



The Branch

June 2023

The Magazine of Wiltshire Retired Firefighters Association

Spotlight Report Condemns Fire Service Culture “Time for root and branch reform”

Home Office Inspections very recently have led to a new report being published by **His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary & Fire & Rescue Services** that states that allegations of bullying have been found in all UK fire & rescue services with a quarter of them also containing examples of racist, homophobic and misogynistic behaviour often being excused as banter.

There has been recent examples of these problems that have hit the headlines which includes cases of alleged misconduct within Dorset & Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service, but the Inspectorate fears that these publicised cases may only be the tip of the iceberg.

HMI Roy Wilshire OBE, QFSM, who was until recently Chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council and before that was CFO of Hertfordshire has been particularly strong in his criticism largely aimed at his former colleagues who manage the service. Mr Wilshire calls for the sector to get a grip on how it handles misconduct because staff need to feel able to report allegations without fear of reprisals. He also calls for a national barred list on which should be placed the names of any member of a fire & rescue service found guilty of gross misconduct to stop them continuing in employment in any FRS.



HMI Roy Wilshire

Spotlight Report makes 35 recommendations. CFOs, national fire bodies and government urged to implement them as a matter of urgency!

Examples of bullying and harassment discovered by HMIs include:

- *A senior officer referring to a Black colleague using the “n-word” and describing it as “having a laugh”.*
- *Two male firefighters joking with a female colleague that they were “going to rape her”, and three of them acting out the rape together.*
- *Homophobic abuse found written on a firefighter’s locker.*

The defence that such misconduct is limited to a small number of members of the service is no longer accepted as the wider extent of the need for change emerges.



Our Spring Lunch



A happy and hungry party of WRFA members gathered on April 16th to enjoy a Sunday lunch together at **The Well, Bulkington**. As always at our social events it was a joy to be together again and the meal was top class too.





Car parking and disabled access was easy



Roger Tombs & John Craig



Frances Mills & Kath Penfold



Janet Gurney, Christine Sutherland, Mac Jackson



SUMMER LUNCH & AGM 6th August 2023



**The Hourglass, Horton Avenue,
Devizes Marina, SN10 2RH**



**Meet, greet & coffee : 10.30am
AGM : 11.00am
Lunch : 1.00pm**



**Lunch
2 Courses
£20.00 members &
spouses/partners
£24.00 for Guests**

**Booking form on website www.wrfa.org.uk or
hard copy with magazine sent by Royal Mail.**

ON-CALL ELEMENT OF THE FIRE SERVICE SHRINKING

On-Call Firefighters (OCFF) used to be called ‘*retained*’. These men and women are the part-time element of the fire & rescue service. It has never been an easy task to recruit and retain a sufficient quantity of part-timers to ensure a reliable response to emergency calls, but when this is achieved the service OCFFs provide is economical and efficient. The problem is that in recent times despite the efforts being applied to advertising vacancies and recruiting, the number of OCFFs throughout the UK has declined to an alarming degree.

“The on-call model needs attention to make sure it is more sustainable and works well...”

Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Service 2020

The Government has expressed concern at the declining state of a vitally important element of the nation’s emergency services and hoped that chief fire officers and fire authorities would respond positively. In fact, the numbers of OCFFs in the UK has not increased but has declined significantly.

In 2010 there were 14,427 OCFFs in the UK and by 2022 the number had fallen to 11,562 according to the Home Office. The inevitable result of this shortfall in OCFFs is the increasing number of emergencies that could not be dealt with by the local OCFF fire station due to the station being off the run due to lack of OCFFs. This has produced some embarrassing situations when the fire has been within sight of the local fire station but the first attendance fire engines had to be sent from fire stations many miles away. There is one recorded case of such an incident where a female died in a house fire.



History shows that in our country it is only when a single fire claims multiple lives that public concern, indeed, anger is stirred and questions are asked in Parliament and in coroner’s court. It must be a distinct probability that this lack of reliability of the OCFF part of the FRS will contribute to a multi-fatality fire that catches the headlines.

The success achieved by the fire & rescue service in the last 30 years in running highly successful fire safety programmes is said to be working against the recruitment and retention of OCFFs. The number of fires has been very significantly reduced which leads to OCFFs becoming bored. In the absence of call-outs many OCFFs become despondent and resign. Where similar issues have been encountered in other countries such as the USA and much of Europe, the activity level of both fulltime and part-time staff has been increased by combining the fire service with the emergency ambulance service.



