



AUTUMN 1993

NOVA

Avon Fire Brigade Journal

Editorial

As I write this editorial my thoughts return to the first one I wrote two years ago. I was full of optimism at the time to ensure that our magazine was issued on a regular basis from then on, jam packed full of interesting articles and photographs, something that everyone could gain enjoyment from as serving or retired members of the Brigade. So what is the problem? Well, apart from a few regular contributors everyone else seems to think that the magazine will just appear as if by magic!

So come on everyone let's have a concerted effort and get writing - share your news and funny stories, I want to be overwhelmed with your contributions - Please!

On a Welfare front, I would like to take this opportunity, once again, to applaud the outstanding work carried out by all of our Benevolent Fund Representatives who give up hours of their own time to visit, encourage and support those in need falling within the umbrella of the Benevolent Fund.

Please continue to give them your support at Station/Departmental level.

CHRIS PALMER
EDITOR

COVER PHOTOGRAPH

Firefighters from Yate and Kingswood tackled this barn fire at Henfield earlier this year.

(Photograph - Courtesy of Bristol United Press.)

The opinions expressed in this magazine do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors and publishers and may not represent the official opinion of the Fire Brigade.

Foreword

I am pleased to be afforded the opportunity to write the foreword to this edition of NOVA and hope that the following 'topical' information will be of benefit and interest to serving and retired members of the Brigade.

The recent Barker case before the European Court which seeks to redress the balance between differing commutation levels for male and female firefighters has created much speculation, the more so because it strikes at pre-conceived notions concerning the desirability, or otherwise, of establishing equality between the sexes in pension matters generally.

This case has highlighted the role the National Association of Retired Firefighters in such instances as it was through this medium that pensioners' attention was drawn to the issue at an early stage and, indeed, far in advance of the notice being issued to serving members. As a direct consequence of this, the Central Office of the Industrial Tribunals was inundated with claim forms from all over the country, to the extent that they had to set up a specialist team to deal with the responses.

Irrespective of whether the outcome leads to a reassessment of commutation levels to the benefit of male pensioners either retrospectively or in the future, this event reinforces the importance of having a national body to monitor such matters. During the last five years to date, 148 firefighters have left the Brigade, 130 of whom were in receipt of pensions under the Firemans Pension Scheme. I am pleased to report that, with one notable exception, all these former members have joined the National Association and have their annual subscriptions deducted at source.

I am proud to be associated with such a body, whose officers give their time freely in the interests of both serving and retired firefighters. With your support, we aim to continue the good work because there are still many hard battles to be fought (not the least being the position of widows arising from post-retirement marriages and implementation dates for pension increases).

I hope when the time comes you will take the opportunity of joining the N.A.R.F. and thereby assist in helping to secure the Association's objectives.

B. G. HOOK (HON SECRETARY)

From the Chief Officer

It is difficult to imagine a time when this Brigade has faced the possibility of so much change. There now seems little chance that the County of Avon will survive in its present form. If it goes, what happens to us? The interim report of the Local Government Commission suggests that whilst the County may go, the Brigade should remain in its present form. (Indeed they suggest some enlargement). This view is supported by the Association of County Councils, professional and representative bodies. The decision will ultimately rest with the Home Secretary, and need not necessarily follow the recommendations of the commission. I trust members of the Brigade and for that matter members of the public whom we serve, will take every opportunity to make their views known, otherwise we may not see many more issues of NOVA.

In the meantime, it is important for all members of the Brigade to remember that, no matter what, a Fire brigade will remain. Whatever changes are to come will not only be a challenge but an opportunity to advance further the reputation AVON FIRE BRIGADE has for being one of the more progressive Brigades in the country.

'Play it Safe' targets the schools

The Play it Safe - Action for Child Safety Campaign is a two year project which brings together government departments and leading safety organisations in the UK who act as advisers. It aims to prevent accidents involving children by raising the awareness of their main causes and promoting ways to prevent them. A key part of this initiative is local and community action.

The campaign has got off to a flying start. To date the Fire Safety Team has attended and promoted the safety message at over seventy venues, an achievement which could not have been made without the support from all Departments of the Brigade. Over 25,000 children under the age of sixteen have so far been targeted and this year, special attention is being made to reach Junior School Children. We have been



invited so far into forty schools and have been made very welcome as we highlight the dangers of fire and by using various 'role play' techniques teach them how to behave responsibly should they ever be faced by the threat of fire. See for yourselves the activity photographs on display in the main reception foyer at Brigade Headquarters. Would your local school appreciate a visit? We would be only too pleased to come and see them (age ranging from 6-9 years old).

This year we have held promotions at various libraries around the County, Asda, Tesco and Sainsburys Superstore, Early Learning Centres and Mothercare both in Bristol and Bath, the Ideal Homes exhibition at Earls Court London, and a multi-agency activity at Midsomer Norton, a very full programme of events. On June 19th and 20th at Durdham Downs, The Marketing department of Bristol United Press organised the Bristol Leisure and Motor Show. This was one

of the largest events ever to be held in the South West and included a wide range of exhibitions covering leisure, motoring, sport and safety, added to

which a full programme of family entertainment, arena events, police displays, historic vehicles attracting people of all ages and interest guaranteed a successful weekend. The Brigade was invited to attend and we were there at the 'Play it Safe' exhibition marquee.

The campaign seems to be gaining in momentum and this has undoubtedly been made possible by the support given by station personnel. The aim of the campaign is to improve the life expectancy and health of young people by reducing the number of accidents involving children and I would like to thank everyone who has contributed in any way in making this campaign such a success.

JOHN SLEIGHT

Photographs show the 'Play it Safe' team at Cameley Primary School and also at the Midsomer Norton activity day organised.



Juvenile Firesetters Programme

Firesetting, especially by young people is a major 'problem behaviour' in Britain today, more so than in any other country in Europe.

Analysis of operational statistics for 1992 within the County of Avon indicates the scale of the problem with no fewer than 2302 fires classified as either arson, suspicious or acts of vandalism. 64 fires were started by children playing with matches.

Fires destroy their own evidence and the established fire-setter may be suspected or charged with lighting only a small number of fires.

Avon Fire Brigade is of course involved in many areas of work with young people within the community, this does not however address the firesetters behaviour, though it is valuable in other respects.

There is evidence that firesetting is a behaviour, which if tackled, can in many cases be successfully resolved through a process of education and awareness training.

The programme instigated by the Brigade has to date resulted in the interviewing of six juveniles on an individual basis, together with investigation into three larger scale incidents involving arson.

The police and several juvenile welfare bodies have expressed strong interest and support for the Brigade's involvement in an area of work not previously targeted.

Any enquiries should be passed to Station Officer John Dando, Brigade HQ, ext. 346.

THE FORESTERS

A QUALITY ESTABLISHMENT SERVING
EXCELLENT FOOD

Real Ale * Live Music * Select Courtyard

77 WESTBURY HILL, WESTBURY-ON-TRYM,
BRISTOL BS9 3AD

0272 622899

Open Day at A7 Yate

On 10th July Yate Fire Station held its Bi-Annual Open Day which was a great success being well supported and enjoyed by everyone attending.

All monies raised went to the Fire Services National Benevolent Fund and over £1,300 was raised which was tremendous.

Among the many stalls and side shows were: Tombola, the biggest raffle you ever did see, with prizes donated by the good people and business community in Yate and Chipping Sodbury, and the day's events were kept moving along with music and commentary from The Martin Boskett Road Show.

Personnel, appliances and equipment were begged, borrowed and scrounged from all over the County which included: the MRT - A5, The Bronto and Rescue Boat - A3, The Emergency Crash Tender from British Aerospace, Filton plus vehicles from Avon Ambulance Service and Avon and Somerset Police.

A1 Temple's star attraction, the well known juggler and uni-cyclist - Jim Rex - also entertained and Fireman Sam was there to give valuable Fire Safety advice to the children.

Station personnel burnt the midnight oil, not only dreaming up games, but also creating new ones and side shows.

The Retained Firefighters at Yate put on a display of firefighting/rescue techniques which was very well received.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank A/DCO Terry for his participation in the Grand Raffle and all personnel, both Brigade and Civilian, for all their help and assistance in making the day the a success for Avon Fire Brigade and the Benevolent Fund.

FF DAVE WINDSOR
BENEVOLENT REPRESENTATIVE
A7 YATE

Junior Lifeskills

The Brigade has been involved in two Junior Lifeskills projects with a third due to be run in September.

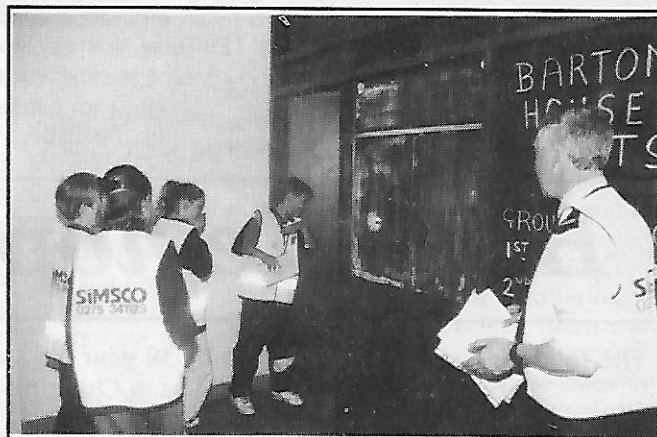
The aim of the project is to teach children to act safely and responsibly in potentially difficult or dangerous situations by experiencing a series of simulated tests and assessing their reactions to them.

Children in year six of junior school, i.e., children aged 10 to 11 years old, were the target group and the scheme was made available to all schools in the Bristol and Woodspring areas with the final selection of schools being decided on the basis of the greatest benefit to schools in particular areas.

Children pass from set to set in groups of 3, the Fire Brigade set involved confronting the children with a realistic fire situation (simulated with lights, sound and smoke generator).

The children have a number of options available to them. Upon opening the door into a domestic lounge the children are faced by the fire and the sight of a person slumped in a chair.

The whole impact of the set relies on the fire situation being very realistic, the children genuinely believe the fire is real which of course makes their reaction to it all the more



critical and undoubtedly leaves a lasting impression on them with a good insight into the devastating effects of fire.

Access is available to a telephone and the children dial 999 and speak to an operator who passes them through to the emergency services (all telephones and operators are within the building).

The set lasts for 10 minutes then the children pass on to other sets, at the end of the Brigade set the children are debriefed and advised on how they may have reacted differently.

