

MINCHINHAMPTON LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

ANNUAL BULLETIN NUMBER 3

The format this year is slightly different and the entire bulletin is devoted to the account of the Minchinhampton Fire Service.

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THE MINCHINHAMPTON FIRE SERVICE A History by Christopher Brown

INTRODUCTION

Why the Minchinhampton Fire Brigade as a topic for study? Not being a local person, I did not realise that the town had its own Brigade. I discovered its existence when the Local History Group visited the Gloucester branch of the County Library to examine their archives.

The subject appealed to me for the following reasons:

- 1) It had a finite life, i.e. a start and finish date.
- 2) It involved local characters.
- 3) It was possible that fires had affected the architectural shape of the town as we now know it.
- 4) It was still within living memory of the more elderly members of the community.

An initial, investigation locally revealed few collaborated facts and only a few paragraphs here and there written on the subject. A typical example is the extract from the 'Story of Minchinhampton, 1850 - 1957' compiled by the Minchinhampton Women's Institute:

"The founder of the Fire Brigade was Mr. Baynes of Lamrnas. The fire engine was kept under the Market House and the water drawn from a well under the 'group of houses called 'The Island', The War Memorial now stands at this spot. The engine was drawn by an old grey mare and when she, was out carrying a carriers cart, and a call came, the firemen had to push the engine themselves. Onlookers were called to volunteer to help fill and. pass the buckets and were provided with an armband so that they could draw their pay. According to our informant some of them did not work very hard but drew their pay all the same. The hose was sometimes taken round on a wheelbarrow. The fire alarm was the tolling of the tenor bell. Nowadays the Nailsworth Fire Brigade is on call for Minchinhampton fires."

To date the research has consisted of examining documents at the Record Office in Gloucester, visiting local people to ascertain their recollections, and locating articles in newspapers on the subject. My thanks go to Mr. John Rubenson for giving me his newspaper research findings. A superb piece of journalism is the extract from the Stroud Journal dated 21st June 1913:

“SERIOUS FIRE AT MINCHINHAMPTON. £400 DAMAGE. About noon on Saturday a fire was discovered in the servants’ portion of Forwood, Minchinhampton, the residence of Mr. F.G. Playne, a member of the well-known firm of Messrs. Ball, Smith and Playne, solicitors of Stroud.

It appears that one of the maids had occasion to go into an attic, and on opening the door found the room full of smoke. She at once raised an alarm, and several employees of Mr. William Harman, the builder, including Mr. William Excell and Mr. Frank Latham, promptly responded to the call, and rendered what help they could, besides calling up the Minchinhampton Fire Brigade. This organisation under Captain W. H. Webb, made an exceedingly smart turn out, and arrived at Forwood to find the upper storey enveloped in flames. They very wisely set to work to make a hole in thereof, through which they poured streams of water, of which there was a plentiful supply for their engine. By working with great determination they were able to confine the fire to the upper storey.

Meanwhile, many willing persons including Mr. Geoffrey Pavey-Smith (Captain of the Nailsworth Fire Brigade) and the Minchinhampton Patrol of Boy Scouts (under Scout Master Leonard Humphries) - were engaged in removing valuable furniture from the lower rooms to a place of safety. Realising the seriousness of the outbreak, P.C. Baker (with whom there were on duty P.C.s Tennant and Hitchings) gave information to the Stroud Police Station, from which place a Stroud Brigade was called. The Volunteer Brigade, under Captain Ford, arrived on the scene in good time, but prompt as they were, the Minchinhampton Brigade had by then succeeded in extinguishing the flames. The fire was put out before Mr. Playne who had been engaged on professional duties in Stroud, could get back home.

Considerable damage was done to the lower stories by water, but the furniture was saved and the total loss is estimated at £400. This, we understand, is covered by insurance. It is thought that the fire originated in the chimney of the servants’ room.”

It is something of a misnomer to call the research the ‘Minchinhampton Fire Brigade, 1755 - 1931’ as, although a fire engine was purchased by local subscription in 1755, the Brigade proper was not formed until 1864. For this reason I have decided to amend the title to The Minchinhampton Fire Service’. Sufficient information has now been collated to tell the story of this Service.

The task now into put the flesh on the bones by further investigation of the characters involved, more local recollections and yet more reading of old newspapers.

THE BEGINNINGS. 1755 to 1799

The Churchwardens Accounts ¹ for 1755 show that a decision was taken to purchase a fire engine. A subscription collection was organised by a Nathaniel Perks. The ninety-nine subscribers gave a total of £74:12:6.

