



GEOFFREY BLACKSTONE

'Britain's most highly-decorated fire chief'



The 31st January 2009 marked the 20th Anniversary of the death of Geoffrey Blackstone.

Following is the national press edition of his obituary, which, making mention of his background gives a better understanding as to the character of the man who had such a profound effect upon us all.

Geoffrey Blackstone, who has died aged 78, was Britain's most highly-decorated fire chief, the last of the direct entry officers and also an author.

He won the George Medal during the Blitz, when he was responsible for London south of the river. An auxiliary fire station was flattened at Woolwich, and Blackstone worked for four hours with his bare hands, digging out several buried beneath the embers, while more bombs fell and the building was in danger of collapse.

It was his report after the major German raid on Coventry (November 1940) which encouraged the setting up of a national fire service in 1941.

In his fifties Blackstone wrote a successful historical novel about the tragic life of George III's youngest sister, Caroline Matilda, who at the age of 15 was married to her syphilitic and mad cousin, King Christian VII of Denmark. He also published a History of the British Fire Service (1957), the only book of its kind.

Geoffrey Vaughan Blackstone was born in 1910 and educated at Uppingham before being apprenticed at the family engineering firm in Stamford (which occupied a 10 acre site near the main railway line). In the course of the next few years Blackstone witnessed the loss of a large family fortune and, perhaps because of that experience, showed no interest in business matters or moneymaking thereafter.

In 1938 he joined the London Fire Brigade, and during the 1939-45 War distinguished himself repeatedly by acts of physical bravery.

After a brief period as fire force commander in the northwest, in 1944 he was appointed chief regional fire officer for Wales, where his love of rugby football and warm feelings towards the Welsh soon established him as a popular figure.

When fire services were returned to the local authorities in 1948 Blackstone became the chief fire officer in Hertfordshire, with responsibility for fire and ambulance services, until his retirement in 1972.

In Hertfordshire he built up one of Britain's most efficient brigades and pioneered improvements in the many new fire stations built for the county's growing population. He was appointed CBE in 1955.

Blackstone was an hospitable man of charm and considerable presence, and an accomplished raconteur, with a huge fund of stories, ballads and ribald rhymes. He is survived by his wife, two sons and two daughters.



Baroness Tessa Blackstone signing an FPA's Jubilee Reprint of her fathers book " A History of the British Fire Service" at the Imperial War Museum on the 4th October 1996. With her in the photo is Ron Bentley (brother of Betty Goble - in the background) who brought the book up to date, by contributing chapter 27, 'Events Since 1957'.

Article compiled & submitted by Brian (Sid) Gifford



Announcements

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THOSE WHO HAVE DIED

I have to announce the deaths of four former colleagues and one former associate. . .

Former Fireman Denis Seymore died on 27th November aged 81 years. Denis served as a Firefighter at Radlett He is survived by his partner Jean Wilson.

His funeral took place at 1600 on 11 December at Garston Crematorium. There are no further details.



Former Wholetime Fireman Gordon Brown, who died on Saturday 29th November 2008, in Cromer Hospital, following a short illness. He was aged 61.

Gordon served at Hitchin between 1969 and 1993, before that he served Hertford. He retired in 1993 to live with his family in

Norfolk.

Gordon's funeral took place at 11.00 a.m. on Friday 12th December 2008 at St Faiths Crematorium, Norwich.

Gordon leaves a wife Nancy, two sons and a daughter.

Former Fireman Bob "Ticker" Harding died on 14 December 2008 following a short illness. Bob served with Hertford Retained and recently celebrated his 90th birthday at Hertford fire station.

His funeral took place at All Saints Church, Hertford at 1.30 p.m. on Friday 19 December 2008.

JUNE NEWSLETTER

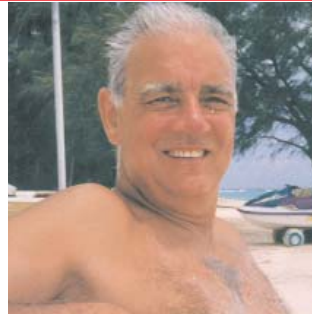
All copy for the June Newsletter to be with me by **Monday 4th June 2009**

My preferences:

- a) E-mail attachment.
jmbpot@ntlworld.com
- b) Floppy disk.
- c) Typewritten.
- e) Handwritten.