One of the most interesting aspects of the scheme has been to highlight the number of misconceptions the children have with relation to fire, and the inability of a number of children to use the 999 system correctly or to be able to pass the correct information to the operator.

Follow up learning packs are sent to the schools involved so that the safety message can be continued and reinforced.

To date over 900 children have passed through the scheme and it is encouraging to note that a number of schools are putting on a scaled down version of the event so that other children may benefit from the important lessons learned.

The success of the event is always difficult to measure because the organisers are unaware of accidents that have been prevented or situations which have been dealt with in

**W.F. DOLMAN
& SON**

Well Established

Family Funeral Directors

A complete personal 24 hour Service

7 Days a week

9 WALCOTT TERRACE, BATH.

Telephone: Bath

444110 or 858897

the correct manner, however the number of children who have reacted the wrong way or even not reacted at all demonstrate the value of this project in raising general levels of awareness.

Finally my grateful thanks to everyone who has made our set such a success. It is important to retain motivation even when you are doing the set for the 18th time that day, to every child it is their first and probably only time to experience such an event.

Events organised by Bristol District Council and Woodspring District Council.

Other participants include: Police, Ambulance, SWEB, British Gas, Home Safety.

STATION OFFICER JOHN DANDO
'F' DIVISION
BRISTOL OFFICE

Photographs show children making their way into the smoke filled flat.

Brigade hopes for Debbie

The following report was written by 18 year old Debbie James, who spent a week in the Brigade with us back in March. Debbie lives in Chipping Sodbury and hopes to join the Fire Service.

I am a student at Brunel College doing a BTec National Diploma in Social Cares.

I am interested in joining the Fire Service and I have to do a major project for my 2nd year course. I have chosen to do mine on the Fire Service. When I got the chance to shadow different officers in Avon fire Brigade I was very pleased.

On Monday I spent the day with Assistant Divisional Officer Bolland. We spent the day travelling around different fire stations in 'A' Division. I got to look at the specialised equipment at certain stations and throughout the day Mr Bolland told me about the role of a Firefighter and his own role as an ADO.

On Tuesday I was with Assistant Divisional Officer Osborne who works in the Fire Safety Office in Bristol. I was able to shadow ADO Osborne and two other Fire Safety Officers. I went with the other two officers around 3 buildings as they did their Fire Safety checks. I also visited the drawing office where the

plans for the certified buildings are drawn up.

On Wednesday I spent the day with Sub Officer Taylor. He is there to make sure all the stations in 'A' Division have everything they need. Sub O. Taylor showed me around Temple Fire Station and then we went on to observe an exercise at a local office block. What they were trying to do was ensure that in the event of a fire in that building they would know exactly what to do. Any mistakes could be learned from.

In the afternoon I was back at Yate Fire Station, after going to check on a pub's fire precautions I had a ride back in the Fire Engine!

On Thursday I was with Assistant Divisional Officer C. Palmer. He's in charge of the press side of the Fire Service, Public Relations and Welfare of the Firefighters and their families. His job as with all the roles in the fire service is a very varied and hectic one.

On Thursday night I went on an Exercise at Sun Chemicals in Yate. This exercise was arranged to make sure in the event of a chemical spillage or fire at Sun Chemicals the Fire Brigade would know where everything was and what to do in such a situation.

On Friday I was back to College.

I would like to thank everyone who helped me with my assignment during the week, where I had the chance to see the many aspects of the Fire Service, including the control room where I never realised so much information was kept and used.

Whoever I spoke to were always ready to give information and encouragement.

My perception of the Fire Service has changed. The job as a Firefighter involves a lot more than fighting fires. It's a very varied and rewarding job.

DEBBIE JAMES

50 years of Benevolence

Winston Churchill called them 'heroes with grimy faces'. Over 1000 UK firefighters lost their lives and over 7000 were seriously injured in the line of duty during World War II. The survival of much of Britain's heritage is due to the dedication and courage of men and women in the wartime N.F.S. and the A.F.S.

At the onset of the War, most Brigades had Welfare and Benevolent Funds with which to offer help to those suffering disaster and hardship. In the Summer of 1940 the plight of widows and orphans of firefighters killed in action touched the hearts of firefighters in the Commonwealth and America, resulting in the formation of the London Fire Services Benevolent Fund in July 1941. Donations from the International Association of Firefighters of America soon led to the setting up of the National Fire Service Benevolent Trust and the means to give grants of £15 to assist Firemen's widows and a weekly allowance of 4 shillings for any of their orphans under 14 years.

In June 1943, when there seemed no likelihood of any rapid end to the War, the dedicated volunteers handling the distribution of grants felt that long term provision must be made so that support for these and other widows and orphans could be maintained for as long as necessary. Two months later the National Fire Services Benevolent Fund came into being and amalgamated into one charity the many other Fire Service Funds which had grown up in the regions, this includ-

ed one set up in Bristol Fire Brigade.

So it was that, in the early hours of Thursday June 10th 1993, a transit set out from Avon and headed for London. On board were Monty Britton, John Clark, Sue Nicholls, Ian Satherley, Geoff Bennett, Ron Marchant, Betty Peet, Fred Hooper, Eric Pimm, Debbie Broome and Ray Petty. Martin Baxter, who had volunteered to drive, had the daunting task of not only 'hitting' London during the rush hour but also having to negotiate the one way streets that lead to Guildhall, for this historic building, dating back to the 14th century, was to be the scene of a Reception to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of the Fire Services National Benevolent Fund in the presence of its Patron Her Majesty The Queen.

Each Brigade throughout the country were represented and we in Avon sent a cross section of its dedicated colleagues who have worked for the Fund at various times since its inception in 1943 to the present day. Some Brigades invited colleagues who had been helped by the Fund, whilst others chose a mixture of both.

Chris and I travelled up to London the day before and were waiting outside Guildhall when they arrived. We joined about 900 guests, meeting up with old friends from other Brigades and waited for the signal to go in. We entered through a modern glass doorway, walked through a security screen and waited while all the lady's handbags were fed through one of those conveyor

belt machines usually found at airports. It was here that several elderly suspect assassins were caught when the alarm bells rang as they walked through the screen, only to find the reasons lay in the metal parts of their spectacles - not a gun or hand grenade in their pockets. However, once through passport control we walked down a corridor overlooking a large courtyard where two London Fire Brigade Appliances were lined up ready for Royal inspection, one of which was used during the blitz on the city. The sight of this particular vehicle certainly brought many a reminiscent lump to some of our wartime colleague's throats.

Down one side of this courtyard was a blue and white striped canopied walkway leading to the ornate main entrance with its red carpet. At the far side, next to the magnificent church of St. Lawrence Jewry, a crowd was beginning to gather, awaiting Her Majesty.

When we received our official invitation we were told in which part of Guildhall we were to assemble, about 600 were directed to the Great Hall, 300 to the Old Library, whilst Geoff Bennett, as Avon's Representative to be presented to The Queen, made his way to the Print Room.

Entering the Great Hall, the first thing that 'hits' you is its fine vaulted roof complete with the shields of all the Guilds found within the city of London and two magnificent statues of Gog and Magog looking down on you from the Gallery.

Coffee was served to music played by the Band of the West Midlands Fire Brigade, during which time we looked at the display boards, one showed photographs belonging to those colleagues who had experienced the Blitz and the years that followed at first hand, another gave a pictorial history of the Fund from 1943 to the present day.

To ensure we would all be in the right place at the right time when the Queen arrived we had been given instructions to stand by one of the Honourable Company of Pikemen who had taken up their places around the Hall. All the city of London Aldermen and women, dressed in their pale blue ermine lined robes, were in attendance ready to answer any questions about the building, its history, its architecture and its treasures. At the far end of the room was a long slightly raised dias behind which was a display of positively gleaming old plates, jugs and goblets. It was noticed that the two policemen standing at each end hardly moved the whole afternoon and on asking one of the Aldermen why, all became clear... the items were a selection of the City Treasures and only left the vaults of the nearby Mansion House on special occasions and as they were all made of solid gold there always had to be policemen to look after it.

We found our Pikeman at his station in front of an enormous marble memorial to William Pitt, one time British Prime Minister, complete with obligatory cherubs, lions, unicorns, crown and scantily dressed angels. Everyone had, by now, found their places and eagerly waited the arrival of The Queen. The appearance of 8 more Pikemen, led by a single drummer, carrying long wooden poles bearing a sharply pointed iron

head or pike (from which they get their names), all dressed in authentic replicas of the red uniforms originally worn by their predecessors during the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), signalled The Queen was in the building.

She arrived at 12 midday to a Change Ringing of the Bells of St. Lawrence Jewry by members of the Fire Service Guild of Bellringers and, after she had received a bouquet from 8 year old Hannah Power, whose father died last year as a result of an accident whilst on duty, she was greeted by the Chairman of the Benevolent Fund Mr Ian Adam and the Right Worshipful The Lord Mayor Locum Tenes, Commander and Alderman Sir Robin Gillett (Deputy Lord Mayor to you and me) followed by a reception committee made up from the various Alderman and women of the City of London. Whilst Her Majesty was making her way to the Great Hall we were offered a choice of either a glass of champagne, fruit juice or tonic water, so that by the time she entered the room we all had a drink with which to 'toast' her health. Trumpeters sounded a fanfare and, led by the Mace Bearer of the Corporation of the City of London, our Patron Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth walked onto the dias. She wore a multi-colour summer dress, blue hat that matched the blue in her dress, white gloves, white shoes and was carrying a white handbag. She was escorted by about 12 people including the Chairman

of the Fund, Alderman Gillett and Aldermen Roger Cork and Anthony Moss, two of the City Sheriffs. She acknowledged our greetings with a wide smile and a gentle nod of her head but, as the Band struck up The National Anthem, her expression changed to the stern one we sometimes see and she did not smile again until Alderman Gillett finished his welcoming address. Ian Adam had thanked Alderman Gillett for his kind words of welcome and she was asked if she would care to meet some of those present... back came the smile and everyone held their breath in case she stopped to speak to them.

We all tried to listen in on the conversations she was having and after she had left asked the 'chosen ones' what she had said to them... their replies were all the same "I was so overawed at meeting her, I can't remember what she said to me."

She met the profoundly deaf teenage daughter of a serving firefighter, to whom the Fund had provided a special hearing aid so that today she could proudly tell Her Majesty how she was at College training to be a Nursery Nurse.

