

The Branch

***Magazine of the Wiltshire Retired
Firefighters Association***

Autumn 2026 Edition

Welcome to my first edition of The Branch. Our usual editor John Craig has decided to take a well deserved break. May I start by thanking John for some really wonderful articles, and inclusions, over the years. I'm sure it's going to be a monumental task for me to try and 'fill his boots'. But I will attempt to.

There will be a few changes you may notice, and I hope to have regular sections dealing with a variety of subject matters.

What I will ask, is that all of you try and contribute to this important magazine. After all, it is yours. If you don't it becomes passive, and I don't want that. I want you to get involved and interreact with other members. The way we are doing this can also be found within our recently set up Facebook page, aptly titled Wiltshire Retired Firefighters Association (WRFA), which was kindly set up by our EC Representative Dave Bradbury. Many thanks Dave.

Why not join and get to know what others are reading or talking to each other about. Even better, post something yourself. I hear some of you cry from the roof tops, 'I can't do that'. You will never know until you try.

Ask a relative or a friend how it all works, they will be glad to help, I'm sure.

As you read through this you have probably noticed that the font I am using has changed from the previous one we used. It's has not been changed by accident. When I started this journey with you I was aware that there are members out there that may have trouble with reading certain types of font, so I investigated, and it appears that the one I am using (Verdana) is recommended purely to aid this.

With that said, I am open to ideas. If you feel that we can make the formatting of words slightly better, then please contact me directly with your suggestions.

My phone number is: **07723009727** or for those who have email:

stevepikewfb93@hotmail.com

AGM and Summer Lunch

At the time of reading this edition we will have had our Annual General Meeting and enjoyed our Summer Lunch, which this year was held in the Garden Room of Beechfield House Hotel in Melksham.

We send our best wishes to those members who were not well enough to attend the gathering this year.

It should be noted that our Secretary/Treasurer John Craig stood down at the meeting, and it was unanimously agreed that John be honoured for his sterling service to the Association, by becoming our President. This he accepted. We send our many thanks to John, and Margaret, for their time, and effort, over the years, ensuring we can continue as a group.

The AGM was presided over by our Chairperson Louise Fielding, and a full report will be included in the next edition.

The following members were elected on to the Executive Committee for 2026-27 as follows:

President : John Craig

Chairperson: Louise Fielding

Vice Chairperson: John Cox

Secretary & Treasurer: Steve Pike

North Area Representatives: Mick Pinnegar and Brian Watts

Central Area Representatives: Vince Kimber

South Area Representatives: Ludo McCaulay and Paul Jaycock

Countywide Representative: Dave Bradbury

Please don't leave it to others, become involved yourselves. Remember to look out for nomination forms next year. I will remind you in our Spring 2027 edition, so you have plenty of time to think about it.



What is a Home Fire Safety Visit?

A Home Fire Safety Visit, sometimes referred to as a Safe and Well Visit, is a completely free service offered by Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service to help keep our communities safer in their homes.

All our advice is based on good will- we cannot enforce people to follow our recommendations, however we suggest that you take on board our suggestions to keep you as safe as possible in your home. During a visit we carry out a room by room check to provide you with appropriate advice to keep your household safer from the risk of fire.

We also work closely with several partner organisations who may be able to support you in other areas. For example, Age UK or Warm & Safe. We can signpost you to these partners if required.

Your safety is important to us , so to help us before we visit your home, we will telephone you to discuss any concerns you may have and arrange to visit you at a convenient time. If we identify that you need detection during the visit, we can install our standard smoke, heat or carbon monoxide detectors where appropriate.

The Home Fire Safety discussion will cover topics such as:

- Using electricity safely
- Cooking safely
- Making an escape plan
- What to do if there is a fire
- Keeping children safe
- Good practice – nighttime routine and other points relevant to you
- Identifying and discussing any further support you may need if necessary

Call **0800 038 2323** and speak to a member of our Prevention Administration Team

We reserve the right to cancel or postpone an arranged visit in unforeseen circumstances. Where this happens, we will do our best to rearrange.