My thanks to all who have contributed to the Newsletter this quarter. Ed.



Former Wholetime Station Officer Gerald (Gerry) Brooker died on Monday 1st December 2008, in West Herts Hospital, Hemel Hempstead following a short illness. He was aged 73.

Gerry served at Watford, Rickmansworth, Garston and Hemel Hempstead between 1959 and 1989 when he retired.

Gerry's funeral took place at 1.20 p.m. on Thursday 11th December 2008 at West Herts Crematorium, Garston. It was attended by some 150 to 200 former friends, colleagues and family.

Gerry leaves a wife Kath.

Potten End,
Herts

December 2008

The late Gerry Brooker

Dear Editor

Would it be possible please; if you have room in the next RMA newsletter; to place an acknowledgement of thanks to all the many fire personnel and their wives who were Gerry's friends and colleagues; for such an overwhelming turnout on the day of his funeral. There were many who travelled from afar to attend Gerry's funeral and the family and myself express our gratitude for their support and also for the numerous cards, letters and 'phone calls which have been greatly appreciated during a very sad time.

**Kind Regards,
Kath Brooker**

THE LATE TOM PRICE



A lot of retired members from the Hemel Hempstead area will remember Tom Price, who was editor of the Gazette and in his early years a freelance journalist.

He spent many hours at Hemel Station waiting for news of a "shout" he became a good friend of the Station and got involved with our Charity Benevolent Fund projects.

He retired to Lincolnshire a few years ago and sadly passed away at the age of 61 in Dec 2008. His widow Marion arranged a Memorial Service locally at Hemel Hempstead, which took place on the 20th February. 2009 at 2.00 p.m. at the Holy Trinity Church in Potten End. which was attended by a number of former colleagues and friends, together with Tom's family.

**Regards
Neil Fleming.**

[See also article on page 6]



Letters to the Editor

Stevenage
December 2008

Dear Editor

Eastcheap Fire

Further to the article in the December 2008 RMA, 'Fires we Fought - Eastcheap Letchworth'.

I was the Sub Officer on Duty at Letchworth at the time, and I had just taken over from Sub Officer C Pond. I was in the Office and I happened to look out of the window on the 1st Floor and noticed people in Eastcheap standing about, and I also noticed smoke drifting across the road.

I informed Control that I was turning the pump out to investigate the cause of this smoke.

As no fire could be seen from Eastcheap, we continued around the block into Commerce Avenue where the cause of the smoke could be seen.

It appeared that no 999 calls were made to Control by the watching Public, and apart from my running call from the watchroom to this incident, this was the only call. The photograph shows certain members of the retained unit, and it is interesting to note that C Pond is not in his pyjamas as outlined earlier by Joe Bibracher, but then the time was just after 1800 hrs!

Wally Chandler

Doissat, France.

January 2009

Dear Editor

"Home Groan?"

Samuel Johnson wrote "When two Englishmen meet, they first talk is of the weather." and its true today, whenever anyone from the U.K phones me "What's the weather like?" is nearly always included early on in the conversation.

I can tell you that as a general rule that the weather in South Western France compared to Hertfordshire is as follows:- In the summer the temperature in this part of France is 5 degrees warmer and considerably drier than Hertfordshire, although when it does rain a whole months rain falls in a couple of hours and is usually accompanied by spectacular electrical storms.

In the winter the lowest temperature is approximately 5 degrees colder at night and during the day it is couple of degrees

warmer. The rainfall is approximately that of the Lake District. The winter period is also much shorter and once January and mid February are out of the way we are able to sit outside in the evenings quite comfortably.

The main money crops in our commune are walnuts and tobacco, both of which are going through bad times at the moment. The tobacco crops have been much reduced over the last couple of years mainly because EEC subsidies are being phased out.

The walnut production is less profitable due to cheap imports from countries such as China. The French have however, under the control of their agricultural ministry, sub-committee the "I.Y.B.T." have been experimenting with a more diverse cultivation.



