

Leading Firewoman 852513. Freda Rosa Goodchild

18th June 1916 to 29th May 2002

Rosa came into our lives late in her twilight years and, it's safe to say, left a lasting impression of a feisty lady determined to remain as independent for as long as her failing health would allow.



As I write her story I am carefully turning the pages of the two very fragile scrapbooks Rosa entrusted to us when accepting she could no longer care for herself, had moved into a Nursing Home. These books, with their tattered corners and faded pages, contain photographs, newspaper cuttings, letters, NFS Firewomen's Magazines and FBU leaflets along with Rosa's hand written comments. Sadly they contain nothing about her personal or family life....I'm ashamed to say I don't even know the names of her parents or if she had any siblings, only that when she was born on 18th June 1916, she was not very strong and "*unlikely to reach old age*", which soon became a distinct possibility when she was diagnosed with osteomyelitis in her leg and endured years of surgery and treatment that would have given the Spanish Inquisition something to think about!!!

Rosa was living in Vellors Lane, Bathwick, a suburb of Bath and an inpatient at The Royal United Hospital, when she was "*called up*" in June 1941, just before the N.F.S. was formed. In September she dutifully reported at the Labour Exchange only to be told she was exempt on Medical Grounds, instead she became one of the first to "*Volunteer*" for the new intake of National Firewomen at Bath Central Fire Station on October 21st that year.



City of Bath Fire Station circa November 1941. F. Rosa Goodchild back row, second from right

Four months later Rosa was back in the RUH and "*came out the day before the "Bath Blitz"*", however there was to be a lighter side to this dreadful day when the stray cat they had adopted gave birth to a litter of kittens (on the station) during the raid....after which "mother" naturally became known as Blitzie. Rosa was allowed back on duty but was to spend the next 6 weeks with her leg in plaster.



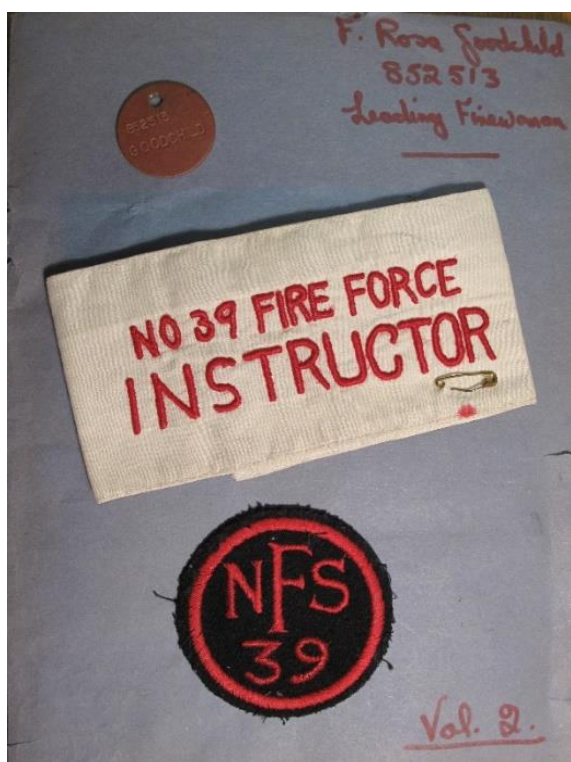
Although she lived and was based in Bath, on two occasions she was sent to The N.F.S. Area 17 Women's Training School at 2 Downleaze, Bristol. The first time was for basic training, the second to determine whether she was a suitable candidate for an Advanced Mobilising Course. She proudly told us how she had taken "*the last remaining vacancy*" and passed out with 99% marks, enabling her to eventually go onto the Fire Service College

F. Rosa Goodchild back row 2nd from right

After a spell at The Regional Training School, Lee Mill, Nr Plymouth, Rosa returned to Bath prior to starting her Advance Mobilization Course at The N.F.S. College, Saltdean, Brighton (formerly The Ocean Hotel).



