveley fire stations and cut 18 firefighter posts. The results of the public consultation are awaited.



FBU AGREES MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING WITH GOVERNMENT

The FBU and the government have just agreed a memorandum of understanding that will allow ‘on-call’ (retained) firefighters to receive their pension entitlement going back to earlier in their service.

The personnel involved will be on a pension based on their modified scheme 1. Prior to this agreement only employment dating back to the introduction of the Part Time Workers Regulations on 1st July 2000 was counted towards the retained fire fighters’ pension entitlements.

FIRE SERVICE GETS SLOWER GETTING TO FIRES

Whenever fire service response times come into the news it is worse comparing how our service is doing in comparison to the other emergency services, particularly the ambulance service, (see pages 6 & 7 of this edition!) The latest government statistics for the year ending September 2021 show that the average response time for primary fires was **8 minutes and 43 seconds**. This was *six seconds slower* than the previous year. This is the largest slowdown for this statistic in five years.



Not surprisingly, the FBU has pounced on the statistic as evidence of the detrimental effect of cuts made by fire authorities. Whilst there must be some truth in the FBU’s claim it must also be true that there are other factors at work here. For example, if it became public knowledge how many ‘on-call’ (retained) stations were off the run due to crew shortage on a typical day there would most likely be strong reaction and concern from the public and press. Who within the fire service is going to be brave enough to admit that the issue of on-call contracts and salaries to ‘on-call’ personnel is not working ? How far we have come from the days of senior officers turning out stations, sometimes in the middle of the night, and recording with a stop watch the time the first away pump left the station.

OPERATION FLORIAN DELIVERS AID TO UKRAINE

When it became clear that the Ukraine War was placing strain on the fire fighting services in that country with commendable speed and efficiency Operation Florian, a UK charity dedicated to giving overseas aid to fire and rescue services abroad, organised a convoy of donated fire engines and equipment to be sent to Ukraine. The convoy consisted of 22 fire fighting appliances accompanied by lorries containing



The men and women who provided the drivers and instructors for the convoy

about 2,000 items of equipment including PPE. Dorset & Wiltshire FRS donated lengths of used hose, helmets and fire boots.

Everything donated was generously donated by the fire & rescue authorities in the UK. The charity is very experienced in delivering aid programmes to fire services in need throughout the world and it was this structure and know-how that enabled the charity to react with such alacrity and effectiveness.

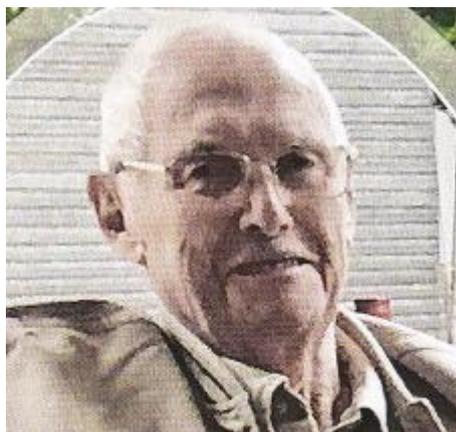
There was no shortage of volunteers to staff the convoy, some of whom agreed to stay behind to give training and guidance to the fire fighters based at places where the donated machines are to be placed into service.

This tangible support to our fire fighting colleagues at a time of their extreme need will hopefully forge bonds of friendship that will last for many years.



Through the rear view mirror some of the vehicles in the convoy can be seen heading for Ukraine.

FINAL SALUTE



ANTONY JAMES WALKER
‘Tony’

30th March 1933 to 17th February 2022

We are mourning the loss of another staunch and valued member caused by the death of Tony Walker as a result of complications following Covid-19. He died from pneumonia in GWH, Swindon on 17th February.

On a bright, sunny spring morning Tony’s funeral took place at St Andrew’s Church, Heddington on 25th March 2022. The beautiful village church was packed to capacity and the Rev Linda Lytham who conducted the service commented on how rarely she had seen so many people at a service. Tony was born in Heddington and grew up there. He sang in the church choir and so began his lifelong interest in music. This developed to include a love of brass band music and Tony became a popular and very talented player of the tuba in Calne Silver Band.

Tony was called up for national service at age 18 and joined the Royal Engineers. He was very proud of his service as a ‘sapper’ and his love of service life led him into the Ministry of Defence Air Force Fire Department when he had completed his two years national service. He was posted to RAF Lyneham and completed a full term of pensionable service there, achieving the rank of Sub Officer. Tony made friends easily because he was always ready to lend a helping hand to anyone who needed one. He made lifelong friendships with those who got to know him through the band or the fire service.

He met his true love and soul mate, Betty, soon after leaving the Royal Engineers and they were married for 65 years. Betty’s death three years ago hit Tony very hard indeed. Tony and Betty had a son, David, who delivered the eulogy at the service.

Rest in peace, dear friend and colleague.

DISCLAIMER

This magazine is published by WILTSHIRE RETIRED FIREFIGHTERS ASSOCIATION. Any views and opinions published with it are not necessarily shared by the Dorset & Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service.