The shorter winters allow crops that you would not normally associate with Europe to be grown on a commercial scale with added benefits of a reduction in imports, transport costs and carbon emissions. Many of the fields together with the large tobacco sheds have now been turned over to trials into the cultivation of bananas and pineapples. These trials have been so suc-



cessful that it has been estimated that Europe could be self sufficient in these crops as early as 2012. Three million tonnes of bananas are currently imported by the E.U each year and it is estimated that 35,000 bananas are consumed by players, umpires and ball boys during Wimbledon fortnight alone.

Only the Germans consume more bananas than us. (They had to beat us at something since they don't play rugby or cricket. . .)

The first supplies of these crops should be on your supermarket shelves in the U.K. by the end of March, with the official launch date being the first Wednesday in April 2009. If you do not see them by this date, please ask your supermarket manager when you can you expect to see European produced bananas and pineapples.

We have tried to grow these at home on a smaller scale with some success, particularly with the bananas. The pineapples were a little more difficult but we still managed a few whoppers. I understand that trials are under way involving tea and coffee. Expect to see the finest blend of teas grown in the foothills of the Pyrennees on your shelves in the near future or how about a nice cup of "Maxwell Maison?".

Joe Bibracher
bibracher@orange.fr

[We wish Joe all success with his crops. Ed]

Address supplied

The Assistant Director

The advertisement for an Assistant Director (ACO) for the Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service; has been published.

It requires apparently "a talented and inspirational individual, a proven manager and leader with the drive and aspiration to develop themselves and the organisation. Must have the ability to demonstrate resilience, courage and tenacity to see through change, is committed to diversity and has previously demonstrated outstanding management and leadership skills".

We look forward to meeting whoever is appointed, they will presumably be able to charm birds from trees, float on air throughout the County, walk on water when necessary, changing water into wine at functions and blessing, uplifting and transforming whoever they meet.

The Optimist

STOP PRESS

Retired Members 12th Biennial Reunion
Longfield Stevenage
Friday 10th July 2009
We look forward to seeing you there



Letters to the Editor

Chesterfield,
DERBYSHIRE
January 2009
Dear Editor

Jubilee Court

I have had a dodgy knee for quite a while, whilst out walking it finally gave up the ghost, my doctor quickly agreed that a new knee looked the best prospect.

Late July saw me in my local hospital where the surgeon, (a lady) did the operation whilst conducting a discussion with her colleague about the relative value of a vegetable patch as opposed to a rose bed in her garden, all of which I found very interesting. I had about five days in the hospital then let out to the tender care of Carol my wife, who I must say did a wonderful job.



The patients - Mick Hodgkins is 2nd from the left

Shortly I was attending my local cottage hospital for weekly sessions of Physiotherapy, which initially were fun, and I made some good progress, however as time went by the progress slowed and I was in a hurry to get back to normal, so I opted for a session at the fire fighters charity's therapy centre at Penrith. I filled out the paperwork which was ratified by my GP and in December 2008 went to Jubilee Court. At first glance I was very impressed the buildings are smart, clean and very welcoming.

My wife accompanied me for the one week stay, there being lovely accommodation available at a very reasonable cost, all of which of course is fed back into the charity.

A typical day would comprise:-

- 0730 breakfast
- 0830 exercise in the gymnasium (specific)
- 0930 swimming pool for physio
- 1030 tea break
- 1045 fitness room, more physio
- 1145 hydro therapy pool, yet more physio
- 1230 lunch
- 1315 Three mile walk

- 1430 hydro therapy pool
- 1530 tea break
- 1545 Gymnasium, physio (specific)
- 1700 rest
- 1800 dinner
- 1900 optional lecture



This is a typical day, sometimes the routine would vary as would the times, but you can see the days are very full and quite tiring. All sessions are supervised by at least one physiotherapist, the lectures are often done by the nurses, subjects ranging from men's health to stress management, healthy eating etc. Each person is assessed as an individual and is given a specific exercise regime to complete. The staff are fantastic very considerate and skilled, whilst I found the experience tiring I came away with my whole body feeling much better.



