

The Malton Fire Brigade



A proud Malton Fire Brigade with their motor fire engine c1915

Introduction

Early fire services were manned by volunteers and equipment was paid for by subscription. Later the fire brigade came under the Local Board and then the town council. Where possible, costs of attending a fire would be recovered from the insurance company.

Outside the town a lot of fires occurred at farms in the stackyards. These fires often proved to have been started by children playing with matches, labourers smoking or deliberately. In the town, the materials used in the construction of buildings, their proximity to each other, and by today's standards the limited firefighting capability meant that fires were feared and often led to significant destruction.

The brigade and engine covered a large area and were summoned by messenger, fire bells in the

churches, or (later) telegraph and eventually telephone.

In 1894 there was a large fire at Duncombe House, but the Malton fire brigade could not be warned in time for them to attend. A suggestion was made at the Malton Board of Health Meeting that the Superintendent's house be switched on to the postal telegraph system during the night as the Malton Telegraph Office is closed [1]

Although Malton had telephones in 1903, it was not until a council meeting in November 1908 that it was agreed that the fire station should be connected to the telephone system [2]

There is a report in 1881 of a fire breaking out in Hovingham and a messenger being sent to Malton

for the fire brigade. Neither the Superintendent of the brigade nor the engine-house keys could be

Examples of Early Fires

A destructive fire occurred in the stackyard of Mr. Clarke's farm at Acklam Sleights, ten miles from Malton, on Monday night a messenger was dispatched for the Malton fire brigade. Unfortunately, a muffled peal had been rung on the church bells the previous day, and the men took some time in getting together, as they could not comprehend what the muffled bells at midnight meant ... it is believed the fire was the work of an incendiary, and that the intention was to burn the whole of the stacks. Mr. Clarke is insured [4]

'On Saturday night just at darkening, the greatest alarm was occasioned in Malton by the ringing of the fire bells in the churches. It turned out to be the stackyard of Mr. W. Topham, of Rowgate, five miles from Malton, which was on fire, a telegram to that effect being sent for the Malton Fire Brigade and the engines. Mr. Topham is one of the largest farmers on the Wolds, and has a vast number of stacks all in jeopardy. It is understood he is, fortunately, insured in the Yorkshire Office [5]

DESTRUCTIVE FIRE On Tuesday morning, about half-past three, the warehouses behind the premises of Mr. Henry Taylor, wholesale grocer, ham factor, &c., were found to be on fire. From the enormous blaze which immediately shot through the roof it was clear the fire had existed for some hours, undiscovered. The series of buildings run up from Wheelgate to near the Market-place, and closely adjoin the whole of the old houses in Finkle street. These at first seemed destined to immediate destruction, and the alarmed inhabitants set about the removal of their property, and in less than half an hour Finkle-street was piled with furniture, beds, &c., half-roasted hams and bacon, and produce of all descriptions [6]

The fire was on the farm of Mr. William Smith, of High Mowthorpe, Malton, and broke out on Friday afternoon, continuing to burn with great fury until Saturday noon The Malton Fire Brigade were early on the scene, but, in consequence of there being no water within three miles, they were of little use except as salvage corps. The total damage done

found. The brigade just left Malton when another messenger arrived to say they were too late [3]

is estimated at £3,000, the produce of 160 acres of corn being destroyed ... The fire was caused by a child striking a lucifer match beside one of the stacks [7]

'on the premises of Mr. Robert Warwick, jun., confectioner, Newbegin, Malton. The fire occurred in a warehouse behind the dwelling-house, where some sweets had been boiled the previous day, but how it originated is not known. With a good supply of water, the Malton Fire Brigade prevented the fire from extending beyond the warehouse, which, with its contents, was destroyed; a portion of the roof of the dwelling house was also burnt. Mr. Warwick is insured.' [8]

Settrington Hall narrowly escaped complete destruction by fire early yesterday morning ... The Malton fire brigade and their engine were immediately sent for, and the servants and villagers meanwhile did their best to extinguish the flames ... The fire originated through the connection of a beam supporting the flooring and a flue, the latter of which had become choked with soot, which had ignited. We understand the damage done is fully covered by insurance [9]

About noon on Saturday a very destructive fire broke out right in the heart of town ... The fire was first observed in a large hay and provender store belonging to the Crown Hotel (Mrs. Suddaby's), and adjoining the workshop of Messrs. Goldie & Co, tailors and hatters, in Old Maltongate. The loft was filled with a large quantity of hay, which caused the flames to spread rapidly, and soon the whole building, and the tailor's shop adjoining were one mass of fire. A lot of cottage property also stands at the end of the workshop, and the fire also spread to the first cottage before the flames were ultimately subdued, through the energy of the fire brigade, who attached their hose top one of the hydrants and also got the new steam fire engine to work as soon as possible The property belongs to the Earl Fitzwilliam and is not insured [10]

The Malton Fire Brigade, with their steam engine, attended the substantial fire at the Malton Farmers' Manure and Trading Company, but 'owing to the distance between the works and the water main, their services were of little avail . . .' [11]