This money was spent as follows:

1) To Messrs. Newsham & Ragg	£55:10:0
for engine and 3 dos. leather buckets.	
2) 18 perches of wall for engine house	18:0
3) Paving for floor	6:6
4) To William Newman for stones	7:6
and planking.	
5) Cart and horses for the day	1:0:0
6) Unloading engine	2:6
7) To Thomas Dicks for mending axle	2:6
broken in carriage.	
8) To Joseph Dyer for fire hooks etc.	2:16:0
9) To Samuel Cosburn for work in	7:10:0
engine house, ladders etc.	
TOTAL	<u>£68: 2:0</u>

Vestry minutes for March 29th 1799⁽²⁾: *“At a vestry this day it is ordered and agreed that Thomas Hill should be paid 10:6d. per annum for cleaning and oiling the fire engine, finding oil and materials for the same and 4:0d per annum in addition for proving and exercising same device every year and the said Thomas Hill having agreed to undertake the same on the above terms.”*

EARLY YEARS. 1819 to 1852

The information for this section has been taken from the Vestry Minutes ⁽²⁾.

1.7.1819 At a vestry this day held it is ordered that a vestry be held on Tuesday next at one o’clock for the purpose of appointing a Committee to take upon therein the management of having and keeping the Fire Engine, Buckets, Fire Hooks, Ladders etc. in good repair to be ready for immediate use in case of accidental fire.

6.7.1819 It was resolved that it was of the utmost importance to the security of the persons and prosperity of the inhabitants of this Parish and its neighbourhood in case

of accidental fire that the Fire Engine be kept in proper repair. In order to ascertain if it be at present in such repair it shall be taken out for trial tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock.

That if the Engine be found to be out of condition it should be completely repaired as soon as possible and that there should be ladders, fire hooks and buckets provided. That a person be appointed with a sufficient salary to exercise the Engine at least once a quarter.

That four different keys be provided for the Engine House and also for the locks securing the ladders and hooks and kept at such places as may be hereafter agreed upon.

That the ladders be never lent to any person under any pretence except in case of fire nor used in any repairs on the Parish account.

That the following Gentlemen be appointed a Committee to see that the foregoing resolutions be carried into effect and to adopt such other Regulations as the majority may think advisable.

Mr. Cockin	Mr. Harman
Mr. W. Playne	Mr. J. Scuse
Mr. W. Browne	Mr. R. Iles
Mr. Townsend	Mr. Jos. Iles
Mr. Ball	Mr. P. Playne
Mr. Sankey	Mr. T. Sheppard
	Mr. Bliss

And the Churchwardens for the time being -

31.3.1831 At a meeting held this day pursuant to notice given in the Church for the purpose of taking into consideration the propriety of erecting a new Blind House. It was resolved to purchase the premises situated between the Market House and the road leading to Parsonage Court now in the occupation of Thomas Wall and William Grange and to build thereon a Blind House, an Engine House and two necessaries for the use of the Market House Schools.

The property belongs to David Ricardo Esquire who has agreed to sell it to the parish at the same price at which it was valued to him on his purchase from the Assignees of the late William Whitehead Esq.

William Cockin
Frank Chambers } Churchwardens

John Hitchings }
John G. Ball
Maurice Scuse
Jas. Neale

15.4.1842 At a meeting held this day the following resolution was agreed to: That this meeting acting on the resolution adopted at a parish meeting held 6th July 1819, resolves that there will be six keys made (if needed) for the Parish fire engine house and also six keys for the parish ladders. These keys to be deposited in the hands of the following persons:

The Rector, the Churchwardens, Mr. J. G. Ball, Mr. W. Pearce, Mr. J. Ogden, and Mr. W. P. Playne

With the express order that the ladders should on no account whatever be used except in case of fire, and that, the above Gentlemen be constituted a Committee for carrying the above into effect and to adopt such other regulations as the majority may think advisable.

25.3.1852 It was agreed that Mr. Bamford be authorised to have the necessary repairs done to the Blind House and Engine House.

BIRTH OF THE BRIGADE, 1864.

Again the source of information is the Vestry Minutes ⁽²⁾.

28.6.1860 The carriage of the fire engine being in a dilapidated condition, the Overseers are requested to apply to Messrs. Whiting and procure from them an estimate of the expenditure of a new carriage.

29.9.64 At a meeting held this day pursuant to notice for the purpose of ascertaining the state of the parish fire engine and for taking measures to render it perfectly efficient.

The meeting, after inspection of the engine, resolve that it is desirable to put it in proper repair and place it on carriage wheels. For this purpose a committee consisting of the Church-wardens of the three Parishes of Minchinhampton, Amberley and Brimscombe - for the time being - Messrs. C. R. Baynes, William Playne, Peter Playne Smith, W.J.G, Frith, Charles Playne, Edward Dalton, Thomas Lancaster, J.

Bowstead, W. W. Kearsley, W.H. Canter, William Simpkins, James Reeves, Samuel Fowler, John Rodway and William Tuffley, of whom five shall form a quorum, be appointed with instructions to carry out the same at an expense not to exceed £25, to be defrayed out of the Highway Rate as heretofore.