The centre, as well as having top of the range equipment and facilities also has excellent catering and social facilities, which include a very comfortable lounge and a bar. For me it was a very good experience and I would not hesitate to recommend its facilities to anyone.

Kind Regards
Mick Hodgkins

Sleaford Lincolnshire

February 2009

Dear Editor

A Busman's Holiday!

In September last year my wife and I went on a cruise to the Norwegian fiords on board the cruise ship Black Watch.

Our first port of call was at Bergen, where in the morning of that day a large fire had occurred.

The fire was in a row of very old wooden constructed houses on the quay side, the fire caused a lot of damage to the properties.

Fighting the fire from the harbour was a Norwegian Naval vessel, a sight you don't see very often, and on the adjacent road several fire appliances.

From the photographs you can see the fire caused much damage to the houses but in my opinion it was a good 'stop'.

We enjoyed the rest of the cruise, good weather, good food and lovely scenery.

Regards,
Mick Wareham



PRIZE DRAW

The quarterly draw took place at SHQ on 18th December 2008 The winners were.

Name	Station/Dept.	Prize
K Playel	Retired Member	£5531.64
E Faulkner	Retired Member	£892.20
M Pidduck	Hatfield	£401.49
N Pluck	Borehamwod	£401.49
M Harvey	Hertford	£401.49
D Russell	St Albans	£401.49
D Heard	SHQ	£400.00

Margaret Nowlan - Treasurer



Brigade Annual Report 1988 - 89

In the Chief officers foreword, "this quinquennial report records the end of the Hertfordshire Fire Brigade and looks forward to the future of the Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service". He continues, "this is not an obituary but rather a preface to the future". Although I think the CO was personally against the title change at that time, the staff survey voted for the change and the FPP Committee endorsed it. The new cap badge was to be introduced 1st April '89.

NOTABLE INCIDENTS

● With a serious fire in a ground floor bedroom coupled with smoke logging at ground and first floor levels, attending crews to Adeyfield Lodge (OPH) Hemel Hempstead on the 6th April '88, had also to deal with some 30 residents within the affected area. Ten were carried down internal stairs, six rescued by carrying down on ladders, whilst ten were carried or led to safety from the ground floor.

● Eight pumps and two HP's were needed to an early morning fire 27 June '88 at Russells OPH, Watford. With no mention of occupants, it does suggest the building was unoccupied.

● 18th August '88 at 0842hrs, a ground floor fire necessitated the crews from four pumps rescuing three persons from a four storey block of flats at Pepper Court, High Street, Baldock. In particular, a child, not breathing, had to be rescued from the flat involved.

Following mouth to mouth, the incident had a relatively happy ending.

- Five pumps were need to deal with:
 - a fire in a derelict school building, Sandon Road, Stevenage, 3 Nov '88
 - fire in a clothing wholesalers building, Woodford Road, Watford, 5 Nov '88
 - multiple pile up on the M25 involving eleven lorries and twelve light vehicles, 19 Jan '89
 - fire in a Smiths Crisp warehouse, Hoddesdon, 8 Feb 89;
 - a chemical store fire at a plating works, Works Road, Letchworth, 1 Mar '89

● Summer Court, Church Street, Hemel at 0127hrs, 3 December '88, three persons had to be rescued and four led to safety from a fire in a 2 storey residential block.

● Credit here to the evacuation procedures at Leavesden Hospital around midday 17 Dec '88 when three hundred psychiatric patients had to be evacuated from a smoke logged building due to a severe fire on the ground floor.

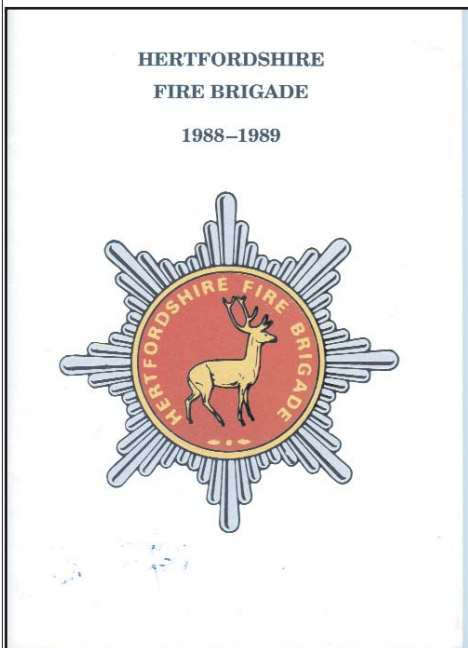
● A fire in an unoccupied school Leggatts Way, Watford, 1823hrs 4th Jan '89 necessitated the attendance of nine pumps for the

use of five jets and twenty-nine BA sets.

● Duty control staff at Hertford would have had almost a birds eye view of the rescue of two persons from a second floor bedroom around midnight 27th Feb '89 at 3 Gwyns Walk, Hertford.

● The crews from sixteen pumps, three HP's and ERT dealt with a Kuehne & Nagel warehouse, Colonial Way, Watford. The mention of a 400m water relay sounds a bit like emergency training at Moreton.

COMMENDATIONS AND AWARDS



Chief Officer's Letter of Congratulation were presented to:

Alan Ward, Andy York, Jim Brimmer, Paul Bromwich, Mark Fretter, Steve Parslow, George Webster, Paul Wood, David Woodard, Phil Brannon, arising out of the Adeyfield Lodge (OPH) incident, and to Terry Stroud, John Jackson, W Clark, Ray Warren, Paul Bordoni, C Oliver, L Lukas, R Austin, following the call to Pepper Court, High Street, Baldock in August '88.

Long Service and Good Conduct Medals were awarded to:

Alan Davies, Jeff Coleman, Bill Draycott, Mike Rolfe, Alan Franklin, Graham Clinton, John Shilston, Denis Wickham (Hitchin), David Styles (Garston), David Holt (Borehamwood), Laurie Bush (Watford), Chris O'Hara (Cheshunt)

GEOFFREY V BLACKSTONE

On page 21 in the report is a somewhat abridged obituary to GVB who had died on 31st January 1989. On page 1 of this Newsletter is the national press edition of his obituary, which, making mention of his background gives a better understanding as to

the character of the man who had such a profound effect upon us all.

For those of you on the internet, Google up "Official Blackstone Engine Website" and the "Blackstones FC". Similarly, anyone wanting a second hand copy of a "History of the British Fire Service" should Google the title where they will find copies priced between £20 & £120

Joining the Brigade as I did in 1959, you quickly realised that the whole outfit was based upon mutual respect and personal responsibilities. Although praise was not always forthcoming in a successful conclusion to an occurrence, a sure way to earn a rollicking however was to have done nothing. Hertfordshire, for sure, had the Midas touch for training would be Chief Officers - Wilf Ward (Norfolk), Harry Ayres (Devon), Bob Rooke (IOW), Archie Winning (Hampshire), John Maxwell (Cambs & Moreton), Brian Fuller (West Midlands and Moreton), Dennis Robins (Wills & Home Office), Stan Horner (Powys), Tom Bailey (?), Jim Cummings (Northants), Peter Morpew (Beds & Home Office) and Mick Howell (Cornwall).

NOTE - Perhaps in the next edition we could have readers recollections of this time, including the names of at least six other CFO's. Apart from the professional side of the job, there were also many laughs. So get writing.

NOTABLE SUCCESS

John Brown, Roy Square and Gordon Kinnear have passed the IFE Membership Exam.

Monies raised for the Benevolent Fund totalled almost 30K with 'B' Division being the main contributor.

Pump competition winners at Watford, were:

Wholetime - Hemel Hempstead (Red Watch)
Retained - Kings Langley
Veterans - Welwyn Garden Cite (White Watch)

Royston were the winners in the County finals of the Retained Technical Quiz. Unfortunately, success was short-lived as they were knocked out of the zone final by Northants.

The commencement of annual exchanges for work experience between Herts and Rheinland Pfalz Brigades.

PERSONNEL

Retiring members included Bill MacKenzie, John Gray, Ivan Reader, Allen Cobb, Ron Gibson, Jim Peto, Mick Bowman and Tom Carter.

