

TIMES PAST

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A look at the Irish Fire Service

OVER TIME, we have looked at some of the services who regularly risk their lives or serious injury to protect or save others. This week we concentrate on the Irish Fire Service with particular attention to Dublin and our local area.

The aftermath of London's great fire in 1666 brought a greater awareness of the dangers of large fires; this led insurance companies to set up fire brigades but only to tackle fires at members' premises, which would have a mark of identification.

Manual force pumps, which it is believed were used in the German cities of Augsburg in 1518 and Nuremberg in 1657, were resurrected, but these had only limited use and had no hoses. German Hans Hautsch improved things by inventing the first suction and force manual pump, adding some flexible hoses.

The birth of the current hose can be attributed to Dutch inventor Jan Van der Hayden, who put together a leather hose 50-feet long and allowing lengths to be joined by adding brass fittings. In 1725, Londoner Richard Newsham developed what could be classed the first fire cart, which was mounted with pumps and pulled to the fire. These could pump 160 gallons per minute up to 120 feet.

In Ireland, the first mention of fire fighting is contained in records of Clonmacnoise in the 10th century, but little else; the best you could imagine would be a bucket service. In the late 1600s, like Britain, insurance companies set up their own fire services in Dublin and other major towns. The same procedures applied, with only those insured by the companies covered and their premises marked. Large fires would be tackled by groups of these insurers' brigades. The firemen wore bright uniforms bearing the company logo.

The first municipal engines arrived in 1705 and John Oats was employed by the city in 1711 at a wage of £6 per year. For this, he would maintain a water engine and employ six men at his own expense, to be prepared in the event of a fire.

From 1800, both police and local groups began putting some sort of fire service throughout the country; all this would be at their own expense. In 1852, the *Towns Improvement Act* gave permission for local councils to provide fire-fighting equipment to towns with a population of over 1,500.

It would be eight years later, in 1862, with the enactment of the *Dublin Corporation Act*, that an organised fire brigade

was established in the capital. Dublin-born JR Ingram, who had worked with brigades in London and New York, was appointed as superintendent. This was followed in 1898 with the establishment of the Dublin Fire Brigade Ambulance Service, which was immediately called into use.

In 1907, the *Public Health Act* allowed local authorities to enter agreements for the common use of fire-fighting equipment. Persons in the area requesting such use were liable for costs incurred.

The Dublin brigade built a permanent headquarters and local fire stations, with the first motorised fire engine arriving in 1909. It was designed by an engineer called Purcell, who requested Leyland Motors to build it. The engine was a 50hp four-cylinder device with dual ignition. The rear-mounted turbine pump could deliver 350 gallons of water a minute. It was equipped with a five-inch suction hose 32-feet long, with an outlet or delivery hose of 1,500 feet, and carried standpipes, axes and other tools.

Dublin City Council is now responsible for a brigade that covers all four local council areas, employing 900 firemen who vary their roles from fire-fighting to ambulance driver and paramedic. There are 15 stations of which 11 are full time, while the four in north County Dublin are retained (paid by call out), with ten stations having an ambulance service.

At present there are 37 authorities, county councils, city councils, borough councils and town councils running 30 fire brigades with 222 fire stations. One third of the fire crews are full time while the rest are retained. The service is run by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, which is responsible for policy making, advising and legislation.

At the beginning of WWII, there were only 24 fire engines to cover the whole country. The 1939 Act required all local authorities to provide fire-fighting facilities in towns with a population over

4,000. Funding for fire brigades comes from government, from the local authorities themselves by means of taking funds from commercial rates, and in recent times by putting a charge on each call-out for chimney, forest, car and some commercial fires, false alarms and calls where special equipment is used.

One of the functions of the *Fire Service Act, 1981* is to train fire service personnel, which is done at local level in centres around the country.

The commanding officer at the scene of an emergency has widespread powers, such as the right to enter any property if he suspects a fire has broken out, the

which would have to be towed to the site of any fire. The only means of doing this was by car and many of the town's hackney cars were fitted with a tow bar for this purpose. The trailer was located at Aird's Yard in Main Street.

New units were set up throughout the county where the volunteer units were active, and supplied with handcarts made within the county by Russell's of Portarlinton. These units were known as ladder-and-bucket brigades, the carts being pushed to fires by the firemen. The end of the war saw surplus appliances abound in Britain and Irish brigades purchased many of what would be real fire tenders.

Portlaoise became home to one such unit. Seven Land Rover fire appliances were purchased in 1956 at a cost of £1,200 each. The fire station in Portlaoise was built in 1958 at a cost of £7,500.

Like other counties, notification of fire was a problem as

communications were not as easy as today; members had to go house to house to notify each other. This meant response time was slow. Redundant air raid sirens were purchased from Britain at the end of the war, and located in each station or unit. In the 1960s, the pager was introduced in Portlaoise, while the rest of the county had to make do with the siren until well into the 1970s.

Laos fire stations are located in Portlaoise, Mountmellick, Mountrath, Abbeyleix, Durrus, Portarlinton, Ballinakill and Stradbally. The Laos brigade has nine tenders and 72 fully-trained officers and firemen supplying a 24-hour, 365 days a year service, with Martin Collins as the chief fire officer.

Carlow Fire Brigade was initially set up in 1879 at the behest of the Rowing and Athletic Clubs in conjunction with the Racquet Court. The first engine arrived in September, supplied by London firm Shand and Mason. It was quickly fitted with equipment such as lamps, buckets, axes, a tank and other tools, yoked to two horses and paraded around the town, then brought to the Quay

where a large crowd watched a successful test, with a fine stream of water flying 130 feet into the air.

The brigade was reformed in March 1906 at a meeting presided over by UDC chairman Michael Molloy. Again, it seems that reorganisation took place in 1912.

The firemen of that era, many of whom worked in Governey's shoe factory, would be called out by ringing the bell of St Mary's Church. In 1937, UDC councillor Thomas Murphy and others felt the brigade should be mechanised and campaigned vigorously to achieve that aim. A fire brigade committee was set up and fundraising organised throughout the county. Willie O'Neill of Tullow Street was awarded the contract to supply the engine.

In August 1936, he travelled to London to order a heavy duty water pump. He then purchased a V8 engine and chassis from Cork. This done, he assembled the pump while adapting the Ford gearbox. Tullow Street coach builders Purcell and Sons completed the carpentry work required for holding the tools and accommodating the horses. The appliance was handed over to the committee in 1937.

The war brought an end to the volunteer service and from 1940 firemen would be paid on a part-time basis. Carlow was part of a joint service with Kildare. John Creed, an ex-army captain, was fire officer for Kildare and in 1951 he took on responsibility for Carlow as well. It was he who brought the Carlow brigade up to required standards, with motorised tenders at all four stations. On his retirement in 1983, both Kildare and Carlow went their own way, and that is how things stand today.

Carlow Fire and Rescue Services have four fire stations located in Hacketstown, Tullow Muinebheag, and Carlow town, each upgraded and fully equipped over the last 20 years, with the new station in Carlow being completed in 2002. This is the service's headquarters. All the stations in Carlow are operated by retained firefighters; the numbers differ depending on the area, but in total there are 45 involved.

Front-line appliances are class B tenders, capable of carrying 1,800 litres of water and fitted with Godiva pumps capable of pumping 2,500 litres a minute. There are also 9,000-litre stainless steel tankers at all stations except Hacketstown, with an emergency tender also based in Carlow, which carries all the equipment and clothing necessary to deal with any chemical incidents.



The old fire station

The IC2000 older appliance