



TheBranch

November
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Magazine of the Wiltshire Retired Firefighters Association

Happy Christmas!



PENSIONS TO RISE?

Triple Lock Retention In Doubt

After much doubt and confusion in Parliament, in one of her last statements to the House of Commons before resigning as Prime Minister, Liz Truss, gave an assurance that the Government would use the Triple Lock to calculate state pension increase from April 2023. At the same time she said that former chancellor, Rishi Sunak, since made Prime Minister, supported the Triple Lock too. The effect of this would be that state pensions should rise by 10.1% from 6th April 2023, and public service pensions too. However, now Liz Truss has been replaced and Jeremy Hunt made chancellor fresh statements from No.10 indicate that the Triple Lock might not survive the budget planned for 17th November.



**Cross fingers for the
Triple Lock to
survive**



REMEMBRANCE

Lest We Forget

HOW WILL YOU REMEMBER THE FALLEN?

This time of remembrance means a great deal to those who have fought for this country and who have seen comrades fall in battle. Others, like the late **Freda Hart** used to particularly remember her brother who was murdered by the Nazis at Dunkirk when his unit of the Grenadier Guards ran out of ammunition and surrendered only to be executed by the Germans. Some members of the WRFA served in the fire service during World War 2 but sadly most of these much respected folk have answered their last call after sharing some of their memories of firefighting and sacrifice under Blitz conditions.



Jerry Willmott
CBE, QFSM

Then, there is our president, **Jerry Willmott**, who as a sergeant in the Norfolk Regiment fought in the Korean War and who undoubtedly carries with him the memories of battlefield horrors and true gallantry. Another WRFA member who preceded his fire service career with a distinguished period of military service is **Harold Porter**. He joined the Royal Navy in World War Two and in his autobiography, *Farmland to Fireland*, Harold details the service



Harold Porter
OBE, QFSM

he gave in the Mediterranean theatre of war which gave him plenty of experience under fire both at sea and on shore. He served for most of the time there on the island of Malta. He had reached the rank of Petty Officer before being demobbed. For Jerry and Harold this time of year must be very poignant.

The WRFA for several years held an evening Remembrance Event in the Devizes Town Hall which took the form of a dinner followed by a concert by the superb Devizes Town Band and ending with an Act of Remembrance and the Last Post. The Executive Committee noted that gradually the attendance at these events became less due it was thought to elderly folk not being happy to travel in the dark. A decision was therefore taken to hold no more of these WRFA events and allow members to find other ways to remember the fallen, perhaps at remembrance services in their locality.

At the invitation of the CFO we shall again participate in the laying of wreaths at Service HQ in Salisbury on 11th November. This year the honour of laying our wreath goes to Ludo Macaulay MBE. However we individually choose to do so,



WE WILL REMEMBER THEM

NEW MEMBERS

PAUL McDONNELL



Paul joined Wiltshire Fire Brigade in Amesbury in 1990 and later transferred to Salisbury. He has just retired and hopes to spend more time on his leisure activities of motor home holidays and walking his dog, Coco. He is also a keen reader.

We hope to see Paul and Karen at many WRFA social events in the future where they will be made very welcome.

Welcome into membership Paul. May it bring you many years of happy fellowship.

ALISON THOMAS

Alison joined Wiltshire Fire Brigade in 2000 as Hydrant Administrator, followed by a time serving in the IT department. Alison ultimately transferred into the Human Resources Department and spent 10 years there before retiring in 2018. Alison lives in central Devizes and since retiring she has devoted time to landscaping her garden, growing fruit and veg and walking her dog, Colin.

Alison has been part of the fire & rescue service family since birth because her father was the late Bert Goodship who was himself a WRFA member after he retired from WFB as Divisional Officer.

We warmly welcome Alison and wish her many years of happy fellowship in this association



Welcome

It is beyond doubt that every WRFA member reading this knows at least six former colleagues who could and should join WRFA. Have you told them about the benefits of joining? If not, why not?

Start by directing them to our excellent website.