The National Fire Service College, Saltdean, Brighton. (F. Rosa Goodchild Top Left)



The Civil Defence Regional Headquarters at Bristol controlled the four Fire Force Areas in the South Western District...Area 17 Bristol, Area 18 Exeter, Area 19 Yelverton and Area 39 Swindon.

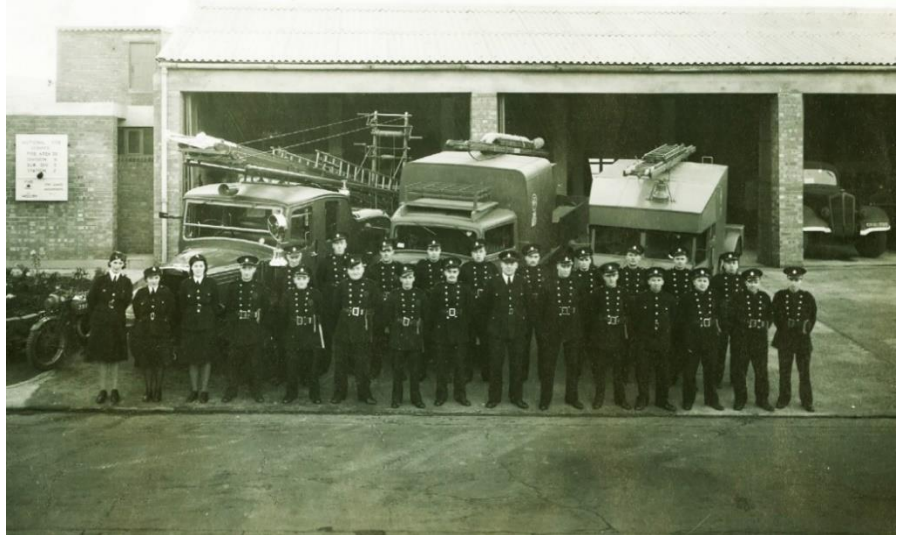
On Rosa's return from Saltdean she was promoted to Leading Firewomen as a Mobile Instructor and temporarily based in Bristol (around the time of the D Day Landings) before transferring to Admin HQ 39 Fire Force at Stratton St Margaret, Swindon two months later.

To say she was "*mobile*" was a bit of an understatement as she constantly moved between Swindon HQ., Chippenham, Gloucester, Salisbury (where she worked alongside a group from the Overseas Fire Service Detachment) and Trowbridge.

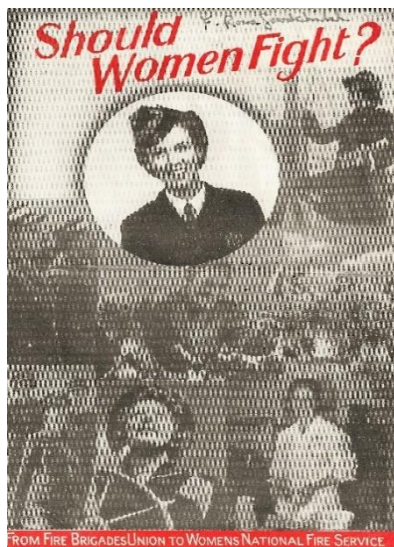
Front cover Rosa's Scrapbook Vol 2.

Eventually her nomadic life came to a temporary halt with a posting to Stroud, Gloucestershire where she “*settled down*” for 6 months in a bedsit on the Fire Station .When asked how she travelled between all these postings...*mostly on the back of a motor bike*” was the reply

