the branch

Magazine of the
Wiltshire Retired Firefighters Association



Winter 2026 Edition

As you see I am experimenting a little to see if any minor changes can be made to The Branch, without losing too much of its meaning.

After my first attempt I did receive some positive feed back of which I am grateful.
A couple of members sent letters of thanks. A few responses came via personal contact in conversations.

However, there was a little bit of feedback from some members, through a third party, who thought more news should be included. The only problem I have with that, is the fact The Branch is now to be quarterly, and should I include news whilst composing, it would become history when published.

There are ways we can keep you up to date with news, and we do our very best to do this. We suggest you regularly open the Association website at WRFA.ORG.UK or look at the posts on our Facebook page, Wiltshire Retired Firefighters Association (WRFA). If you join FB as a follower, and agree the rules, you can actually post articles yourself. This opens a whole new experience in relation to how you become involved with the WRFA, it becomes interactive rather than just passive.

What I will ask, and I've asked before, is that you try and contribute to this important magazine. After all, it is yours.
Perhaps some of you have stories to tell but you are not sure about putting it in words, or you want to add a picture and are not sure how to go about it.
I am willing to come to you, and we can go through the process together. Don't worry, if you don't want to have your name shown we can just make it an article.

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

stevepikewfb93@hotmail.com

DORSET & WILTSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE

Adapted, in part, from DWFRS leaflet



CHIMNEY SAFETY

A clean chimney can help prevent fires and structural damage to your property. Regular cleaning of your chimney or flue will eliminate the build up of soot and clear obstruction such as bird or animal nests, leaves and debris.
It is not enough to use a vacuum cleaner, and you should make sure that you chimney or flue is inspected regularly.

Chimneys/flues should be swept:

- At least once a year when using smokeless fuel, or bituminous coal.
- Twice a year when burning wood
- One a year when burning oil.
- Once a year when using gas.

The following safety advice should always be followed when lighting an open fire or woodburning stove.

- Don’t use flammable liquids such as petrol or paraffin to light your fire.
- Don’t burn excessive amounts of paper or rubbish.
- Don’t overload the fire with fuel.

When the fire is alight, check the loft space occasionally to make sure there is no smoke leaking from crack, defective brickwork or mortar joints.

Ensure any ash deposits after use are allowed to cool properly, and remove safely in a metal container and dispose of safely.

DORSET & WILTSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE

Adapted, in part, from DWFRS leaflet

Carbon Monoxide and Gas Safety.

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a colourless, odourless, tasteless, poisonous gas produced by incomplete burning of carbon-based fuels (including gas, oil, wood, petrol and coal)

Because you can't see it, taste it or smell it, it is highly dangerous and in certain conditions can kill quickly and without warning.

Symptoms of Carbon Monoxide poisoning

- Headaches
- Nausea.
- Dizziness.
- Breathlessness.
- Collapse.
- Loss of consciousness.

Signs of CO

- Flames on most heating appliances should be crisp and blue. Yellow or orange flames should be checked by a professional.
- Look for staining, sooting or discolouration on appliances.
- Look for increased condensation.
- The pilot light blowing out frequently.

How to stay safe from the dangers of CO

- Get coal, oil and natural gas appliances checked annually by a qualified professional.
- Fit an audible carbon monoxide alarm and always follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- Regularly test the alarm and change the batteries/alarm as required.
- Ensure there is adequate ventilation, and don't block air vents.
- Turn off the appliance and seek immediate assistance if you suspect CO or your CO alarm sounds
- Don't ever bring a BBQ or portable heater into an enclosed space without proper ventilation.

(continued)

DORSET & WILTSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE

Adapted, in part, from DWFRS leaflet

Follow these six steps if you smell gas.

DO

- Open windows and doors to help ventilate the gas.
- Turn off the gas supply at the meter and make sure any gas appliances are turned off.
- Call the National Gas emergency Number on **0800 111 999** Lines are open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

DON'T

- Smoke or use any naked flames
- Touch any electrical switches. Turning a switch on or off could ignite a gas leak.
- Enter a cellar if you smell gas, even if your gas meter is located in the cellar.

STAY SAFE

'New' Brigade Training Centre

This article was originally published in the September 1985 issue of, The Journal of The Wiltshire Fire Brigade – Moonrakers *On Watch.*

It is replicated here to remind members as to the origin of the Training Centre, which is undergoing a major refurbishment. It is hoped to bring you an update of that in the Spring 2027 issue of The Branch.