We look forward to welcoming them!



WRFA AUTUMN LUNCH



Header photos taken by Andrew Mayland at Westonbirt Arboretum, 17th October 2022

WRFA members and guests were treated to a very enjoyable time at the Autumn Lunch which was held this year at Lydiard House Hotel on the outskirts of Swindon in an area known as 'Swindon Village'. The restaurant at the hotel pulled out all the stops to provide us with a first class Sunday Lunch on 16th October.

The price charged was very reasonable and all who attended felt that the event represented excellent value for money. In beautiful weather those attending gathered in a very pleasant dining area and our Chairperson, Louise Fielding, took charge of the formalities and presentations after the dining was concluded.





WAITING FOR THE PUDS. Happy faces wait in anticipation of the desserts being served. In this picture (far left) can be seen Yve Benwell who had a full knee replacement only days before the lunch and arrived in a wheelchair piloted by her gallant hubby, Len. It was Yve and Len who suggested that the WRFA used the hotel for a social event having enjoyed a Sunday lunch there a few weeks ago.

(all photos of the event were taken by John Craig)



What better way to spend a Sunday lunch time than to gather with friends and former colleagues for a drink, a chat and to enjoy delicious food. Now we look forward with gleeful anticipation to the next WRFA social event that is the Christmas Festive Lunch on 19th December at Bowood Hotel. Bookings now being taken by phone or email. See page 7.

Presentations at Autumn Lunch

Three members of the WRFA were presented with the British Fire Services Association Queen's Platinum Jubilee Medal

PETER WIXEY

Received the award for his long service in the fire community culminating in a recent brave rescue of a neighbour from a burning caravan after his retirement and his resilience in the face of many adversities.

REV CANON HENRY PEARSON

Canon Pearson served as a retained firefighter in Suffolk and later was the Brigade Chaplain to the fire services in Suffolk and then Wiltshire. The medal is recognition of his distinguished service to firefighters.



PETER MILLS

Peter Mills served as a retained member of Ramsbury Fire Station for many years, becoming station commander until an in-service injury cut short his service. Thereafter he has served with outstanding commitment to the WRFA and the BFSA. He was presented with the medal and a framed print to recognise his work and loyalty.



Yippee!

**WRFA
SOCIAL LIFE**



“ Come on, chaps, let’s get to Bowood.
There will be delicious food,
kind people AND lots of lady deer's!!!!”

**Another
WRFA
event to
start your
Christmas
joy!**

Christmas Festive Lunch

Monday 19th December 2022

Kerry Suite, Bowood Hotel, Derry Hill SN11 9PQ

Cash bar from noon. LUNCH SERVED AT 1.00pm

Three-courses

£25.00 members, spouses, partners and carers

£35.00 guests

MENU

- A. Cider & Onion Soup, cheddar croutons**
- B. Chicken Liver Parfait, red onion marmalade**
- C. Smoked Salmon, crème fraîche**
- D. Goats Cheese Soufflé, smoked tomato, basil pesto**

Main

- E. Roast Turkey with all the trimmings**
- F. Pan Fried Salmon in herb butter sauce**
- G. Duck Leg in Merlot sauce**
- H. Cauliflower Steak marinated in Rose Harissa**

Desserts

- I. Christmas Pudding, brandy custard and vanilla ice cream**
- J. Mulled Fruits Pavlova**
- K. Pineapple Tart, pink peppercorns, rum syrup, coconut sorbet**
- L. Selection of British Cheeses, apple chutney, treacle and walnut bread**

Coffee & Truffles

LAST DATE FOR BOOKING 10th DECEMBER

To book phone 01380 726343 or email johncraig7@btinternet.com



HEALTH MATTERS



JOHN & JANE COX



John and Jane both have legs in plaster casts following each having a different accident within days. John had a bad fall and ruptured an Achilles tendon while trimming his hedges. Jane was on her way to GWH for outpatient treatment when she fell getting into the ambulance and broke her ankle badly. Jane will be in the cast for several weeks and must wear a surgical boot for 9 weeks thereafter. We send our love and best wishes to the accident prone pair. Their cat, Poppy, is fine!

PETE WIXEY

Pete has had an extended stay in GWH while investigations were made into why he had six falls in seven weeks. He has been diagnosed with a heart condition that urgently requires him to have a pacemaker and a defibrillator fitted. Despite the urgency, weeks have passed without any call from GWH about the fitting of these devices. Pete has also been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. We wish him all the very best.



ALBI RICHARDSON

Albi has been rushed into GWH several times recently with an irregular heart beat. He has also been waiting for a long time for surgery to repair a hernia but this cannot be done until his heart problems are sorted out.

We hope that this is done quickly and that Albi's health improves. Albi is very satisfied with the treatment he has received so far at GWH.

YVE BENWELL

Yve has had a full knee replacement procedure and she opted for this to be performed privately at Ridgeway Hospital, Wroughton. The surgery has gone to plan but Yve has suffered a great deal of pain and is relying heavily on analgesics while the recovery process takes place.

Within less than a week of the operation Yve attended the Autumn Lunch at Lydiard Park and did so in a wheel chair pushed by Len. It was good to see them both there. Get well soon, Yve!





GLENN FOREMAN

Glenn has had yet another cardiac procedure performed on his heart and the hope and expectation is that if successful the treatment will give him a better quality of life. In addition to his heart condition Glenn has to cope with another unrelated chronic condition and so we do hope that the cardiac procedure has been successful.

We send our best wishes to Glenn and to Angela.

BETTY CARTER

Betty suffers with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and unfortunately this flared up recently forcing her to cancel her attendance at the WRFA Autumn Lunch at Lydiard Park. Betty lives alone and takes much pleasure in attending as many of our social events as possible and is usually one of the first to book. We hope that she will be well enough to attend the Christmas Festive Lunch. All the best, Betty.



ROGER TOMBS

Roger suffered a minor stroke recently from which he has made a remarkably good recovery except for it leaving him blind in one eye. Fortunately, he reports that his sighted eye is doing a good job for him and he is anxious to assure us all that he is still very much 'on the field of play' and grateful for the extent of his recovery.

We hope that Roger has no further setbacks and keeps well from now on.

FRANCES MILLS

Fran has been unwell for some time and has had her fill of visits to hospitals and clinics, some of which are some distance from home in Ramsbury. The conclusion reached by her consultant is that she has been given the wrong medication and correcting this has not been as straightforward as might have been hoped.

It was a delight to see Frances at the Autumn Lunch and we sincerely hope to see her and Peter at the Christmas Festive Lunch.





DID YOU RECEIVE ‘SHOUT!’?

If you are a member of WRFA you are entitled to receive a free copy of the quarterly magazine published by **THE FIRE FIGHTERS CHARITY** under the title, *Shout!* The copies are usually delivered by Royal Mail and if you are not receiving your copies' you should call the charity on **01256 366566** and ask to be placed on the mailing list.

The Autumn edition of *Shout!* Is out now and it is full of articles of interest and use to retired members of the fire & rescue service. The magazine is targeted at the retired members of the service. Make sure you are not missing out!



REACHING OUT FOR HELP IS A STRENGTH

One of the articles in the latest edition of *Shout!* urges members of the fire community who need help not to be reluctant to reach out for it. To do so is a sign of strength and not weakness. A quotation from Jeff Cross, a 43 year old member of Devon & Somerset FRS, is *“If you need help, to ask for it is not a sign of weakness . It is actually a sign of great strength.”*

The first step in reaching out to the Fire Fighters Charity for help is to call the Services Access Line on **0800 389 8820**

Here are examples of the programmes of help available:

- Covid Recovery
- Digital Physiotherapy
- Wellbeing Hub
- Residential rehabilitation and nursing support
- Welfare Support & Financial Support
 - Living Well Group & Befriending
 - Family Support
 - Reset programme

This is not an exhaustive list.



FIRE NEWS!



