

Cowbridge Fire Brigade.

The letter in last week's Gem complimenting Cowbridge and Llantwit Major fire brigades for their rapid response to a call at a barn fire at St Hilary is a timely reminder that Cowbridge Fire Brigade will be celebrating its centenary next year.

The Brigade was formed in September 1901, Alderman Edward John of the Eagle Stores having been largely responsible in purchasing the first fire engine for the town. Mr David Tilley was invited to undertake the formation of a fire brigade, organising recruitment and training with great success. The initial members of the brigade were Captain Tilley, Lieutenant James, Foreman Bradbury, Engineer Lambert and Firemen H. Goulden, L. Thomas, A. Stockwood, A. Spencer, B. Thomas, S. Lane, J. Beer, H. John, J. Bond, E. Warren, I. Croom and R. Morgan.

The brigade was soon in action - in 1901 it was called to a fire at the Ancient Druids Hotel, a 15-room house (the three-storey building at the entrance to Druids Green), where a match had been dropped in a chest of drawers; the following year saw action at a cottage at the rear of the Town Hall, where a fire had been started by an upset paraffin lamp, at a thatched store house in the Limes, and at Hooper's ironmonger's shop in Llantwit Major, where an oil lamp had exploded. Farm fires were not uncommon - a hay rick blaze at St Mary Church in 1904 was caused by sparks from a passing engine on the railway line, and there were others at Germonds Farm near Welsh St Donats, and Picket farm, Clemenstone.

It is clear that a sense of camaraderie, so much a feature of the modern brigade, soon developed. There are a number of newspaper accounts of the concerts (usually for fundraising), and celebrations, often at Llandough Castle where the Ebsworths were staunch supporters. The first outing and dinner took place on September 6th, 1902: "Favoured by glorious weather, the members of the Cowbridge Fire Brigade had a most enjoyable outing together on Monday afternoon. Leaving Cowbridge at 1 o'clock they travelled by brake to Southerndown where a pleasant hour or two was spent on the beach. The journey was then continued through Ogmere and Bridgend, Cowbridge being reached about 7.30. The drive was a most pleasant one thanks to the smart handling of the ribbons by Driver Morgan, and with well-sharpened appetites the firemen sought out the Duke of Wellington Hotel where a capital spread awaited them...."

The fire brigade performed a valuable role, despite primitive equipment - a manual fire engine and a limited amount of hose. In Cowbridge only about a third of the town could be served by pumping from the river. Away from the river, buckets or private water carts had to be used, though an attachment to the well in West Village was soon brought into use. (Mains water did not come to Cowbridge till 1926). It is not surprising therefore that Captain Tilley soon saw the need to obtain a new steam-powered engine, and in the years 1909 and 1910, when he was Mayor, he set about fund-raising by inviting donations and subscriptions from as many people as possible.

In 1910, a new steam engine of about 300 gallons/minute capacity was purchased at a cost of £378. September 6th saw the formal presentation of the engine to the council by Mrs Ebsworth; Master Thomas Edmondes of Colwinston lit the furnace fire, Lord Ninian Crichton Stuart attached the first length of hose, and Mrs Ebsworth started the engine for testing 'before a large company of ladies and gentlemen of the district'. Capt Tilley reported

that the engine 'gave satisfaction when tested, forcing two good jets of water from the engine at the river to each end of the town'! The only drawback was that the fire station - in what is now the Lesser Hall kitchen - had to be enlarged at a cost of £10 to take the new engine.

Of the fires attended with the new engine (which was horse-drawn), there were again a number of farm fires - a hay rick at the rear of the Bear Hotel, at Llwynhelyg farm, Brocastle and Breach. In 1914, the thatched roof of a cottage in the West End of Cowbridge, belonging to Mr Illtyd David (this was probably the old Westgate Inn) was set alight by a spark from a passing traction engine. The biggest fire of the early years of the century, however, was in Hancocks' malthouse at the rear of the Vale of Glamorgan Inn (in what is now the Old Wool Barn). Here £3000 worth of damage was caused; the bill presented by the brigade came to £32 - 8s - 6d, of which cleaning and drying the hose came to £3 - 4s - 6d, and polishing £1 - 10s - 6d.

For 22 years, David Tilley was Captain of the Fire Brigade, and he can be fairly regarded as 'Father of the Fire Service' in the town. He developed a highly efficient brigade, with a strong sense of comradeship and service, combined with cheerfulness - attributes which still characterise the service today.

Written by Jeff Alden 2000

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Cowbridge Fire Brigade

Brigade formed 29/9/1901. Alderman Edward John 'instrumental in purchasing the fire engine for the town'. Capt Tilley invited to undertake the formation of a fire brigade; he organised 16 men and trained them.

