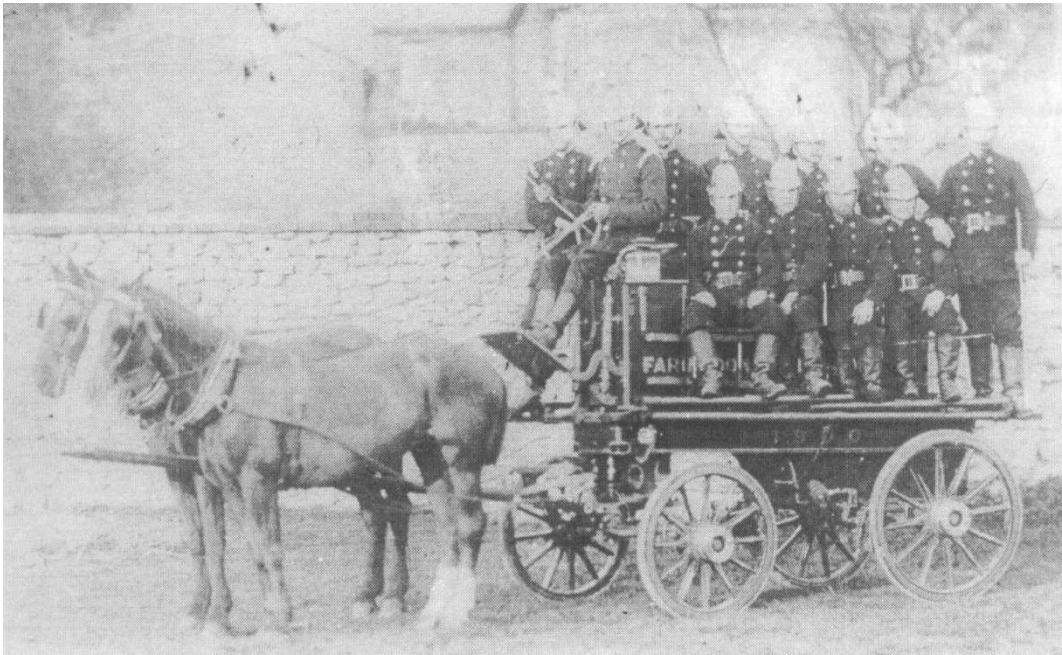


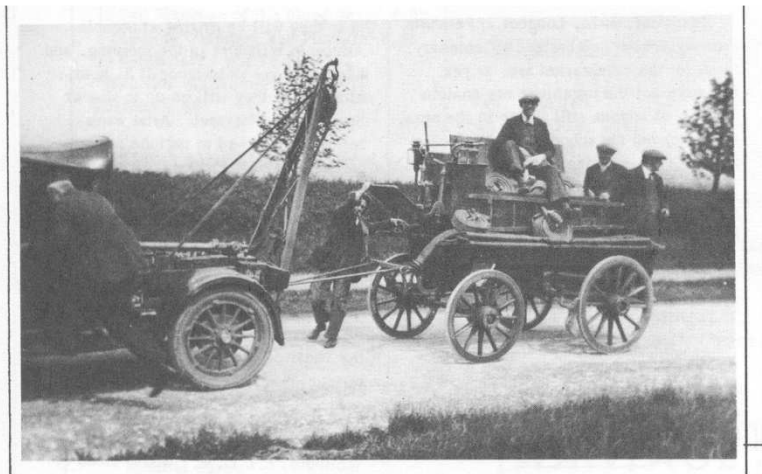
THE FIRE SERVICE in Faringdon

From The Changing Faces of Faringdon Book 3



c.1900 Faringdon Firemen with their new manual pump which needed up to 8 men each side to deliver the water. The photograph was taken in Bull Close, London Street, the Police Station can be seen in the background.

Feb 10th 1973 Faringdon Venture



We think this was one of the last of the old Faringdon Fire Engine's turn-outs to attend a burning tar barrel at the top of London Street, sometime in the 1930's. Normally drawn by horses the engine was, from time to time, manually moved, but on this occasion Ann's breakdown vehicle towed the machine.

L. to R. Mr Self; Mr Harry Hancock; Mr Minnie Goodman; Mr Fred Rogers

Always Ready

First, a little of its history & of its development in Faringdon. To get the facts on this our reporter contacted Mr Sid Taylor who, in 1965, retired after 35 years service as a volunteer. Mr Taylor joined the Service in 1930, when Faringdon got rid of its manual pump & received its first motorised vehicle. In those days the Brigade was run by the Rural District Council under the leadership of Captain Self & Sub-Captain Charlie Smith.