ONE DEAD, 8 INJURED AT BRISTOL HI-RISE FIRE

**Residents clamour for improved fire safety, including sprinklers.
Fire & Rescue Service says building's fire protection met current safety standards**

On 25th September in the early hours fire broke out in a flat on the top floor of a 16-storey tower block in Bristol. The process of alerting the residents to the danger and evacuating them was described as chaotic. The police had to go into the burning building knocking on doors to wake families and guide them to safety. Some on the top floor were trapped indicating a problem with the means of escape and men were forced to try to escape heat and smoke by climbing out of windows and clinging on while awaiting rescue. One man lost his grip and plunged the full height of the building to his death. Not surprisingly the residents who survived the blaze have banded together to campaign for much improved standards of fire safety. High on their list of demands is that sprinklers be retrofitted to the block.



Evidence is piling up that fitting sprinklers is cheaper and less disruptive than its opponents claim. Why was the fire service silent about no sprinklers at Twinnell House?

A spokesperson for Avon Fire & Rescue Service has made a statement that the building complied with the building regulations and all the flats had smoke alarms. No one claims to have heard an alarm because the one in the flat where the fire originated was probably rendered inoperable quickly by the fire. The fire service responded with 11 appliances and reported that the fire was quickly extinguished. The aerial ladder platform sent to the fire could not reach those trapped on the 16th floor.

For the residents to be told that a fire that killed a neighbour and injured so many complied with the safety Regulations must surely beg the question, "*then what must be done to improve the standards to prevent any further tragic fire deaths and keep the residents of Twinnell House, Easton and similar tower blocks safe from fire?*" One fact that must be emphasised is that external cladding played no part in this fire tragedy.

In 2009 a fire occurred in daylight at a residential tower block in London called Lacanal House. Six residents died and many were injured. External cladding did play a significant part in this fire. The coroner included in her very detailed comments that sprinklers should be retrofitted to residential tower blocks. Scant notice was taken of this recommendation at the time by Government and the civil servants advising ministers. A prediction was made that further hi-rise fires would result in tragedy and then came Grenfell Tower.

ANOTHER BRISTOL HI-RISE FIRE

While the residents of Twinnell House were still agitating strongly for the fire safety arrangements at their 16 storey block to be upgraded urgently, including the fitting of sprinklers, following a fatal fire in September, a second tower block suffered a serious blaze only weeks later on 20th October. This time, fortunately, there were no fatalities and the 90 residents escaped with their lives but 6 required hospital treatment. Again, the alarm raising process and evacuations were described by residents as “chaotic”.



Ecclestone House, Barton Hill hours after the fire was extinguished.
Photo by ITV News West Country

The location of the fire was Ecclestone House, Barton Hill. The alarm was raised at about 6.00am. The fire originated on the 16th floor and this time there was significant damage to apartments on other floors from fire, water and smoke. Temporary housing has had to be found for those residents unable to live in their flats until repairs have been carried out by Bristol City Council.

The Avon Fire & Rescue Service has stated that the building complied with the building regulations as was the case at the Twinnell House fire in September.

Recognising the very real concerns of all residents of hi-rise blocks in Bristol, the

Bristol City Council has issued a statement that their safety is of huge importance and further information regarding fire safety and associated guidance is being sent to all residents. The coroner's inquest into the death of a man at the Twinnell House fire might uncover some information of value and will perhaps put further emphasis on the need for sprinklers in hi-rise tower blocks. The cause of the Ecclestone House fire is believed to be arson. Police have made an arrest of a male on suspicion of arson with intent to endanger life.



How many more fires in hi-rise blocks will it take to drive home the message about the value of fire sprinklers?

FIRE NEWS (continued)

FAIR PAY OR FIRE STRIKE

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) is balloting its members for strike action because the pay offer tabled by the fire employers falls short of their demands. After initially offering 2% rise the employers have increased their offer to 5% for firefighters and control staff. The FBU's executive council has recommended to its members that the offer be rejected.