The widow of a Fireman killed during the War and now confined to a wheelchair herself,

told her how the Fund had supported her and her family since she became a widow.

The Queen was introduced to two disabled Firefighters, one had been

**Trumpeters
sounded a
fanfare and, led
by the Mace
Bearer of the
Corporation of
the City of
London, our
Patron Her
Majesty Queen
Elizabeth walked
onto the dias.**

injured whilst on duty and was now confined to a wheelchair, the Fund had provided him with a specially adapted car, whilst the other had been struck down with an incurable wasting disease and was also confined to a wheelchair. The Fund had provided him with a battery operated wheelchair so he could maintain his independence and not have to rely on his wife to take him out.

Even the Queen, who has been trained to control her emotions, must have found it difficult not to have been moved when she met a young fireman, his wife and their young son, the little lad was strapped into a special pushchair, the telltale feeding tube in his nose giving away the fact he was severely handicapped. Her Majesty spent some time with them listening to how the Fund has been involved with the family since his birth.

After about half an hour the Queen took her leave of us in the Great Hall and, to the sounds of the Pipers of the Strathclyde Fire Brigade, made her way up the long, deeply carpeted passage, past the entrance to the largest surviving medieval crypt in London, parts of which date back to the late 13th century, till she arrived at The Old Library where yet more people, to whom the Fund means so much, were introduced to her.

She met the retired Wartime Control Officer who had 'worked' for the Fund for 30 years, 2 little sisters and their brother (all under the age of 6) whose daddy had been injured on duty so badly he had been medically discharged, a serving Firefighter and his 9 year old daughter who, although in the middle of Radiotherapy and very poorly, insisted she 'wanted to see The Queen'. The son of a fireman, tragically killed whilst on

duty, was able to tell her he was now studying at Cambridge, helped by an annual University Grant from the Fund.

However, events were not without its funny side... due to a 'technical' hitch the loud speaker system linking all parts of Guildhall was inadvertently left on so that when the toastmaster 'invited' those in the Great Hall to 'partake of the buffet' it was heard loud and clear in The Old Library, just as Her Majesty came through the door... so much to her great amusement... she commented how she wouldn't be a bit surprised if she wasn't crushed in the rush for the food, swung her arm as if she were warming up as opening bowler for England in a Test Match to indicate the speed and direction in which any rush might come from and roared with laughter.

After about half an hour she was escorted to the Print Room, where she was invited to sign the visitors book and was presented with a special commemorative plate.

No charity, large or small, could have grown into the National Organisation the Benevolent Fund is today, without the loyal support of its founder members or stalwart workers and it was to 6 such people that the Queen was introduced.

Honorary Firefighter Geoff Bennett was specially invited by Avon Brigade Council to meet our Patron because of his continuous work for the Fund. He has been associated with the F.S.N.B. since those dark days of 1943 and has served, without a break, as either a local Secretary, Treasurer or Chairman. Today, at the age of 79, he is still a very active worker for the Fund on 'B' Division Council. He was also the first Secretary of the Bristol Fire Service Benevolent Fund which was in existence a couple of

years before the National Fund was founded and had similar aims.

When he met the Queen he told her how very proud he was to have been one of the Fire Brigade's contingent lining the Coronation procession route in Cockspur Street 40 years ago. Her Majesty said, "I expect you got very wet". After thanking her for her Royal Patronage, which means so much to any charity, Geoff said he was also very proud to have played hockey against Prince Phillip, Duke of Edinburgh, when he was a Senior Lieutenant stationed at H.M.S. Royal Arthur during the War. Her Majesty remarked how her husband used to enjoy his hockey and was quite intrigued with this wartime memoir.

Meanwhile, back in the Great Hall, the formalities over, we were invited by a member of the Guild of Toastmasters, resplendent in tailcoat with a red sash across his chest, in a voice so clear and distinct that it would probably shatter glass if he shouted loud enough, to 'partake of The Buffet' (which as you are already aware was also heard in The Old Library) which was served by equally emaculate catering students and gave us a choice of a hot meal of Haddock with Prawns and Mushroom Sauce or Carbonnade of Beef with new potatoes or a cold meal of poached Salmon and Cucumber Mayonnaise or Lamb Cutlets. Both menus offered various salads and the meal was completed with either Damson and Gooseberry Souffle or Summer Fruits and Cheeseboard. All good meals deserve a good wine, we were served with a selection of Champagne, Alsace Pinot Blanc 1991 and Chateau de la Roache 1991.

When The Queen left Guildhall at about 1.15pm, guests were allowed to go wherever they wanted in the historic

building. Some went on one of the impromptu guided tours being given by the Alderman, some talked to old friends, whilst some simply wandered around soaking up the atmosphere.

Avon's party, who up until now had been spread over three rooms, met up in The Old Library and 'compared notes'. Our colleagues from Somerset joined us for a glass of wine, sitting on the deeply carpeted steps, safe in the knowledge none of use would have to drive home and made the most of what was left of this memorable day, which was fast coming to an end. At 2.30pm exactly the band played The National Anthem, indicating it was time to think of going home... they had a hope!

Someone (don't ask me who) finally decided we should at least make our way towards the door and we retraced The Queen's steps back down the carpeted passage, past the entrance to those old crypts, till we got to the Main Entrance where, 3 hours before, Her Majesty had arrived. Here everyone was taking photos of their parties, their fami-

lies, their Brigades (probably for articles just like this one). People from other Brigades were using each other's cameras so everyone would be in group photos.

Gone were the Fire Appliances, gone was the Royal Daimler, gone were the crowds of people awaiting The Queen's arrival, in their place were Fire Brigade Transit Vans, Coaches, Cars and Taxis ready to take their weary but very happy passengers on their long journeys home.

It was a day to remember and one only made possible through the generosity and hospitality of the Corporation of London who, along with several businesses, had sponsored the whole event and to them we express our grateful thanks.

Our driver, Martin, finally found us and somehow managed to get us all on the same mini bus when we realised WE hadn't taken a team photograph, so out we all climbed, took up positions and Martin obliged with the camera ... then everyone clambered back on the bus and went home.

When things go wrong and the unexpected happens, severe injuries or death are suffered by even the best trained firefighters. The Benevolent Fund stands today ready to help them and many others in any way it can, as it has done conscientiously for the last 50 years. The Fund, born in wartime, has not had to deal with the consequences of war since 1945, but the need for the support the Fund provides to those who survived that war and to the present day U.K. Firefighters, is as great as ever. With its network of voluntary helpers and fundraisers deployed all around the country, guided by the professional staff at Littlehampton, the Fund is ready and able to carry out its charitable commitments.

PENNY DEVERILL

**'A' DIVISION SECRETARY,
FIRE SERVICES NATIONAL
BENEVOLENT FUND**

COUNTY OF AVON FIRE BRIGADE

Royal Reply

Those who read the article 'Firebrands light up Failand' in the last issue of NOVA will know that the Bristol Fire Service Hockey Club, founded during the last war, played against several Service teams in the Bristol area. Among these teams was one from the Royal Navy at Corsham, one of the players being Prince Phillip, now Duke of Edinburgh.

On the offchance that the Duke might recall these wartime contests, Geoff Bennett sent a copy of NOVA to Buckingham Palace and within a couple of days received a personal reply - and a gentle reprimand!

The text referred to His Royal Highness as a midshipman,

when in fact he was an instructor at the Petty Officers School with the rank of Lieutenant! And he played centre forward, not on the wing as stated! Geoff has since written an apology, but perhaps he can be excused for these inaccuracies because the incidents took place some 50 years ago, and memory can easily play tricks.

However, the Duke congratulates The Firebrands on their successful run in the Pizza Express National Hockey League (they finished fifth in the Premier Division 1993), and he wished the club every success in the future.

G.B.

A look behind the scenes of a South African Fire and Emergency Service

Margaret Kent from Pietermaritzburg Fire and Emergency Service, South Africa, called into Brigade Headquarters whilst in Bristol.

I work in the control centre of the department. Our main task is to receive calls from the public and other departments concerning fires, motor vehicle accidents, entrapments, flooding, hazmat/hazchem spillage, etc. We respond to all incidents within the Pietermaritzburg borough where people are confirmed trapped or their lives in danger.

The Control Centre has two main functions:

1. Receiving calls for fires and rescues.

2. As a central communication point for all municipal departments. After hours we take all complaints for the various departments, such as: water, electricity, parks, forestry, civil defence, sewage, etc. Our computer system has a selection whereby we are able to tell who is the senior on duty from each department at any given time, and we pass the complaint on to them.

The computer programme is one of the most up to date in South Africa. It has five different sections and then each section is divided up into more sections.

At any time we are able to see which machine is attending which incident and what the situation is. One section is dedicated to a chemical data base.

On joining the department I went on a four week course on basic fire technology and techniques. This taught me how to fight a fire using fire hydrants, hoses, beaters, etc., if the need ever arose. In the case of an extreme emergency I go out on fire calls.

The Brigade has 23 machines and vehicles:

Water Tenders (pumping appliances) ..	4
Light Pumps (Grass fire units)	3
Rescue Pumper	1
Crash Fire Rescue Unit (Airport Tender) 1	
Hydraulic platform	1
Water/Foam Carrier	1
Foam Tanker	1
Command Vehicle	1
Motor Vehicle	6
Personnel Carriers	2
Service Vehicle	2

All major appliances carry 3500l of water. Three water Tenders, Rescue Pumper and the Crash Fire Rescue Unit carry cutters and spreaders used in rescues. The command vehicle is used as a control centre at a major incident.

The whole brigade is divided into three watches (Red, Green, Blue), and each watch has about 26 men. Due to staff shortage the men have to jump two machines during shift. Every time a machine leaves the station the control centre is informed how many men are left available for further calls.

On joining the brigade all men go through a six week basic fire training course and then join a watch and they will continue to do training courses from time to time.

All operational staff are compelled to do 45 minutes physical training during each shift and this goes for control room staff as well. Lectures and drills are also undertaken during each shift.

