



# The Branch

SEPTEMBER 2022

**Magazine of the Wiltshire Retired Firefighters Association**

## FIRE SERVICES UNDER PRESSURE AND UNDER STRENGTH



LEFT : A field fire blazes close to Stonehenge and the A303.

ABOVE : Headlines evoking memories of 1976

The exceptional heat wave that began in mid-July and continued well into August put the English and Welsh fire and rescue services under great pressure. The London Fire Brigade had a particularly difficult few weeks in common with many more rural services. Any area of grass or shrubbery and also the fields of crops became tinder dry and vulnerable to the smallest of ignition sources. The portable and disposal type



barbeque is thought to have been the cause of a significant number of the wildfires. A call has gone out for these to be banned or controlled and some super stores stopped selling them voluntarily during the drought. **(More FIRE NEWS, page10)**

## OUR SUNNY AGM & LUNCH



On 7th August our AGM was held in splendid sunshine at The Hourglass Pub Restaurant in Devizes. The very successful meeting was followed by a delicious Sunday roast lunch for which the Hourglass is becoming noted.



**L to R.**  
Deanna Gentleman  
Jerry Willmott (President)  
Louise Fielding  
(Chairperson)

**Old Pals Meet Again**  
No doubt reminiscing about their  
days serving at Amesbury  
are (left to right)  
Matty Maggs  
Les Fielding  
Paul Jaycock



**Veteran Of RAF Lyneham Fire  
Section**  
Ray and Irene Richens  
found a shady spot on the terrace as  
they waited for the AGM to begin.

*Photos by John Craig*

## DURING THE AGM MEDALS WERE PRESENTED

Our Chairperson  
Louise Fielding  
presented John Cox with  
The BFSA  
Queen's Platinum Jubilee  
Commemorative Medal  
to mark his long and loyal  
service to the BFSA and the  
WRFA



John Craig was delighted to  
be presented with the same  
medal awarded to mark long  
and loyal service to both the  
BFSA and the WRFA.

### WRFA ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS

**One of the decisions taken at the AGM was to accept the recommendation of the Executive Committee that with effect from 1st April 2023 the annual subscription to WRFA will rise from £10 to £15.**

**The annual subscription has been held without an increase for over 20 years and raising it was not a decision taken lightly. Members may be sure that the Executive Committee will ensure that members still get good value for money. Those paying by **STANDING ORDER** will have to replace the instruction to their bank. Advice is available from John Craig 01380 726343. Those paying by auto deduction need take no action.**



1st April 2023



## **The Mighty Ovens Throbbled and Out Came Our Roast (although some preferred fish & chips)**



**Margaret Craig, Jane Cox, John Cox, Louise Fielding, Les Fielding, Christine Sutherland and Ron Laycock.**



**Janet Gurney, Betty Carter, Kath Penfold, Ann Lapham, Faye Jackson, Mac Jackson, Frances Moreton, Alf Moreton.**

## NEW MEMBERS

### IAN JEARY

Ian recently retired from Dorset & Wiltshire FRS after serving for 30 years. He began his career at Swindon on Blue Watch and rose to become an Area Manager, or in 'old money' a Senior Divisional Officer.

Ian has a wide range of interests including eating out, football, theatre, cycling, travel and cinema. He is also taken for walks by his dog. He lives in Bath with his wife, Alice. We wish Ian many years of happy fellowship with us and hope to see him and Alice (and the dog?) at many of our social events.



IAN

### JOAN McGILL

On 21st June, Bill McGill passed away and Joan lost little time in applying to become a member of the WRFA. She has been given a warm welcome into the Association. Bill and Joan enjoyed 62 years of happy marriage and made many good friends. They were for a time keen users of their caravan.

Joan had a career in nursing before retiring. Joan lives in central Devizes and her daughter, Jane, and son-in-law, Robin, live in Rowde. Once she has passed through the early stages of bereavement Joan hopes to take advantage of some of the opportunities to socialise offered by her membership of the WRFA.



JOAN

### JAMES ('JIM') MAHONEY

Jim Mahoney has retired from Dorset & Wiltshire FRS and has been welcomed into membership of WRFA. He first joined East Sussex Fire Brigade in 1991 and in 2008 transferred to Wiltshire.

Jim lives in Semington with his wife, Lorraine. He lists his interests as walking, cycling and paddling (canoes). We are delighted that Jim has joined us and we look forward to seeing him and Lorraine and some of our social events.