INTRODUCTION

Work commenced in April 1984 on the construction of a new training Centre for Wiltshire Fire Brigade.

The constructors were the Westbury firm of Rush and Tompkins who completed the Training Centre in the summer of 1985.

The Training Centre enables the Brigade to train Wiltshire Firefighters under realistic conditions which they encounter in actual fire situations, and to conduct fire safety courses for industry both nationally and within the county.

THE SITE

The training Centre is situated on the Hopton Industrial Estate, to the West of the main A361 Devizes to Swindon Road, approximate one mile North-East of Devizes and covers an area of 5,250 square metres (½ Hectare). Only one entrance to the site has been provided for both security and safety reasons.

There are three separate building on the site, a fire training building, lecture complex (including appliance bays) and a fire fuel store.

Car parking facilities have been provided adjacent to the entrance and the drill yard includes a marked out manoeuvring area for instruction and examinations of heavy goods driving. Two fire hydrants have been provided together with a 35,000 litre surface level open water pool.

The fire fuel store is situated adjacent to the fire rooms and from within this store a hydrant valve can be operated to re-fill the water pool, via an underground pipeline. An area of the yard will be used for oil tray fires and RTA situation exercises.

‘New’ Brigade Training Centre (continued)

FIRE TRAINING BUILDING

The Fire Training Building is of reinforced concrete construction; the fire rooms are lined with refactory tiles to allow high temperature fires, in excess of 800°C, to be fought without risk to the building structure.

The three storey building incorporates a five storey drill tower, and the construction is such that the first three floors of the drill tower form part of the fire training complex. All the metal framed windows to the building are of different sizes and opening types, with sheet metal be used instead of glass.

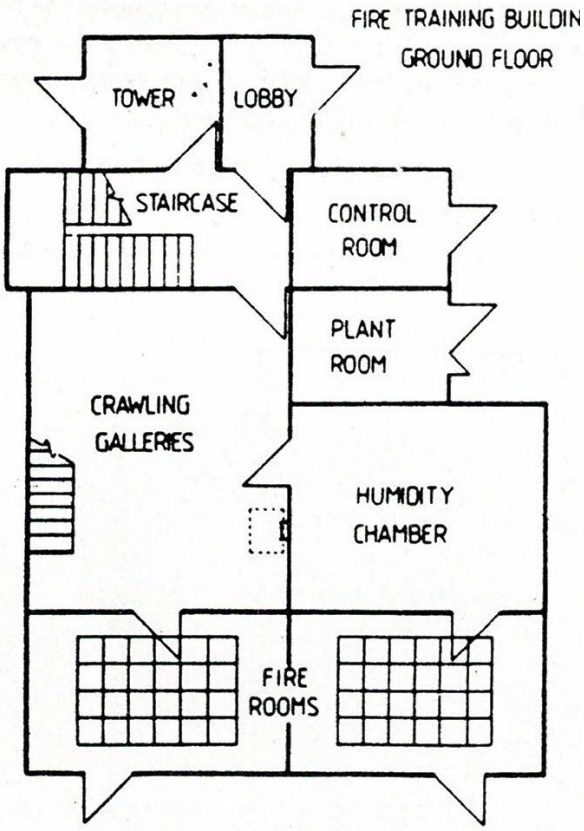
Both fire rooms at ground floor level can be entered externally or internally via steel fire doors and both rooms are sprinklered. Special attention has been given to drainage from these rooms, which incorporate a substantial fall to a large drainage gulley.