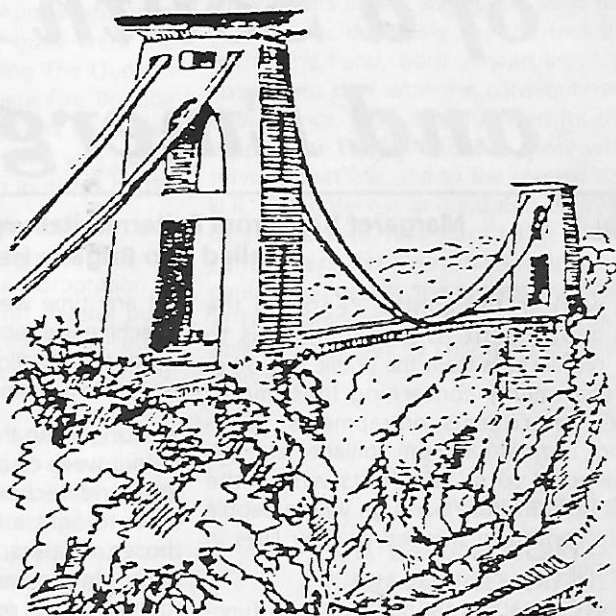
Brunel's Bridge of Sighs

This is the second instalment of the article on Clifton Suspension Bridge that appeared in the last issue of Nova. It features the hazardous building operations and some of the dramatic and tragic events which followed the opening ceremony in 1864 - five years after Isambard Kingdom Brunel's death.

SUSPensa VIX VIA FIT

This Latin motto inscribed high in the stonework of Clifton Bridge can be translated 'Suspended Way Made with Difficulty' - no understatement! How were the massive suspending chains thrown across the gorge? In the first place, nine wire ropes were slung across the river upon which planks were laid. Upon this precarious platform workmen assembled the chains, link by link, beginning with the eastern side. Then the platform was transferred to the western side. In spite of working at these dizzy heights, only one life was lost - yet during construction of the GWR Box Tunnel, nearly a hundred men died!

If you wish to experience the movement of the bridge, stand for a moment on the solid abutment and grasp the first suspending rod in one hand. The tremor of passing traffic is quite perceptible, and during high winds the road platform has been known to rise as much as 7 inches above normal level. To allow for movement in the wind and expansion or contraction of the links through variations of temperature, the chains are strained over enormous cast-iron saddles riding on a double set of steel rollers. Each roller is 2 feet long and 4½ inches in diameter, and the whole saddle travels to and fro. Total weight of the chains and bolts is 1,100 tons, saddles 120 tons, and each of the 4,200 links averages 24 feet in length, 7 inches in breadth and an inch in thickness. The four anchorages are each carved from solid rock to a depth of 70 feet - you can peer into the tunnels near the toll houses and see the chains disappearing from sight. Within the anchorage chamber chains are secured to a fixed saddle, then they divide and each continues through massive brickwork 8 feet thick to be secured to 3-ton anchor plates.



The final stage in the bridge's construction was to bolt suspending rods from each chain to carry the huge longitudinal girders which separate the roadway from pedestrians, and to these girders a transverse framework of light girders, strengthened by diagonal trusses, is bolted and rivetted. Footpaths are cantilevered from the main carriageway, giving an unrestricted view. Timorous users of the bridge can be consoled by the knowledge that it will bear far more than is ever expected. In theory this is 7,000 tons, including its own weight; in fact, just after its completion, 500 tons of stone were dumped in the centre to test the stress. One wonders what were the feelings of workmen who added the last few loads of ballast!

A day for Bristol to remember was 8th December 1864. Thousands of citizens and people from surrounding villages thronged the natural grandstand on both sides of the Avon, while privileged personalities occupied a special grandstand

erected at the Clifton approach. A procession two miles in length, composed of civic dignitaries, Druids and Foresters, military detachments and representatives of many trades (including gold-beaters, soda-water manufacturers, cork-cutters and iron bedstead makers), and band after band, wound its way slowly up through the town, and amid tumultuous cheering, more firing of cannon and fanfares of trumpets, crossed and re-crossed the bridge led by the Lord Lieutenants of Gloucestershire and Somersetshire. Bristol's dream had come true, thanks to Mr Vick, Mr Brunel and Messrs Hawkshaw and Barlow.

An interesting fact is that Dr David Livingstone, when visiting Bristol as a member of the British Association, crossed the Clifton bridge before it was officially opened.

In contrast to the gay sightseers and picnic parties who often cross the bridge today, there is a grim side to its history. Since the opening approximately 1,000 people have committed suicide by jumping from the bridge. Only a few are known to have fallen from the bridge and survived. Most remarkable was the young woman Sarah Ann Henley who jumped off on 8th May 1885. Her skirts retarded her fall and she was rescued from the river shocked but unhurt. Two others were children aged 3 and 12 years. Their father, who was mentally unbalanced, forced them off the bridge at night. It was high tide and both luckily fell into the water just when a boatman from Pill was passing beneath. They were hauled to safety and quickly recovered in hospital.

Aviation has contributed to the bridge's human toll. Planes are forbidden to fly beneath it, yet in February 1957 a flying officer of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force took a gamble with the treacherous air currents of the gorge and, after screaming beneath the span, lost his life when his Vampire jet fighter crashed and exploded amid the trees of Leigh Woods. And in 1930 Group Captain Heath flew a biplane fighter beneath the bridge - only admitting that he was the pilot 50 years after! During one of the recent Bristol Balloon Fiestas a pilot was known to have flown beneath the bridge, although previously warned against it. Another escapade frowned upon by the authorities is bungee jumping, the latest dare-devil stunt. Members of the Dangerous Sport Club, tied to long elastic ropes, have leapt from the bridge to be 'arrested' from plunging into the River Avon, dangling in mid-air like puppets. Definitely not to be attempted with a clothes line!

The bridge's fatal attraction for suicide attempts prompted the fixing of this notice to the stoneword: 'The Samaritans - talk to us in confidence, Bristol 298787. Nearest phone on Clifton side - 1/4 mile or ask at the Toll Booth.' Obviously it is impossible to say how many lives have been saved by this notice. The Samaritans charity was founded by Chad Varah, a controversial Anglican priest who conceived the idea when officiating at the funeral of a 14 year old girl who had taken her life because of ignorance and fear when she experienced her first period. Rev. Chad Varah vowed to redress such sexual ignorance and other stressful personal problems by establishing the world's first telephone helpline. Now Samaritan groups are established in many other countries, still encouraged by the 80 year old vicar.

December 1989 marked the 125th year span of Clifton Suspension Bridge, an anniversary marked by a fireworks display. The bridge was closed to traffic and rockets and a simulated waterfall of fire lit the gorge. Originally designed for horse-drawn carriages (toll charge one shilling per wheel!), the original cost was less than £100,000 - to replace the bridge today would cost around £25 million. Toll revenue is around £320,000 annually and maintenance costs are made up from an investment fund realising £300,000 a year in interest.

As with all public bridges, safety precautions are constantly taken. Several large scale overhaul operations have taken place since the bridge was opened. Preserved by countless layers of red lead and paint, it is still in sound condition, a fact which pays great tribute to the iron-founder craftsmen of Brunel's day when most of the work was done by hand.

The bridge has been illuminated on a number of memorable occasions, such as Bristol-French week (1930), the Silver Jubilee (1935), Festival of Britain (1951) and the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II (1953). Lit by over 4,000 bulbs, its graceful outline shines like a fairyland bridge, reflecting and shimmering in the inky waters of the river far below. Clifton Suspension Bridge has had its times of triumph and disaster, humour and pathos, and the Latin words on the Somerset side - *Suspensa Vix Via Fit* - aptly sum up one of the city's most romantic stories.

GEOFF BENNETT.

Seagulls in Bristol

INTRODUCTION

Back in late June the BBC Natural History Film Unit spent a day at Brigade Headquarters filming the seagulls that have set up home on the roof of Headquarters and A1. Members of White Watch A1 greatly assisted in the filming and I am sure they, as I did, found the day to be very interesting especially on talking to Peter Rock who has studied the birds for many years. As a result of our involvement and the interest apparent, I asked Peter Rock if he would write an article for the Brigade Magazine so that everyone can learn and understand a little more about the nature of his work with these birds at Temple Back.

CHRIS PALMER

In 1972 one pair of Herring Gulls nested on an office roof in Bristol. By 1980 there were 100 pairs of Herring and Lesser Black-Backed Gulls sharing the rooftops around Bristol Bridge. Nowadays there are more than 500 pairs in all parts of the city. By the year 2000 I estimate that the population will be something like 1500 pairs. To put it another way, Bristol is going to have a Seagull Problem.

WHY ARE THEY HERE?

After the Second World War gull populations rose dramatically, thanks mainly to the birth of 'The Throw-Away Society'. Before the war most rubbish was composted, went for pigswill, or was burned and in those days the ash bin really was a bin for ashes. After the war, for a whole host of reasons, these practices died out and included in the rubbish were increasing amounts of what The Institute of Waste Management describes (wonderfully!) as 'putrescible waste'. Hundreds of new landfill-sites had to be opened to dispose of the rubbish being generated.

It was the Clean Air Act of 1953 which prevented the burning of rubbish at the tips that really contributed to the amazing success of gulls in Britain. Suddenly, there was a wonderful source of food, and gulls flocked to the tips in their thousands. Harold MacMillan told the people of Britain in 1957 "You've never had it so good". Whether or not it was true for the people could be argued, but there is no doubt whatsoever that it was true for the gulls! Perhaps he was a secret seagull fan!

The upshot of all this was that traditional gull colonies were rapidly outgrown. And what better places to go than towns and cities? They offer the gulls a wealth of nest sites with plenty of shelter and no predators. But, above all, the food supply is limitless. It doesn't take much imagination to see the city from the gulls' point of view, as a series of small islands surrounded by cliffs.

Before the war roof-nesting was unheard of and, of course, after the war it was the coastal towns that attracted the first colonies. Nowadays, however, many inland towns and cities support

roof-nesting colonies. And these colonies are growing. Urban gulls breed far more successfully than gulls at traditional colonies. In Bristol pairs raise between 2 and 3 chicks to fledging every year, whereas in a traditional colony like Skomer Island a pair may raise only one chick in every two years.

THE STUDY

In 1980 I began looking seriously at the roof-nesting gulls in Bristol. Initially, I wanted to know where they went after fledging and whether or not they returned to breed.

In order to answer these questions I placed a large plastic ring on each chick's right leg. The ring has a pair of letters engraved upon it, and by using a different colour every year, I am easily able to identify individual birds from some distance.

In the 14 seasons of the study I have colour-ringed 2300 birds in this way and many of these now have long life histories which have built up with each sighting.

SOME RESULTS FROM THE STUDY

1. WHERE THEY GO

The two species (Herring and Lesser Black-Backed Gulls) which have colonised Bristol and other towns and cities throughout Britain behave quite differently despite being very closely related.