Initial members: Capt D. Tilley

Lieut. James
Foreman Bradbury
Engineer Lambert
Fireman H Goulden
L. Thomas
A Stockwood
A Spencer
B Thomas
S. Lane
J. Beer
H. John
J. Bond
E. Warren
I. Croom
R. Morgan

Fires Attended:

October 1901: Ancient Druids Hotel, a large 15-room house (where a match had been dropped in a chest of drawers)

1902: Cottage at the rear of the Town Hall (fire started by a paraffin lamp). Lodging there was 80 year old William Davies.

May 6th Small thatched store house in the Limes, used by the RDC. The roof was destroyed, but several nearby thatched cottages escaped.

Ironmongers shop in Llantwit Major

January 1903 Child of W Jenkins, Pelican Inn – fatally burned.

1904: Hay rick blaze at St Mary Church - caused by sparks from a passing engine

1905 ‘The suction pipe fixed at East Village well remains the same as last reported.....No pipes have been fixed at the Malthouse or Bear yard wells as suggested. Either a large tank near the market or pipes to the wells, or both, is obviously necessary in this part of the town’ – Fire Brigade annual report

September 4th and 5th 1906 Fire of 4 hay ricks at Boverton Place, Llantwit Major

1907 Mr R Tucker, the Limes
Mr A James, Church Street
Mr D Evans, east village – all elected to join the Fire Brigade

1909: Germonds Farm, Welsh St Donats

1910: Picket Farm, Clemenstone

In 1909, the annual inspection and competition of the S. Wales District of the National Fire Brigade Union took place on the cricket field, by permission of Mr EH Ebsworth. The Brigade march was headed by the Pontyclun Brass Band.

In 1910, a new steam engine of 260 to 300 gallons/minute capacity was purchased at a cost of £378. Capt Tilley had organised the fund-raising; the fire engine was presented to the council from subscriptions received by the Captain. On September 6th, Mrs Ebsworth of Llandough Castle made the formal presentation; Master Thomas Edmondes of Colwinston lit the furnace fire. Lord Ninian Crichton Stuart attached the first length of hose, and Mrs Ebsworth started the engine for testing. The fire station had to be enlarged at a cost of £10 to take the new engine.

Fires Attended with the new engine:

1913: Rick fire, rear of Bear hotel

1913 From ‘Siftings’ by Velox :
‘Spencer and Crowley, Croome and Brown,
Defending the honour of Cowbridge town;
Bond and Warren and Brown’s only son
Working their hardest to earn the “Well done”.
Tucker and Harris, Carswell and Trott,
“Sleepy old Cowbridge!” why, certainly not.’

August 18th 1914: Cottage at West End, Cowbridge, belonging to Mr Illtyd David - where a spark from a traction engine had set alight a thatched roof

September 3rd 1914 D Harris, E Crowley and W Wilmott joined the army (from the fire brigade team) for service during the war.

1914 W Brown and WM Brown joined up – and others in later years.

**Borough of Cowbridge Fire Brigade
Affiliated to the NFBU**

November 11th 1914

To Mr W A James, Contractor, Cowbridge (of Stafford House, Westgate)

Dear Sir,

I beg to submit the account for services of firemen at Crossways in Oct 1914 pumping out water from the lake. Time taken from leaving the fire station and replacing engine at night 10 a m to 10 p m. The cost of cleaning the fire engine and polishing same is £1.0.0. The men's time is charged as per scale. Copy enclosed.
The Fire Brigade Committee make no charge in these special circumstances for the use of the fire engine; neither have I as Chief Fire Officer.

Chief Officer	-.-.-	
Engineer Brown	£1.5.0	
2 nd Engineer Groom	£1.0.0	
Fireman W M Brown	£1.0.0	
Hire of Engine	-.-.-	
Cleaning and Polishing Engine	£1.0.0	
Total	£4.5.0	D Tilley , C O

1915: Llwynhelyg farm

1916: Hayrick at Brocastle farm

1919 Harry Gibbs joined the brigade

1920: Breach farm (in loft over cattle sheds)

1921: Hancock's malthouse & storehouse at the rear of the Vale of Glamorgan inn. £3000 worth of damage. The bill presented by the brigade came to £32 - 8 - 6d, of which washing, cleaning and drying the hose came to £3 - 4 - 6d, and polish £1 - 10 - 6d.

1923 Two vacancies in the brigade – those applying were CG Thomas of 10 Croft Street and A Hawkins of 16 Westgate Street.