Bonfires and garden safety

Bonfires are very common in the summer, but they can get out of control very easily. If you want to burn off garden waste, here's some safety advice.

- Site any bonfires well away from buildings, fences, trees and garden structures.
- Have a garden hose to hand in case the fire starts to get out of control
- Don't light a bonfire on a windy day, as it could flare up more than you expect
- Be courteous to your neighbours – if you're planning a substantial bonfire, let them know, and stay with it all times to ensure that it remains safe
- If you're intending to have a large bonfire, use our online form – we often receive emergency calls from people who can see lots of smoke, and it helps us to know where this could be a controlled burn
- Never use flammable liquids such as petrol or paraffin to start a bonfire.

Garden Equipment

- Refill garden heaters, petrol mower etc in the open air and don't smoke while doing so.
- Deal with any fuel spillage by allowing it to evaporate, soak into the ground, or cover with an absorbent material.
- Take care when lighting garden heaters and never move when lit. Keep away from flammable materials, such as awnings or laundry lines.
- When using candles or flares, make sure they are firmly packed into the ground.
- Keep children and pets away from naked flames and hot lanterns.
- Make sure any candles, flares and lanterns are fully extinguished when you have finished with them.



Fireworks

Fireworks are safe if you use them properly. If you're putting on a home display, you should follow some simple steps to make sure that everyone has a good time without getting hurt:

- Plan your firework display to make it safe and enjoyable, and check the time you can legally set off fireworks.
- Only buy fireworks which carry the CE or UKCA marks, keep them in a closed box, and use them one at a time.
- Read and follow the instruction on each firework, using a torch if necessary.
- Light the firework at arm's length with a taper and stand well back.
- Keep naked flames, including cigarettes, away from fireworks.
- Never return to a firework once it has been lit.
- Don't put fireworks in pockets and never throw them.
- Direct any rocket fireworks well away from spectators.
- Never use paraffin or petrol on a bonfire. (*see sheet above*)
- Make sure the fire is out and surroundings are made safe before leaving.

Follow these top tips for sparkler safety:

- It is recommended that sparklers are not given to under 5's.
- Make sure everyone handling sparklers wears gloves.
- Hold sparklers at arm's length while being lit and light one at a time.
- Don't wave sparklers about close to other people.



Fireworks (continued)

Did you know?

- It is against the law to carry fireworks in public if you're under 18.
- Fireworks must not be sold to anyone who is under 18.
- It is an offence to let off fireworks at during night hours (11pm to 7am), except on Bonfire Night (midnight), Diwali, New Year and Chinese New Year (1am).
- It is an offence under The Explosives Act 1875 to tamper with, or modify, fireworks.
- Sparklers can reach temperatures more than 15 times as hot as boiling water.

After the event

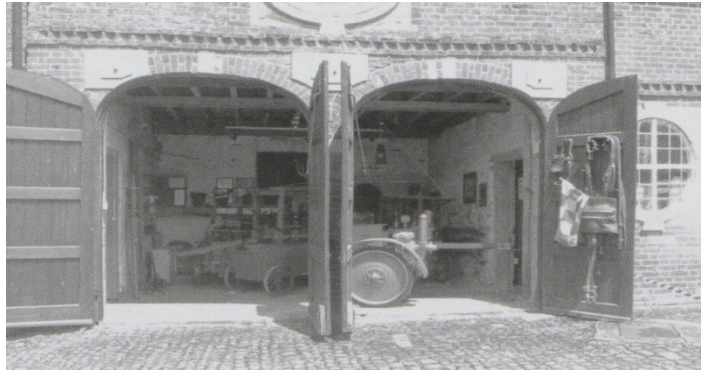
- Never put fireworks, even those which are fully spent, on the bonfire.
- Never dispose of fireworks by burying them.
- Safely dispose of fully spent fireworks.
- Soak misfired or partly spent fireworks in a container of water in an area where they cannot be tampered with (preferably away from the display site) and contact the manufacturer, or supplier, for advice on disposal.