- continued on page 6 -



Round Up

- continued from page 5 -

Promotions were awarded to Bob King (DCO), John Potipher (ACO Operations), Dave Wilston (DO III) and the following ten promoted to Station Officers:

Craig Herbert, Simon Bygrave, Ian Michell, Pete Smith, Steve Howers, Richard Bond, Kim Anderson, M Osborne, R Church and Peter Dartford.

EQUIPMENT

The Brigade ended its long association with Siebe Gorman by investing in the Sabre 'Centurion' BA sets. It was further proposed that three thermal imaging cameras would be purchased and sited, one per division.

TRAINING

Myself now being into my last year and the Brigade anxious to maintain a Gifford in the job, my youngest (Martyn), in Recruit Course 2/88 passed out on the 24th Nov '88.

Where have the last twenty years gone?

Sid Gifford

TOM PRICE - The late Editor of the Hemel Hempstead Gazette. Tom arrived at Hemel Station one day in around 1966 as a young reporter working for a man in Milton Keynes who ran a freelance agency called Three Counties News Agency. Because of his quiet unassuming character he was well received by the Watch Officers, he was not pushy and his reporting was accurate and factual, He was able to send items out via whatever the system was in those days, I think Teleprinter and sell to any media around the world who chose to run his stories. He would spend the evening in the company of the watch once work was done and be ready to pounce when either a Fire or Ambulance Emergency took his fancy, for this he was affectionately known as "Scoop"

I remember one Saturday evening on White Watch under John Simmonds, we got a call at about 1900 to a man at Hemel Railway Station with his head stuck in the ticket office window. It transpired that he had been drinking all day in the Railway Pub and had asked for a ticket for a train to Bovingdon (obviously there was no such service). The ticket agent had got rather bored with his insistence and moved away from the oval window but the poor fellow stuck his head in and did the classic park railing trick. John Simmonds said to Tom "we will give you a head start on this one it's not life threatening but may be amusing." Scoop set off in his maroon Mini Van reaching the station just before us and got some good shots and a classic story before we up ended him and slid the poor fellow out. That story went all over the world and indeed I received a cutting from an uncle in Melbourne Australia.

Tom became a firm friend of the station and joined them on many Benevolent Fund raising events, notably the "Mate a Monster" project to Loch Ness that the late Ron Percival organised.

In later years Tom's commitment as Gazette Editor, together with the changing personnel at the station, meant we saw less of him but he was always available for help and publicity when we organised any events or charity fund raising.

He was indeed a good friend and ally to the Fire Service both as a person and a journalist.

Neil Flemming

HFRS Golf Section Update



Not long now until the start of the season, time to dust off the clubs & blow the cobwebs from the golf swing.

The Golf Section would like to invite all retired members who enjoy the game and some friendly competition to join us in 2009. Over the years we have seen the number of retired firefighters attending the golf section drop - we are keen to reverse that trend.

A new website has been built which has all the info on fixtures, results & general golfing news so it is now easier to plan your golfing year with us at the society. Visit www.hfrsgolf.co.uk to find out more.

If you have any other questions about the golf section & you can't find the answers on the website, please feel free to contact me.

Phone: 07957 685260

Email: carl@hfrsgolf

The first event is a 36 hole competition being held at Mill Green Golf Club on the 30th March. Hope to see you all there.

*Regards Carl
Secretary HFRS Golf Society*



Top this for a speeding ticket . . .

Two British traffic patrol officers from North Berwick, east of Edinburgh, were involved in an unusual incident, while checking for speeding motorists on the A 1 Great North Road.

One of the officers (who are not named) used a hand held radar device to check the speed of a vehicle approaching over the crest of a hill, and was surprised when the speed was recorded at over 300mph. The machine then stopped working and the officers were not able to reset it.

The radar had in fact locked on to a NATO Tornado fighter Jet over the North Sea, which was engaged in a low-flying exercise over the Borders district.

Back at police headquarters the chief constable fired off a stiff complaint to the RAF Liaison office. Back came the reply in true laconic RAF style. "Thank you for your message, which allows us to complete the file on this incident. You may be interested to know that the tactical computer in the Tornado had automatically locked on to your 'hostile radar equipment' and sent a jamming signal back to it. Furthermore, the Sidewinder air-to-ground missiles aboard the fully-armed aircraft had also locked on to the target. Fortunately the Dutch pilot flying the Tornado responded to the missile status alert intelligently and was able to override the automa1 system before the missile was launched.