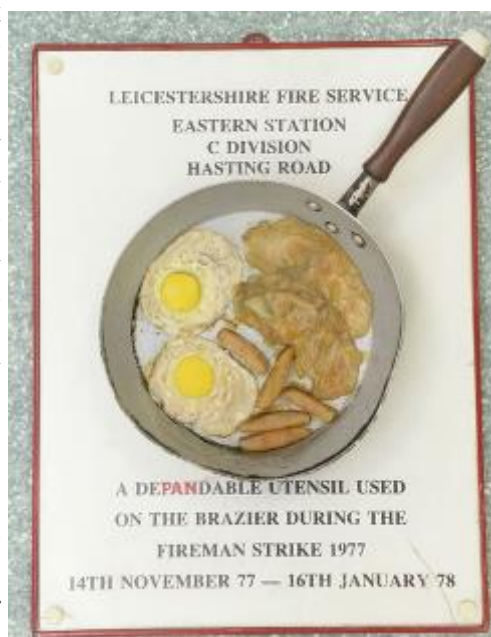


Soldiers dealing with a serious shop fire in Leicester. (photo Leicester Mercury)

To those who are old enough to remember the FBU strike of the winter of 1977/78 the noises we are hearing are remarkably similar in many respects to those heard during the run up to the first strike. At the time, the pay of firefighters lagged well behind the national average and **inflation was running at 16%**. The FBU was demanding a pay rise of **30%** but Jim Callaghan's **Labour Government** was adamant that pay should not rise nationally for anyone beyond **10%**.

Confident that a fire strike would quickly cause the Government to cave in, the FBU proceeded to call out their 30,000 members and 97% did strike. The Government responded by ordering the military to take over by providing an elementary fire and rescue service equipped with AFS Emergency Pumps nicknamed 'Green Goddesses'. These pumps were withdrawn from Home Office stores and the troops were given basic training in their use. To avoid operating them from fire stations they were based at TA centres in towns and cities. Control rooms were closed and calls were handled by senior officers in emergency controls often located in police controls.

To the concern and disappointment of the strikers, the strike dragged on for nine weeks from 14th November to 16th January. In many rural areas the retained firefighters continued to protect their communities because most were not FBU members. This created enmity between wholtime strikers and the retained service that took years to dissipate.



A memorial to the strike on a Leicester fire station. Photo by Male Tovey

The FBU was forced to accept the Labour Government's terms and abandoned the strike accepting a **10%** pay offer and a new pay formula that lasted for 25 years, plus a reduction in hours from 48 to 42 hours per week.

WILL WE SEE THE RETURN OF CHIMNEY FIRES?

I began my career at Central Fire Station, Leicester in 1963, the height of what might be called '*The Chimney Fire Era*'. Few residents of the city had central heating and the use of open fires burning coal, coke or logs was a very common and popular form of heating. An additional worry From a fire safety point of view were paraffin heaters widely used as an alternative to open fires and these oil heaters kept us busy too accounting for many house fires.



WOOD BURNERS known to produce a lot of tarry soot requiring chimney swept frequently.

We usually dealt with a chimney fire from the hearth and fire grate and rarely had to resort to putting a hose reel down the chimney pot. Then came the legislation to reduce air pollution and gradually the law made using open fires less popular and central heating more popular and convenient. The need to have flues kept clean of soot became less important and the number of professional chimney sweeps reduced accordingly.

But the current energy crisis is worrying fire chiefs who can see householders turning back to open fires and wood burners. Will this bring back chimney fires especially if householders neglect to have their chimneys swept regularly? **John Craig**



Having chimney flues regularly checked and swept by a professional sweep (left) should help avoid the need for a visit from the fire & rescue service being necessary.



STOP PRESS

As this edition of 'The Branch' went to press the sad news of the death of WRFA veteran , MAURICE BETTERIDGE was announced. A full obituary will be published in the next edition.

DISCLAIMER

This magazine is published by the Wiltshire Retired Fire Fighters Association. (www.wrfa.org.uk)
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