

The Branch

FEBRUARY 2024

SERVING
FIRE
VETERANS

The Magazine of Wiltshire Retired Firefighters Association

CLIMATE CHANGE & THE FIRE SERVICE

This winter has brought home to many parts of the UK, including Wiltshire, that the impact of climate change is starting to be felt in earnest. A prolonged period of rain caused severe flooding, closing roads inundating homes and many other types of property, **including Marlborough Fire Station**. The fire appliances had to be moved into an alternative building that will serve as a temporary base to the Marlborough on-call fire crews for several months until the damage to the station can be repaired.



Photo by Marlborough Fire Station

Dorset & Wiltshire firefighters used boats and rafts to transfer people stranded in their flooded homes to dry land and safety. Some of those rescued in this way spoke to the press in praise of the work done by the firefighters at a time when their own fire station was knocked out of use by flood water.

Before Christmas WRFA member, Marion Taylor, was forced from her home in Royal Wootton Bassett by flash flooding. Unfortunately, as water poured into her house some 999 calls for help were not attended due to spate call conditions and Marion's was one of them. For several months she has been living in Tockenham with her daughter..

continued from front page

Of course, flooding is but one of the damaging and dangerous affects attributed to climate change and global warming. Many parts of the world are seeing an increase in drought and with that comes the risk of wild fires. Compared to other parts of the world such as France, Spain and the USA, the UK has experienced relatively short periods of the wild fire hazards and 2023 was a particularly easy year for wild fires in the UK. But we can expect that if the “experts” on climate change are giving accurate predictions last year will prove to be an exception and future UK summers will bring extended periods of dry, hot weather and then will come the wild fires.

Many WRFA members are old enough to remember the UK summer of 1976. In the summer of that year we experienced a nine week period with very little rainfall and the UK was parched from Lands End to John O’Groats. The crisis was serious enough for HMG to appoint a Minister for Drought. In urban areas we saw standpipes shipped on fire hydrants from which the public could draw water because household supplies were cut off.

Inevitably, the fire calls shot up and all fire brigades were under extreme pressure. Mutual aid arrangements soon began to creek, groan and eventually fail. It was no good Fire Control calling for help from over the border because they were in trouble too!



The Great Drought

1976

With a repeat of the 1976 drought likely on not just occasional years but on most years it is a reasonable assumption that planning for them must surely be a high priority for the chief fire officers of today. This planning and preparation will no doubt have to consider the fact that the fire & rescue services of today have less resources than we had in 1976. The number of pumps off the run because of the difficulties in recruitment and retention poses a big problem if/when a widespread and sustained drought hits the UK again. The situation became critical in 1976 with some fires not getting the attendance they deserved or not being attended at all. That was the situation when the fire & rescue service was in a relatively strong position. Whether the future?

One fire & rescue service does not appear to be too concerned about the future demands upon it. The Avon Fire & Rescue Service is considering taking 40 fulltime firefighter posts out of its establishment. Presumably this indicates that there is a surplus of personnel on the fire stations in Avon at the moment and the CFO and the politicians are confident their resource levels will meet the public demand. Time will tell if cutting establishments when climate change looms over the nation is a wise move. When the first so called Cold War ended the Government came to the conclusion that the reduction in the threat of nuclear war removed the justification for keeping the Civil Defence Services and they were disbanded in 1968. This included the Auxiliary Fire Service and the excellent emergency equipment that the AFS was trained to use. Things have changed and in addition to the workloads already here due to climate change the threat of conventional and nuclear attack is back. In the light of all written here how sad that the AFS has gone.

NEW MEMBER

IAN RENNIE

With very great pleasure we have welcomed Ian into the association. He joined Wiltshire Fire Brigade and served in the county for all of his 38 years. He retired as the Group Manager based at Salisbury. He lives at Winterbourne Stoke with his wife 'Babs'. Ian lists his interests as dogs, voluntary work, gardening, walking. He watches a lot of sport and his first love is rugby.

We wish Ian and Babs many years of happy fellowship with us.



ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS

Yes folks, the time to secure your continued membership of WRFA is fast approaching. The sum due is only **£15** and there are several methods of payment on **1st April**,

Automatic Deduction : Over 90 ex-members of Wiltshire Fire Brigade, Wiltshire FRS or Dorset & Wiltshire FRS use this very easy method. It only applies to those on one of the fire pension schemes. Just give me your payroll number and the subscription will be deducted from your April pension payment and paid to WRFA.