HERRING GULLS

Herring Gulls are rather sedentary creatures and, for the most part, prefer to stay in and around Bristol throughout the year. However, Bristol-ringed birds have been seen along the coasts of the Severn Estuary as far as Swansea and along the south coast from Plymouth to Brighton. Two birds made it to Merseyside and five have visited France (probably following the ferries).

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULLS

Lesser Black-Backs spend six months of the year abroad - the cold half of the year! Their wintering grounds are Spain, Portugal and Morocco. There have been almost 100 sightings of Bristol-ringed birds abroad, the furthest of which was at Nouakchott in Mauritania, some 4000km from Bristol.

2. DO THEY RETURN TO BREED?

These gulls can live up to 30 years in the wild and do not reach full maturity until they are 4 years old. After fledging they tend to disappear from Bristol until they are old enough to breed. During this time they go exploring (Lesser Black-Backs doing the really long-distance travelling).

When they are ready Bristol-ringed birds certainly do return to breed, but, interestingly, it is almost exclusively males that return. The females ringed in

Bristol seek other colonies in which to breed. This effectively prevents in-breeding. More interestingly, most of these males return to the very roof they were hatched some years before, or as close as possible to it.

THE FIRE STATION

I have been ringing chicks on the Fire Station roof since 1981 and the total ringed there now stands at 230. It's an unusual roof in that it is a real stronghold for Lesser Black-Backs. From a total of 230, only 17 Herring Gulls have been ringed.

Lesser Black-Backs ringed on the Fire Station roof have turned up in all sorts of places throughout southern Britain, but have also been recorded in Holland (1), France (4), Spain (4), Portugal (2) and Morocco (1). During the 1993 season I have recorded 15 colour-ringed adults on the Fire Station roof, 11 of which were hatched there. Obviously, the place has its attractions! For my

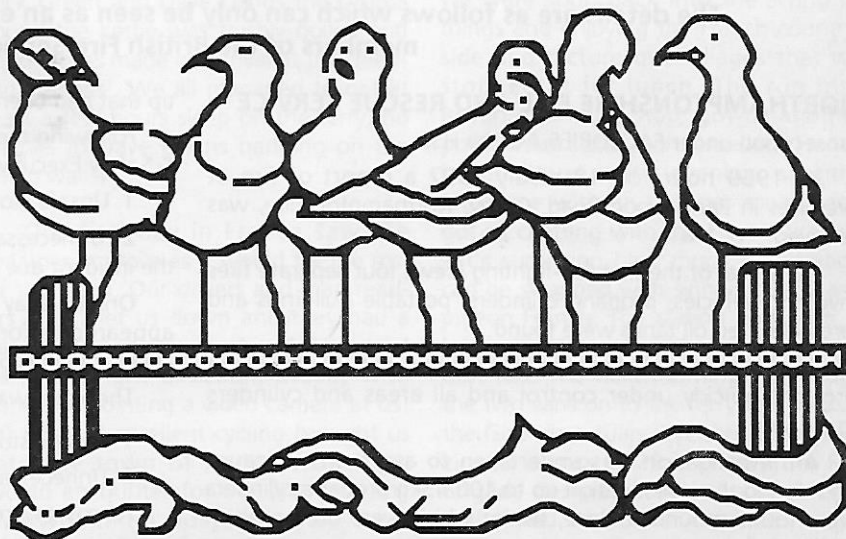
study it has been an important roof and will, I hope, continue to be. I'd like to express my thanks for the help and cooperation I've received over the years.

MORE SERIOUS MATTERS

At the beginning of this article I spoke about the history of roof-nesting gulls in Bristol and predicted something of a problem by the year 2000.

Many attempts at controlling the gull numbers in the city have been made, ranging from bird-scarers to covering entire roofs with netting. Each of these methods has cost money and all of them have had little or no effect.

In 1980 the colony was more or less confined to the area around Bristol Bridge, where few people live. But over the years, it has spread outwards into residential areas and even into Broadmead shopping centre. The gulls are beginning to cause the kinds of problems that get reported in the local



newspapers. These problems are nothing compared to what will happen in a few years time!

Of course, there are some complications.... The first is that whilst a large number of people who have experienced gulls in the city dislike them intensely, rather more like them with equal passion. Whatever your feelings are about city gulls, one thing is clear; they are here to stay! The present level of 500 pairs is probably just about acceptable. When the population reaches 1500 pairs and people on the street are attacked frequently and struck - never mind the white stuff flying through the air! - questions are going to

be asked. It seems daft to ignore the problem and hope that a solution will arrive by itself. Any method for controlling the rise in numbers will have to be prudent and sensitive to people's feelings. It is only through sensible and thorough research that a strategy can begin to be formulated.

The second complication is that Lesser Black-Backs outnumber Herring Gulls by 3:1 at the moment and by the year 2000 this figure will be 4:1. The Lesser Black-Backed Gull is therefore the more important species to understand. But, because it spends six months of the year abroad, or, to put it another way.. half its life, it is the more difficult species

to study. From my own records I find I can account for better than 60% of the Herring Gulls I ring after they have fledged, but less than 25% of Lesser Black-Backs. Plenty needs to be done! The trouble is that this kind of research costs money and in these recessionary times few are willing to part with it. however, being a persistent sort of chap, I hope to attract the kind of sponsorship necessary to undertake the work. Wish me luck! Oh, and if you have any bright ideas, please let me know!

PETER ROCK
JULY '93

£5,000 fine - unnecessary dangers to firefighters!

Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service, together with the HSE, were successful in the prosecution of a company in Corby, Northampton earlier this year.

The details are as follows which can only be seen as an encouraging outcome by all members of the British Fire Service!

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Prosecution under FACTORIES ACT by HSE

At 1959 hours on 18th July 1992 a report of fire at premises in Princewood Road, Corby, Northamptonshire, was received.

On arrival of the first fire-fighting crews four separate fires involving vehicles, propane cylinders, portable buildings and large elevated oil tanks were found.

Six appliances were requested to attend and the fires were brought quickly under control and all areas and cylinders made safe.

An investigation was undertaken to ascertain the cause and during the investigation up to 100 45kg propane cylinders were found around the site, ten of which were on a rubbish

tip that had been involved in the fire.

Following the investigation a report was sent to the Health & Safety Executive reporting them of:

1. Unsafe storage of Liquid Petroleum Gas Cylinders;
2. Unnecessary danger to firefighters when dealing with the incident due to the unsatisfactory storage of LPG's.

On Thursday 21st January 1993, Directors of the company appeared before Corby Magistrates Court to answer the above charges brought by the Health & Safety Executive.

The case was proven and the following awards made:

1. Unsafe storage of LPG cylinders - Fine £500
2. Unnecessary danger to firefighters - £5000

All costs were also awarded against the defendants.

Bristol to Bordeaux Cycle Ride

Back in August '92 when John Gamlin approached us with the idea, I don't think any of us realised just how much time and effort would go into the preparation and organisation of this trip. Along with the travelling arrangements themselves, came the more difficult task of trying to raise money through private and commercial sponsorship for the cause we had chosen to support - The Frenchay Hospital Childrens' Burns Unit. An incredible amount of leg work and energy went into trying to attract commercial backers and although quite a bit of cash, gifts, prizes, etc. was raised in this way, most letters were answered with a polite "sorry... but good luck." I must mention that as well as those that went on the trip the whole of Green Watch at A1 and others, too numerous to mention, put in a lot of work and must be thanked for their efforts.

As the time for the trip got closer the preparations became more hurried. Around about January the cyclists began to embark on serious training. Although we all regularly cycled to work we decided to go out at least once a week as a group. Starting off with 30 mile trips, we managed to work up to 80-100 miles in a day. This training stood us in good stead for the trip itself as none of us had any fitness problems coping with the final tally of 466 miles in 5 days. We had managed to get all our bikes sprayed the same colour - green of course - and also acquired matching cycle shirts and shorts to give us that professional look.

On the non-cycling side, arrangements were being made by the 'drivers' for ferry tickets, vans, fuel, food and provisions etc. Letters were flying thick and fast between Bristol and our twin city Bordeaux, with everyone having a laugh trying to translate the French. Monsieur Merv. Osborne putting us right on translation and Marilyn helping us with typing. By the time we had set off for France we were prepared for every eventuality.

Our first day took us to Portsmouth. Family and friends gathered at Temple to send us off. With good weather, and only one puncture, we made good time on what proved to be our longest day (101 miles) arriving at about 5.00pm at Portsmouth Fire Station where we showed and ate before we caught the overnight ferry to St. Malo. Thanks to Dick Green and Dave Lukins the cyclists found the kettle was freshly boiled and sandwiches made on arrival at the 'feeding stations'. We all managed to get at least a few hours sleep on the ferry, no thanks to Dave Lukins banging on the cabin walls!

Our first day in France saw the weather improve as it would for the rest of the week. Our drivers and map readers didn't let us down and they had a van positioned at every Junction to send us in the right direction, usually with someone pointing a video camera at us! 90 miles of excellent cycling brought us into the town of Redon where we would encounter for the first time the overwhelming hospitality we were

shown throughout the trip. Food and drink were in good supply and they insisted we 'finished the bottle' of aperitif before eating, all three of them!

The next day took us down to La Roche Sur Yon where we were surprised to be escorted into the town by two police motorbikes, TV and press cameras also came out to greet us and we all laughed to see our pictures in the local paper the next day! That evening we enjoyed a superb meal provided for us by the brigade there, I must also mention the accommodation and breakfast which we had at the local technical college. Everyone seemed to be going out of their way to look after us.

Each night was getting later and each morning it was getting harder to get going but once we were on our way we were soon back into the swing of things and enjoying the French countryside and picturesque villages that we stopped at for lunch. The run into Royan, our third stop, got us another police escort and more excellent French hospitality. A warm evening, aperitifs and wine with an outdoor meal, soon got us chatting with the French firemen - it's surprising how much information can be swapped with sign language and pigeon French. The station dog, Sam, a large alsation came in for a lot of attention too. The next morning we loaded the two vans on to the ferry that crosses the Gironde estuary. We, however, were zipped across at 20 knots by the Fire Brigade Rescue Launch. An impressive craft fitted with sonar, satellite naviga-

tion and various gadgets - we all wondered when Avonmouth's inflatable would be up-graded to this standard! We were met on the other side of the channel by various dignitaries from the Bordeaux Fire Brigade, Town Council, exchange group and about 30 members of the Brigade Cycling Club who were to accompany us the last 75 miles to our destination.