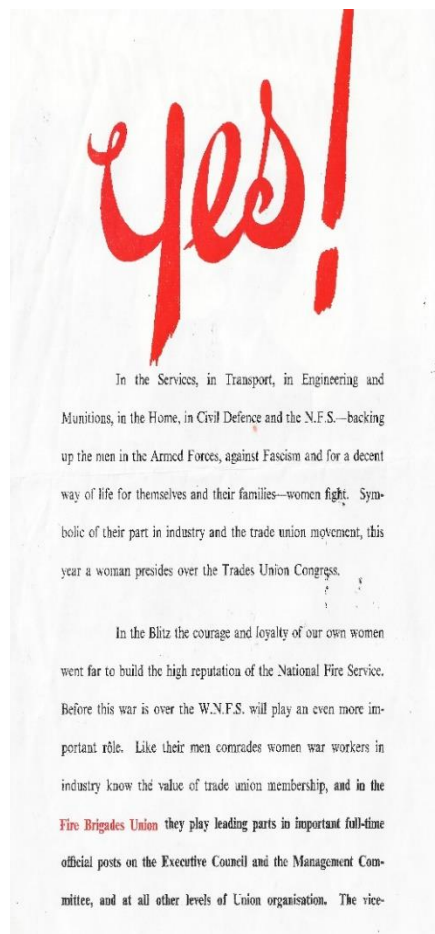
Rosa is not in this photograph although she could have been there as her chosen mode of transport can be seen on the far left hand side



Stroud Fire Station & Personnel.



Rosa was a staunch supporter and very active representative of the Union during the early days of her career, however by accepting “*promotion and first stripe*” she was required by The Fire Brigades Union to resign her position.



chairman of the Management Committee of our Union is a member of the W.N.F.S.

Women from every Region compose a National Advisory Council, working with the Executive from whom representatives go to the Government's Joint Consultative Committee for Civil Defence workers. Thus, from the Station to the Ministry of Home Security, the **Fire Brigades Union** provides close contact for members of the Service.

Basically, the problems of seamen are similar to those of the men, and in the solving of these much already lies to our credit.

On women's wages there has been nearly a 40% increase.

A proper system of sickness and injury pay has been established. The long-drawn-out struggle for the adequate provision of uniforms is now coming to a close. Accommodation, discipline, welfare and leave, are matters to which the Union gives constant attention.

But there is still much to be done. A proper system of medical attention, the application of common-sense duty routine, improvements

Rosa's health was always a problem, she was frequently in hospital in severe pain and, of course, unable to work. St George's Day 1945 found her “*back again*” in the RUH under the care of Mr Kindersley, her Orthopaedic Surgeon and she was there (in a specially adapted wheelchair as she was still officially bed bound) when V.E. Day was announced. She vividly remembered the celebrations on the Ward, everyone was given some red, white and blue hair ribbon (which she proudly wore on the 50th Anniversary in 1995), drank coffee and ate biscuits (“*an unheard of luxury in such a place in those days*”) followed by lunch....soup, tongue salad and trifle (*even more of a treat*) washed down with a glass of sherry!!! Later that day everyone gathered around the radio as they enjoyed a “Special Cake” for afternoon tea.



The Red Cross Sanguilo Convalescent Home

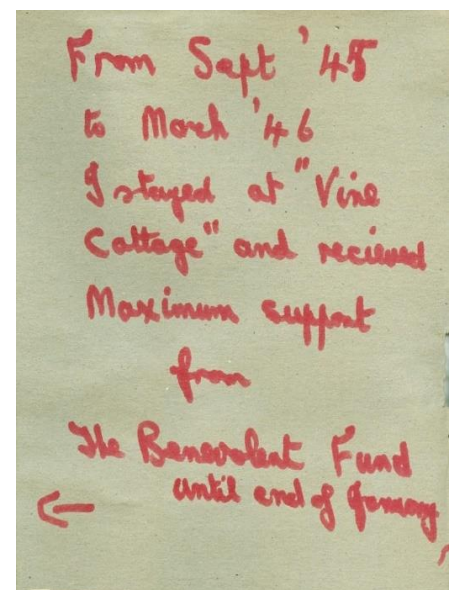
By the second week of July she was “*just about walking*” and offered a place at the The Red Cross Sanguilo Convalescent Home, Sherfield on Loddon, Basingstoke, where she “*spent V.J. Day in the company of other walking wounded*” from the ATS, WAAF, NFS and Civil Defence.