HEALTH MATTERS

News of those dealing
with illness.



GLENN FOREMAN

Glenn reports that he is daily having to cope with not one but a number of serious health conditions including a cardiac condition and Crohns disease. In November he had another heart operation in Bournemouth aimed at easing his angina. He has had a very rough start to this year due to recurring illness and we wish him a better period of health for the rest of 2023 and beyond.



JERRY & PAT WILLMOTT

Jerry has been in GWH, Swindon for quite a long time but was discharged on 21st May. He is being cared for at his son's home in Swindon. Jerry has been suffering from recurring infections and has had two toes amputated. Pat is still in the house in Potterne which has just been put up for sale. Investigations are being made into the possibility of Jerry and Pat moving into a retirement complex. Pat is still requiring frequent treatment on her foot which has restricted circulation. We send best wishes to both Jerry and Pat.



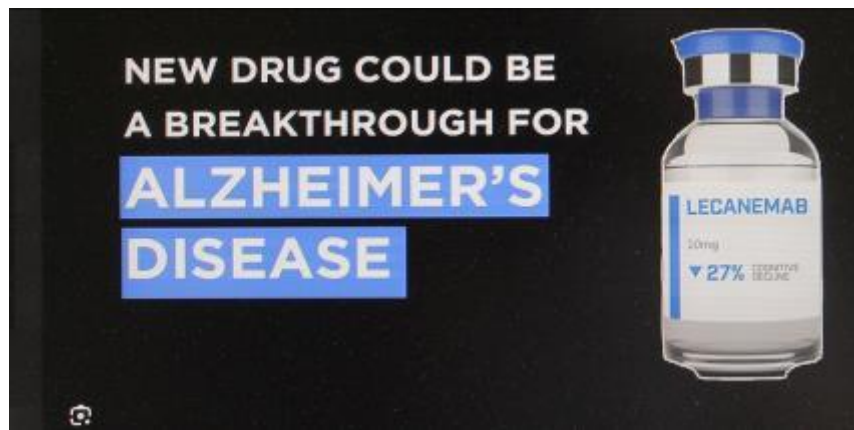
LOUISE FIELDING

Our chairperson, Louise, has become another victim of the uneven paving that is so commonplace these days. Louise tripped and fractured a bone in her foot. We hope she is not in too much pain and discomfort and that the surgical boot she is having to wear she will soon not need.

AUDREY WANNELL

Audrey recently suffered a minor stroke known as a transient ischaemic attack (T.I.A.) and is recovering at home. She was not admitted to GWH as an in-patient. Audrey's daughter, Heather, is caring for Audrey who is being monitored carefully to spot any deterioration in her health quickly. We wish Audrey a good recovery and better days ahead.





In the Autumn of 2022 the news was announced that clinical trials of the new drug, **Lecanemab**, could be seen as a treatment for sufferers from **Alzheimer's Disease**. This drug is the first potentially disease-altering therapy to come through phase 3 clinical trials. Lecanemab met its primary endpoint by reducing patient's cognitive decline by 27%. This is a far superior result to other drugs that have been tried.

Naturally, the news caused a wave of excitement through the medical world and some saw it as a very encouraging breakthrough. However, medical opinions are divided with some doctors saying that they feel it is too early to place too much emphasis on the clinical trial results.



Readers will perhaps not be surprised to learn that the FIRE FIGHTERS CHARITY is finding times hard financially. For the first time in its history, our charity is looking for new ways to supplement the traditional forms of raising income which have been reliant upon the fundraising by individual firefighters and members of the fire service community.

The charity is seeking businesses across the UK who are prepared to fund the mental health and wellbeing of fire service personnel. The charity has seen a very significant increase in demand for mental health services since the pandemic. In parallel with the increasing calls upon its services the charity is facing increased running costs due to the cost of living increases.

Despite the challenges it is facing the FIRE FIGHTERS CHARITY is pledging that it will continue never to turn its back on those needing support.