Faringdon's First Motorised Fire Appliance-1930. With it is the personnel carrier which the Firemen bought themselves & presented to the Rural District Council.

In the days of the manual pump, when attending a fire, volunteers from among the bystanders were pressed into service to operate the pump, 14 men being needed, 7 for each side of the pump arms. The Brigade received its first motor vehicle in 1930 & then moved to a Fire Station in Bromsgrove.

The Brigade parade with their new vehicle near the Bromsgrove Fire Station.



L. to R. Back:- Dick Goddard; Sid Taylor; Herby Page; Archie Townsend; Mike Tucker.

Front standing:- Charlie Smith, Captain; --- Drewett; H. Hunt; W. Busby; Chris Grey; Freddie Rogers.

Sitting:- Wilf Mulford, driver.

Previous to this the manual pump had been kept under the Town Hall – the pump in one bay & an ambulance in the other. In those days, as now, the Firemen were volunteers & were then paid the princely sum of 5/- per quarter for their services. The first fire that the motorised Brigade attended was at Newton House, the home of Sir Leo Page.

At the outbreak of war, in 1939, the Brigade became part of the National Fire Service & included 6 full-time firemen. During the war they attended many calls & fought fires as far afield as Coentry, Bristol, Exeter, London, Avonmouth & Southampton. After the war the Brigade became, for a time, part of the Oxford City Service & then, as it is now, part of the Berkshire & Reading Fire Brigade. At the end of the war also, it reverted to its present system of all part-time firemen.

With the changes in organisation, came changes in titles. Mr Taylor, who had achieved the rank of Fire Captain prior to the war, was known as a Leading Fireman during the N.F.S. period, & after the war, his title changed again to that of Sub-Officer. This is the title by which the Officer-in-Charge of the Fire Station is known now.

Asked which he thought was the most difficult fire that he had ever attended, Mr Taylor said that it was undoubtedly a fire in a timber yard in Bristol during the Blitz, when it was so cold that the water from the hoses froze.

The Brigade had similar experiences in February 1947 when, within the space of a week, they dealt with fires at the Royal Military College, Shrivenham & at Goodfellows House, Filkins, former home of Sir Stafford Cripps. A report on the latter fire says 'Firemen's uniforms became encased with ice despite the fierce heat, & hose pipes were quickly frozen to the ground@. But at least they were not fighting these last two fires under a hail of bombs.

One of the most difficult fires the Brigade had to deal with since the war was at Coleshill House on 22nd September 1952. First on the scene was the Faringdon appliance, & firemen were showered with molten lead as they fought their way into the house. Eventually, the last three firemen to leave the building had to jump from the first floor. Operations here were severally hampered by the fact that the nearest water supply was the lake three quarters of a mile from the house.

VICE ABOUT THE SIZE OF THE HIC.



A smart turn-out and intense concentration during a drill practice in the grounds of Faringdon House.



When a new man joins the force he first does 8 hours Basic Training & then he has to pass a test before he is allowed to ride to a fire. Then he has to put in 20 hours full-time duty at Didcot or Reading, usually on Sundays. This is followed by another 3 Sundays spent in Breathing Appliance Training before he is considered to be fully qualified. Even when he reaches this stage, he has to continue further training during the rest of his service. Much of this is undertaken at weekends.

The full strength of the Faringdon Station is 12 men. They are equipped with 2 appliances – the one shown above & a personnel carrier/water tender, both of which can carry 400 gallons of water. This is essential in a rural area such as ours when they may have to fight fires far away from any water source.

Firemen, of course, are not only called out to deal with fires. Calls are made upon them frequently to road accidents, where their services are required to extricate people trapped in their shattered vehicles. They had a call of this type recently when they went to Inglesham where one heavy lorry had run into the back of another & the driver of the rear lorry was trapped in his crushed cab. With the opening of the M4 this type of call may be expected more often in the future.

The Faringdon Station, of course, works in close cooperation with other stations from a wide area. If a fire is likely to prove too much for one Station to deal with, then other Stations may be alerted & called upon when necessary. Similarly Faringdon Station may be called to fires outside their normal area.

Fires which occur in certain high risk places are always attended by more than one force unless definite information is received in time that they are not required. This is known to Firemen as a Pre-Determined Attendance (P.D.A.). Any fire occurring in buildings bordering Faringdon Market Place carries this classification, as do most of the large country houses, because they are so often so far from water supplies. This may explain to readers why, sometimes what sometimes turns out to be a small fire, may be attended by up to 3 appliances, unless the caller relays adequate information to the service about the size of the fire.

At present firemen are alerted by bells in their homes & by the siren which calls them from wherever they work. In future, however, we may have the siren no more, as the men are to be issued with personal radio beepers which they will carry at all times.