Fast Bank Transfer : If you bank online, you may pay your dues by transferring the money into the account 77-50-05, number 28196668 Wiltshire Retired Firefighters Association.

Cheque : Please make cheque payable to Wiltshire Retired Firefighters Association and send to John Crag, 12a Gaisford Chase, WORTON, Devizes SN10 5RX. You can do this any time between now and 1st April.

Standing Order : You can give your bank an instruction to pay your annual subscription every year on 1st April until you choose to cancel it. This is known as a standing order. You can obtain a form from John Craig by phoning 01380 726343.

The form should be sent to your bank at least by 1st March to give time for the instruction to be processed.

Cash. : Cash payments are acceptable . However it is not recommended that you send cash through the post.





HEALTH MATTERS



BRUCE BRINGLOE

Bruce is having a hard time suffering simultaneously with four chronic illnesses. This has caused him to be housebound to the bungalow that he and Janet share in the centre of Devizes. He has to take massive amounts of medication to keep his ailments under some control. Even with the medicines Bruce frequently loses consciousness and falls, sometimes resulting in injury. Janet is valiantly doing a great job as Bruce's carer. Area representatives of WRFA are keeping in touch with Bruce and Janet and giving as much help as possible. We wish them well.



MIC POUND

Mic now lives in Herefordshire but he has faithfully maintained his membership of WRFA . He now writes to us all as follows :

“Hi Fellow Wrinkles,

Mic Pound (ex-Stratton) here. It's 30th December 2023 and I just got great news yesterday. For the second time in ten years cancer has snuck up on me and for the second time, the good old NHS has cut it out and rescued me. Let's hear it for the NHS and all who sail in her! My favourite nurse is The One that I was lucky enough to marry, Joan, who takes amazing care of me. She is The Lady with the Gramp. Thank you, my love.

This latest episode came about thanks to BOWEL SCREENING PROGRAMME, available at age 60 (reducing to 50) of which I am an avid follower. Having lost a close family member to this vile disease , I am well aware of the value of vigilance. To those who may be reticent about that sort of thing, I would scream from the rooftops to encourage you to put a carp in an envelope (yes, that does say 'carp' - let's keep it clean) and post it. You will thank yourself later and your loved ones will too. My message to you all is cherish your loved ones, cherish your health, keep smiling and have a great '24.

All the best, Mic

JOHN & DEANA GENTLEMAN



John and Deana are both under the care of GWH, Swindon as out-patients at present.

Deana began to feel very unwell before Christmas and she was found to have a disorder of the blood that required investigation. Deana developed appendicitis and had to be admitted for surgery. The removal of her appendix did not cure the blood disorder. In fact the appendicitis was caused by the condition of the blood allowing infection to take a grip on the appendix.

Multiple tests have been taken and Deana awaits the results of these.

John has become concerned that he becomes breathless quite quickly and has asked for an appointment with his cardiologist. This has been granted and he expects to be seen very soon.

ATRIAL FIBRILATION

Atrial fibrillation is a heart condition that causes an irregular and often faster than normal heart rate. Atrial fibrillation is the most common heart rhythm disturbance affecting 1.4 million people in the UK. It can affect any age but **it is more common in the elderly.**

The normal heart rate is between 60 and 100 beats per minute.

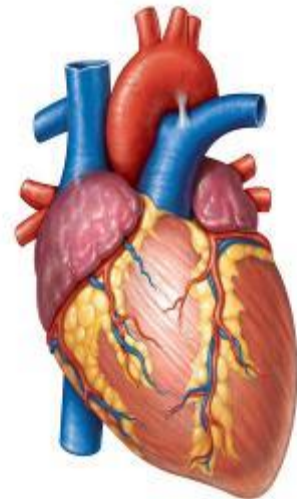
If the heart goes into AF the chambers of the heart stop working efficiently and some blood can start to pool and clot. If a clot is then pumped to the brain this causes a stroke which can result in death or disablement.

The symptoms of AF are irregular heart beats and fast heart rate. In some cases the heart rate can be considerably higher than 100. The patient may feel dizziness, shortness of breath or tiredness. There may be palpitations of the heart. In some cases AF does not produce any symptoms and the patient may be unaware that they have an irregular heartbeat.

The causes of AF are not fully understood but it is more likely to affect people with other conditions such as high blood pressure, obesity or heart disease.

Treatments include medication to prevent a stroke and control heart rate or rhythm. In some cases an electric shock is administered to restore normal heart rate and rhythm (cardioversion).