The last day's route took us past beaches, vineyards chateaux - the scenery could not have been more beautiful or more French. The final few miles were slowly paced so as to tie us in with the end of a display by the Brigade Acrobatics Team at the Town Hall. We finally arrived tired but satisfied at the completion of the trip looking forward to a relaxing weekend in Bordeaux.

This was not to be however, as the Bordeaux Fire Brigade Social Club had a full weekend of events for us. This started about an hour after we arrived when, after a quick shower and change, we were rushed back to the Town Hall for formal introductions with the Mayor. City plaques and gifts were exchanged then it was back to our accommodation followed by a night out at the cabaret complete with Barry Manilow look-a-like compere and magician with wild animals. We finally stumbled into bed at 2am.

Saturday was vineyard day. Visits to 2 Chateaux for guided tours and wine tasting were split by lunch at Pauillac, a small medoc town famous for its wines - and very nice they were too! Thankfully Saturday evenings get together was a relaxed affair; a reception at the offices of the Bordeaux-Bristol exchange. Most of the people there spoke good English compared to our painfully bad French.

Another day out on Sunday took us to the seaside at the resort of Archachon with a boat trip and packed lunches. We also managed to stop at a couple of Fire Stations in the area for a look at how the French do things. We finally managed to meet the Firemen at the central station where we were staying on Sunday evening and I think we were all struck by the fact that there were more similarities than differences between us. After much chatting and swapping of souvenirs we finally managed to start packing the vans at about 10.00pm. We left Bordeaux at 5.00am the next morning for the long drive back up to Cherbourg where we had arranged to stay overnight in order to catch the 9.00am ferry on Tuesday morning. 5 hours on the ferry and 3 hours on the road up from Poole got us into Bristol about 4.00pm.

If we thought that was it, we were wrong because we still had to sort out the prizes, thank you letters, return of

equipment etc. and then there was the article for the Brigade Magazine to write!

The distance cycled was 466.6 miles and the top prize was won by Pat Lavelle at A1 who guessed exactly.

Many thanks to all those who helped but haven't been mentioned and if you really want to know more we will send you the video!

THE TEAM:

John Gamlin, Dave Lukins, Dick Green, Bob Jerome, Dave Amesbury, Neil Griffiths, Jim Wemyss, Steve Box, Russ Bennett, Adrian Mantle, Stewart Brown. Green Watch A1.

Members of the Green Watch Team together with the Lord Mayor of Bristol Mr John Channon and Lee Cottle, aged 10 who has been receiving treatment at Frenchay for a number of years, just before setting off on their cycling marathon.



The County of Avon Fire Brigade forges links with the Gambia Fire Services

In October 1991, Divisional Officer Dave Hutchings of 'A' Division, visited the Gambia for a holiday and made contact with the fire service. What he saw of the standard of fire appliances and equipment available to respond to emergency situations, quite frankly horrified him.

There was a complete lack of the most basic equipment and the majority of vehicles on the run were of colonial vintage expect a 1960's TK Bedford and a Dodge K850 donated by Shropshire.

The ambulance service is operated by the fire service with again a shortage of basic equipment, e.g. an ambulance will carry a stretcher, two blankets and the crew would not be qualified First Aiders.

Because of this acute shortage of adequate equipment denying the keen personnel the opportunity to effectively deal with emergency situations, with absolutely no provision for Road Accident Rescue for which there is an increasing demand - some days up to ten people die in road accidents and extrication is achieved by the use of axes and bars. This in fact was the prime motivation for the establishment of links between us when DO Hutchings wit-

nessed the death of four people following a road traffic accident where they remained trapped for 24 hours with the rescue equipment required to release them having to be borrowed from the United Nations.

HISTORIC LINKS

The Gambia is a microcosm, a sliver of Britain's colonial history now finding its way as an independent state, a republic within the Commonwealth.

The Country is approximately 4,000 square miles with a population of around one million (the same as Avon) it is 200 miles long and at the widest point is only 30 miles narrowing to 12 miles.

The Gambia is the smallest country in Africa and its creation and existence was brought about by the river Gambia which the French, Portuguese and British fought over for many years during and after the slave trade. It provides a safe reliable route into the interior of North West Africa, this section of Africa was previously known as Mandingo land.

Bristol has had historic links with The Gambia since the 17th Century with the Bristol ships trading the slave triangle

between Bristol, The Gambia to Americas and returning to Bristol with cotton and tobacco.

Prior to independence Banjul the capital was known as Bathurst island, this name taken from Bathurst Basin in the old Bristol City Docks. Many street names in Banjul will have a familiar ring to Bristolians with Picton Street, Gloucester Road, and Albert Market to name a few.

The highly successful Roots television series was based on the slave trade from The Gambia and Fort James Island still provides a monument to this barbaric trade.

Stone built holding stations still stand where newly caught slaves were held before shipping to the Americas. When the fort was built it was named after the Prince who was to become James II. Rusty cannons are still to be seen, reminiscent of the bitter colonial wars between France and Britain for this highly lucrative trade and the control of the river Gambia.

Alex Haley discovered that his great great great grandfather Kunta Kinte was born at Juffure on James Island, it is rumoured that an ageing rel-

ative still lives there and visitors may meet her on a visit to the island.

The Country is politically stable, operating a multi-party democratic republic. The indigenous population are of a warm and friendly disposition with the most common saying "no problem in The Gambia". It is of Third World status whose economy is based on aid, ground nut exports and more recently tourism, they are a proud people who endeavour to conceal their poverty.

The total annual budget for the Fire Service is £50,000 which includes salaries, fuel, maintenance and repair, there are 200 firefighters both male and female with the average salary being £37.00 per month for 48 hours per week.

Tragically as we in the west feel the effects of the recession the backlash in Third World countries such as The Gambia causes even greater financial deprivation and poverty.

EQUIPMENT SENT

With all the facts described earlier brought to the attention of the Brigades Public Protection Committee there was total support for the initiative to send two Water Tenders, Road Accident Rescue Equipment, a Breathing Air Compressor together with numerous spares to The Gambia.

The vehicles and equipment arrived in The Gambia May this year and Divisional Officer Hutchings and his partner Claire spent summer annual leave training The Gambian Firefighters.

Claire spent 10 days with the 28 women Firefighters teaching First Aid and Casualty Handling and Casualty Care whilst DO Hutchings taught the

use of the equipment and rescue techniques.

THE FUTURE

Following the venture the depth of their resources problem has been further highlighted and the County of Avon Fire Brigade with the full support of our politicians will continue to build on this initiative by further donations and the setting up of a training programme for The Gambia Officers whereupon we may seek further assistance.

I would wish to extend my sincere thanks and appreciation both from the County of Avon Fire Brigade and The Gambia Fire Service to the following companies whose generosity made this venture possible.

Saxon Sanbec, Courage, Rolls Royce, Nuclear Electric, GATX, British Seed Houses, Bristol Port Company, Bristol Oil Company, ICI Fertilizers, B & S

Commercials, Hamworthy, Godiva, The Gambia Experience Travel Company.

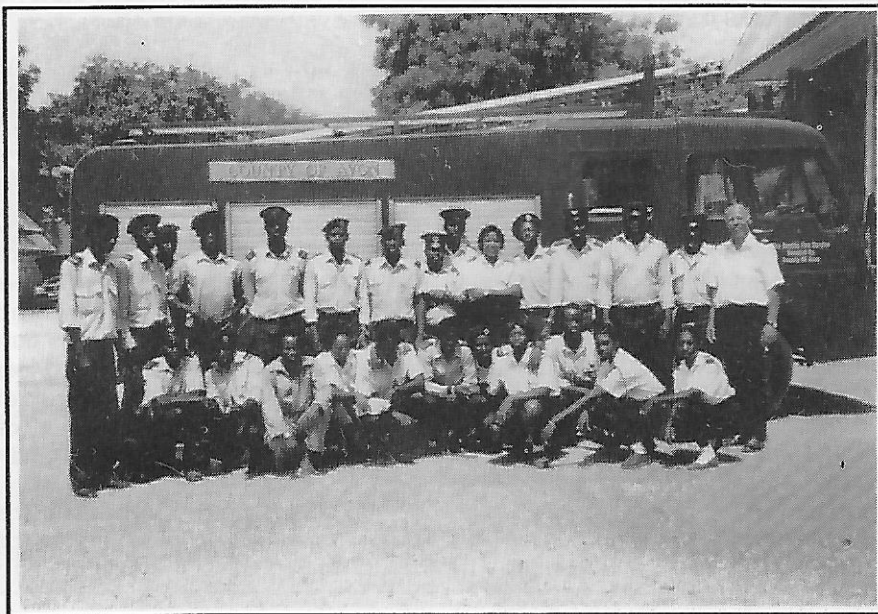
CFO

The project continues to gain momentum and anyone interested in helping in any way or who is able to help raise or donate funds towards future shipping costs, please let me know.

My involvement in The Gambia so far has been a very valuable and rewarding experience and if any of you seek a working break in high temperatures at a cost of approximately £700 for two people, once again let me know.

DAVE HUTCHINGS

Photograph shows Dave Hutchings with some of the Firefighters alongside one of the K850 Dodge appliances in The Gambia.



Well done C1

Weston-Super-Mare

Firefighters at C1, through their fundraising efforts, have been able to donate substantial sums of money to a number of local charities as well as the Fire Services National Benevolent Fund.

On Saturday 20th March, Chief Fire Officer Andy Walters presented £250 cheques to the following charities at C1: Weston Hospicecare, The Multiple Sclerosis Society, The Notable Club (bus appeal) and Cancer Research (Frenchay). The money donated to these charities came from a proportion of the proceeds of their Carol float collection at Leo's Superstore last year.

The presentation evening was very well represented by all the charities involved and the buffet provided by White Watch along with the pleasant atmosphere made this a super evening that I am sure the recipients will remember.

Members of Blue Watch set off from Brigade Headquarters on Thursday 1st July on a Charity bike ride from Bristol to Bournemouth to raise funds for the Meningitis trust and the FSNBF.

But they did not use conventional bikes they used one with six wheels which used to pound the promenade at Weston-Super-Mare and has been transformed into a mini fire engine complete with blue flashing beacon and two-tone horns.

They raised £2,100 over two days which added to the £3,000 collected on the last two charity rides just about says it all - well done C1!