However this last spell in hospital had been much more serious than before and it therefore came as no surprise when Mr Kindersley suggested a career change and recommended “*Rehabilitation Commercial Training*”. Meanwhile Rosa started working for The Admiralty until a place became available.



Throughout her Fire Service Career and long illness Rosa was always grateful for the support she received from her Fire Brigade Colleagues and The Red Cross, writing in her scrap book “*From September 1945 till March 1946 I stayed at Vine Cottage and received maximum support from The Benevolent Fund until the end of January (1947)*”.

Rosa officially left The Fire Service on medical grounds in July 1946 but was allowed to wear her uniform until she was discharged from Sanguilo.



Thirty years later Rosa was living in Shirehampton, Bristol when she came into our lives and very well known in her neighbourhood. Depending on how good (or bad) her mobility was, she regularly attended her local Church and had a long association with the Girl Guides Association, both as their Leader (always referring to her charges as “*her girls*”) and District Commissioner, in fact it was one of “*her girls*” who made The Fire Services National Benevolent Fund aware of Rosa’s situation.

Visits to her little council flat were never dull, be it delivering her Christmas Hamper or simply dropping in for a chat and a cuppa. Of course there were rules....we’re talking about a fiercely independent old lady with a long memory, used to running things her way and at her pace. We knew there would be the obligatory look through the “scrap books”, no matter how many times you had seen them before, you were allowed ...expected...to make your own tea or coffee...not forgetting one for her and of course, she would never refuse a cream cake or bun if you brought one with you !!!

As the years passed we noticed not only a deterioration in Rosa’s mobility but increasing loneliness until one day she admitted she thought the same and, through her Church, was thinking of applying to St Monica’s Nursing Home on “The Downs”. The next time we saw her she told us that, although she automatically qualified for admission due to her Service to the City of Bristol, she was “*required to attend an interview to ascertain if she was suitable*” (These were not her exact words but let’s say.....they were close enough!!!!)



We moved Rosa into No 1 Bungalow, St Monica's, Cote Lane, Bristol using the Fire Station Van, she didn't have much and it only took three trips before she was settled in. The plan was for her to live independently with the support of carers and the choice of joining fellow residents in the main dining room for her meals if she so wished. Sadly life in this little bungalow didn't suit her and, after a number of falls, it was decided she would be safer living in the main house.

Being in a Nursing Home did not necessarily mean Rosa planned to sit (or sleep) in a chair all day ...at least not a static one... she would often bemoan *"it's my legs not my brain that's stopped working!!!"* I'm not quite sure whose bright idea it was to ask The Benevolent Fund to consider giving an elderly lady in her eighties a battery operated wheelchair, however one such vehicle was duly delivered which meant F. Rosa Goodchild now had a set of wheels and no-one at St Monica's would ever consider themselves safe again!! She would hurtle along the wide corridors (and around corners) on her way to Chapel, the Dining Room or back to her room, like a modern day Boudicca on the rampage, finally we were asked to get the engineer to call and reduce the maximum speed she could travel down to 4 mph....very much to her annoyance.

The only place Rosa, or anyone else for that matter, could really consider themselves safe was out in the Garden...which, fortunately, she absolutely adored.

Sadly age began catching up with Rosa and, when we visited her for what was to be the last time, she completely stunned us by saying she knew perfectly well what was *"around the corner"* and we must have *"these"* as she handed over her precious scrap books.

Rosa died at St Monica's on 29th May 2002 in her 86th year, a few days later her coffin was taken along those wide corridors she knew so well to rest overnight in St Monica's own Chapel of St Augustine before we all gathered to say our goodbyes at her funeral.

For someone *"unlikely to reach old age"* I think she did very well....don't you?



**Penny Deverill,
A.F. & R.S. Pensioners Association**