Some cases require a treatment called catheter ablation which involves destroying the area of the heart causing the abnormal rhythm by means of radiofrequency energy. This is usually followed by the fitting of a pacemaker. (*Information from NHS*)





Congratulations!

SAM HONoured BY THE KING

In the NEW YEAR HONOURS LIST Station Manager at Trowbridge, SAM ALLISON, was awarded the King's Fire Service Medal.

Sam has been recognised for his drive and passion in promoting greater inclusivity, including his significant efforts with harder to reach communities

During the pandemic Sam led the Service's efforts to locate and persuade those living in remote locations such as canal boats to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

Outside the fire & rescue service Sam has recently been appointed the first black soccer referee in the Premier League for 15 years. He took charge of his first Premier League game on Boxing Day.

Sam joined the fire & rescue service as an on-call firefighter at Melksham in 2004. He became a substantive firefighter at Trowbridge in 2012. Since then he has risen to become the Station Manager. We offer our warmest congratulations to Sam.



RETIREMENT OF CAROLE HARRIS



Carole Harris retired in August at a Watch Manager in Dorset & Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service Control. Carole served for a total of 36 years and saw many changes in the fire control during that time, one of the most significant being the amalgamation of Dorset FRS with Wiltshire FRS.

Carole comes from a fire service family, her father, Roy, passed away only recently after many years in retirement from Wiltshire Fire Brigade.

Carole lives with her partner in Swindon and we sincerely hope that Carole will, like her father, join us in the WRFA.

We wish Carole many years of happy and healthy retirement which is what she deserves after so many years of high quality service.

Photos on this page & front cover by Dorset & Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service





SOCIAL EVENTS



CHRISTMAS FESTIVE LUNCH



For the second consecutive year the WRFA held its Christmas Festive Lunch at Bowood Hotel Spa & Golf Resort near Calne.

It was a very enjoyable occasion with 50 members and guests dining together in the Wycombe & Kerry Suite.

We were delighted to welcome Graham Hill-Holgate, the General Secretary of the British Fire Services Association, to another WRFA social event.

Graham presented Peter Mills with an inscribed vase to mark the gratitude and appreciation felt by the BFSA for Peter's amazing length of service to the BFSA. His dedication and loyalty have been exemplary, always putting the needs of others before his own.

Peter is continuing to serve the BFSA and is the local man to contact if help from the BFSA Members Welfare Fund is needed.



The Kerry and Wycombe Suites were both used to accommodate our celebration. From noon members and guests began to arrive and 'slake the dust of the road' with aperitifs served by the very attentive barperson, Joshua, from the well stocked bar. The drinks were enjoyed in the lounge area as we all renewed our friendships and made new friends.

The food was cooked and served to the high standard we have come to expect at Bowood. The service at table was friendly and competent under the eye of Rebecca who supervised the presentation of the meal. After the dining we held a raffle that raised £209.00 for WRFA funds. Everyone left for home in good spirits.

The feedback from members about this event has all been very positive. It is clear that the Bowood Hotel Spa and Golf Resort is very popular with WRFA members.

On the strength of this a decision has been made to hold the WRFA Spring Lunch at Bowood. It promises to be another good one. Don't miss it!



SPRING LUNCH



Monday

8th April 2024

Cash bar from noon

Lunch at 1.00pm



Bowood Hotel Spa & Golf Resort

Derry Hill, SN11 9PQ

Two-courses £26.00

Booking form on website

www.wrfa.org.uk



Good food
Good drink
Good company
Don't miss it!



GOVERNING THE WRFA.

**Would YOU like to lend a
HAND?**

February is the time of year when members of this Association are invited to stand for election or re-election to the Executive Committee at the AGM in August. Or, you could invite another member to stand having first obtained their permission to do so. For more details or to obtain a nomination form, please contact JOHN CRAIG on johncraig7@btinternet.com or phone 01380 726343.

FINDING LIFE

A STRUGGLE?

ARE YOU IN CRISIS ?

**Call the CRISIS LINE
at**



THE FIRE FIGHTERS CHARITY

Any day, any hour

Expert help available

PHONE

0300 373 0896

For routine access to services 0800 389 8820



Photo by South Yorks FRS

SMOKE GETS IN YOUR EYES

Amongst Other Places!

How I Came To Understand

TACTICAL FIRE VENTILATION

JOHN CRAIG OStJ, QFSM, FIFireE

CHAPTER ONE

I was not in the fire service when a fire happened in Leicester that was to have a significant impact on my thoughts, actions and writing on this subject in the decades to come.