Further advice can be found on the **RoSPA** website

Note from the Editor:.

In our present climate, additional care should be taken regarding the increased danger of 'wildfires',

'De Olde' Wiltshire Fire Brigade Museum



Some of you will recall the collection of fire service artefacts held in the Stable Block at the Manor House headquarters.

The collection consisted of old pumps, ladders, small gear and uniforms, as well as numerous photographs and documents, all depicting the origins of firefighting in the county of Wiltshire.

This collection was the brainchild of Mr Peter Thorpe, who was a senior officer in the Brigade and an enthusiast for fire service history.

Along with the assistance of a small team of volunteers, and guidance of the Wiltshire County Council museum section, the display became a registered museum, open to the public on regular occasions.

However, with the passing of time and change of personnel, the collection fell into neglect and after closure in the 1990's became a storage area for discarded items from other departments.

With the amalgamation of Wiltshire and Dorset in 2016 the future of the collection became more pressing, as the Manor House and the Stable Block were to be sold off.

With this in mind a small group of concerned members of the service approached the new management as to the future of the museum. Firstly, could a temporary storage area be made available and secondly, was there any intension to create a permanent display area for the interest and education of the public.

It soon became clear that the management response was extremely negative, with the possible outcome being that the collection would be disposed of, by way of a 'skip' if necessary.

In order, to gain time it was necessary to remove the museum items immediately from the Manor House, as the premises were now up for sale.

Arrangements were made, with the cooperation of other fire service departments, for the smaller items to be transferred to a container in Trowbridge and the larger items moved to Swindon.

Over the course of a few days a small team of volunteers cleared the non-relevant items from the museum and re-registered those items which were to be transferred to the new locations.

When this was done it gave us a breathing space to decide on the next step.

The new Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service basically had no resources for any form of visitor centre, and with the emphasis on cost there was now growing pressure for us to evacuate the container at Trowbridge which was rented and needed to be powered and serviced.

With some reluctance it was decided that rather than allow the items to be destroyed the collection would need to be dispersed to other museums, collections or organisations who would appreciate them for future generations.

Disposal

Bearing in mind that this work was done between our other 'day' jobs and the interruption of Covid, this was the most intensive part of the project.

Firstly, we had to try and identify those items which were loaned to the museum and not donated.

This was difficult as the records available were not set in any order and some of the information was often 40 years old. With basic names and postal addresses only.

We were lucky, in so far as once people knew we were closing down the museum, some came forward and claimed the items. However, some of the loaned items were found to be missing and did not form part of the re-registration of the items taken into the disposal process.

Next, we attempted to collate those items which had a specific reference to a Wiltshire Fire Station or other location. This involved such items as manual fire pumps, leather buckets, brass small gear, all of which could be placed in local displays at the station(s) or other local visitor centre.

We then contacted museums in the county, whether they be run by the Wiltshire Council or local town museums. It was hoped that these would take a significant number of items. However, this did not prove to be so as many of them have more than enough items awaiting display. And they require a high standard of provenance and health and safety assurance which we could not always provide. Still, some did come to our assistance for which we were truly grateful.

At about this time some firefighters and other service employees asked as to whether any items could be purchased. Initially, we were not sure as to this was ethical, and after some discussion it was decided that for a 'reasonable' donation to the Fire Fighters Charity the items could be released.

A special charity fund account was set up and all finances we recorded and handled by a formal charity fund collector.

By now all items had been relocated to Swindon and we still had a large number of items, many of which had no real relevance to Wiltshire, or indeed to the Fire Service, such as old cine projectors and 35mm cameras. These and other items were offered to Oxfam for use in their charity fund raising, which they were happy to accept.

Some years ago, I was member of the Fire Service Preservation Group, a registered charity of enthusiasts who preserve old fire appliances and who take part in 'living history' re-enactment displays. On contacting them, two representatives arrived to catalogue about half of the items, with the view of offering them to their members on the basis of the highest donation given to the Fire Fighters Charity. This task was undertaken with great professionalism and within a few weeks the majority of items had been sold, and over £6000 raised.

Of all the items it was only the old street escape ladder from Marlborough that we could not find a home. The ladder was partly disassembled from a previous attempt at restoration and some parts were missing.

With the now virtually empty storage areas our task was almost finished. We had sorted and disposed of the vast majority of the items. The collection had gone to persons or organisations who would appreciate them

We had raised nearly £13000 for the Fire Fighters Charity.

However, I did not want to go down I fire service history as the man who gave away all of the Brigade's collection, so I 'squirrelled' away some key items, including vintage pumps, ladders, and other small items which represented the development of firefighting, in the hope that one day there may be an opportunity for some form of public display.

These items are, at present, held at Swindon.

Now that I have retired from the service I cannot guarantee the future of this small collection as it is now in the hands of others.

KINDLY SUBMITTED BY CHRIS HARRIS.



Wilton Pump



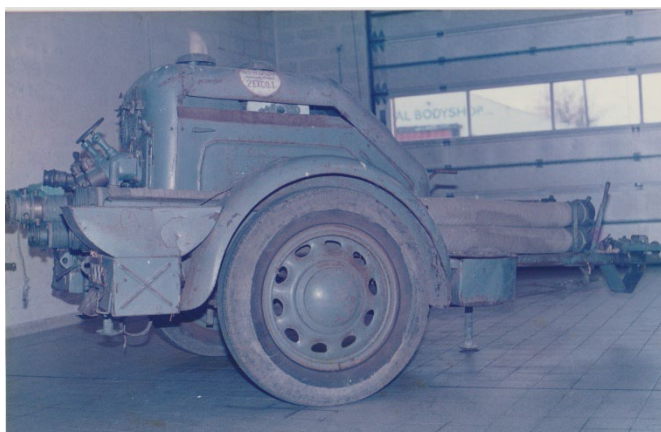
Merryweather Pump



Bowood Pump



Foam Fire Appliance



Factory Fire Pump:
Malmesbury



Street Escape: Marlborough

The London Nail Bombings



PA Photo from BBC article

BY STEVE PIKE. EX: LONDON FIRE BRIGADE

The afternoon of April 30 1999 started the same as any other for me, and the members of Green Watch A23 Euston. We undertook the 'hurly burly' of commuting in. Me, from my home in Swindon, others from around the country, to a place that was to be our second home for the next 15 hours.

I arrived at about 17:30 ready for roll call at 17:59 and change of shift at 18:00.

I made my way the second floor and entered the Station Officers dorm to change and ready myself for whatever the night sent my way.

It was always busy at Euston due to its location, and like other stations we were what they call the 'take' station for surrounding stations, being: Clerkenwell, Soho, Kentish Town and Manchester Square. That meant whenever any of these stations had a fire call Euston's Pump would be on the first attendance.

If we had a call they would be ordered on to our ground, depending who was the nearest available. To be honest, all of these stations were busy.

It started the same as every other night duty on the 'Greens' at A23 Euston. We had a full complement of Firefighters on duty to crew our Pump (P), Pump Ladder (PL) and Fire Rescue Unit (FRU). Minimum of 13, and no, superstition never came into the equation

Once changed I made my way to the office on the ground floor and was met with the usual remark, or two, from others around .. 'Alright Guvnor, yes thanks, and you?'... (continued)

... After the handover from the off going Officer in Charge it was time to go to the appliance room for Roll Call. All of the personnel who had done a mutual exchange (taking over from your opposite number on the off going Watch) were already in position, and nominations of crewing was now carried out.... it was now our turn to help the citizens of our ground. Well nearly. This was happening at the same time at all stations across London.