David Miller

THE RECENTLY RETIRED

Gordon MacMillan	Service HQ
Roger Day	Service HQ
Mark Fretter	Garston
Gene Cutler	Hemel Hempstead



A Golden Wedding

A SOUTH AMERICAN CRUISE

Dear Editor,

I have been meaning to send you an e-mail with regard to our Golden Wedding experiences but due to me being in hospital after we returned and Veronica breaking her leg I have not got around to it.

As you know we have a passion for travelling and seeing how the other half live, so to celebrate our Golden Wedding Anniversary we went on a three month cruise around South America and Antarctica. We left on January 6th and returned on March 28th 2008.

Our first port of call was Funchal, Madeira and then on to Dakar in Senegal. The Cape Verde islands were next and then on to Dominica in the Caribbean. On 21st January we arrived at Tobago and then on to Devils Island which was a French penal colony and featured in the film Papillon. Several French convicts were guillotined here.

On then to the Amazon where we navigated the river as far as Macapa. Next we went to Belem City later visiting Maceio in Brazil and Salvador. On 4th February we arrived at Rio de Janeiro where the carnival was being held. Here a woman's body, with hands tied behind her back, was seen floating alongside the ship. On a more pleasant note we went to the statue of Christ the Redeemer and strolled along Copacabana beach with Sugar Loaf mountain in the background.

And so on to Buenos Aires, situated on the River Plate, where I went to the tomb of Eva Peron and in contrast the football stadium where Maradona started his career. Coming back up the River Plate we called in to Montevideo in Uruguay, here we saw the anchor and range finder recovered from the Graf Spey battleship.

Off now to the Falkland Islands where we landed just outside Stanley. Here we encountered penguins for the first time. During our tour I asked an islander about



the conflict with Argentina. As I suspected vast oil reserves have been found off the coast and the war arose from Argentina trying to lay claim to them. It also came out that as soon as the Gurkhas arrived to take part the Argentinians could not get their hands up fast enough.

The next area to be visited was Antarctica where we cruised the Lemaire Channel and went to the Antarctic base camps of Chile and Britain. It was a stunning sight with icebergs, glaciers, mountains rising from the sea, and all types of wild life.



And so on to Ushuaia in Argentina which is the southernmost city in the world. Our Golden Wedding anniversary took place whilst cruising the Chilean Fjords which are similar to the fjords in Norway but on a much larger scale, they are spectacular.

Continuing our journey we visited Puerto Montt, Talcahuano, and Valparaiso in Chile before arriving at Lima in Peru. Here we visited a sacrificial pyramid site.

On now to Guayaquil in Ecuador, which was another destination frequently used by pirates. Next on the list, Manta, Ecuador where I visited the local Fire Station and I bought a Panama hat (panama hats are made in Ecuador not Panama). The fire appliances are

American and I was surprised to see old manual pumps, and so back across the equator heading up the coast towards the Panama Canal. It took a whole day passing through Panama Canal and the journey was televised and sent back to the UK. via the Internet.

On Monday 10th March we docked at Puerto Limon and went on a jungle trek seeing much wildlife, highly coloured birds, sloths, monkeys and bats etc. There are 151 volcanoes in the area and the last earthquake, quite recently, measured 7.3 on the Richter Scale and claimed the lives of 87 people.

Our next port of call was the San Blas islands occupied by the Kuana Indians. There are about 400 islands each about the size of four football pitches and very close to sea level. On to Cartagena in Colombia where there are many oil fields in the sea on the approach to the port.

Our next port of call was unscheduled at Aruba to take off a sick woman before we went on to Curacao in the Dutch Antilles We then set sail for La Guaira in Venezuela, we were the first passenger liner to dock here in the last 4 years.

The next island we visited is one of our favourites, Margarita and so on to Granada and Barbados. Glad I did not have to foot the bill to stay overnight at a local hotel, cost was \$4900 per night - minimum 5 night stay - Tiger Woods hired entire hotel for his wedding.