The fire in question occurred on 16th January, 1962. I was 17 years old and living with my parents on the estate of fire brigade owned houses around the Central Fire Station in Leicester. My father, Frank Craig, was the Senior Fire Prevention Officer for Leicester City Fire Brigade in the rank of Assistant Divisional Officer. I was a clerk employed by the Commercial Union Insurance Company.

THE FIRE , “The One That Got Away”

A hosiery company trading as F.Ellis Ltd occupied a factory of four floors and basement 40ft x 120ft. This large building with considerable stock, machinery and floor space on which to carry it was part of a terraced block. On one side was a printing works. On the other side was the college of art and technology. To the rear was a factory occupied by a throwster business. All these buildings and two other smaller premises suffered fire damage, the building of origin being burnt out completely.



All four floors and basement well alight.
Photo, Malc Tovey Archives & Leicester Mercury

On the morning after the fire my father was too exhausted to tell my mother and I much about the fire but I did later find out more from him. The fire had become a Brigade Call which meant that off duty brigade personnel , including my father, were recalled to duty to crew reserve appliances that were needed at the fire.

I joined Leicester City Fire Brigade in June 1963 and after training was posted to the Central Fire Station. Many of the men on my watch had fought the Ellis fire and when on night duty in the dormitory the chat before slumber overtook us often turned to the subject of that particular fire. I always tuned in carefully to what was said. It was easy to understand that this fire was nearly under control when something went very wrong. I yearned to know more. It was obvious from what I heard that Chief Fire Officer Errington McKinnell OBE, MIFireE was very fortunate not to have lost some men that night and five did need hospital treatment.

Why dd this fire grow to become so serious so quickly? I know why and here it is.

FIRST ATTENDANCE : The alarm was raised by Pearson heat detectors in the basement. The automatic alarm signal was received by Fire Control at 21.58hrs and immediately the first attendance of Pump Escape, Major Pump and Turntable Ladder was sent.

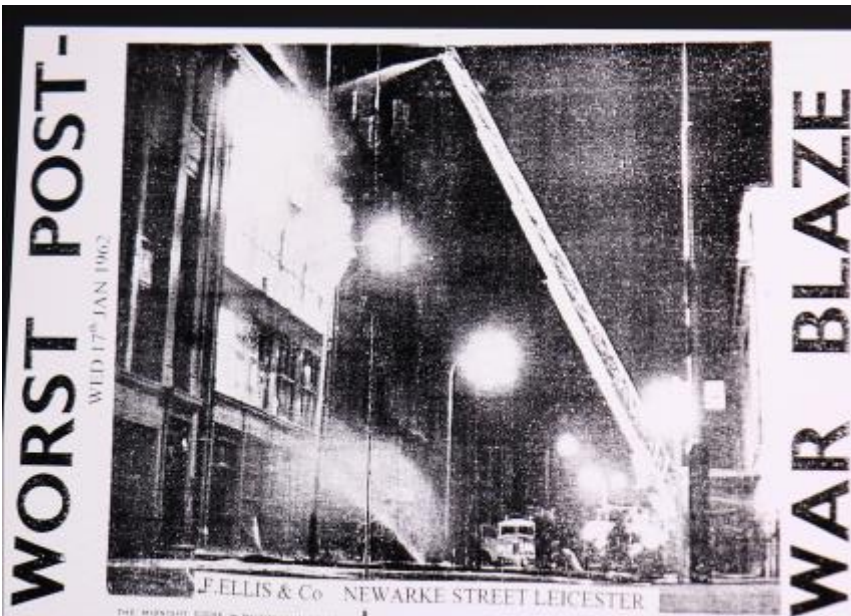
The factory was only about a mile from the fire station in Lancaster Road and so the running time was short. In only **12 minutes** an informative message was sent by Divisional Officer George Alexander, **“Basement well alight, 2 jets and BA in use.”**

DCFO Eddie McCoy was soon in attendance and at 22.30 he sent the first **assistance message “MAKE PUMPS 4”**. This caused CFO McKinnell to attend and the Pump Escape from Eastern Station was mobilised. Another Major Pump from Central Station was also sent.

At 22.34 DCFO McCoy sent an urgent radio call **“ Ambulance required immediately”**. The teams of BA wearers trying to find and hit the seat of fire in the basement were taking a lot of punishment and some were being overcome by heat exhaustion. The working conditions for the BA teams were made so difficult because the **open lift shaft** running from the basement to the top floor had been covered at ground floor level by spray jets effectively sealing the primary route for smoke & heat from the area of fire.