That the engine, when repaired, to be delivered into the charge of a Captain and assistants who shall receive such remuneration as the committee shall think fit and be responsible for its custody and management under a code of regulations to be prepared by the committee.

11.10.1864 At a meeting held this day pursuant to notice given to the full committee, the following was unanimously agreed:

- 1) That a sub-committee consisting of Messrs. Lancaster, Baynes, Canter, Reeves and Fowler be appointed for carrying out repairs to the engine so agreed at the last meeting and for enforcing the rules made or to be made by the general committee for its regulation and maintenance. Of the above, three to form a quorum.
- 2) That it be left to the sub-committee to decide whether to provide leather buckets or others as they may be informed and advised.
- 3) That the engine be repaired together with all its apparatus and the fire ladders be in the charge of Captain William Hill and two assistants to be appointed by him, subject to the approval of the sub-committee.

That the Captain shall receive £1 and the assistants 10/- each annually, on condition of keeping the fire engine etc. at all times cleaned, greased and ready for immediate use.

That the engine should be seen and certified to be in such condition by one or more of the sub-committee at least once a month, That such visits be entered in a book to be kept for that purpose.

- 4) That once every quarter, at such times the committee may order, the engine shall be brought out and proved to be in working order in the presence of at least two of the committee who shall enter their report of such inspection in the same book.
- 5) That the Captain shall make out a list of sixteen able-bodied men who may be

willing to pledge themselves at all times to turn out with the fire engine in case of fire - each of whom shall receive 2/11d. annually.

- 6) That the annual payment to the Captain, the assistants and crew shall depend on obtaining satisfactory certificates of having done their duty. Such payments to be made at Christmas.
- 7) That in the case of fire, the Captain, assistants and crew shall go with the engine, receiving pay at 1/- each for the first hour and 9d. each succeeding hour they may be at work.
- 8) That no beer or other liquor to be given to or taken by the crew, save such modest quantities as the Captain may think necessary and serve out.
- 9) That the keys of the engine house and ladders be securely located. One shall be at the Police Station and one in charge of the Captain.

1.11.1864 At a meeting held this day of the fire engine committee, consisting of Messrs. C. Baynes (Chairman), Thomas Lancaster, J. Reeves, and Fenning Parke (Secretary) a letter was read from the Royal Insurance Company and Mr. Lancaster expressed a favourable opinion of the rules proposed for the management of the Minchinhampton fire engine and offering under advice of Messrs. Shand and Mason, Fire Engineers several suggestions as to the provisions of hose, buckets, etc.

The committee, having sent for William Hill, resolved before determining said hose, buckets etc. that he prepare an estimate of what was considered to be absolutely necessary at present to render the engine efficient in these respects.

The committee further resolved to accept the tender of B. Whiting & Brother for the alterations and repair of the engine as specified and shown for the sum of £11:10:0 and directed that the work be commenced at once.

22.11.1864 At a meeting of the fire engine committee, the Chairman having reported examining the wooden platform of the engine carriage, the condition of which could not be ascertained until the lead was stripped off. The repairs of which were not provided for in Mr. Whiting's contract. He found the carriage to be entirely rotten and therefore took it upon himself, pending confirmation of the committee, to direct that the necessary work be done at an additional cost of £1. The committee confirmed this order.

William Hill, having as directed made duty a list of articles required for rendering the engine efficient, the committee resolved accordingly that the following be procured:

- 1) That two lengths of canvas hose at present in hand be fitted with new union joints.
- 2) Two additional lengths of canvas hose each 40 ft. fitted with same joints.
- 3) Three pieces of suction pipe each 6 ft. long with union joints.
- 4) Two dozen galvanised iron buckets. One copper branch pipe with jet 3'6" long. One iron spanner to fit joints.

The committee request the Chairman to communicate with Shand and Mason to ascertain what will be the cost of these articles.

1864/1865 The committee have to report that in compliance with their instructions they have caused the engine to be put in complete repair. In doing so an -expense of £33:10:8 has been incurred viz:

To Shand & Mason as per bill	£22: 0:8
To Whiting as per bill	<u>£12:10:0</u>
	£33:10:8

This exceeds by £.8:10:8 the amount originally sanctioned by the parish but the committee would observe that the sum was named on a rough estimate and as when work was in hand, it was found that it must either be incompletely done or this small additional sum expended, they took upon themselves the responsibility of incurring it and hope that in so doing they have met the wishes of the parishioners.

The engine being in an efficient state it is necessary to make provision for keeping it so and for its working when required.

In the first place, as to its place of deposit and custody. As was foreseen, the alterations having made it too large for the old engine house - which indeed was never suitable, being too damp and ill ventilated - Mr. Ricardo has kindly consented to allow it to be placed in the lock-up under the Market House. This will, of course, receive some slight repair and cleaning but more especially new doors of open work, either in iron or wood, which would allow the engine to be seen, be themselves ornamental and allow free circulation of air.