After spending a few days at sea we arrived at the Azores and although I had been here before it was the first time there was no mist and low cloud. Well now it was all over except 4 days at sea returning to the UK. A truly outstanding experience which we shall remember for the rest of our lives.

I bought a complete set of professional videos and took many photos should anyone wish to see them.

*Regards,
Colin and Veronica Pond*

[We send Colin and Veronica belated congratulations for their Golden Wedding.Ed]



New Watford Fire Station & Service Museum

THE TIMES - Letter of the Year:

A SENIOR MOMENT - (I PRAY TO GOD THAT I HAVE THEM LIKE THIS...)

An elderly lady actually wrote this letter to her bank. The bank manager thought it amusing enough to have it published in The Times..

Dear Sir,

I am writing to thank you for bouncing my cheque with which I endeavoured to pay my plumber last month. By my calculations, three 'nanoseconds' must have elapsed between his presenting the cheque and the arrival in my account of the funds needed to honour it. I refer, of course, to the automatic monthly deposit of my Pension, an arrangement which, I admit, has been in place for only eight years. You are to be commended for seizing that brief window of opportunity, and also for debiting my account £30 by way of penalty for the inconvenience caused to your bank. My thankfulness springs from the manner in which this incident has caused me to rethink my errant financial ways.

I noticed that whereas I personally attend to your telephone calls and letters, when I try to contact you, I am confronted by the impersonal, overcharging, re-recorded, faceless entity which your bank has become. From now on, I, like you, choose only to deal with a flesh-and-blood person. My mortgage and loan payments will therefore and hereafter no longer be automatic, but will arrive at your bank by cheque, addressed personally and confidentially to an employee at your bank whom you must nominate.

Be aware that it is an offence under the Postal Act for any other person to open such an envelope.

Please find attached an Application Contact Status which I require your chosen employee to complete. I am sorry it runs to eight pages, but in order that I know as much about him or her as your bank knows about me, there is no alternative. Please note that all copies of his or her medical history must be countersigned by a Solicitor, and the mandatory details of his/her financial situation (income, debts, assets and liabilities) must be accompanied by documented proof.

In due course, I will issue your employee with a PIN number which he/she must quote in dealings with me. I regret that it cannot be shorter than 28 digits but, again, I have modelled it on the number of button presses required of me to access my account balance on your phone bank service. As they say, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.

Let me level the playing field even further. When you call me, press buttons as follows:

- 1-- To make an appointment to see me.
- 2-- To query a missing payment.
- 3-- To transfer the call to my living room in case I am there.
- 4-- To transfer the call to my bedroom in case I am sleeping.
- 5-- To transfer the call to my toilet in case I am attending to nature.
- 6-- To transfer the call to my mobile phone if I am not at home.
- 7-- To leave a message on my computer (a password to access my computer is required. A password will be communicated to you at a later date to the Authorized Contact.)
- 8-- To return to the main menu and to listen to options 1 through 8
- 9-- To make a general complaint or inquiry, the contact will then be put on hold, pending the attention of my automated answering service. While this may, on occasion, involve a lengthy wait, uplifting music will play for the duration of the call.

Regrettably, but again following your example, I must also levy an establishment fee to cover the setting up of this new arrangement.

May I wish you a happy, if ever so slightly less prosperous, New Year.

Your Humble Client

This letter was written by a 98 year old lady - Doesn't it make you proud!

PHOTO 1 Taken from Local Board Road looking across Lower High Street, with Appliance Bay just to the left of the concrete silo, and



offices and accommodation further to the left.

Photo 2 Showing Museum framework in foreground with training tower steelwork behind and main building behind that. (Taken 18th



FIRE MUSEUM



AT THE FIRE STATION
WHIPPENDELL ROAD JUNC.
RICKMANSWORTH ROAD
WATFORD

OPEN DAYS ~ 2009

ON THE FOLLOWING SATURDAYS
FROM 1.00 P.M. TO 4.00 P.M.

18th April	16th May	13th June
18th July	15th August	19th September



Brigade Engine House

