

SUTTON COLDFIELD FIRE BRIGADE

By *FRED WAITE*

How it all began

In 1886 one of the first tasks of the new Sutton Coldfield Borough Council was to set up a Volunteer Fire Brigade.

The administration of this was passed to the General Purposes Committee.

At their meeting on 30th June the Chairman stated that "A manual fire engine, hose cart with hose, ladders and other appliances suitable for the borough could be obtained for a cost of £350. and in his opinion there would be no difficulty in establishing a volunteer fire brigade".

A Public Meeting was held on 21st July and a number of men volunteered to serve on the brigade.

At the committee meeting held on 30th July it was decided that the brigade would consist of 12 men and 6 supernumeraries. The men who had volunteered were then invited into the room and particulars of their ages, occupations etc. were taken, after which the committee proceeded to make their selection. The result being as follows:

Fireman John Fletcher (borough surveyor) Temporary Captain.
Charles Stewart, Lieutenant.
Charles Cole.
Charles Scott.
Charles Roper.
Frank Parr.
John Whittaker.
John Weaver.
Thomas Trappett.
Richard Steventon.
Tom Hardy.
Alfred Woodcroft.

Supernumeraries

Joseph Horton.
John Bickley Jnr.
Thomas Gould.
Walter Smith.
Charles Huckle.
H. Weston.

Frank Parr later withdrew his name and was replaced by John Wood.

At a meeting on 18th October the committee accepted a tender from Messrs. Shand Mason for a fire engine and appliances at a cost of £179-5-0.

A housing for the new fire engine would be provided in The Swan Hotel.

On 28th June 1887 the cost of 12 Suits of Clothes for the fire brigade was shown as £28-17-7.

On 30th August 1887 the Captain of the brigade, now Charles Browning, reported that a delay in attending to a fire had been caused by the difficulty in obtaining horses to pull the engine. (see appendix a)

To assist in this the Captain was instructed to obtain an estimate for Traces, Harness and Reins for the fire engine. The captain reported that the cost of Boots for the brigade was £15.

It was decided that a Gratuity of £5. be given to Captain Treadaway of the Birmingham Brigade for the assistance rendered by him in the purchase of the fire appliances, formation and drilling of the brigade.

On 27th September the Town Clerk was authorised to pay a subscription of 5/- a year to the Midland Fire Brigade Association.

The cost of Caps was shown as £3-13-4 and for Whistles £1-4-6

The Captain of the brigade reported on 25th October that "On the 18th inst. I put the fire engine into the new engine house at the Town Hall. Taking advantage of the occasion to have a Wet Drill of the brigade and the fire hydrant outside the Town Hall, also the engine.

The pressure in the main was very good and the engine works splendidly. Both the hydrant and engine throwing the water over the clock tower"

Note. This was the Old Town Hall now the Masonic Hall in Mill Street. The clock tower is no longer in existence.

The Engine House is behind the double green doors to the right of the building.

The final cost of the Fire Engine and Appliances was £214-11-0.

At a meeting on 28 February 1888 the Captain suggested that a Fire Escape should be provided for the borough.

An application was made to have the space in front of the fire engine station put into good order so that it could be used by the brigade for practice.

The Rent of the Engine House was put at £4-14-0.

On 24th April the Captain submitted a draft 'Rules and Regulations of the Sutton Cold field Volunteer Fire Brigade' which were considered and some alterations made.

They were approved and 50 copies ordered to be printed together with 'The Firemans Handbook'.

A meeting on 31st May decided that the brigade become a Member of The National Fire Brigade Union at an annual subscription of £1

On 5th June it was requested that the space below the Town Hall should be enclosed with iron railings and two gates to render space available for the fire brigade drill.

The cost of a Standpipe for the South Staffs Waterworks Co Ballhydrant was £2-8-11.

At a meeting on 29th October 1888 the committee recommended the purchase of a Fire Escape with Hose Box, Portable Shoot and Jumping Sheet from Mr Robert Thomson of Broad Street according to specification at a cost not exceeding £60.

On 18 December 1888 The Fire Brigade and Hackney Carriage Committee took over the administration of the brigade.

A meeting on 28th May was informed that the Fire Escape had been delivered at a cost of £46.

It was agreed that the following appliances be obtained to accompany the fire escape:

Single outlet standpipe	£3-0-0.
Branch pipe & jet	£0-19-6
Fire hook	£0-13-6
Crow bar	£0-6-6
Turncocks tools	£1-0-0
Brigade pump	£3-7-6.