One of the biggest fires seen in the town was seen in December 1893 at the works of the Malton Farmers' Manure and Trading Company Ltd. Their premises were near the railway station. The fire gutted the premises, causing extensive damage. The company had installed electricity earlier that year. Interestingly 'The Malton fire brigade, with their steam engine, responded to the alarm made at midnight, but, owing to the long distance between

Staffing the Fire Brigade

Census entries make no occupational references to 'fireman' or similar and we therefore assume that the role of fireman was a voluntary one and secondary to a main occupation. Newspaper reports don't mention individuals. Occasional mentions are made of those appointed to be 'Superintendent'. In April 1861 the Local Board

A Steam Fire Engine

In September 1884 the Local Board agreed to sell one of their old manual engines and purchase a steam-engine [16] In August 1885 the Local Board admitted that two years of effort had failed in obtaining a first-class steam fire engine for the district. This engine would primarily be for use in the country around the town. Subscriptions had fallen short, generally because landowners in the country felt there would never be sufficient water. The Local Board concluded that they should ask subscribers that their contributions be put towards a first-class manual engine [17] Earl Fitzwilliam and the insurance companies threatened to withdraw their subscriptions if a manual engine were purchased

the works and the water main, their services were of little avail.' [12]

... three houses, the property of Earl Fitzwilliam, in Newbegin, Malton, were entirely destroyed by fire ... it was feared the whole side of the street could be destroyed, but, thanks to the exertions of the Malton Fire Brigade, with their new steam fire engine "The Fitzwilliam," the flames were ultimately confined to the block of buildings in which they originated. The property was some of the oldest in the town. The houses, having thatched roofs, blazed so rapidly that the inmates could not rescue their furniture, and from a residence next the burning block a sick lady (Mrs. Stockdale) had to be carried out [13]

appointed Matthew Yates, ironfounder, as 'superintendent of the fire engines', vacant by the resignation of Mr. Wm. Smiddy [14] In October 1865 the Board of Health appointed Mr Ralph Yates Superintendent of the fire brigade. The record of the same meeting reported that there were 'thirty men belonging to the fire brigade.' [15]

[18] The Local Board invited tenders for the supply of a steam fire engine.

Steam fire engines were pulled by a team of horses but used steam from a water boiler to power the pump which provided water to the fire hoses. The Malton fire brigade did not have their own horses and 'borrowed' them as needed from local tradesmen and farmers.

Late in 1885 there is a substantial newspaper report covering the trial of a 'Merryweather' engine in the Market-place:

TRIAL OF NEW STEAM FIRE ENGINE AT MALTON

Yesterday afternoon an interesting ceremony was performed in the Market-place at Malton, where a new steam fire engine, supplied by Messrs. Merryweather and Co., of London, was tried and publicly christened in the presence of the Board of Health and a large concourse of townspeople. A deputation, consisting of Councillor Woodhouse and Mr. Supt. Pattison, was also present from Scarborough to witness the proceedings. Soon after two o'clock a procession of the fire brigade, with the new engine and the old manual, went round the town and up to the front of the Town-hall, where the steam engine was quickly attached to the water main, and the brigade proceeded to get up steam and attach their hose. Meanwhile Mr. Seth Tinsley, the chairman of the Team Labour Committee, and Mr. Robert Metcalfe, the chairman of the Board of Health, mounted the engine, and proceeded with the christening ceremony. Mr. Tinsley briefly introduced the Chairman of the Board, who recounted the steps which had led up to the

purchase of a new and efficient steam-engine. He compared the advantages of the latter with the old, decrepit manual engine, which had so long been a disgrace to the borough, and having hinted that, as about one-fourth of the cost of the new engine had been contributed by the lord of the manor, Earl Fitzwilliam, he thought they could not do better than (with his lordship's permission) name the engine "The Fitzwilliam," which he proceeded to do formally amid cheers. Steam having meanwhile been got up the engine was put to a full test, under the superintendence of Mr. J.H. Cleaver (Messrs. Merryweather's representative) and Mr. J.L. Webster, the chief of the fire brigade. Steam was got up in 8 1/4 minutes after fuel was put in the fire-box, and with three jets attached the engine easily threw a strong volume of water over the highest house in the Market-place; in fact the trial was in every respect satisfactory. The engine, however, it should be stated, has been specially constructed to the order of the Board for country work, and built to travel quickly over rural roads. It will carry four jets of water at full pressure, and when the supply is plentiful, when under full steam, it will work 120lbs to the square inch, throwing out water equal to that of a 4.36 man-power land-worked fire engine - and that, too, with four times the force of the latter. She will pump 400 gallons of water per minute. The engine is constructed with all the latest improvements, and its weight (about 23 cwt.) is equally distributed over the four wheels, so that when travelling at a high rate of speed in the hilly district of the Wolds there will be no danger of capsizing. The boiler is Merryweather and Field's patent, and will not explode if, through negligence, it is allowed to run short of water while the fire is burning under it. The makers claim their engine to be more economical in the consumption of fuel than any other of like capacity. The Malton engine was built with wider tyres, extra strong axles, and a width of 4 feet 6 inches instead of 4.2 between the wheels in order to run in the ruts of the country roads; in fact portability was an important feature of the contract, and the engine is said to be a model for an agricultural district. Immediately after the trial, loud cheers were given for the new engine, and then the members of the Board of Health, Messrs. Merryweather's representative, the Scarborough' deputation, and about a dozen other invited guests adjourned to the Council room, where the chairman of the Board of Health (Mr. Robt. Metcalfe) entertained the company, and a suitable list of complimentary toasts were submitted. "The efficiency of and success to the engine when required" was proposed by the chairman, who complimented the town on the possession of the newest and best means for extinguishing a fire, and in a long speech he showed the practical advantages which would accrue to insurers, who now had a right to certain deductions from the fire offices. Mr. Cleaver, of London, and Mr. J.L. Webster, the superintendent of the Fire brigade, &c., responded to the toast - Mr. Samuel King gave "The Subscribers," and Mr. William I'Anson responded. - Mr. Simpson, solicitor, proposed "The Town and trade," which was acknowledged by Mr. Russell; and Councillor Woodhouse and Superintendent Pattison, of Scarborough', responded for "The Visitors." Other toasts followed. - York Herald, 22 December 1885"