June 1926 Death of Captain David Tilley, Ivy House, Westgate

List of Members who served in the war

Cpl D. Harris, Royal Sussex, joined 1/9/14; demob 2/19; he was wounded 3 times
Pte E. Crowley, Royal Sussex, 4/9/14 10/7/17; to labour, iron mine- killed by accident
Cpl W. Willmott, Royal Sussex, 4/9/14; killed in action 25/9/15
QMS W. Brown, Cardiff City Battn 12/14; demob 5/19
Pte WM Brown, RASC MT 1/3/15; 12/19
Pte W Bishop, 7th Welch Rgt 2/16; 4/19
Pte R Tucker, Royal Welsh Fus 8/17; 3/19
Pte A Sanders, RFA 10/17; still serving 10/19
Pte T. Bond, Cardiff City Batt 5/15; demob 8/18; twice wounded

In 1921, "David Tilley, captain of the Fire Brigade, chairman of the S. Wales District Council of the National Fire Brigades Association, charity representative of Widows' and Orphans' funds, and member of the Council in London. Under him, Cowbridge had 'one of the best equipped and most efficient brigades in the County for the size of the town'."

In addition, Mr Tilley had been for 30 years a member of Cowbridge Town Council, 3 times Mayor; he remained as Chief Officer of the brigade until the end of 1923

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Cowbridge Fire Brigade by Bill Lewis

Reading the article by Jeff Alden in a recent GEM has encouraged me to jot down some of my own comments and recollections of the Cowbridge Fire Service.

The first fire appliance, in the early 1900s, was a manual pump operated by four men each side of the pump, pulling down on a bar. Each side was pulled down alternately in a see-saw motion to pump water. Young people would be paid one shilling an hour to operate this pump, which was mounted on four wheels and pulled by a horse. A hose cart would be pulled by a rope to accompany the pump.

In 1910, this was followed by a steam operated pump pulled by horse. The driver was employed in a nearby monumental mason's yard, and would on receipt of a fire call await the arrival of the horse. The horse was supplied by a local coal merchant, who I understand also made the horse available to pull the hearse in funerals!

In the later 1920s the horse-drawn appliance was replaced by a motorised open fire appliance having solid tyres. One of these Dennis Ace Braidwood Pumps was used in Cowbridge until the 1960s and was finally sold to a Hollywood film company and featured in the film "Fahrenheit 451".

The district covered by the Cowbridge Fire Brigade was the old borough and the former Rural District Council. The Fire Appliance and crew members - all part-timers - were based in Cowbridge, in the station under the Town Hall (in today's Lesser Hall kitchens). They were supplemented with what were known as 'Standpipe and Key' personnel living in Llanharan and in Llantwit Major. The early means of calling personnel was by a call-man who had to run to each fireman's home to call him out. This was followed by an electric bell mounted in the Town Hall clock tower.

Sometime between the two wars - possibly in the late twenties - a Dutch barn on fire, on the site where the St Hilary TV mast now is, was attended by the Cowbridge Fire Brigade. The water point was some distance from the fire, necessitating more hose than the appliance was carrying. A car which used to accompany the appliance on such incidents was sent back to the station to collect more hose and to bring up the beer at the same time. It was thirsty work - and several firemen were employed in Thomas Morgan's Brewery at the Bridge in Cowbridge. The fireman driver found out that he had a problem. There was not enough room for both beer and hose: so in the best tradition of firemen's welfare, the fireman took the beer back first!

Among the part-timers working prior to the second world war were Bill Brown (captain), Bill Bishop, Herbert Tucker, Tom Bond, Fred John, Harry Trott, Walter Carswell, Mr Groom, Gwyn Thomas and Tommy Carter, with Jack Roberts at Llanharan. In 1938, the Brigade became partly full-time and partly part-time. Tom Bond, Fred John and Jack Roberts became professional firemen, and remained so after the war until retirement. When Coronation medals were handed out, Walter Carswell was presented with one representing all part-timers

in Glamorgan Fire Service. Unofficially we kept Walter in service to complete 50 years. By this time he must have been about 75! Of course at this age he didn't ride to fires, but attended drill nights.

Among major fires attended by the Cowbridge Fire Brigade were those at the cinema in 1942, and the garage in 1946. They were active in the Cardiff blitz, and were first on the scene in the Llandow air disaster in 1950, as well as in other air crashes. Fires in Ham Manor, Miskin Manor and Penllyne Court, at a large MOD factory in Bridgend, and at Aberthaw power station (with two explosions) saw the Cowbridge brigade's active involvement. They have also played a heroic role dealing with accidents in the Llanharry iron-ore mine, and motorvehicle accidents.

The Cowbridge Fire Station has also maintained the tradition of a competitive spirit. During the competitions held by the Glamorgan Fire Service, we always won the lightweight pump four-man drill and three-man hydrant drill. In 1953 the team of Danny Powell, Lew Carter, Ernie Wheaton (part-timers) and Bill Lewis (professional) created a record - which still stands today - in completing the four-man drill in 9.5 seconds. Cowbridge always won the Divisional cup, beating 20-man stations like Barry and Bridgend.