In regard to the arrangements to be made for working the engine, the committee do not know any better can be devised than those adopted at the last meeting which have since been submitted and approved of by the Royal Insurance Company.

Under these rules a small annual sum will be necessary for carrying them out, which

the committee suggest may be raised by subscription.

In the event of the engine being called into actual service, there is no doubt that the insurance companies interested will pay the hire of the men, as provided by the rules and also any damage which the engine may sustain.

It was proposed by George Playne and-seconded by F. Parke that the committee approve the proceedings of the fire committee as reported and sanction the payment of £8:10:8 expended in excess of the grant.

Thankful acceptance was made to Mr. Ricardo for permission to place the engine underneath the Market House. The fire committee were requested to enquire and report at what cost suitable iron doors can be procured for the engine house.

The fire committee were also requested to arrange and carry out the rules already sanctioned as to the working crew of the engine and that they be authorised to expend on that account a sum not exceeding £5 per annum out of the Highway Rate.

THE BRIGADE'S HEYDAY 1866 - 1915

Sources are the Vestry Minutes ², the Parish Council Minutes ³ and the Stroud Journal⁴

4.10.1866 The fire engine committee have to report that since they have taken charge of the engine, after it had been put right at the expense of the Parish, have been successful in maintaining it at a very efficient state without further charge beyond the usual allowance for periodical trials and annual fees to the men of the Brigade, as the following statement of accounts will show:

<u>Receipts</u>	
Subs, from Norwich Union	£6: 6: 0
29th Aug. 1866 H.D. Ricardo ~sq. Hyde Farm	£4: 8:0
6th Sep. 1866 Royal Insurance for Grist's Fire	£5:13:2
20th Sep. 1866 Royal Insurance for Ham Mill	<u>£15:16: 6</u>
	£32: 3: 8

Expenses

As per vouchers, committee
exhibited £27:16: 3

Balance in Hand £4: 7: 5

The committee has great satisfaction in stating that on the three occasions which the engine has lately been called into play it has attracted the notice and commendation of all spectators, not only by the superior efficiency of its working but by the steadiness and good conduct of the Brigade.

The committee is anxious to obtain belts for the firemen which are necessary as distinguishing marks to prevent confusion. A specimen estimate had been prepared - the total cost will be £3/17/- Messrs. Whitings have offered to present the Brigade with three hatchets required to be worn with the belts of some of the crew.

The committee are also desirous of providing another length of canvas hose which will cost £2/8/-, making with the belts a total of £6/5/- or £1/18/7 in excess of present fund and they would therefore sanction to expend a sum of £2 for the purposes of the engine, chargeable to the Highway Rate.

3.12.1868 A sum of £5 per annum to be paid out of the Poor Rate in aid of the expenses of the engine maintained by the Nailsworth Fire Engine Association for use in the Minchinhampton Parish.

25.3.1870 It was proposed and agreed that the chairman be requested to ascertain whether the Old Blind House and the engine house adjoining, now belonging to the Parish, be sold.

6.2.1872 Annual Dinner of the Brigade at the Crown Inn.

23.3.1872 Mr Baynes, who has acted as secretary and treasurer for the Fire Engine Committee since its appointment, submitted an account with vouchers and receipts and payments showing a balance in the Savings Book of £8/2/3. He begged to hand over the minute book and all paper connected with the engine to the Vestry clerk as ex-officio secretary of the committee, proposing that Mr. W. H. Smith be added to the committee. This was carried. Following a motion proposed by Mr. C. Playne, best thanks of the meeting were presented to C. R. Baynes Esq for his valuable services to the fire engine committee.

6.12.1873 C.R. Baynes, as chairman of the fire engine committee since 1864, reported that the Hon. R.H. Eden having been added to the committee, had been chosen as chairman and executive member, and would submit for the approval of the committee such alteration of existing rules for the management of the Fire engine and fire brigade as appeared necessary.

He moved that the committee be authorised to expend a sum of not exceeding £35 in placing the engine in a state of complete repair, renewing apparatus etc.

25.1.1876 Brigade Dinner at the Crown Inn. The Chairman of the evening Cpt. T.W. Gardner of the Stroud Volunteer Fire Brigade spoke highly of the energy displayed by Cpt. Whiting, who out of raw material and an indifferent engine had by perseverance obtained as good an Engine and Brigade as any in the County. Mr. Whiting read the annual report - The Brigade consisted of 14 members, had attended 12 practices and 2 fires. In one instance they had saved property to the value of several hundreds of pounds.

19.4.1876 The members of the Brigade presented as a mark of esteem to their Captain, Mr. Whiting a new dress cap.

16.2.1877 Annual Dinner at the Crown Inn. Cpt. Whiting said he had been a member for 14 years. The Brigade belonged to the Parochial Authorities and were not allowed to wear uniform.

He had tendered his resignation due to pressure of business but it had not been accepted and he would continue for another year.

16.8.1879 Competitions were held between the Minchinhampton Fire Brigade and the Brimscombe Volunteer Fire Brigade in Camp Field.

8.1.1880 Annual Dinner at Crown Hotel. Cpt. Whiting said it was the 16th anniversary of the formation of the Brigade and during that time they had been called upon to attend 40 fires. During the year they were sad to lose 2 members who had died. They were now left with 12 members.

3.7.1880 M.F.B. and B.V.F.B. had a mutual drill at Brimscombe, it being the custom for one Brigade to visit the other during the year.

15.1.1881 Annual Dinner. Cpt. Whiting said he wanted to see his mem better equipped. He had tried three times to get uniforms but had had three doses of the cold

shoulder. They had had four calls and eight practices.

15.10.1881 Cpt. Whiting gave a test call to the bell chamber of the Parish Church. The engine was brought out and 7 forty-foot lengths of hose connected and taken to the roof of the church. To accomplish this, one round 30 ladder was used, and 3 scaling ladders.

18.1.1883 The 19th Annual Dinner. Cpt. Whiting said they had had only one fire during the year and reached it within 17 minutes of the call. (Holcombe Mills) Cpt. Barrett said he had been connected with Fire Brigade work for 20 years, the earlier part with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade. Cpt. Moreton represented the Nailsworth Brigade.

1.2.1833. The Brigade had purchased a large sheet to take to fires in buildings in case the inmates had to jump.

21.6.1844. M.F.B. Annual Dinner. To celebrate the 20th anniversary of the formation of the Brigade. At a recent fire the Brigade were on the spot and pouring water on the fire in 8½ minutes, and they were on duty at that fire for 76 hours. Capt. Whiting had served under Cpt. Hill for 10 years, and had been Captain for 10, but he now thought of retiring. He would like to see the Brigade in uniform.

6.4.1885 Annual Dinner. Cpt. Whiting said he had reconsidered resigning and was pleased to still be their Captain. The members were now in uniform.

25.7.1885. The M.F.B. accompanied by the B.V.F.B. drove to Stroud and met the Town Brigade. From there they all went to Nailsworth with their engines decked with flags. The S.V.F.B. did not take part because of lack of outfit.

13.5.1886. Annual Dinner at the Crown Hotel. Cpt. Collings and the Stroud Brigade attended in their new uniforms and boots. Also present were Cpt. Barrett of the B.V.F.B. and Mr. Hill representing the Nailsworth Brigade.

7.1.1888. The members of the N.F.B. were invited to spend an evening at the residence of their Captain to mark his 53rd birthday, and his 24th year of service in the Brigade. The paint room at Messrs. Whiting's Coach-building Establishment, in Butt Street, was tastefully decorated for the occasion and an excellent supper and entertainment was enjoyed by all.

3.9.1995. Brigade to be maintained from the rates as here for to. A small committee

to be appointed to manage details. The position of each fire engine and address of Secretary, Captain and call boy of each brigade to be printed on cards, to be fixed on each Post Office, Police Station in the parish, or other prominent positions.

3.10.1895. A committee appointed - Messrs. Joseph Harman, W .J. Ogden, Thomas Whiting and James Simmonds.

12.12.1895: The Fire Brigade committee be authorised to purchase:

10 pairs boots

1 tunic

10 life lines

1 bucket strainer

1 pair lamps

irons and ropes

The cost not to exceed £10.

2.3.1896. Mr. Ogden reported that no second hand boots could be found. He brought samples of new ones at £1 per pair. Council authorised purchase of ten pairs, as per sample.

27.6.1896. M.F.B. proceeded to The Lammas, the residence of Mr. C. R. Baynes (the founder of the Brigade). The men were put through several drills by Cpt. Wess and an experiment with the jumping sheet was tried. Cpt. Baynes, grandson of Mr. Baynes, jumped from a second storey window of the house and successfully landed in the sheet. The party proceeded to the White Horse Inn, where they met the Chalford Brigade and went on to Sapperton, where an excellent meal was provided by Mr. Harrison of the Bell Inn.

5.7.1900 It was stated that the Market House Committee would charge the Parish Council a rent of Two Guineas per annum from Lady Day for the use of the Engine House.

6.12.1901. The funeral took place of Mr. Thomas Whiting, aged 66, who had been a member of the Fire Brigade for many years, and Captain for the last 25. The coffin was carried on the Minchinhampton manual engine the deceased's helmet being placed on top, and members of the Brigade acting as bearers. Many firemen from the local brigades attended - Stroud Volunteer, Stroud Town, Brimscombe and Chalford.

17.12.1904. The funeral of Mr. E. Young, a member of the Brigade. Amongst members from the Minchinhampton Brigade were: Cpt. Webb, Firemen H. Boulton, J. Hopes,

T. Frewster, C. Close and A. Herbert.

21.4.1910 It was stated that the only water available for firefighting had to be obtained from wells and pools. It was suggested that several hydrants be installed. Also it was said that the condition of the engine and equipment was very poor and Messrs H. Smith and E. G. Barrett were appointed to look into the matter.

7.7.1910 The inspectors reported that the engine was in a bad state of repair and needed to be renovated. There were 290' of canvas and leather hose, one small hand pump 23 buckets and 1 jump sheet. It was said that the Parish Council made annual payment of £3/16/- and quarterly amounts of 15/- to the upkeep of the Brigade. The shortage of water was acute.

6.1.1911. The Fire Brigade Inspectors reported that repairs had been carried out to the fire engine by Mr. J. Hooper at the Motor repair Works, near Blue Boys, at the cost of 3/17/-. The engine now worked much better. The Brigade had 4 lengths of leather hose and 5 of canvas the couplings of which were of the old pattern and would have to be altered as they would not fit the new 2½" universal size. A hydrant is to be fixed at the Cross, and the cost of £2/10/- to be defrayed by the Parish Council, who would also offer the Stroud Water Company £1/1/- per annum provided they could occasionally use the water for practice.

15.4.1912. Hydrant fitted at the Cross and a connection piece had been ordered from Messrs Newman and Hender to suit the old hose. As soon as it is received, the hydrant will be tested.

17.4.1913. A letter was read from Mr. A. Summers respecting the charges made for services at a fire at Blue Boys Farm on February 4th, stating that he considered them unreasonable, and asking if the Brigade is maintained by the rates. Cpt. Webb and Mr. Boulton attended on behalf of the Brigade and produced the rules and scale of charges. After considerable discussion the Clerk was instructed to reply to Mr. Summers and state that the Brigade is maintained by the rates and that the claim is made on the authority and in accordance with the rules adopted by the Council (a copy of which can be seen in the Clerk's office) and also to point out that the charges made by the Council are, they believe, the most reasonable in the District.

15.5.1913. A letter was received from Mr. Summers stating that in his judgement the claim made for services rendered by the Brigade is incorrect according to the rules. Mr. Summers attended the meeting as did Captain Webb and Mr. H. Boulton. Mr. Summers is to be given an account in detail with a list of the helpers and ask him to

kindly favour the Council with a cheque to settle the same. Major Ricardo invited the Brigade to tea at Gatcombe and hoped they would give a display. The Major's invitation was accepted with hearty thanks.

14.7.1913. The Fire Brigade Committee Report. On Tuesday June 17th the Committee met the Brigade at the Cross where they inspected the hose and had the same tested from the hydrant and they were of the opinion that two lengths of leather hose and two lengths of canvas hose were useless. They then went to the engine house and inspected the engine and hand pump. The hand pump was found to be slightly out of repair and the suction boxes of the engine required new hinges. The Clerk was instructed to contact Mr. Jas. Hooper to see to the repairs to the hose. On June 26th the Committee met at the Crown Hotel, when quotations were received from Messrs. McGregor Ltd. & The United Brassfounders and Engineers Ltd. After careful consideration it was proposed by Mr. Grist, and seconded by Mr. Fyffe and carried, unanimously that Messrs. McGregors quotation be accepted. The Clerk was instructed to order the same at once, this being really necessary. The Clerk placed before the committee a list of rules and regulations together with a scale of charges for the Brigade attending fires, which he had prepared for their approval. After adjusting the annual payment, the Council to The Brigade, it was unanimously agreed to recommend the Council to adopt and pass these rules and regulations and scale of charges and that the scale of charges for the Brigade be printed on a board and placed in a prominent position at the Engine House.

The Fire Brigade to consist of a Captain, Hoseman, Assistant and five able-bodied men. Charge for the use of the engine per day of 12 hours, or any part thereof £1/10/-, (Half price if not used)

Horse hire to be charged at actual cost. Captain or Officer in Charge 10/- for 3 hours or less, 1/- per hour thereafter. Hoseman 7/6d for 3 hours or less, 1/- thereafter

Assistant 7/6d ,, ,, ,,

Fireman ,, ,, ,,

Pumpers & Helpers 1/- per hour or part hour

Ringling the Fire Bell 2/6d.

Messengers 1/— each

Cleaning the Engine, Hose and Appliances 10/6d.

The Captain or other officer in charge to serve the Brigade, Pumpers and Helpers with refreshment as necessary. (Drinkables not to exceed one pint of beer per man per hour) -

The above scales were made and adopted at a Meeting of the Minchinhampton Parish Council duly called and held on the 14th July 1913

H.G. Ricardo - Chairman
F. E. Jones - Clerk.

The Clerk was instructed to order Mr. J. Simmonds & Sons to paint the scale of charges on a notice board and fix same at Engine House also to put the following notice on the old notice board - 'The Fire Brigade will not attend any fire unless an official call is received by some member of the Brigade, the Clerk of the Council or the Police.'

The Council agreed the Fire Brigade Committee be authorised to purchase 4 lamps for the engine.

