

Hundreds expected at ex-fire chief's funeral

WRITING his eulogy just before he died, former Avon Fire Brigade commander Frank Wilton wrote "born on ASH Wednesday 1934 in ASH Lane, Wells, Somerset, it would appear that the die was cast!"

It was a typical bad joke from the highly-experienced fireman which kept him close to his peers and made him one of them, said Ian Satherley, former colleague and secretary of Avon Fire & Rescue Service Pensioners' Association.

"He was one of the nicest people you could ever meet; always there to encourage and support, plus he never liked being called sir - it was Frank," Mr Satherley added.

His is one of many tributes which have come in for Mr Wilton, who died last month aged 85 following a short illness.

Today hundreds of people are expected to attend his funeral at Sedgemoor Crematorium.

"He was a popular man, very pop-

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ular," said Mr Satherley.

Mr Wilton, born with the first name Francis, was born near Swindon. After a short spell in the Royal Navy he joined Wiltshire Fire Brigade in 1954, soon becoming sub officer in Moreton-in-Marsh.

A promotion in 1961 followed and he took charge at Salisbury.

Stints followed working at Bromsgrove for the Worcester City and County Fire Brigade and then in fire prevention at Wolverhampton Fire and Ambulance Service.

In 1971 he returned to the South West to become deputy chief officer at Gloucester City Fire Brigade and then chief fire officer at Bristol City and County Fire Brigade.

After a posting in Scotland he returned again to become chief officer at the Avon County Fire Brigade in 1984.

One of his highlights of his five-



year post at the brigade was welcoming HRH Princess Anne to the opening of a new control room at the then new fire brigade headquarters in Temple Back, said Mr Satherley.

He was also presented with Queen's Fire Service Medal in the 1988 Queen's honours list.

After retiring from the fire service he continued work as a safety engineer for National Power, doing fire safety audits at power stations across the UK and Europe.

He finished his eulogy, saying, "finally hung his boots up and despite the ravages of old age patiently awaits (but not eagerly!) the attendance of the grim reaper when he will attend his last show and return yet again to ASH!"

He leaves his wife Betty, son Mark, Darren and daughter Shona.

Betty said: "He always had time to engage with all those he came into contact with. His humour was renowned throughout the service."