In 1962, fresh in the memories of British firefighters were the two basement fires in London, Smithfield Market and Covent Garden, at which LFB lost a Station Officer and Fireman at one and another Station Officer at the other. CFO McKinnell and his men must have been thinking, **“is this to be our Covent Garden?”**

The Emergency Tender which carried 8 Proto breathing apparatus sets was mobilised and the CFO ordered supplies of Protosorb CO2 absorbent and the large oxygen cylinders to be sent. The CFO clearly had the plan to settle down to a long, hard fire fight with BA wearers being carted off to the Royal Infirmary when the conditions in the basement overwhelmed them.



“The Worst Post War Fire in Leicester”
Photo : Malc Tovey Archives & Leicester Mercury

But the situation was soon to change very dramatically.

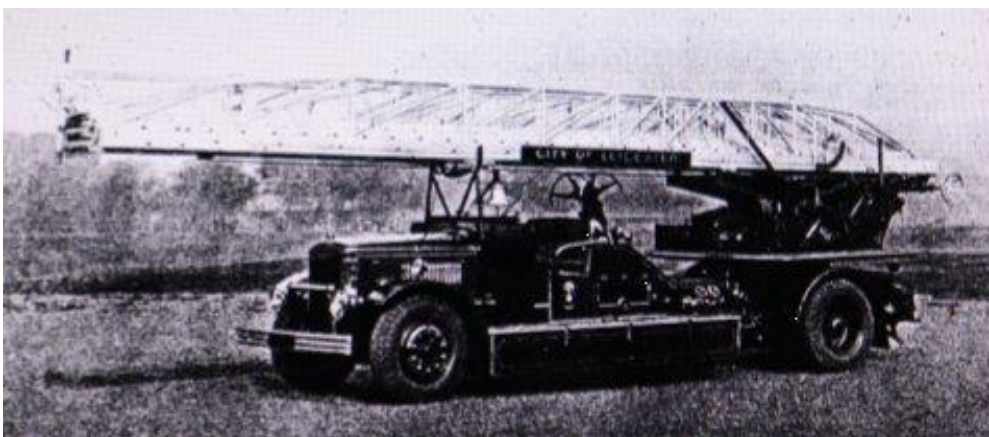
I cannot be certain who gave the order but assuming it was the CFO, he ordered **that the sprays sealing the lift shaft to be knocked off.**

Fireman Frank Woodcock was one of the BA wearers in the basement when this happened. He told me that suddenly the dense, acrid smoke surrounding them and the intense heat began to disappear and for the first time the branchmen got a clear view of the seat of fire and immediately directed their jets onto rolls of burning cloth. Thinking they had won the fight,

Fireman Woodcock and his partner emerged from the basement and walked to the Breathing Apparatus Control Point.

Frank and his fellow BA wearer asked for their tallies to be returned from the control board commenting as they did so that the fire was beaten but the Breathing Apparatus Control Officer was looking upwards and replied, ***“Really, well what’s that then?”*** The BACO was drawing attention to flickering flashes of flame visible in the windows of the top (third) floor. Seconds later every window blew out in a violent flashover.

From being a basement job the fire was now involving totally the top floor and spreading. The turntable ladder was hastily got to work as a water tower at the front of the factory in Newarke Street but the fire was spreading laterally too. In Fire Control a fire call was received by automatic



fire alarm to the College of Art & Technology which was next door to Ellis Ltd. Fire Control pressed the button to make it a ‘Brigade Call’ calling in the off-duty personnel from the fire estate houses. My father was one of those and he took charge of a major pump sent to the college which had become part of a fire involving several premises.

Incredibly by today’s standards, this very serious and costly fire was dealt with by 5 pumps, 1 turntable ladder and 1 emergency tender. Five firefighters were injured enough to require hospital treatment. CFO McKinnell admitted to the press that his men had “taken a lot of punishment”. Many of the factories in the city as large as Ellis Ltd had sprinkler protection. The factory of fire origin had automatic fire detection but no sprinklers.

The CFO sent the stop message at 01.48 worded ***“Stop for F.Ellis Ltd, a building of four floors 40’x120’, all floors destroyed. 8 jets and aerial monitor in use.”*** Notice the unusual use of the word ‘destroyed’ and the omission of the mention of fire spread to multiple other premises.

The turntable ladder was 27 years old. Radiated heat from the blazing factory warped the ladder sections and damaged the appliance beyond economic repair.