20.4.1914. The Fire Brigade Committee were elected as follows - Messrs. Grist, Smith, Barrett, Hutchirigs and Fyffe.

12.10.1914. The Captain stated that the lamps which had been got for the engine were not suitable and that they should find a large one more suitable. Mr. Barrett replied that he had seen Mr. Miller who had supplied the lamps, but could not get him to change them. Mr. Grist said he would do what he could in the matter.

11.1.1915. Mr. Miller was having a large three sided candle-lamp made.

THE END OF THE BRIGADE, 1916 - 1931

The final years of the Brigade, especially after World War I, were largely punctuated by the need for better water supplies. Most of the references in the Parish Council Minutes³ are duplicated, so some editing has taken place in this section.

17.4 1916. A letter was read from Mr. Jones, Foreman of the Jury, over the death of the late Mrs. Heiron, calling the Councils attention to the fact that no water was available at the fire and suggested that two or three hydrants should be provided at different parts of the district. Amberley and the Pike at Brimscombe mentioned.

4.7.1917. The matter of the Fire Brigade expenses were considered and it was thought a safer protection to the town would be given if further fire hydrants were fixed.

14.1.1918. The Chairman reported that the Stroud Water Company could not undertake firing any fire hydrants during the War on account of the shortage of labour.

24.3.1919 The Clerk reported that the arched cellar underneath the Crown Hotel and the late Mr. Thompson's property would make an excellent reservoir for water supply in case of fire and it was probable that it would be filled up with debris, that the Council should take steps to secure it for the purpose named.

19.5.1919. The school managers had given consent for the stand pipe for the Amberley hydrant to be left at the Amberley Schools. A notice to quit was received from the Market House committee for the fire engine, owing to alterations necessary in carrying out a plan for a new War Memorial. The Fire Brigade Committee were instructed to visit and make new arrangements at another site, also to carry out the cementing of the proposed water tank under late Mr. Thompson's premises as a reserve tank for fire purposes.

30.6.1919. The committee reported having visited several sites and found none so suitable as the shed in the Crown Hotel Yard and they produced an agreement drawn up for taking this shed at a yearly rental of £5/0/-. (This was paid quarterly.) Mr. Simmonds proposed that an inventory of all the fire appliances should be taken. The inventory

2 x 38', 2 x 50', 1 x65' and 2 x 75' lengths of hose.
 3 x 6' lengths of suction hose
 1 lamp for engine 20 buckets
 1 hand pump & hose 1 x ½" & 1 x ¾ nozzles
 1 nipple to standpipe 1 jumping sheet.
 Ladders 2 grip hooks
 40 pumpers badges 1 coupling
 Pole shafts for engine 1 rope suction basket
 1 broom 1 soft broom
 2 barrows 2 shovels
 2 pickaxes 3 stone hammers
 1 standpipe at Amberley School
 1 standpipe in the charge of Mr. Barrett.

9.2.1920. Mr. Chamberlain spoke of the recent fire at Mr. Merrills, West End and strongly advised a fire hydrant be fixed near park Terrace gates.

11.10.1920. Mr. Barrett reported a visit from Stroud Volunteer Fire Brigade with their new motor engine who tested the new water tank which was found most satisfactory and he thought the town at this end was now well secure in case of fire there being an adequate water storage.

15.2.1921. Mr. Barratt recommended that new rates of pay be allowed to firemen when employed at a fire and suggested the following:

	Turn out (incl 1 hour)	Thereafter
Captain	10/6d	3/6d.
Fireman	7/6d.	2/6d
Pumpers	1/6d	1/6d
Engine	10/6d	2/6d

Horses - Actual cost.

21.3.1921. Mr. Barrett on behalf of the Fire Brigade informed Council that the Captain and his men were very dissatisfied and the Captain was inclined to send in his resignation. The follar of the engine house was very unsatisfactory. They had no water supply, the pump being out of order. The uniform was completely worn out and unfit to use. After discussions the Council felt the Brigade had reasons for complaint but as times were now very uncertain and thing's so costly, they could not see their way to spend much money. It was suggested to write to Stroud Brewery Co. and see if they could put a new floor to the shed or engine house, it being their property.

18.4.1921 The Fire Brigade committee were elected as follows: Messrs. Barrett, Hall, Pond & Hutchings. The Clerk informed Council he had received Captain Webb's resignation.

4.7.1921. The Clerk reported that the Fire Brigade had met the Committee who had heard their complaints, chiefly on the condition of the floor of the engine house which made it impossible for them to keep the engine clean. Further complaints were made in reference to boots and coats but after consideration of the high cost at the present time, this matter to remain open.

8.11.1921 The Chairman opened four tenders received for the new floor of the engine house:

A. Daniels	£40/-/-
W.A. Harman	£16/-/-
B. Bishop	£22/-/-
J. Simmonds	£22/10/-

Discussion followed as to the proportion of cement being specified and eventually the Council accepted the tender of Mr. Harman on condition of the proportion being 4 to 1.