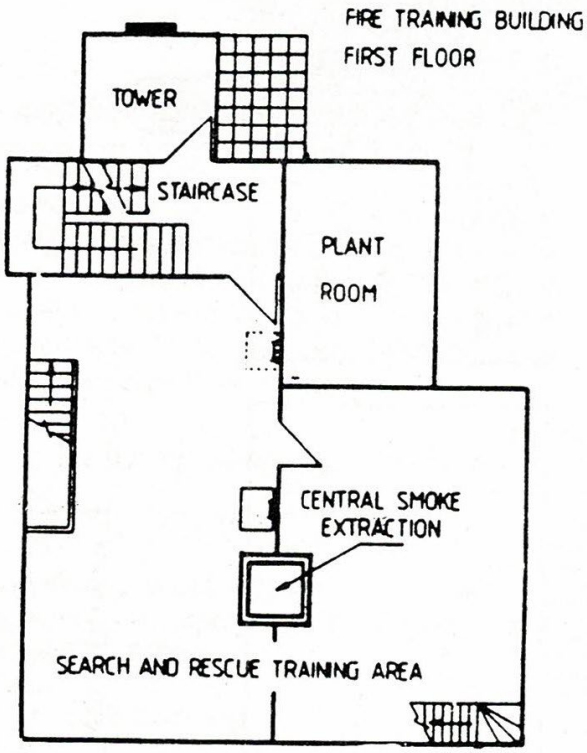


The orientation section is of modular construction with crawlways on three levels. Manufactured in steel, the moveable panels are constructed to provide infinite variety without the use of tools. Obstacles provided are of modular design to enable siting anywhere in the system.

100% humidity can be obtained in a humidity chamber and the floor surface has had to receive special attention to ensure that it remains ‘non-slip’ in these conditions.

‘New’ Brigade Training Centre (continued)



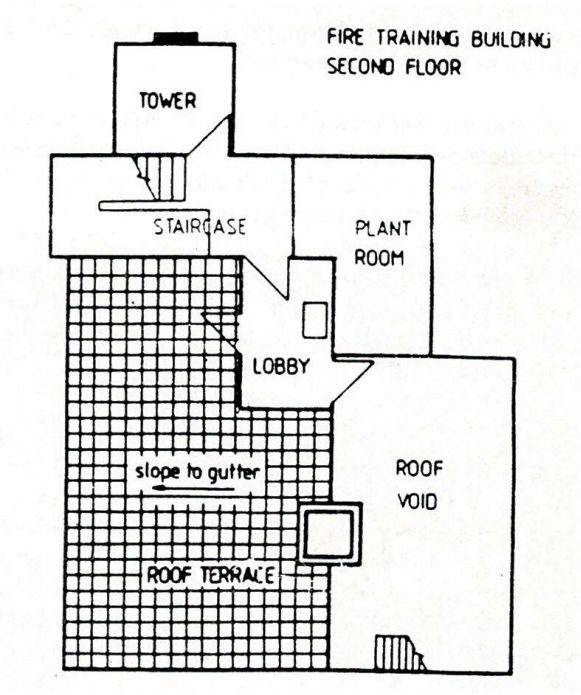


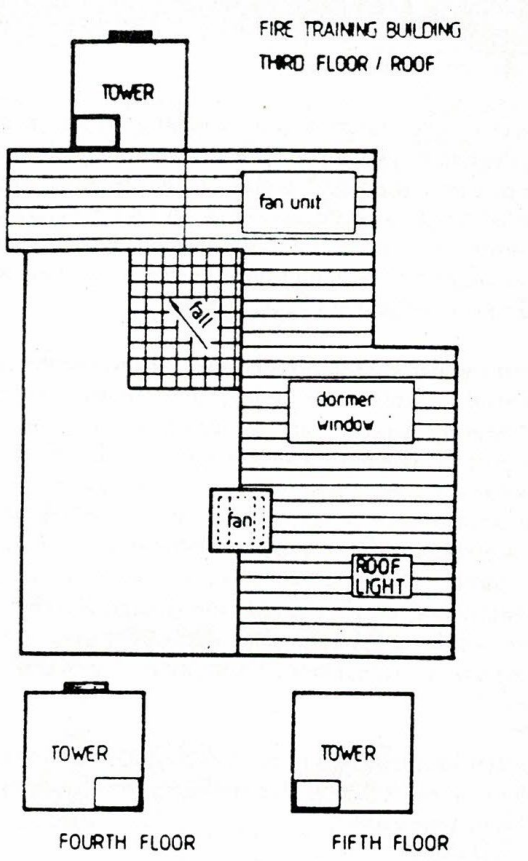
A number of treads in the staircase leading from the ground to the first floor can be easily removed in order to provide realistic conditions experienced at incidents.

On the first floor of the Fire training Building is the search and rescue area. Nine rooms have been created by the use of semi-permanent partitions, with a total of seventeen doors giving access to the rooms. It is anticipated that movement of the partitions will rarely be necessary, since by locking or unlocking the doors considerable variations to the routes taken by crews can be achieved.

(Apologies for the quality of the plans on this, and the next page. They are not brilliant in the original publication)

‘New’ Brigade Training Centre (continued)





At second floor level the attic area can be entered internally via a staircase, loft hatch or vertical ladder. This area has a false floor with sections that can be removed to ensure that personnel adopt the correct procedures when moving over suspect floors.

Within the Fire Training Building vertical ladders can be used to descend from the flat roof at second floor level through the building to the ground floor. Exercises commencing on the second floor flat roof will be undertaken to simulate fires involving basements and sub-basements.

An enclosed staircase is provided to the second floor of the tower and there is no other means of ascending the tower internally to reach the parapet roof.

A 100mm dry rising main extends the height of the tower with outlets on each floor. The tower is fitted, at ground floor level, with a foam inlet box with pipework allowing discharging into the ground floor of the tower.

On each of the three working faces of the tower anchorage points have been provided at roof level for an Everest Safety Device, and a dummy hoist is fitted to the main working face.

‘New’ Brigade Training Centre (continued)

SAFETY EQUIPMENT

The movement of personnel throughout the building can be monitored from the Control Room. Thirty-three radar detector heads have been installed, each with a range of 1.5m to 2m. Anyone coming within range of detector heads will be indicated on the console in the Control Room.

In addition, seven microphones have been sited within the building to assist location of crews and monitor conversations between personnel.

Twelve temperature and two humidity sensors wired back to the Control Room provide a constant indication of conditions within the Fire Training Building. Five gas fired heaters with outlets at different levels enable temperatures to be maintained at a realistic level elsewhere than the fire rooms. The individual output of these heaters at any time is governed within the Control Room.

In the event of an emergency occurring within the building, central control of all facilities enables immediate shut-down of heating, humidity and smoke generation. By the operation of a single button all lighting is switched on, and smoke extraction is commenced. Five of the windows remain closed in normal use by means of compressed air generator maintaining sufficient pressure against these spring loaded windows. On actuation of the smoke extractor fan the compressed air is released immediately, thereby allowing the windows to open. This is essential since the central extraction arrangement incorporates a powerful 7½ kw fan.

Seven loudspeakers in the building allow an instructor in the Control Room to give instructions to the crews, should this be necessary.

In addition, and independent of this system, loudspeakers have been provided in the orientation room at ground floor level and the attic room at second floor level in order to inject sounds encountered at fires (e.g. noise of factory machinery).

Three ‘panic buttons’ at identical locations on the floors of the Fire Training Building will give instructors operating inside the same facility to instigate emergency procedures as can be achieved from the Control Room.

The London Nail Bombings



BY STEVE PIKE. EX: LONDON FIRE BRIGADE

(continued)
The early morning, at the end of the shift, arrived without too many more incidents and preparations could be made to hand over to the on-coming watch.
It started as usual with the sound of my Sub.Officer's voice bellowing from the office .. *'cup of tea and biscuits for the Guvnor'* I didn't ask, but I never refused. It duly arrived and was enjoyed, as I finished a bit of paperwork.
The rest of the watch made sure equipment was serviceable and in place, and their kit was clean and ready to hang up at the end of the shift.
Petty cash was checked and correct, the call register was up together and a new sheet for that day was started.

It was a while before the end of the shift, I can't remember the exact time, that the office phone rang. It was from the watchroom attendant informing me that I had an outside call from Brigade Headquarters.
My first comment was, 'funny, I didn't think they worked at week-ends'.
The conversation went something like this:

Me: *Good morning, Station Officer, can I help you.*
Caller: *Is that Station Officer Pike.*
Me: *Yes.*
Caller: *Were you the Incident Commander at the bombing incident last night.*
Me: *Yes, that was me.*
Caller: *I'm (name) a counsellor here at BHQ.*
Me: *Hello, what can I do for you.*
Caller: *It's what I can possibly do for you. That can't have been a very nice thing to have experienced ……(continued)*

Me: *It wasn't nice, but you've just got to get on with it, and do your best. And to be honest there were quite a few others involved. Not just me.*
Caller: *But you had to make some very important decisions, didn't you.*
Me: *Yes, but that's what I do.*
Caller: *I'm calling you to see if you need to talk to anyone professionally to help you through things that might be on your mind.*
Me: *Thanks, but I'm fine ta. We tend to talk it through together.*
Caller: *Well perhaps you might not think that at the moment, but perhaps we can help you.*
Me: *No, I'm fine thanks.*
Caller: *If you can tell me a little bit about your experience last night, I might be able to help……*