In May 1886 the Board of Health decided to test the efficiency of the brigade and engines by having an "alarm drill." The report makes interesting reading and provides an insight into the issues of the day: "... Previous arrangements had been made with Mr. Park, of Amotherby Mill (distant three miles from Malton), and he was surprised that the alarm should be given at 5 o'clock last Wednesday. The alarm at the station was given at 5.15, and the fire bell was put in at 5.20. The whole of the brigade, with the exception of one man who was ill, assembled at

5:28. Three men and myself left the station with the hose cart at 5.29, arriving at Amotherby at 5.50. The engine with brigade arrived at 6.16, and were playing on the mill at 6.20. Much delay was caused by the horses not arriving as quickly as desirable, and further delay was caused by harnessing, and fruitless attempts to start the horses, and for which the brigade were not responsible ..." [19] Richmond and Ripon Chronicle, 8 May 1886

A Motor Fire Engine

There was frequent discussion about the advantages and costs of the fire brigade having their own horses. In 1908 a motor fire engine was thought to be too expensive [20] At some point however, in 1913, Malton and Norton decided that they needed a motor fire engine. The specification included being able to reach a speed of 40 mph, climb a 1 in 4 gradient, and be so constructed as to

give good tolerance on muddy and rutted roads. Tenders were received from Messrs. Merryweather £975, Messrs. Stand, Mason & Co £1,035 and Messrs. Henry Simons & Co £898. The Merryweather one was chosen [21] Such an engine was purchased and named "The Countess Fitzwilliam" in a ceremony led by Earl Fitzwilliam at Malton on 1 August 1914 [22]

Fire Station



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In March 1914 a warehouse in a yard at the Bridge-foot was leased from Earl Fitzwilliam and this was the start of a 'fire station.' [23] Image here is in the possession of the Woodhams Stone Collection

Fire Brigades' Friendly Society



The Yorkshire Fire Brigades Friendly Society held its 34th general annual meeting in the Corn Exchange at Malton in May 1905. After the meeting, around 3,000 men joined a procession headed by the Malton steam engine and men of the Malton brigade. The postcard, left, shows the procession moving along Yorkersgate. Afterwards, brigade superintendents had dinner at the Green Man hotel, where Superintendent R. Richardson of the Malton brigade was presented with the long service medal [24].

References

- [1] Yorkshire Gazette, 3 March 1894
- [2] Yorkshire Gazette, 28 November 1908
- [3] York Herald, 18 June 1881
- [4] Dublin Evening Mail, 17 September 1863
- [5] Lancaster Gazette, 12 November 1864
- [6] York Herald, 14 December, 1867
- [7] Sheffield Daily Telegraph, 29 September 1873
- [8] Driffield Times, 4 March 1876
- [9] Sheffield Daily Telegraph, 5 May 1882
- [10] Driffield Times, 1 October 1887
- [11] York Herald, 12 December 1893
- [12] York Herald, 16 December 1893
- [13] Sheffield Daily Telegraph, 17 May 1895
- [14] Yorkshire Gazette, 27 April 1861
- [15] Yorkshire Gazette, 28 October 1865
- [16] York Herald, 27 September 1884
- [17] Bridlington Free Press, 29 August 1885
- [18] Yorkshire Gazette, 3 October 1885
- [19] Richmond and Ripon Chronicle, 8 May 1886
- [20] Yorkshire Gazette, 24 October 1908
- [21] Yorkshire Gazette, 18 October 1913
- [22] Yorkshire Post and Leeds intelligencer, 3 August 1914
- [23] Yorkshire Gazette, 28 March 1914
- [24] Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer, 8 May 1905.