JIM



## WRFA SOCIAL EVENTS



### Sunday Lunch    October 16th

Last date for booking 1st October  
Book early to avoid disappointment

**The Lydiard House Bar & Restaurant**  
**Lydiard Park, Swindon SN5 3PA**

**Two-courses £20    Three-courses £23**

**To view menu and book, use form on website  
or the one sent with hard copy of 'The Branch'.**



**WRFA CHRISTMAS  
FESTIVE LUNCH**  
**Bowood Hotel Kerry Suite**  
**Derry Hill, Calne**

**Take a Note!**  
**Get it in the diary and**  
**mark the calendar**  
**Monday 19th December**



**A MENU THAT SPOILS YOU FOR CHOICE  
PRICE TO BE GENEROUSLY SUBSIDISED**

**Booking form out soon!**



## **Health Matters**

News of those dealing  
with ill health



### **PETE WIXEY**

Pete's health has deteriorated recently and he is currently back in GWH, Swindon. The medics think he might have had a bleed on the brain because he has had six falls in seven weeks and his eye sight has become very blurred. Pete has been offered a place on the list of those receiving 'The Branch' in audio form. Our thoughts are with him as his physicians plan the next step in treating him. They think he might have Parkinson's disease.



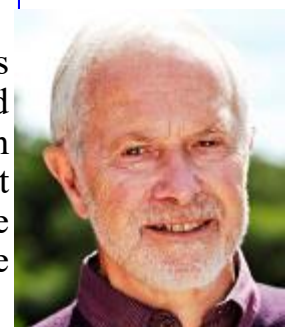
### **PETER & FRANCES MILLS**

Peter has been an in-patient again at GWH. This time he was suffering from sepsis and for some time he was very ill. Soon after he was discharged from hospital Frances had to be admitted as an emergency. She was found to have had a form of minor stroke called a transient ischemic attack. We wish them both happier times and better health.



### **GLENN FOREMAN**

Glenn had a trip in his garden that injured his calf and Achilles tendon necessitating him wearing a surgical boot on his damaged leg. He was also due to have further heart surgery performed in Bournemouth but he asked for a postponement because he felt unwell and thought a delay was in his best interests. Glenn, we hope that you are soon feeling better and your treatment is done soon.



### **ALF MORETON**

Alf has a very painful hip joint and he is on the waiting list to have the worn out joint replaced. He has been told that he may have to wait 8 months before the surgery can take place but given the sorry state of the NHS waiting lists this is not by any means a bad target.

We hope that Alf's treatment is not delayed and that he is soon relieved of the pain and his mobility is much improved.

# COST OF LIVING CRISIS



## HOW CAN I PAY THIS BILL?

The news regarding the financial turmoil which has engulfed the world seems to get worse with every passing day. Through no fault of their own many people are going to struggle to keep out of debt and continue to live in a safe and healthy manner when the cost of energy and other vital commodities keeps going up rapidly.

If you are on a low income many will be thrown into despair at being faced with bills that they cannot pay. Members of the WRFA are advised that if they find themselves with too much month left at the end of the money, or they are faced with a bill or bills that they don't have the means to pay, they are entitled to make application to one or both of the following.



Telephone Services Access Line

**0800 389 8820**

Open 9am to 5am

Monday to Friday

Apply for a hardship grant

**British Fire Services Association**

**Members Welfare Fund**

Apply through local officers

**PETER MILLS 01672 520466**

or

**JOHN CRAIG 01380 726343**



Both organisations will treat applications in confidence and will do their utmost to help former members of the fire & rescue service or their widows/widowers in genuine need.

## PEOPLE & PLACES

### **LES FIELDING** FIFireE, MIFSM, MICIHT

Since retiring from Wiltshire Fire Brigade Les Fielding has established himself as one of the world's most highly regarded fire engineers dealing with underground fire risks. Working for *London Bridge Associates* Les has been contracted to work on some of the world's most challenging tunnel and underground railway engineering projects.

He has now decided to stand down from this work and his massive contribution to the area of fire safety has been very properly recognised by the industry. At the *6th Forum of the ITA COSUF TSO* held in Brussels recently a special presentation was made to Les by the Chairman, Max Wietek. Les was presented with a certificate and also vouchers for chocolate and wine. Les is a stalwart of the WRFA and we are proud to have him in membership. Well done, Les!



### CAPTION COMPETITION



**Editor : I can't think of a caption for this photo taken at the AGM Can anybody make a suggestion?**

# The Great Fire of Wennington

The name of a village on the eastern edge of London, bordering Essex, will no doubt go down in the history of London Fire Brigade alongside those such as *Grenfell Tower*, *Smithfield Market*, *Kings Cross Station*. The village is called **Wennington** and it has a population of only about 300. Those people were faced with a terrifying ordeal by fire on **19th July 2022**. This was the day that broke heat temperature records in the UK. In Lincolnshire an unprecedented temperature of 40.3C was recorded and in many other parts of England and Wales, including London, the temperature soared nearly as high.

The weeks leading up to the super hot day were dry and nearly as hot bringing tinder dry conditions to fields, grassland and even private gardens. Wennington has a one-pump (wholetime) fire station within the LFB.