It was agreed that the Number of Firemen be Increased by 4. These being rendered necessary by the extra number required to man the fire escape.

On 30th July the new fireman were named as:

William Griffiths	Carter
Edward Griffiths	Carter
Robert Stewart	Labourer
J. Bennet	Chimney Sweep

The Captain was requested to obtain estimates of the cost of putting the outlying districts of Boldmere, Wylde Green and Walmley into electrical communication with the fire station in the town.

In the Captains report for the year he said that "The brigade had attended 6 fires. This being One more than the previous year.

2 Chimney Fires, 1 Hay Rick Fire and 3 House Fires.

Two of the house fires were of a serious character but by the prompt action of the brigade were checked with a minimum of damage to property.

On the occasion of the fire at Mr Smith, Ironmongers, on The Parade, your brigade was rewarded by the proprietor, through the Mayor, for their prompt answer to the call and so quickly extinguished what threatened to be a most disastrous fire!

"The New Escape is fitted with hoses etc. to fix onto hydrants so that it is both ready to save life or extinguish fires, and should the engine be away at the time of an outbreak in the town, the utility of this double provision will be clearly demonstrated".

On 24th September it was agreed that the owners of property saved by the efforts of the fire brigade be informed of the cost and be asked whether they would like to contribute to the amount.

The cost of attending to Mr Riley's rick fire at Warren House Farm was £2-5-0.

The meeting on 29th October 1889 was informed that Mr Dorsett of Walmley had paid £2-6-0 expenses in connection with his rick fire.

Mr Riley said that he would have paid had the demand been made in time for him to charge the expenses to the insurance office.

It was agreed that when the brigade attend any fire the Town Clerk be instructed to make immediate application for their expenses.

On 28th November the estimated cost of putting the outlying districts in electrical communication with the fire station was:

To the erection of wire etc. to	with telephone	with signal bell
The Police Station at Hill	£20-18-10	£17-9-10
Gate Inn, Boldmere	£30-16-10	£27-7-5
Police Station, Wylde Green	£29- 4-0	£25-15-0
Police Station, Walmley	£19-17-3	£16-8-3
	£100-16-11	£87-0-6

To which must be added the cost of erection of wire along the line of railways.

The cost of maintenance is about £30. per. annum.

It was decided that this expenditure is too great to undertake.

The committee also decided not to recommend the purchase of fire appliances for outlying districts at an estimated cost of £80, as this expenditure would not in their opinion be satisfactory in its results.

On 29th April the Town Clerk was instructed to write to Mr Swinbourne with reference to his refusing to allow his horse to be used to horse the fire engine on 21 April.

On 25th June 1890 The Captain reported that during the last year the brigade had attended to 5 Fires plus 1 False Alarm. 2 Hay Ricks, 2 House Fires and 1 Fire in The Park. The total time from leaving and returning to the engine house was 12 hours, against 5½ hours the previous year.

At a meeting on 25th September The Captain reported that he had fixed Fire Hydrant Indicator Plates to 19. 2½" hydrants and 33. 2" hydrants, leaving 2. 2" and 2. 2½" hydrants that he could not at present locate. Making a total of 56 hydrants in the borough.

The chief drawback is that the 35 2" hydrants will be removed as the new mains are extended, but will be again placed at the end of the mains unless such main is joined to another main.

On 25th February 1891 The Captain reported that from January 5th to February 15 the brigade had turned out to Five Fires. Being a number unprecedented in so short a period. Owing to the timely discovery of each fire the damage had been small compared to the risk.

On May 6th 1891 The Mayor opened the new Watch Room.

In June The Captain in his annual report said that 11 Fires were attended to during that year.

3 House Fires, 1 Outside Shed, 1 Hay Rick and 6 Fires in The Park. Two of the fires in the park had destroyed over 200 acres of gorse and ling.

At the meeting on 30 September 1891 the Borough Surveyor submitted a plan showing the position of the present available fire hydrants (16) throughout the borough.

It was recommended that 51 additional hydrants be provided and fixed in suitable parts of the borough at an estimated cost of £160.

On 30 December 1891 The Captain reported of a Fire at Mon Vale Farm, Barr, at which 11 Firemen had attended. (see appendix b)

The Captain reported on 27 April 1892 that owing to the large number of houses being built at a considerable distance from the fire station that the brigade should be supplied with life saving appliances that can be readily taken to a fire.

He recommended that a set of treble extension ladders extending to 31'6" be purchased to be carried on the side of the fire engine instead of the portable socket ladders now carried. He also requested that the fire escape be modified so that it could be drawn by a horse.

On 29 June 1892 in his annual report the Captain requested that owing to the distance of sufficient water in case of fire from farm premises or other residences in the outlying parts of the borough, he strongly recommended the purchase of a Steam Fire Engine as the manual one is not powerfull enough to do the work required.

On 28 September 1892 the Captain reported that owing to Mr Swinbourne selling his horses they had great difficulty in obtaining horses for the fire engine.

On 28 December Counciller Jordan offered to present a treble extension ladder to the brigade free of cost.

Mr Allport of Station Street had offered to provide horses for the fire engine for the sum of £50. a year.

On 12 November 1893 the Captain reported that several pathways had been regravelled and the hydrant lids covered which makes it difficult to find them and in frosty weather it would take a considerable time to clear the hardened gravel off.

The Captains annual report on 25 April 1894 stated that "7 fires had been attended to. 6 in The Park and 1 Stable Fire. Only one fire outside the park was the lowest on record.

The number of hydrants is now 70.

Mr Allport has carried out his contract for horses in a most satisfactory manner, the shortest time in turning out the engine to a fire was 4 minutes.

The engine has been out 43 times, vis. 36 practices and 7 fires. The brigades clothing is very dilapidated having been in use 7 years":

On 26 September 1894 the Captain reported that "owing to want of hydrants in Hartop Road, Anchorage Road and Tudor Hill as these are private roads, should a fire occur on any of the properties there situated it would have to burn out or I must call in the assistance of a neighbouring brigade".

On 28 November 1894 it was recommended that the fire brigade be provided with new uniforms.

On 24 February 1895 a fire occurred in the basement kitchen of the Coffee House in the High Street.

Owing to the severe frost all of the hydrants were frozen and useless except the one at the weighing machine, which was kept thawed by the Water Company for the purpose of supplying water to the inhabitants.

The Borough Surveyor reported on 24 September 1897 that "due to the number of houses being built another 50 hydrants should be provided".

On 30 June 1897 the Captain reported that only 3 fires had been attended to during the previous year. The lowest number on record.

The contract with Mr Allport for supplying horses had ended and horses will now be supplied by the Highways Committee.

On 4 July 1900 the whole of the fire appliances and the members of the brigade were inspected by the Council.

The greater part of the appliances were found to be unsatisfactory for the town.

Several lengths of hose were leaking and considering the valuable property erected and being erected in the borough it was thought that the appliances and hoses should be brought up to date. Also new clothing should be purchased for the firemen.

On 24 April 1901 it was recommended that a Steam Engine together with appliances and hose be purchased from Messrs. Merryweather & Son at a cost of £411.

On 9 November 1901 the New Steam Fire Engine was displayed at the Moat House and christened "Alexandra" by the Mayoress.

On 24 September 1902 it was recommended that the whole of the fire appliances with the necessary hoses be located in the buildings adjoining the Council House.

On 29 April 1903 it was recommended that provision be made for the erection of a Fire Engine House, Loft and Hose Drying Tower when building the New Town Hall.

On 25 June 1903 it was recommended that 7 Fire Alarm boxes be provided by The National Telephone Co. at the following locations

Walmley Village.

Birmingham Road and Penns Lane Corner.

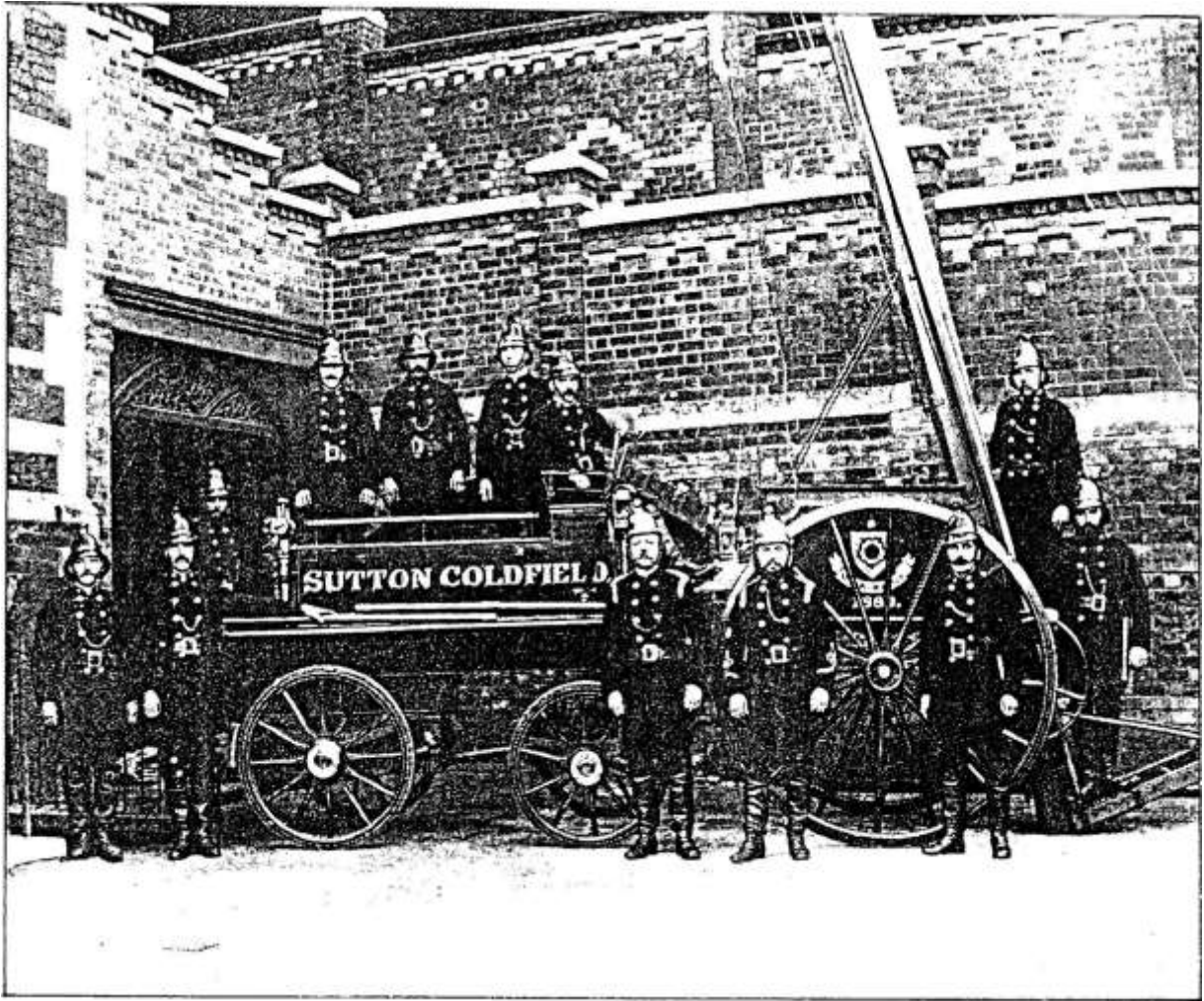
Boldmere Road and Shelfield Road Corner.

Boldmere Road and Highbridge Road Corner.

Birmingham Road and Vesey Road Corner.

Birmingham Road and Duke Street Corner.

Reddicap Heath.



The Shand, Mason Fire Engine outside the first fire station

In September 1904 the fire engine and horses were moved to a coach house and stables in Anchorage Road whilst the New Fire Station was being built.

On 22 August 1905 during a practice with the hose carriage an accident occurred in which a fireman died. (see appendix c)

The new fire station was opened on 1 December 1905.

On 17 February 1913 it was recommended that a man be appointed to devote the whole of his time to the work of the brigade, who had been trained as a fireman and who shall be responsible for drilling the men and the efficient working of the brigade.

On 14 July 1913 Mr W.H. Dean was appointed Chief of the Fire Brigade at a wage of 30/- a week and a house.

Extracts taken from the Minute Books of the General Purposes Committee and the Fire Brigade and Hackney Carriage Committee by F. T. Waite.

20th August 1887

Meeting of the General Purposes Committee
 Alderman Urwell in the Chair.

Minutes 94, 95, 96 and 100 continued

102.

The Chairman presented a Report of the Captain of the
 Fire Brigade

Resolved, That the same be received and entered
 on the Minutes

Copy Report.

August 20: 1887.

To the General Purposes Committee
 Gentlemen,

On the 8th inst. at 9.10 am. I was
 called to a Hedge Fire in Veckey Lane, arrived
 there with Engine and 4 Men about 9.35 am.
 Found the Bank of Hedge smouldering, the Hedge
 burnt down, and for some distance in the Field
 the grass burnt - put it out with Fire Brigade
 Pump. The Field is in the occupation of M^r.
 Bibby.

The delay in getting to the Fire was owing to the
 difficulty in obtaining Horses. M^r. Holford who supplies
 Horses for the Engine only having one fit to work,
 and M^r. Swinburne who assists him having both
 M^{rs} Ancher.

Your obed^t. Servant

Chas. E. Browning

Minutes of the Fire Brigade Committee
 Council for the year 1891

- Minute 89. The Borough Surveyor submitted Tenders for Fire Hydrants from Messrs. Bird & Co., J & S. Roberts, W. H. Woods & The Glenfield Co. Kilmarnock.
91. Resolved, That the 54 Hydrants and fittings be purchased from The Glenfield Co. Co., Kilmarnock, at the following prices -
- Spindle Hydrant (C.28) at 20/- each
 - Surface Box (13 17) weighing about 69 lbs, at 5/3 each
 - Duckfoot Bends (A.14) at 4/10 each.
 - Bells and joints 10/- per set
- The Captain of the Fire Brigade presented a Report of a fire at Mon Vale Farm, Barr.
92. Resolved, That the Report be received and entered on the Minutes.

Decr 5: 1891

Gentl. Called by fire bell at 4.57 P.M. Informed by Mounted Messengers that a Barn was on fire at Mon Vale Farm, Barr. Engine away at 5 1/2 P.M. 11 Firemen being in attendance. Having about 5 Miles to travel I took 6 men on the Engine telling the others to proceed a Conveyance, which they did. On arrival at 5.45 P.M. found by the fire had been put out by the Residents and neighbours. On examination of the premises found that a quantity of straw at one end of the Barn had been on fire, the greater part burnt, and the joists and flooring above slightly charred and damaged by breakage so as to pour water the better on the burning straw beneath. Returned to Engine House at 7 P.M. Cause of fire unknown. Damage about £5. Tenant

Meeting of the Fire Brigade Committee,
Committee Room in the Chair

Appendix c

An apology for non attendance was received from the Mayor.
The Captain of the Fire Brigade presented a
Report in reference to the accident causing the
death of Norman Hogg.

481

Resolved That the Report be received and
entered on the Minutes.

August 31st 1905.

Gentlemen

I beg to report that on Tuesday evening the 22nd
inst. I left the Fire Station at about 8 p.m. with 9 men
in the hose carriage for practice drill, I told the Driver
and men to go down Tamworth Rd cautiously as far as
the Railway Bridge Turnround and put on the new
hydrant on the left hand side; when about 200 yards
down I felt the Machine swerve to the left and run
in a slanting direction up the side of the Bank at
the side of the Road, coming to a dead stop it turned
over on its right side, throwing us all out, almost
before I got up I heard a shout a man under I looked
on the side I fell but did not see anyone on
round the other side of the Machine (the Bank side)
and saw a man in a doubled up sitting position, I
put my hands under his arms and noticing the soles
of the Boots under the rim of the front wheel shouted
left, left, and I discovered ^{the 12th} ^{of} laying
him down he was unconscious, I noticed he had a
contused eye and bruised ear went for a Medical
man, he immediately regained consciousness, Dr. Flavel

General Hospital Birmingham in a Motor Car his wife,
Fireman J. Higgs and Police Sergeant Wilson going with
him, all the other men altho' shaken and some bruised
were not seriously hurt; Engineer Benton superintended
the Machine being got up and it was taken to the Fire
Station, on my arrival there I asked the Driver R. France
how he came to drive up the Bank, he said the hook of
the barb chain of the near side Horse's bit hooked into
the pole chain and so drew us on to the Bank.

At about 7/30 a.m. the next morning I received a telephone
message from the Hospital that Fireman Higgs passed
away at 7/20 a.m.

This news was received by me and the Members of the Brigade
with the most profound regret and sorrow, this is the
first accident to any Member since the foundation of the
Brigade in 1887.

The Brigade have suffered a severe loss in the death of
their late comrade after 7 years companionship he being
one of our most active members both at Drill and whenever
called out to a Fire.

The Funeral took place last Saturday afternoon the 26th
inst. the Coffin being conveyed on the Manual Engine
and was attended by all the members of the Fire Brigade,
a detachment of Police Inspector Bachelor and Sergeant
Wilson and a deputation from his sick club, the Sutton
Benefit Society, the Chairman and Members of the
Fire Brigade, Committee meeting the cortege at the
Cemetery.

I am Y^{rs}.

Chas. C. Browning.
Captain.