By now I was getting a little bit fed up with this conversation. I had been in the service nearly 30 years by now and had never had a call like this before…anywhere. I do appreciate that welfare of personnel is paramount in the service, but I didn't want it then. I still don't. I have memories, good and bad, I think everyone does. I knew what being a firefighter was about, a whole family history full, so I wouldn't have joined otherwise. I had stories of incidents recounted to me before I was old enough to join.
Well, those who know me can probably guess what happened with the conversation next.

I talked to the counsellor and gave 'chapter and verse', leaving nothing out at all.
Then this happened.
Caller: *Oh, my goodness that sounds terrible, thank you for talking to me.*
Me: *That's OK.*

And they hung up.

There is a footnote to this.
During the next tour I had another phone call from BHQ, this time from a Senior Officer. He asked me what I had said to the counsellor in our conversation, so I told him.
Ah, came the reply, that explains a lot. Thanks for being honest.

(Apparently, and I can't confirm 100%, but the counsellor was a 'little bit upset' by what I had said.)

……(continued)

A couple of tours later it was time for the debrief of the incident, and all initial crews were called to the meeting room of the now vacant North Area Staff office at Paddington Fire Station.
It was a room I knew well as I had spent two years there when I was in charge of Green Watch, and riding the Area Command Unit.

When all were gathered we were updated on who the Metropolitan Police had charged in relation to the incident. This dealt with a little later.
The Senior Officer conducting gave a broad outline of the incident and thanked everyone for their actions.
The question was asked if anyone should be highlighted as being worthy of a special note regarding actions. It was a unanimous consensus that as we were the crews involved, we worked together, so no.
After the usual Operational Procedure comments, of which there were few, we were asked if there were any question.

I raised my hand and said, yes, I would like to know why I was left as the Incident Commander when the Area Command Unit was in Soho Square with Senior Officers available.

The reply was immediate and straightforward. One of the officers informed me that someone had been sent to the incident from the ACU and upon arrival had taken a look and reported back that *'it looked like a film set', the Station Officer has it sorted, and I'm not sure what else I could do.*

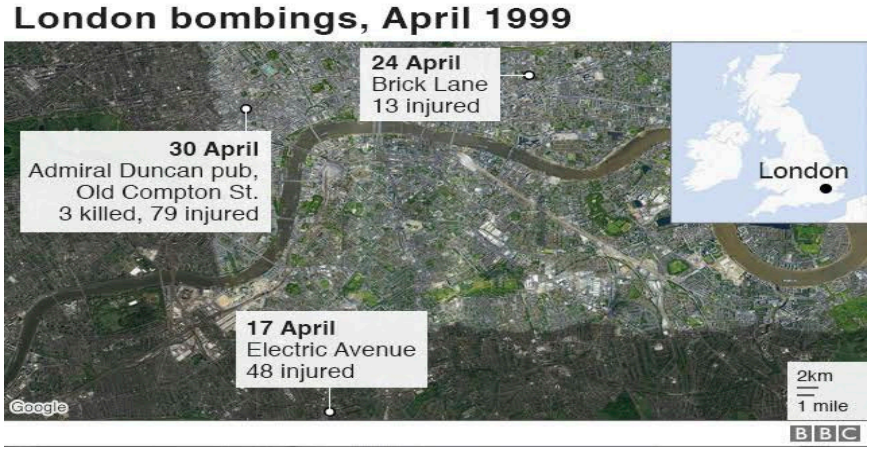
And then another surprise.
'Steve, you know that person you talked to near Wardour Street'?

What do mean, how did you know that? I never mentioned it to anyone.

Well, you were the only one with a white helmet in the area at the time, so it had to be you.

You were caught on camera leaning on a shop window talking to…. David Copeland. They lifted his fingerprints from it. (I'm not 100% sure how this came about, but it did)

The actions leading up to The Admiral Duncan Incident



Electric Avenue

The first bombing, on Saturday, 17 April 1999, was in Electric Avenue, Brixton an area of south London with a large black population. Forty-eight people were injured, many of them seriously, because of the 4-inch (100 mm) nails that were packed around the bomb. The explosion was strong, sending nails in all directions.

Brick Lane

The second bomb, on the following Saturday, 24 April, was aimed at Brick Lane in the East End of London, which has a large Bangladeshi community. There is a street market on Sundays, but perpetrator Copeland mistakenly tried to plant the bomb on Saturday when the street was less busy. Thirteen people were injured, and surrounding buildings and cars were severely damaged.

And then:

On April 30, 1999, it was Soho's turn.
David Copeland detonated a nail bomb in the Admiral Duncan pub Old Compton Street. Targeting the LGBTQ+ community. It was to be his final act.
The bomb was contained in a sports bag and exploded at 18:37 on a busy Friday night.
The blast killed three people, Andrea Dykes (who was pregnant), Nick Moore and John Light.
There were an additional 79 injured, many being life-altering.

David Copeland was arrested shortly afterwards and despite being diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia was deemed fit to stand trial.
He was convicted and sentenced to six concurrent life sentences in June 2000.
Steve



In Memoriam





Bruce Bringloe

26th August 2026

Bruce was born in Thurnscoe, Yorkshire where he grew up and went to school. Not many people know, but Bruce was an accomplished singer and won many singing festivals as a boy soprano. He joined his local Harmonic Male voice choir and spent many happy hours singing in concerts.
After leaving school he went to work on a farm, but it wasn't for him and he wanted adventure, so he joined the Coldstream Guards.
After returning from a year's service in Aden, Bruce and Janet announced their engagement and married a year later.
Bruce had various jobs after that but never really settled, and after the birth of their daughter Alexandra both he and Janet opened a corner shop in South Yorkshire. Within a year the fire brigade were advertising, and Bruce applied. He was successful and joined as a firefighter.
With Alexandra suffering from ill health the family were advised to move away from the pollution of the local pits. Wiltshire Fire Brigade offered him a job, and he transferred to Salisbury.
During his service at Salisbury Bruce organised 13 Open days raising a large amount of money for the FSNBF.
He also organised two events for Children in Need.

It was in 1986 that Bruce suffered serious burns and scalds whilst attending a training exercise at the Brigade Training Centre, Devizes. He was admitted to Salisbury District Hospital for treatment, where he made a good recovery.

When his operational service was completed, Bruce was appointed the Brigade Driving Instructor and Examiner. A role he undertook with diligence and competence.

Bruce's Funeral was held at the West Wiltshire Crematorium on Friday 25th September and was well attended by family and friends.

Rest In Peace Bruce



In Memoriam





Rodger Albert Hyslop

3rd October 2026

Rodger will be remembered by many within Wiltshire Fire Brigade, first as a Control Room Operator and later as the Brigade Photographer.
He was also a qualified electrician, and that side of his career is where our paths first crossed. Roy Cox, a friend of mine for many years, and Rodger, both worked for Bell-Fruit in Pewsey, which is how we came to be introduced. I was just beginning my own Brigade career at the time, so it seemed a pleasant surprise when Roy joined a few years later as a Firefighter, followed by Rodger as a Control Operator.

Rodger experimented with electrical equipment well before he gained his qualification. His family recall that, in his early years, he built a crystal radio receiver and later dismantled the family radio. Which he didn't quite put back together correctly.

He was also a cricket umpire for a local team and would borrow a farmer's white coat to undertake the task. This action gained him the nickname 'Farmer Hyslop'.

He was also a leader in the Army Cadet Force in his spare time, and went on to attain the rank of Captain. Also undertaking the task of being the County cook.

But above all of this he was a devoted family man to his wife Judy, their son Robert and his wife, grandchildren and great grandchild.

Rodger's Funeral was held at the West Wiltshire Crematorium on Monday 2nd November and was well attended by family and friends.

As you would say Rodger '*It will soon be Christmas*' – 'Keep smiling'

Rest in Peace

At the Executive Committee meeting held in July it was agreed to formally accept the above badge design as our Association logo.
I have also had it made (personal donation) as a 25mm pin badge which is available FOC to all members. I am trying to hand them to members as and when we meet, but this is a mammoth task, and it will take a long time. If you are interested, please send a S.A.E to:
Steve Pike, 155, Wheeler Avenue, Swindon, SN2 7HW and I will send one upon receipt.



From The President and all Executive Committee members of our Association. Look forward to seeing more of you in 2027.

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