CP

Retirements, Ill Health and Injury Discharges

Since our last issue of 'Nova' fourteen of our colleagues have left the Brigade through retirement, ill health or service related injury discharge and they are as follows:

Stn O. B. Freeguard, T/DO D Williams,
T/Stn O J Shrimpton, Ff R Lonsdale, Ff J Muir,
Ff A O Hornett, Sub O G O'Hare, Sub O R Clark,
LFF A Doyle, Ff G Toop, Ff C Tudor,
Sub O A R Taylor, Sub O A Eddy, and LFF A V Davies.

I am sure you would like to join me in wishing all our former colleagues all the very best for the future.

CHRIS PALMER

The Fireman's Prayer

When I am called to duty, God, wherever flames may rage,

Give me strength to save some life, whatever be its age.

Help me embrace a little child, before it is too late,

Or save an older person from the horror of that fate.

Enable me to be alert and hear the weakest shout,

And quickly and efficiently put the fire out.

I want to fill my calling, to give the best in me,

To guard my every neighbour and protect his property.

If, according to my fate, I am to lose my life,

Please bless with our protecting hand, my children and my wife.

Getting it off your chest

There are many members of the Brigade with hobbies and interests as diverse as flower arranging to amateur dramatics (in fact amateur dramatics is extremely popular). But how many are into doing 1,562 sit ups in 1 hour with a 50lb weight on their chest? The answer is 1 and his name is Mike Collin of White Watch, B6 Speedwell who completed this gruelling task in aid of the Cancer and Leukaemia in Childhood Trust and raised £1,000 in doing so!

Mike carried out this amazing feat at the Bristol Charities Fayre held at Narrow Quay, Bristol back in July and also broke the previous record, set by a former member of the Parachute Regiment, by a mere 369!

He got the idea after seeing it being done on television and all I can say to Mike is well done but be very careful in what you choose to watch on television in the future!

CHRIS PALMER



Photograph shows Mike in determined mood during his record breaking feat. (Courtesy, Bristol United Press).

Fire at the Hippodrome - 1948

In a fireman's mess room had most
 Been given their 'two veg and roast',
 When suddenly the alarm's demand
 Made movement quick, on every hand,
 Of scattering chairs, and scurrying feet.
 And engines 'shooting' to the street,
 In a matter of seconds flat.
 With the scribbled-down message, that
 Smoke was seen from the Hippodrome.
 Which was not far from the station's home!
 So, in a cabin small and full
 To dress with speed became the 'rule'.
 And when our engines soon arrived
 From them, we very quickly dived.
 As orders 'flew' both thick and fast.
 And water pumps made counter blast.
 We heaved now flooding hoses right

Into a hall of blazing light.
 Down which but half-way would our feet
 Go, for of reaching flames great heat.
 From a stage of such fiery glow
 Putting on its most spectacular 'show'.
 But, despite this we bravely sought
 To get nearer the 'enemy' fought.
 So now we pulled and dragged our hose
 With water playing still, 'twixt' rows
 Of seats, until we came to be
 Face on with fire's great density.
 Slowly forward, because of it
 We came to the orchestral pit.
 Where a strange 'baton' of water we waved.
 This auditorium to be saved.
 But not before fire's very last 'trick'.
 When it gave out its 'dying kick'!

As the safety curtain of weakened parts
 Came crashing down. And fireman's hearts,
 And minds experienced the fears
 That they had known in the 'blitz' years.
 And we fell back! Dropping our hose
 As huge bright orange flames arose.
 And sparks flew everywhere. So thus
 Was created more work for us.
 Regaining our feet we soon 'came to'
 That we might tackle this fire anew.
 Aided by one sustaining thought.
 Others, encircling it too fought.
 And so, within another hour
 Was seen a lessening of fire power.
 Then, with unending water-supply
 From river near, it came to die!

GILBERT CROKER

The First Battle of Lansdown

For those of you who may not be aware, a significant battle took place during the English Civil War in 1643 between the Royalist and Parliamentary forces.

Just a stones throw from our new Brigade premises at Lansdown the Royalist army led by Sir Ralph Hopton, the Marquis of Hertford and Prince Maurice fought a bloody battle against the Parliamentary army led by Sir William Waller, who was acknowledged as one of the finest, tacticians at that time. In fact Waller's battle plan proved too much for the Royalist as they fled in disarray initially.

This year marks the 350th anniversary of the Battle of Lansdown and it is interesting to note that a second Battle of Lansdown took place just a short time ago. Read on!

THE SECOND BATTLE OF LANSDOWN

"This being a true and accurate account of the events witnessed by many a God fearing man on Wednesday 23rd June in the year of our Lord 1993, ending in the movement of 'S' Division men from Avon Fire Brigade Headquarters in the City of Bristol, to an assault on new offices at Lansdown, Bath."

A bloody but confused battle ended on Lansdown at six o'clock on Wednesday. Some old stalwarts there, were amazed at the severity of the fighting and the jockeying for positions. They

had never seen anything like it before in England.

The 'S' Division men led by their Commander Barry Smith left their camp at an unearthly hour that morn to make sure that everything had been labelled correctly and placed in crates with their mark on. It was feared that waste bins, staplers and blotters would disappear off the face of the earth, but it was more than any mad dared to do given the knowledge of how skillful certain colleagues in arms had become with their hydrant keys and bars.

An 'S' Division Officer interviewed after the battle echoed his admiration for a Junior Officer he had fought alongside that day: "That Martin Rundle is the best shifter of lockers and chooser of ground that I ever saw!"

It must be said that when ones men are engaged in the toil and strain of the transfer of their equipment from one battle station to the next how wonderful tis to be able to use 'an electric lift'!

The transportation wagon was soon filled to bursting with stores and supplies and last smaller articles of convenience were conveyed to Lansdown by the personal carriages of the 'S' Division men. Before the exodus took place there were minor skirmishes on the top floor between exiting Officers and those anxious to move into vacant ground, but this did not result in too much bloodshed nor delay the battle plan.

Runners and Lookouts had earned their bread and water that day as com-

munication arrived that the invasion force had left their previous position and were heading towards Lansdown.

'S' Division men who had arrived early to ponder and fret over the master plan tried in vain to gain better vantage points and secure finer views of the lush, green, abundant countryside surrounding their new position but, alas, they had to be content with the fact that all the best work stations had been captured and plundered by those more senior than themselves!

As the offloading of supplies and equipment commenced most strange it was to note that desks, chairs and other pieces familiar in these surroundings, though never seen before, suddenly appeared to adorn the posts of some of the 'S' Division men - most strange!

Soon it became realised that the battle was reaching its inevitable end with 'S' Division men laying about the place in exhausted heaps unable to put anymore effort into the sorting and rearrangement of their new abode. Yes the day had taken its toll, and although opportunity was taken for rest and refreshment that afternoon on the patio with debate focused on what was in position beyond Lansdown Golf Course, there were many aching muscles and dust covered uniforms and a decision was made by the battle weary Commander to reform and continue the assault on obtaining some semblance of order the morrow!

CHRIS PALMER



Hi-Ex Foam demonstration in 1966

Down Mem



Protective clothing demonstration in November 1970



Home Office inspection in October 1969

Memory Lane



A keen young member of the Brigade on the night of the lecturette finals held at Brislington Fire Station. Who is it?



Rescue Tender on the run at A3 Avonmouth in 1971



Firefighters emerging from the Co-op Supermarket fire in Broomhill following a severe fire in August 1970

Fox Glove

The following text is the contents of an Admin 42 report submitted to the Officer in Charge A2 Southmead by Firefighter P. J. Nash.

Date: 14th April 1993 Reference: Gortex Gloves

Sir,

I must report to you that my Gortex gloves are 'missing'. On 14th April 1993, I had 3 hours time off from 1930 - 2230 and Ff Roberts (White Watch) covered me during that period.

My gloves were put on the appliance by myself, removed by Ff Roberts and placed in my Fire boots. On return I placed my fire kit on the appliance and noticed my Gortex gloves were missing. My Colleague Ff Peat, informed me that a Fox had been seen leaving the appliance room with a glove in his mouth. Ff Peat and Sub O Day chased the Fox in the station yard and retrieved the glove. On inspection it was found to be one of my debris gloves.

I can only assume that the Fox had made off with my Gortex gloves. An inspection of the station yard was made by myself and Ff Peat but to no avail!

NASH P.J. 776

Report from Officer in Charge: To Divisional Commander:

Sir,

Previous to the above the 'culprit' was disturbed trying to get away with a neckerchief.

I attach pictorial evidence of the villain to co-operate the statement that a 'Fox' does frequent the station.

Divisional Commanders Comment:

"Best excuse this year on A Div!"



'Fox Gloves' on the wall at A2 with his eyes on a B.A. Set!

How many can you name in this photograph?



Some time ago there was a big oil rig fire in Saudi Arabia. Immediately the call went out for the legendary 'Red Adair', the top man in the world on oil fires. Unfortunately he was unavailable. So after a frantic search through 'Yellow Pages' they came up with 'Green Adair' of Dublin. A quick phone call to Ireland and 'Green Adair' agreed to do the job for half the anticipated price and would leave the next morning.

Later the next day the Hercules aircraft carrying 'Green Adair' and his team landed in the desert next to the burning well. The doors opened, the tail ramp came down and out of the aircraft at high speed came a huge green fire engine which hurtled across the sand and drove right into the middle of the flames.

The doors flew open and half a dozen big fellas leaped out and started beating out the flames with donkey jackets. This continued for some time but eventually got the fire under control and at last put it out.

Out of the smoke and debris emerged 'Green Adair' and his blackened, exhausted crew to be thanked by a very grateful oil company who handed over a cheque for the agreed sum plus a health bonus. As he pocketed the cheque 'Green Adair' turned to his men and said, "The first thing we do with this money lads is fix the brakes on that ***** truck!"

Coming down to earth with a bump!

The following text is part of a letter, I received from a supportive parent which did raise a chuckle, although I must emphasise the letter was very genuine and sincere.

Dear Sir,

My daughters are members of a 4-piece established gym club catering for girls and boys 5-15 years old.

They wish to purchase a 'Stuntmaster' 6m x 4m inflatable area which absorbs the impact of landing at height from asymmetric bars etc., thus lessening the risk of injury to the gymnast during training.

It was suggested that this item is similar to that used by Fire Brigade where persons have to jump from burning buildings. As our fund raising is limited we wonder if you know any outlet where we may be able to purchase one secondhand.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs. M.