This is the number to ring if you need support from the charity

0800 389 8820



Savernake Munitions Disaster Memorial



Photos by Dorset & Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service



CFO Ben Ansell
GM Wayne Presley
CM Richard Lake
CM Michael Grimshaw

On 2nd January, 1946 blast waves radiated out from a railway siding at the Army munitions depot at Cadley, near Marlborough. Fires were started and property as far away as the town of Marlborough, two miles away, suffered damage. Very sadly, eight soldiers were killed. The initial explosion was followed by others and heroic efforts by soldiers, railway staff and firefighters succeeded in moving to safety railway trucks containing 1,000 tonnes of bombs, shells and mines. **On Sunday 23rd April, 2023 a new memorial to the disaster was unveiled in Marlborough.**



CFO Ansell lays a wreath



The wreath laid by CFO Ansell

The memorial is located alongside the Town Hall. The ceremony was attended by the mayor and other civic dignitaries, Army officers, fire and police officers.

The National Fire Service attended the disaster with pumps and crews from Marlborough, Pewsey, Andover, Swindon and Devizes with Company Officer Joe Brain as senior fire officer. The bravery of CO Brain and that of Section Leader Vane was recognised by the award of the George Medal to each of them. Five other NFS members received the British Empire Medal.



The NFS era appliance owned by the Wannell family attended.



The Standard Bearers from four Royal British Legion branches attended



**The Army provided a piper and an armed honour guard.
The thoughts of all present must have been for those who died in the disaster
and in recognition of the brave men of the Army, GWR and the NFS who spared
the Marlborough area many more casualties and property damage.**



Direct Entry Scheme Launched by Fire Chiefs



The National Fire Chiefs Council has announced that it is launching a scheme that will enable those with **proven leadership skills, from a variety of sectors, to apply for station manager posts in UK fire & rescue services without needing to have Fire Service experience or to have followed the traditional promotional route.**



Rob Barber

Direct Entry Project Executives CFO Dawn Whittaker (East Sussex FRS) CFO Rob Barber (Staffordshire FRS)



Dawn Whittaker

A recruitment agency has already begun seeking candidates who will be expected to acquire, develop and demonstrate skills and expertise in management and command functions, as set out in a nationally agreed applicable role maps. Seven fire and rescue services have agreed to join the pioneering pilot to self-fund a direct entrant. The seven FRSs are East Sussex, Staffordshire, Oxfordshire, Shropshire, Avon, Leicestershire and North Wales.

The project has been launched to address some of the recommendations in the HMICFRS *State of Fire* report. In this report, the inspectorate states, *“To provide the best possible response to the public, services need to be able to choose from the widest talent pool possible. The pool is currently restricted with many people feeling excluded.”*

The Fire Service College will partner with the NFCC and early adopting entrant services to deliver a training programme. **Although direct entry is a not a new concept this is the first time there has been a national, robust and quality assured direct entry process and programme.**

“By diversifying those in our more senior roles we can invest in the future of our sector...”

CFO Dawn Whittaker



SNIPPITS

News in Brief



National Fire Chief's Council Appoint Nick Ross as Chair of Trustees

Nick Ross has been appointed by the NFCC to be the independent chair of the board of trustees. Nick developed from his journalism skills to be recognised as one of the UK's most respected safety campaigners. Following on from being the presenter of the TV 'Crimewatch' programme Nick accepted an invitation from CFO John Craig of Wiltshire Fire Brigade to assist in promoting sprinkler protection in residential properties. This brought him into contact with campaigning for fire safety which is an interest he still maintains. Nick always checks out the scientific evidence and integrity before putting his weight behind any safety campaign.



Drivers Increasingly Dazzled By Modern Headlights

New research carried out by the RAC has concluded that 89% of the drivers who took part in the survey consider that the headlights on modern cars are too bright and dazzle drivers of oncoming vehicles very often. The RAC consulted 2,700 drivers about their experience of night driving on UK roads. A common view expressed by the survey participants was that it is often impossible to tell if the headlights of an approaching vehicle are dipped or on full beam.



The problem of dazzling headlights is known to have caused a significant number of drivers to avoid night driving. The regulations governing vehicle lighting are decided at international level. The RAC survey has shown that the majority of the drivers consulted wish to see the regulations put under review.