(Bill Lewis, of Cae Stumpie, Cowbridge, spent most of his working life in the Fire Service. He started as a part-timer in Cowbridge, and finished as Divisional Commander in B Division of South Glamorgan).

This short article is just to round off the story of the Cowbridge Fire Brigade, after Bill Lewis's most interesting account the other week.

During the last war, there was of course a greatly increased need for fire services. The Cowbridge Brigade found that the new fire engine was too big for the station under the Town Hall and so they, and a branch of the Auxiliary Fire Service, moved to Billy Jones's West End Garage at 56 High Street - where Chamberlains is today. The two brigades had to deal with aircraft fires, as well as the devastating fire in the Cinema in Eastgate in April 1942. Rumour has it that a cigarette end was dropped into a box of film - and also that Cardiff cinemas had unfortunately sent spools of film to Cowbridge to be stored, safe from enemy attack! Another major fire was at the Bridge Garage in December 1946 when a tanker delivering petrol proved to be too close to a coal-burning stove. This was a spectacular fire which affected more than the owner of the garage, Mr Frank Sanders - as some of the new cars just returning to the civilian market were engulfed in the flames!

After the war, the AFS was disbanded, and the Fire Brigade returned to an enlarged Fire Station at the Town Hall. Unfortunately, I do not have any photos of the AFS (does any reader have one? I would love to see one!) but this photograph shows some of the members of Cowbridge Fire Brigade on the fire engine outside the old headquarters - clearly where the Lesser Hall kitchen is today. Seated are Danny Powell senior, Tommy Carter and Herbert Tucker; standing are Iori Jones, Harold Bevan and Ernie Wheaton.

The Brigade continued using the Lesser Hall HQ until the new Fire Station in Druids Green, on the site of the old railway, was opened in May 1960. Cowbridge now has fully trained professional firefighters available 24 hours a day; in fact in 1999 they turned out a total of 503 times - to fires and road accidents and other emergencies. In addition, the men of the Fire Service are all involved in various aspects of community work - and frequently figure in the pages of *The Gem* as a result. Among them are Paul Thomas with his charity work such as Operation Christmas Child and missions to Uganda, Paul Sansom with various initiatives in youth work in Cowbridge, Neil Byrne with the Scouts and the Youth Centre, Andy Banks with Town Twinning. Always willing to help, to give advice, to get involved, the men of the Cowbridge Fire Service are a credit to the town - and we are fortunate to have so many dedicated, cheerful and pleasant firefighters.

J Alden

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Frank Dark – telephone interview by Betty Alden, July 2019

Frank worked at Cowbridge Fire Station from 1950-1955. He was one of three full-time fire officers (the others were Tom Bond and Fred John). Others like Danny Powell, whom he remembers, was a retrained part-timer. There was only the one engine, kept in what is now the Lesser Hall, at the back of the Town Hall.

When Frank arrived in 1950, a trailer pump engine was in use, but this sprung a leak and it had to go. Along came the Dennis Ace (*photograph chs04666*). Its registration number was BNY 88. Frank drove it occasionally (there were not many calls out). It was still at the station in 1954, as Frank remembers showing it to his sister on her return from honeymoon - she rang the bell. By the time he left Cowbridge to work in Llantwit Major ambulance station in 1955, the Ace had been replaced by a Dennis Rolls (with a Roll Royce engine). This proved to be too large to fit into the fire station, so it was kept parked under the chestnut tree at the back of the Horse and Groom.

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Richard Yokely, retired San Diego fireman – e-mail correspondence with Betty Alden, July 2019

Richard Yokely has a particular interest in the Dennis Ace fire engine (*chs04666*), which was used by Cowbridge in the 1950s. He contacted the History Society after seeing the picture of the Ace on the 'Peoples Collection Wales' website, and continues to track its history.

He says that this particular engine was built in 1936, and was originally delivered to Mountain Ash in April of that same year. It was taken into the National Fire Service in 1941, and 'released to local control' around 1948. It then made its way to Cowbridge.

After Cowbridge (about 1954 or 1955), it must have been exported at some point to the US, as it appeared in 1966 in the film 'Tobruk', which starred Rock Hudson and was made in Los Angeles (released in 1967). It then appeared in the 1970s in 'Emergency', about the Los Angeles County Fire Department, and also 'Baa, Baa, Black Sheep', a WW2 television series set in the Pacific. This engine was last seen at a fire brigade 'muster' in Los Angeles in the

early 1980s, and there are unconfirmed reports of it being bought by a museum. Richard Yokely has never knowingly seen this Dennis Ace engine in the film 'Fahrenheit 911', as had been reported in a magazine article.