CHRIS PALMER

Fire alarm sparks rodent riddle

A pensioner searched his home high and low for six weeks to find a pesky rodent who kept squeaking at him.

The Taunton man felt certain there was a rat or mouse in his attic after hearing shrill squeaks from somewhere above him both day and night.

But when he was finally driven to distraction and called in council rat-catchers, they discovered the noise was coming from his smoke alarm.

No one had told the long-suffering gent that when batteries started to run low in his smoke alarms they would sound a warning.

And according to envi-

ronmental health officers, the high-pitched beeps which are issued every two minutes have caught out several unsuspecting people.

A spokeswoman for Taunton Deane Council said as soon as the householder made the squeaking noise over the phone they knew what the problem was.

"The squeaking had been going on for about six weeks. But when he made a noise, we realised straight away what it was and put him out of his misery.

It's not the first time we've been called to deal with pests which don't exist. All down to the fault warnings on smoke alarms."

A lighthearted look at life



**Members of Red Watch A1 Temple awaiting the arrival of
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire Brigades!**

Yes, another typical drill session at B4 Brislington





"Yes, it's a firefighter's life for me!"



Founder members of White Watch C1 Sewing Circle with an essential tool of the trade for stitching-up a colleague!

Left to right: Rich Frith, Dave Warren and Tim MacLennan

TURLEY FABRICATIONS LTD.

Sheet Metal Specialists in Stainless Steel, Aluminium & Mild Steel.

* Up to 10 x 1/2 Shearing * 8ft x 1/8 Press Brakes *
3.5 m x 3 mm Press Brakes



* Gas Electric Co + Argon Arc Welding *
Light Structural Fabrications

* Prototype, production runs * Power Rolling Service

BRISTOL 613510 & 613640

Unit D1, Avondale Works, Woodland Way, Kingswood, Bristol.

Bedminster Police Station

joined the Auxiliary Fire Service on 1st July 1940 at Bedminster Police and Fire Station in East Street, just a few weeks after the first of the air raids on Bristol in June, as a part time messenger boy.

The old Police Station in East Street was built as a combined Police and Fire Station in the early 1800's with the stables at the rear for the fire horses and cottages in New Charlotte Street for the Inspector and sergeants married families.

The tower over the main entrance of the building was the watch tower where a duty fireman was posted, day and night, to watch over the surrounding area for signs of smoke or fire, before the general use of telephone or street fire alarms.

As far as is known, the Station had one Shand-Mason horse drawn steam pump and one horse drawn escape ladder.

Built into the side wall of the engine room is a large range with side boiler and large tap on the front. The range was type made for Fire Stations at the time with a quick release lever on the side to drop the front fire bars and the fire out at the front. The fire was kept burning day and night, winter and summer. At the back of the engine room was the small office called the watch-

room. Fire Stations today still have watchrooms, a carry over from the old watch towers.

I, along with my two other messenger friends Ken Whitehead and John Bowerman, used to do three or four evening or night duties a week. The officers were Auxiliary Fire Service (A.F.S.) Fred Stallard and Jack Nutt. We also had two Police Fire Sergeants, Frank Wilkins and 'Tiger' Smith, brought back from retirement for wartime service. 'Tiger' Smith was a tiger, and woe betide anyone caught shirking. They were one of the last links with the old horse drawn fire engines, and they used to tell us some of the workings of the old days.

One of the tales I remember was a ploy to get assistance of the public to go up Windmill Hill. On a call of fire the horses would be brought from the stables at the back through double doors to the engine room. The harness was suspended from the ceiling in front of the engine, and the horses were hitched to the engine. The driver was the coachman and his job was to drive to the fire,

take the horses off the lynch pole and take them away from the engine and put blankets on them to keep them warm after their gallop.

The engineers job, on a call of fire, was to go to the range in the side wall and fill a water can with a large spout, with hot water from the large tap of the range. It was poured into the brass boiler and the lid sealed tight. The fire box door was opened where thin sticks had already been laid in the fire box. The

handle on the front of the range was lifted which dropped the front bars, and the fire was shovelled into the fire box of the steamer. All this took less than a minute. The crew, usually six, already wearing fire boots, would put on tunic, fire helmet, belt and axe, and jump on their place on the engine.

The front doors would be opened and out they would go with the fire gong ringing, operated by the officer in charge with his foot. Going along East Street the gong would be

rung furiously and the horses would attempt to run faster, but the driver would hold them in check, so that they were almost prancing.

At the back of the engine room was the small office called the watchroom. Fire Stations today still have watchrooms, a carry over from the old watch towers.

The engineer rode on a step at the rear nearside of the engine behind the coal box and shovel. On top of the coal he had an unofficial small sack of sawdust, which the officer in charge was not supposed to know about. As they travelled along East Street with the gong sounding and the driver and crew shouting (the common shout was Hi-Ya-Hi as sailors used when hauling sails), the engineer would throw handfuls of sawdust in the firebox. This did nothing to heat the boiler, but caused clouds of smoke and sparks to come out of the chimney and float along East Street. This brought people out of the pubs, shops and houses and quite soon there was a crowd running after the engine. That is why the horses were kept reined in so that some of the crowd could keep up. Along East Street, into Mill Lane, around the urinal in the middle of the road and up Prospect Place to Windmill Hill. Under the bridge and that is where the horses slowed to a walk, the crew dismounted and the crowd gave a hand to help the engine up the hill.

Being a Police Fire Brigade, the firemen were also constables, and the fire horses were used on a rota basis by the mounted police on the beat to give them exercise. I believe this caused problems on occasions when the Fire Brigade turned out with the gong sounding and the police horse trying to gallop after the engine.

FRED HOOPER

Brigade Skittles Team

The team did well last season coming fourth in the league against stiff opposition from the Grenadiers and the Devons.

This was celebrated with a nice weekend away on the coast at Sidmouth at a plush hotel for the presentation of the trophies which were awarded as follows:

Club Person of the Year -	Pete Dobson, A7
Top Player of the Year -	Paul Drake, B4
Highest Individual Score -	Don Dolling
Lowest Individual Score -	Mac Aston's daughter
Most Ducks -	John Marshall, A7

Sadly one of our most regular players for many seasons - Bill White (Knocker's dad) passed away.

The Pensioners side sold their first prize from the competition and will provide a perpetual trophy for the team in remembrance to Chalky.

Brigade Knockout

The Competition for 1992 was a great success with White Watch A1 Temple making it to the final with the Pensioners.

The Pensioners captained by Bill Lewis (ex A2) had to rely on Mac Aston (ex T/Dept) and Bob Essen (ex FP) to provide a convincing win.

Bill Lewis achieved the highest individual score of 52 which upset Berni and Ginger from A1 so much, the Brigade camera tells the rest of the story.

A presentation was held at B6 and two hundred and fifty pounds was presented to C.L.I.C. and fifty pounds to the Fire Services National Benevolent Fund.

Our thanks to the Landlord of the Maypole, Hanham for hosting the Competition and donating the prizes which included a barrel of beer for the Pensioners.

KNOCKER

Cycle Race

After many months of planning and preparation the County of Avon Fire Service, Cycle Race team set off north on the M5 - destination Birkenhead.

The team consisted of myself (John Bennett), Nick Baldwin and two renowned local racers to even up the odds against the strong northern and London squads. We had arranged to stay at a station in Birkenhead on the Saturday to be fully rested for the race on the Sunday. For those of you who don't know, Birkenhead is a part of Liverpool and Liverpool is a VERY big city. So, after about 3 hours of travelling around the streets of Liverpool, two trips across the Mersey and a tank of fuel later, we finally arrived at the station for a well earned rest.

In the morning we had our breakfast, thanked our hosts and set off for the race at about 8 o'clock. You may think we were being a little over cautious as the race wasn't until 12 o'clock and we could almost see the park from the station but we were taking no chances. Believe me, Liverpool is a maze.

The race venue was excellent. A circuit of about two miles on well surfaced roads around Birkenhead park which had been closed to traffic and swept before the race. There were over 80 starters, a real mixture of experience and

abilities. The weather was good. Dry, cool with just a slight wind to compensate for the lack of any hills. It was going to be a fast race.

It was about the 8th or 9th lap that a small group of 6 riders started to get away and it was about now that one of our strongest riders, Phil Marshall, got a puncture and had to abandon his hopes. That just left myself, Nick and Will Bundy to try and get a place on the line.

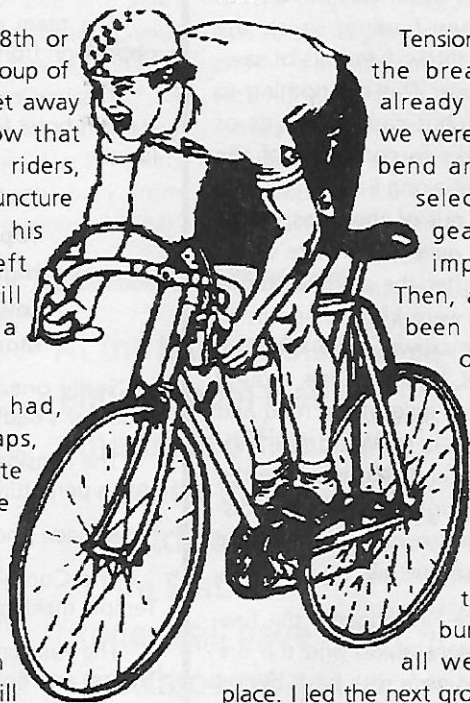
The breakaway had, over the next few laps, put over a minute between us and there was no real chase. Time was slipping by, only half a dozen laps remained when we started to chase in earnest. Nick and Will were on the front and driving hard. I was trying to control things behind them and having the occasional flurry on the front. The gap was down to 29 seconds and we could just see the leaders in front but it was too late, the bell was sounding.

Things get very hectic on the last lap. People forget the chase and concentrate

on jockeying for position. Nick and Will managed to stay near the front and were in a good spot for the sprint, I was not.

Tension was mounting, the breakaway 6 had already finished when we were round the last bend and riders were selecting the right gears for the impending sprint. Then, as if a gun had been fired, we were off, heads down, out of the saddle and pedalling like crazy.

Nick and Will went over the line with a bunch of 6 others, all were given 14th place. I led the next group over and got 15th. The winner was Nick Yarworth, a policeman from Gloucester. Three men in the first 15 was not a bad result for our first try. Especially when you consider the fact that the British squad, most of whom were racing this day, won the International Fire Service Championship a few weeks later.



JOHN BENNETT, B1