At this point it was my duty to check all personnel had the correct personal equipment (PPE) ready and serviceable. Handlamps working, whistles, Hazchem cards, neckerchiefs, gloves etc. Yep, all good, now other checks were undertaken.

Drivers checked their appliances, everyone tested their respective Breathing Apparatus sets and filled out their tallies. The watchroom attendant had filled in the Nominal Roll Boards and issued them to the drivers.

All necessary log book information was entered and signed as correct.

This was now getting a little after 18:00 and so far nothing untoward had happened. But someone, somewhere on Soho's ground had other ideas. Something that was going to change a lot of people's lives.... forever.

Unbeknown to us at this time, a person we now know to be David Copeland had set his latest deadly trap, in the Admiral Duncan Public House in Old Compton Street W1, on A24 Soho's ground.

Meanwhile routines carried on at both stations, and we got the standard 'cuppa' and started to plan (the best we could) our night ahead. The most important part that shift was to sort out the National Lottery for May, so everyone to the TV room and get your money out. Why I volunteered to manage that I'll never know...it was like getting blood out of a stone.

Everyone was settled ... who's first. We didn't get much further than that.

The first call-out alert of the shift came at 18:38, *(I don't have the call-sheet, so this is approximate)* everyone reacted and proceeded to the appliance room....what was it? The watchroom attendant illuminated the Green light as per the teleprinter ordering...Pump only. As I walked past the watchroom I asked what they had...'reported explosion on 24's ground'. OK, let's get back to the TV room....(continued)

The walk back to the TV room took less than a minute, as we sat down to resume..... The call-out system sprang into life again. Everyone returned to the appliance room and looked up at the indicator lights.... Red and Blue, (Pump Ladder and Fire Rescue Unit)

The FRU was, more often than not, usually mobilised on it's own, due to the greater area of London that it covered. When this happened and it was only the Blue indicator that came on, the usual shout out was 'BLUE ARMY'

So, this time we knew we were probably on this 'job' together. Everyone responded to their nominated appliances, drivers were already in the watchroom to get the ordering sheet and route card, if needed.

I took my position in the OiC's seat of the Pump Ladder and waited a few seconds for my driver, who mounted the appliance and handed me the sheet.

As I read it my heartbeat increased a little, and I can't repeat what my verbal reaction was. I pushed the appropriate button on the appliance 'Button Box' which sent a message to Control that we were mobile.

' A24 Ground. Confirmed explosion.. Admiral Duncan Public House, Old Compton Street W1. Unknown persons injured/trapped'.

(it contained more information than this, but the message got through to everyone of how serious this could be)

The distance to the incident from Euston Fire Station is approximately 1.5 miles, and it took us less than 5 minutes to get there. With my mind trying to evaluate what we could encounter, it seemed like hours.

As we arrived I could see carnage in front of me, I still remember pushing the In Attendance button on the 'Button Box'. Again, Control were informed.

Whilst crew members dismounted and started First Aid my first duty was to identify who was the Incident Commander from Soho's crews. I was met in my quest by their TL's driver (no names from this point). I asked where his guvnor was.... He's not on duty tonight, our Sub's in charge. Their Sub Officer saw my white helmet and made a bee line to me. I was given comprehensive informative of what we had, and formally took charge. I was now the Incident Commander..... (continued)

Due to the informative I had been given, and indeed what I was witnessing, my first command was... send a priority message, from me,

Make Pumps 6, Ambulances 10 unknown number of casualties, all oncoming appliances to carry station first aid equipment stocks.

Soho's TL driver repeated what I had said and replied: 'Leave it with me Guv' and away he went.

As I turned to survey the scene, and really take in what had happened my FRU OiC (Sub Officer) came up to me and said, 'you had better come and have a look in here Guvnor' and pointed to the Admiral Duncan.

We passed quite a few of the injured and I can only describe most of them as human pin cushions...but they were not pins, they were four inch nails (I won't detail the injuries any more than that). All crews at this time were doing a fantastic job attending to the injured, and as per the 'rule of thumb', were prioritising the quiet ones first.