The dormitory tales told of this fire stirred my curiosity and desire to learn more about fire venting as a tactic. This brought me into the company of firefighters of all ranks and also many fire engineers who had more knowledge and practical experience of this matter and who were kind enough to share their knowledge with me. *There was very little in the Manuals of Firemanship published by the UK Home Office that was of help in studying tactical fire venting.*

There is little doubt in my mind about what went wrong on that January night in 1962. The decision to allow the basement fire to vent up the lift shaft by knocking off the sprays covering the shaft would have been a good one had the turntable ladder been used to smash the windows in the top floor first. This would very probably have avoided the flashover and the subsequent uncontrolled period of fire spread. For a critical period the fire was in control and not the CFO.

In the follow-up chapters to this article I will try to explain how other experiences kept bringing me back to the lessons that could and should have been learnt from the Ellis Ltd fire. **JMC**

SAD NEWS

CFO OF WEST MIDLANDS FOUND DEAD

It was with sorrow that the WRFA received the news that CFO Wayne Brown of the West Midlands Fire & Rescue Service had been found dead at his home on 24th January. Police say that there are no suspicious circumstances.

The Fire Authority had placed CFO Brown under investigation over allegations made that accused him of falsifying his professional qualifications when being appointed to the job which carries a salary of £180,000 per annum.



STEVE BENSON



It was with very great sorrow that the news was received of Steve Benson's death.

He had been struck down by a particularly unpleasant form of dementia and it claimed his life in a remarkably short period.

Steve served at Stratton and Swindon. He was FBU Secretary for a time. His funeral is to be held on 2nd February at 1.30pm, Kingsdown Crematorium,

FULL OBITUARY IN APRIL EDITION

ROY WHITCHER



The Branch understands that Roy died on 14th January. After retiring Roy moved to Devon. He did not join this Association.

Roy served at Salisbury and was highly regarded and respected. His funeral was held in Brixham on 26th January and at the same time a wake was held for him in Salisbury. Donations in Roy's memory to the Fire Fighters Charity may be made at :

<https://roywhitcher.muchloved.com>

RIP

FINAL SALUTE



ROY HARRIS

19th February 1943 to 4th November 2023

Roy passed away after living his 80 years in a way that touched the lives of many others in a very positive way. He had been suffering from dementia in a care home but it was an aggressive infection that finally overwhelmed him.

Roy was born in Hendon and his early years instilled into him the importance of a happy family life such as he had. At the age of 15 he joined the **Royal Navy** entering a training base in Anglesey named HMS Indefatigable. Life as a sailor suited Roy and his career saw him serving on numerous warships. One tour he particularly enjoyed was aboard HMS Dampier that lasted a year and involved calling at ports in the Far East, Africa, Hong Kong and Singapore. Roy rose to the rank of Petty Officer.

In the early 1960s Roy met **Janet** while still in the Royal Navy at a ballroom in North London. Janet was to become the love of his life and they **married on 4th April 1964**. This began a very happy marriage that lasted for 45 years until Janet passed away. Roy's devotion to Janet and the degree to which he missed her when at sea made him take the decision to leave the Royal Navy. By this time they had two much loved daughters, Carole and Sharon, two further reasons not to be away at sea for too long.

On leaving the Royal Navy Roy joined the **Wiltshire Fire Brigade** and so began another career that brought Roy success and respect. He was initially posted to Swindon where he became a Station Officer. He transferred in that rank to take charge at Trowbridge. Further promotions followed and his final position was in charge of fire prevention in the North Division of Wiltshire in the rank of Divisional Officer. Roy excelled in this post that gave him opportunity to display his management skills and firm grasp of technical issues. After completing 20 years service Roy was awarded the Fire Service Long Service and Good Conduct Medal by the Queen.

To help him relax and restore his energies and to assist Janet to cope with deteriorating health the couple bought an apartment in Tenerife. They later changed this for one in Spain. This time spent overseas brought many happy times and good memories.

Back in UK, Roy and Janet set up home in Royal Wootton Bassett before sadly Janet passed away. Roy found the loss of Janet hard to bear and he sought relief from his grief by taking a keen interest in international cricket and the Ashes series in particular. He followed the MCC team to lend his support in the Antipides.

Roy's funeral on 27th November was very well attended. Rest in peace, Roy.

DISCLAIMER

This magazine is published by Wiltshire Retired Firefighters Association. The views and opinions published in it are not necessarily shared by Dorset & Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service. Editor, John Craig OSTJ, QFSM, FIFireE