70 Wennington properties were damaged by fire. 19 were totally destroyed.

Photo Sky News

At around 1.00pm a compost heap in the garden of the house next to Wennington Fire Station erupted into flames and the fire spread immediately to dry grass. The LFB had an above ground diesel tank at Wennington Fire Station and the fire headed towards it. But the Wennington pump was attending a fire 6 miles away and the nearest available pump to Wennington came from Orpington in Kent. Racing through the Dartford Tunnel its crew arrived just in time to stop the fire a metre away from the diesel tank.

The crew sent for assistance but the fire spread very rapidly driven by a whimsical wind that kept changing direction. The assistance message initially made pumps 10 but it took five hours to complete the make-up and eventually the job went to 15 pumps but not before the fire had taken a firm hold on the area that included streets like *The Green*, *Kent View* and *Marina Cottages*. The parched gardens to properties in these streets gave the fire lots of fuel to increase in intensity and begin to spread into the houses. Seeing that the firefighters were overwhelmed some villagers did their best with garden hoses to keep the fire from affecting their homes but not all were successful. In total about 70 homes suffered fire damage. 19 houses were totally destroyed by fire. (Continued on page 11)

### THE GREAT FIRE OF WENNINGTON (continued)

On one of the first pumps to arrive at Wennington's conflagration was a Fire Brigade's Union official, Darrell George, and he has been giving the press his account and opinions on the incident. He has put into words his frustration at seeing the fire getting out of control when he and his colleagues could do little due to lack of resources and equipment. He is quoted as saying that without supporting appliances his crew ran out of delivery hose (*Daily Mail 20th August*). Had they been able to extend their hose line just a few more lengths they could have checked the fire spread but the fire ran ahead of them. Firefighter George claimed that 39 pumping appliances were off the run due to lack of crew at the time of Wennington's hour of need.



Four of the Wennington houses destroyed were not insured.  
The householders have been left destitute.  
Photo Sky News

FBU official comment points out that the LFB closed 10 fire stations and took 15 pumps and the personnel crewing them off the establishment in recent times. The FBU has been very critical of the nation's Chief Fire Officers, alleging that they have not done nearly enough to resist the cuts to fire & rescue services' personnel and equipment. The union is taking a very much "*we told you so*" attitude and many others may feel that at a time when climate change is bringing serious wildfire and also flooding threats to the UK on an unprecedented scale, cutting the fire & rescue resources is perhaps showing a lack of foresight and wisdom.

It has to be pointed out that July 19th 2022 was the busiest day in LFB history since the Second World War. At the time that LFB control received the first call to Wennington the Brigade was already dealing with a 30 pump wildfire plus numerous other fires requiring multi-pump attendances. Although five firefighters suffered heat exhaustion and some villagers suffered ill effects from smoke it is very fortunate that no lives were lost. Four of the householders whose homes were totally destroyed were uninsured and have been left destitute. It took nearly 9 hours before the 'stop' message could be sent for the 'Great Fire of Wennington'.

## IN PRAISE OF WATER CARRIERS by John Craig



The 21st century version of a local Water Carrier

I was privileged to be appointed CFO in Wiltshire in 1986 and one of my first tasks in getting to know the brigade was to take stock of the appliance fleet. Something stood out to me like a sore thumb. There was not a single bulk water carrier in the fleet. This meant that the maximum amount of water any individual fire engine carried to a fire in Wiltshire was only 1800 litres (400

gallons), the tank capacity of a standard water tender. This seemed to me to be taking little regard for the huge area of rural fire risk in the county and also the miles of motorway running through it. Motorways are 'dry' when it comes to finding water for fire fighting with not a fire hydrant to be seen. Yet, vehicle fires are common as indeed are road traffic collisions and the cargoes carried on lorries if ignited often presented a very challenging fire needing a lot of water. So, my thoughts were "*we need to add water carriers to the fleet quickly*".

The obvious need was to include purchase of water carriers in the Brigade capital programme but the fire authority members were already in a very sensitive mood about capital expenditure having been generous in their eyes to the WFB by allowing the funding of the new Brigade Training & Development Centre and then reluctantly accepting the need for an additional fire station for Swindon at Westlea.



Rear view showing pipework and portable pump

The Brigade Engineer, **Dave Symes**, was a man who quietly accepted a challenge and when given the task of producing water carriers on a shoe-string budget he came up with a brilliant solution. He found out that at Wincanton in Somerset a firm dealing with bulk transport of milk was replacing some of its tankers. Dave had examined these and he told me that although the vehicles had each done around 100,000 miles they could be turned into water carriers with work carried out by Brigade Workshops at Trowbridge. This entailed alterations and adaptations to the pipework and the fitting of new lockers, plus the mounting of a hose reel and a light portable pump. The purchase price and the conversion work was within our budget and I was delighted to give Dave the go ahead for the project. In very reasonable time Dave and his staff had produced the first WFB style of water carrier and it was put into service at Wootton Bassett (now 'Royal Wootton Bassett'). It carried 9,000 litres (2,000 gallons) of precious water, the equivalent of 5 standard water tenders for water capacity. Two more WrCs soon went into service at Ramsbury and Wilton.



## FINAL SALUTE



### FREDA ETHEL HART

14th July 1921 - 12th July 2022

We were very sorry to learn that Freda Hart, our oldest member, passed away just two days short of her 101st birthday. What a full and productive life she lived that included serving throughout World War 2 in the fire service.

Freda was born in Stoke-on-Trent and at the age of 18 she began working life in the retail business but was then drafted into working in a munitions factory in Crewe by government decree. She hated this work and when she saw an advert in a newspaper calling for men and women to join the AFS she went along to Burslem Fire Station and enquired about joining. An officer showed her into a room where heaps of uniform lay on the floor and Freda was invited to select from the heaps items of uniform that fitted her. She was delighted to be enrolled in the AFS, determined to do her bit for the wartime effort. In 1941 the service was nationalised and Freda became a member of the NFS based at Fire Force HQ, Pirehill, Staffordshire.

Freda excelled at the duties required of her to help running an efficient control room and her promotion to Leading Firewoman and then Senior Leading Firewoman was not long in coming. Promotion brought leadership and management training at the NFS College which used the former Ocean Hotel near Brighton. Following this, Freda was allocated a staff car and posted to Shropshire where her duties involved touring all the fire stations where women were serving to monitor their training, welfare and morale. She loved all her service in the NFS but particularly this period in Shropshire. During this time Freda met Steven Hart, a sailor serving in the Royal Navy, and the couple formed an attraction for each other very quickly. Steven proposed knowing that his ship, the cruiser HMS Manchester, was likely to have some tough fights ahead of her, and Freda agreed to become his bride and so began a very long and happy marriage.

After the war, Freda and Steven returned to Steven's home town of Marlborough where he ran a successful business. They had four children. And as they shared in parenting the family Freda and Steven shared in their love of golf too. They became stalwarts of Marlborough Golf Club and both of them held the captaincy for more than one year. Sadly, Steven predeceased Freda and she lived alone in the town for many years. WRFA members including Peter Mills and John Craig were always delighted to visit Freda. Her funeral was conducted by WRFA member, Canon Henry Pearson at North Wilts Crematorium on 10th August.

Rest in Peace, Freda

JMC



## FINAL SALUTE



### **WILLIAM ('Bill') MCGILL**

Bill was born in 1936 in Kilmarnock, Scotland. He held ambitions to become a marine engineer but his step-father insisted he took up an apprenticeship as a carpenter and joiner. While on holiday in Blackpool he met Joan and their relationship grew into a very happy marriage that lasted for 62 years. Joan was from Devizes and she and Bill set up their marital home in the town. Bill did his national service in the RAF and was posted to a base in The Hebrides where he worked on radar and achieved the rank of Senior Aircraftsman.

In Devizes Bill found work first with Rendell's and then with a firm providing shop-fitting and refrigeration services. A fellow employee was a retained fireman and he encouraged Bill into also becoming retained. Bill enjoyed the fire brigade so much that even though he was on a good salary as a foreman, supported by Joan he took a pay cut to join the Wiltshire Fire Brigade fulltime at Swindon. He was 28 at the time, an age some considered too old.

Bill caught the eye of CFO John Broadbent and he appointed Bill as his driver. He later served as a Leading Fireman on a year's secondment to Hopton Barracks training members of the Territorial Army. Bill continued to do well in the brigade and became a fire prevention officer in the rank of station officer based at Brigade HQ (Potterne). Following this he served in the same rank at Trowbridge. His 30 year career ended with him serving as Assistant Divisional Officer at Swindon. After completing 20 years service Bill was awarded the Fire Brigade Long Service & Good Conduct Medal.

Bill and Joan have one child, Jane, who lives with husband, Robin, in Rowde. Sadly Bill's health began to fail after retirement from the fire service and for 16 years he suffered illness although Joan and Bill did use their caravan before this to have many happy leisure hours and build a large circle of good friends.

Just before his death on 21st June 2022 Bill was found to have a brain tumour and secondary cancers in his lungs. He was 86. He passed away with his close family around him at RUH, Bath. The funeral service was held at St Andrew's Methodist/URC Church in Devizes on 6th July 2022  
Rest in peace, Bill. JMC

#### **DISCLAIMER**

*This magazine is independent of the Dorset & Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service and any views and opinions published in it are not necessarily shared by the Service or the fire authority.*