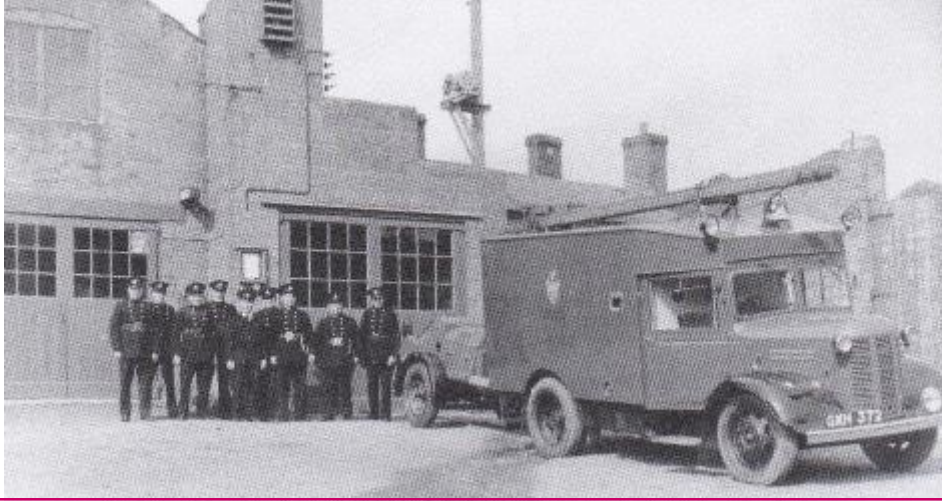
Tony Andrews Resigns From Executive Committee

Tony Andrews has been forced by a combination of personal circumstances to tender his resignation from the WRFA Executive Committee. His reluctant decision was made after many years of faithful service on the committee as a member for the South Area. He will be maintaining his membership of our Association. We thank Tony for his contribution to the work of the EC and wish him well.





A Touch of Nostalgia



MARKET LAVINGTON FIRE STATION

Many readers will be surprised to know that there used to be a fire station in the village of Market Lavington. The ATV towing a trailer pump is index number GXH 372. The stations like Market Lavington were designated 'Light Units' and they survived until 1953. The ATV continued giving good service until 1966. Looking at the number of retained personnel in the picture the problems of recruiting must have been much easier then.



CHILMARK VICARAGE : 15th MARCH 1989

A tragic fire at this vicarage during the late evening spread rapidly to block the staircase and the vicar, his wife and small son had difficulty escaping. The three small daughters all perished in the fire. The tragedy caused the Salisbury Diocese to adopt a policy of fitting smoke alarms in all vicarages and also sprinkler systems to those being built or renovated.

FINAL SALUTE



JOSEPH ('Joe') NASH

15th March 1929 to 22nd March 2023

Joe was born in Normanton, West Yorkshire, a small mining community. He was very proud throughout his 94 years of his Yorkshire roots. The very early days of his life were hard because Joe's mother, Phoebe, was widowed when he was only 2. It was Joe's grandmother, Rebecca, who took on the responsibility of raising Joe because Phoebe had to work to put food on the table.

Joe finished his education at Normanton technical college, aged 16. He first worked as a mechanic and then as a painter and decorator. At age 18, Joe was called up to do his National Service and he was conscripted into the Royal Horse Artillery. His military service eventually saw him posted to Larkhill in Wiltshire and in 1948 he met Grace in Swindon Empire Theatre. They fell in love and married in St Bartholomew's Church, Wootton Bassett on 1st March, 1952. Grace was just 16 years old.

After his devotion to Grace, Joe's next love in life was the Fire Service. He joined Wiltshire Fire Brigade in 1956 and initially served at Swindon. In 1960 he moved to Somerset Fire Brigade as a Sub Officer and later a further move was made to Oxford. In 1965 Joe moved to Warwickshire where he served at Nuneaton, Rugby and Stratford-on-Avon.

In 1976 Joe moved to Gloucestershire where he served in three different roles while based very happily with the family in the village of Frampton on Severn. Joe rose to the rank of Deputy Chief Fire Officer and took retirement after 30 years of service with distinction in 1986. Sadly, Grace passed away on 4th July 2018. After his funeral service on 13th April 2023 at St Bartholomew's Church in Royal Wootton Bassett Joe was laid to rest with Grace in Royal Wootton Bassett.

Joe was a loyal and valued member of this association and we miss both him and Grace very much. Rest in Peace, Joe.

DISCLAIMER

The views published in this magazine are not necessarily shared by the
DORSET & WILTSHIRE FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE