

Fire Heritage Network UK.

Annual General Meeting 2012.

The 2012 Annual General Meeting and Seminar of the Fire Heritage Network UK was held on Saturday 25th October in Scotland's capital city of Edinburgh in the wonderful surroundings of the former Lauriston Place Fire Station, now the Museum of Fire and Headquarters of Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue Service.



This year's event was organised by members of the Scottish Fire Heritage Group in conjunction with the Honorary Curator of the Museum of Fire, Retired Assistant Firemaster Ian McMurtrie MBE, and Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue Service.

As is now customary with our annual meetings the festivities began on the Friday night with a get together in the Premier Inn adjacent to the Museum of Fire and within easy reach of all our hotels - thankfully! A mix of dialects from all over the United Kingdom could be heard in the bar but all united in the subject matter - fire service preservation. Many old friendships were rekindled and new ones forged and a thoroughly wonderful evening was enjoyed by all.

Saturday morning in Auld Reekie (old name for Edinburgh) saw rain falling but this did nothing to dampen our spirits. SFHG gals Jackie and Maria ensured the registration process went smoothly and the Annual General Meeting was opened by Deputy Chief Officer David Mallin of Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue Service who included in his talk a brief introduction to the new single tier Scottish Fire and Rescue Service due to come into operation on 1st April 2013 and will replace the eight existing Scottish Fire and Rescue Services. Alan House Chairman of the FHNUK replied to and thanked DCO Mallin for his opening speech.



The first speaker was Ian McMurtrie MBE. Ian joined the fire service in 1947 and worked his way through the ranks attaining the position of Assistant Firemaster. He often recalls a conversation he had with Edinburgh's then Firemaster Frank Rushbrook in which he mooted the idea of preserving Edinburgh's firefighting past. Mr Rushbrook thought the idea a superb one and tasked Ian with developing the project. Initially, the collection was located in the City's McDonald Road Fire Station and then moved to Lauriston when the station ceased to function in an operational capacity. Today the Museum of Fire is probably the finest fire museum in the country.

Ian then spoke about the creation of what was to become the first municipal fire brigade in the world by one James Braidwood (trust a Scotsman!). After a serious of disastrous fires in 1824 Braidwood, a surveyor in Edinburgh then 24 years old and a product of Edinburgh's Royal High School, was enlisted by the City Fathers to establish a creditable fire brigade.

James Braidwood, himself apprenticed in plumbing, joinery, roofing and brick-laying, employed a variety of tradesmen and then trained them in the art of firefighting often drilling them at night and practising their climbing skills under the city's North Bridge. Ian then went on to speak about the difficulties encountered by the early firemen especially as the construction of the buildings and narrow access in the city caused tremendous problems for the fledgling firemen. In some parts of the city these problems still exist as we were to see for ourselves the following morning!



Our next speaker was Dennis Scott of the Scottish Fire Heritage Group. Dennis, a retired Leading Fireman having served with Grampian Fire Brigade was responsible for establishing a preservation movement in the North East of Scotland and together with fellow preservationist Peter McCombie now look after the collection of fire appliances that belong to the Aberdeen Branch of the SFHG. An exponent of the Doric dialect of the North East of Scotland, Dennis then spoke without the need for an interpreter about Braidwood's

influence and of how his training and methods were taken up by many other Scottish cities including the Aberdeen Fire Engine Establishment. Dennis also cited some disastrous fires that occurred in the Granite city. A vote for the content of Dennis's talk earned him a 9.5 by the audience!

Alan House, Chairman of the FHNUK was our next speaker. Alan gave a very informative talk about the work of the Firefighters Memorable Trust and the ongoing campaign to have all those employed as firemen/firefighters and killed in pursuance of their duties, entered on to the Memorial which now has to be enlarged to accommodate the ever increasing number of names now coming to light. Alan then spoke about the sale of the Fire Service College to the Investment Company Capita and the implications the sale had for the future of the Heritage Collection held at the College. Thankfully a happy ending has ensued with the Firefighters Memorial Trust taking over the collection (including the painting "Saved") and the running of the College Memorial Chapel. Printed archival material will remain in the care of the College library but ownership of the Merryweather Collection will now pass to the Trust.

Executive Committee Member Nigel Compton was next up to the podium and gave us an illustrated talk entitled "It's In The Family". Nigel spoke about family trees and the Fire Service and explained that often the fire brigade contained many generations of firemen, our host today, Ian McMurtrie was testament to that with his Great Grandfather and his two brothers, his Grandfather and Great Uncle and both of Ian's sons - Kenneth and Jamie having served in the city of Edinburgh. Nigel then suggested ways in which this information could be accessed with the internet and the National Archives being the most common. Nigel also talked about his company - Nigel Crompton Associates and how he assists Television companies and other interested parties with their research. With the 100th Anniversary of the start of the First World War in 2014, Nigel expects his workload to increase considerably!

The creation and development of the City of Edinburgh was the subject of the next talk by Hamish Coghill. The illustrated lecture informed us of how Scotland's capital city grew from humble beginnings built close to an extinct volcano and from there to the creation of the old and new towns and the royal connections Edinburgh has enjoyed through the years.

The business of the Annual General Meeting then took centre stage.



After a return to our hotels for a quick change into our glad rags, we met back at Lauriston to be transported by a preserved Leyland Atlantean bus (supplied and expertly driven by Martin Denman of the Glasgow Vintage Vehicle Trust) to our venue for the evening's entertainment, Edinburgh's Bainfield Bowling Club.

There we were treated to a superb five course meal expertly prepared and delivered by our caterers Alex Graham and Company of Kilsyth.

The entertainment for the evening saw a welcome return to these proceedings by the Scottish Folk Group The Wherries. However before they took to the stage there was an important function to perform.

The formation and operation of the Museum of Fire and it's continuing popularity has been due in no small way to the input and lifetime's work of Ian McMurtrie. A very modest man, Ian has never sought recognition and has remained behind the scenes working two days a week at the museum ensuring the numerous requests for information are answered. He has in so many ways shown us how to preserve and maintain a collection and to highlight Edinburgh's birthright as the first city in the United Kingdom to have a properly trained and highly motivated fire brigade.



In order to honour Ian's achievement, I suggested to the Executive Committee that we should mark this in some way at the evening dinner. Sometime before the AGM, I had been in touch with Ian's wife Betty and his son Kenneth to inform them of our intentions and Betty ensured all the Clan McMurtrie were all in attendance with only Ian being unaware of the impending award. Alan House and Bob Bonner then made the presentation to Ian of a Crystal Decanter and

Glasses to mark Ian's lifetime achievement to fire service preservation. All present then endorsed this fitting tribute by giving Ian a standing ovation. I presented Betty with a bouquet of flowers.

With the formalities over, it was time for an evening of music and mayhem courtesy of the Wherries Folk Duo - Dave and Kenny and they certainly didn't disappoint! A large part of their act is to invite members of the audience onto the floor to do the 'actions' to the songs and to play all manner of rudimentary musical instruments from a washboard to a length of garden hose.





Practically no one escaped from the audience participation or indeed from the Wherries eagle eyes! but the end result was a thoroughly enjoyable evening of fun and music.

All too soon the evening was over and it was time to get back on the big yellow bus for the journey back to our hotels. The lower saloon was then treated more music this time from the

Devon contingent singing the praises of their home county, the Scottish contingent then replied with a rendition of the old Scottish classic, "Ye Canny Shove Yer Granny Aff A Bus"!

Our study visit on the Sunday saw Edinburgh bathed in bright autumnal sunshine and again we boarded our bus for the short journey into the city centre. There we met up with retired Assistant Divisional Officer Colin Foster, our guide for the morning part of the study visit. The first stop was to the statue of James Braidwood where Alan House laid a wreath (supplied by Nigel Crompton Associates) and dedicated it to the memory of all fallen firefighters in the United Kingdom.



Colin then took us on a most interesting walking tour of Edinburgh showing us the site of the original Police/Fire Station in the High Street and then onto Heave Awa Close. We were then taken to see some of the difficulties that James Braidwood and his men would have faced with regard to access through the numerous closes to the "multi-storey" tenements beyond, problems that the modern day service also have to overcome. Colin's knowledge of Edinburgh's history was most impressive and he enthralled us with

stories about some of the city's more dubious residents and the gruesome ends they met!

Martin then returned with the "Yellow Pearl" for our journey to Leith for the afternoon part of the study visit to Her Majesty's Yacht Britannia, now a floating museum and tourist attraction.

The order to build Britannia was given to the famous Clydeside shipyard of John Brown & Co. and signed on February 1952, two days before the then Princess Elizabeth's father, King George VI died.



Britannia was launched on the 16th April 1953 by the Queen and for 44 years she was the Royal family's floating residence steaming over one million miles before being decommissioned in 1997.



The tour of the ship was fascinating and the use of audio handsets given on entry supplied us with all sorts of facts about the Royal Yacht and the various Royal apartments onboard. The comparison between the accommodation above decks to those below were worlds apart especially as we made our way down to the crew's cramped and sparse conditions.



All too soon it was time to leave Britannia and make our way back to Lauriston for our homeward journeys.

I am sure all the delegates enjoyed the 2012 Edinburgh Annual General Meeting and my thanks go to:-

The Chief Officer of Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue Service.

Retired Assistant Firemaster Ian McMurtrie MBE.

Watch Commander Stuart Sinclair and who looked after all our needs on Saturday's AGM.

Martin Denman (Our driver) of the Glasgow Vintage Vehicle Trust.

Retired Assistant Divisional Officer Colin Foster.

Bainfield Bowling Club.

Alex Graham Caterers.

And finally, to all the members of the Scottish Fire Heritage Group.

May I thank them for their help and enthusiasm not just in making the weekend a huge success but for their ongoing support and commitment in furthering the aims of the Scottish Fire Heritage Group.

Bob Wright,

Chairman,

Scottish Fire Heritage Group.