As we both entered the building I began to understand why we needed to look, both him and his crew had already checked for persons trapped or injured...clear, this was something different. A scene of total carnage. Every surface you could see, walls, floor, ceilings furniture and fittings everything was peppered and pierced with nails, hundreds of them.

There was also the obvious signs of fatalities, suffice to say it was impossible to tell who or how many poor souls there were.

As the injured were attended to, and by now being transported away from the scene, I took it as my responsibility to check the area to see if anyone had wandered off and needed assistance. The Eastern end of the street towards Dean Street and onward to Charing Cross Road was well covered, and congested, so everyone that end could be seen to. The Western end towards Wardour Street was eerily quiet, so that's where I went. Nothing.

As I made my way back it crossed my mind that although the Area Command Unit was in attendance, in Soho Square, not one Senior Officer had made contact to take over as Incident Commander. That was dealt with later at Command level debrief...(continued)

As the incident progressed minutes turned in to hours and the usual relief crews began to arrive. All initial crews were stood down and released from the incident, but we were not. The Metropolitan Police impounded all appliances in case they contained secondary devices or evidence. We couldn't even get our shoes. So, we all trudged the short walk to Soho Fire Station to get that well deserved cuppa that we had missed out on earlier in the evening. There was a lot of chatter amongst the crews, but none of it sank in.

At last the appliances were released, and we could make our way 'home' to A23. Again, chatter but nothing meaningful. That would happen once we were cleaned up, appliances and equipment replenished, and readied to go back on the run.

I recovered my paperwork and money tin from earlier, the standby crew had put in the office for safe keeping. They were released, and the watchroom attendant informed Control. We were once again, 'on the run'.

It seemed strange but we were not mobilised again for quite some time that evening, and I think we were allowed a bit of 'down time'.

It was just after midnight that we were on the move again. This time it was 'the pair' Pump and Pump Ladder to reported explosion in a building in New Oxford Street. The expletives were numerous, but basically 'oh no not another one'. (*I'll let you put your own meaning on that...whatever you come up with, won't be wrong*)

Upon arrival the sigh of relief was fantastic. The cause was from a stone corbel which had dislodged from a building being renovated and hit the road. Stop message sent, False Alarm Good Intent, no danger to the public. Bye.

Back 'home' to A23.

This is just part of this incident's story. In the next Edition I will explain what happened next, the reasoning to all of this, and the aftermath. Unless you don't want to read it of course!

If that's the case, you'll never know.

Steve

Dr Roger Snook MD



Roger and Sue Snook

John Craig has informed us that he received the following notice from Dr Roger Snook's nephew, Andrew Hedges (In April 2026):

'Hello. My uncle, Roger Snook, died in autumn 2025. When researching for his eulogy I came across a very glowing article in The Branch, Feb 2015 issue, dealing with his contributions to emergency rescue and care.

I don't know if anyone involved in your publication would still remember him but I wondered if you maybe like to include a small notice?

Sadly his wife Sue, my aunt. Died earlier in the year in Feb 2025 after being diagnosed with Parkinson's in 2023 and I think the shock of that and the exhaustion of caring for her at home for two years finished him off.

I knew he was a well respected NHS consultant and did good work after that but I had no idea quite how influential he was.

Growing up he was just my posh uncle...I'm sorry it's taken me so long to get in touch but it's been a very bad 12 months – my mother was diagnosed with lung cancer the same month Sue died, and she has died too. Andrew'

John has sent a response to Andrew on behalf of the WRFA, and our belated condolences go to Andrew and his family.

NOTE:

The article Andrew refers to was written by John, and you can read the full account in the February 2015 back copy of The Branch.

DISCLAIMER

The views and opinions published in this magazine are not necessarily shared by the Dorset & Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Authority. Unless stated e.g. Fire Safety Notices