19.9.1921. Hydrant authorised at top of West End, near to Mr. Hooper's house and another proposed for Lamb Inn, Amberley.

9.8.1923. The Council inspected the fire engine and hose and found the engine defective and also three lengths of hose. The fire hydrant at the Cross was tested and found to be leaking. Captain Webb and Mr. Boulton met Council and made statements of what was required to repair valve to engine and that 400' of new hose was necessary. Captain Webb informed Council that he must now resign after 50 years service and hoped Council would support his nominee, Mr. H. Boulton as Captain. The Council felt regret at Mr. Webb's resignation, but could not expect him to continue in his advanced age.

24.9.1923. It was decided to inspect fire engine after repairs on Saturday 6th October at 3.00 o'clock.

6.1.1924. Fire hydrant had been fixed near Black Horse, Amberley.

5.5.1924. Fire Brigade Committee: Messrs. Barrett, Matthews and J. Hall.

25.8.1924 The Chairman reported that the inspection of fire hydrants at Amberley

had been carried out by tests of the Stroud Volunteer Fire Brigade He recommended from what he saw that the Council would be well advised to scrap the old engine and maintain a few men as a reserve with the present hose and to call upon an outside Brigade should a fire occur. He thought it would be possible to give a sum of money per year as a retaining fee to the outside Brigade and thus have a call upon them. Mr. Barrett replied that he did not think the Council had the power to subscribe to an outside Brigade and noticed in the Chairman's remarks he had not referred to the Brimscombe Brigade which he thought were quite efficient and had a good engine. He would like to invite the Council to come down and inspect their turnout and see for themselves. ... The matter was adjourned to come up at an early meeting before Quarter Day.

24.9.1924 The matter of the Fire Brigade was again discussed and it was suggested that the engine be sold. Mr. Hutchings proposed that the Fire Brigade Committee should go carefully into the matter and prepare a scheme to lay before the whole Council. The Clerk suggested that the Council should meet the Brigade and have their opinion before doing anything drastic.

6.10.1924. It was stated that the Fire Brigade had drilled from hydrants and a tank, and was found to be satisfactory. Without the engine the tank in the High Street was useless. It was decided to keep the Brigade in operation.

17.4.1928. Fire Brigade Committee: Messrs. Barrett, Matthews, A. Dennis and L. Close. Fire hydrant was proposed for Box. There was discussion re. continuing upkeep of Fire Brigade and the feeling was that the Brigade was not of any great service, owing to altered conditions and it was not fair to the outside districts of the Parish. It was stated that the Brigade cost £303 in ten years, but for nine had received no call.

21.8.1928. The Fire Brigade Committee gave their recommendations:

- 1) That the existing manual engine be disposed of as being no longer sufficient protection.
- 2) That two men be appointed at a suggested fee of £2/-/- per annum to keep in order the existing fire pumps and using it for any small outbreak in the town. To test each fire hydrant in the Parish twice every year, report to the Council in writing that this had been done and have charge of present hosepipe. Perform any other duty the Council may wish to define.
- 3) That each hydrant in the Parish be marked with a brass. plate and that authority be asked from the Water Company for a responsible person, appointed by the Council, to hold a turn key to water mains at the nearest point.

This report was carefully considered by Council and on taking the vote, was passed with one opponent.

25.9.1928. After discussion, it was agreed to give three months notice to the Captain of the Fire Brigade, to terminate on December 25th 1928.

10.12.1928. The Clerk reported that the Captain of the Fire Brigade would not accept the three months notice to terminate their engagement. Mr. Chamberlain thought that the Council were the employers and should not be dictated to by the Brigade. A fire hydrant was needed at St. Chloe. The Clerk stated that he had spoken to Mr. Jeffery Smith, Captain of the Nailsworth Volunteer Fire Brigade and they were quite agreeable to attend at Minchinhampton or Amberley should they be required. It was agreed with the Police as to where to call Brigades for any part of the Parish. Mr. Hutchings be given six months notice to give up the engine house and advertise the sale of the manual engine.

18.3.1929. The Clerk informed the Council that the Captain of the Fire Brigade had notified to him that unless the Council gave a proper notice they should sue for their fees. After strong discussion it was moved and agreed that the rules of adoption be rescinded and that the Brigade give up in March 1931, and that three months notice be given at Christmas 1930.

25.6.1929. Four tenders were received for the old fire engine and the tender of Mr. C. Blick, £6/5/-, the highest was accepted. Discussion as to the remaining plant of the Fire Engine and storage tank took place and it was decided to get an inventory from the Brigade Captain and report at the next meeting. Mr. Hutchings kindly allowed same to remain at the engine house.

9.9.1930. Mr. Hutchings claimed further rent for engine house as it was still in Council hands. It was resolved to sell the, various articles at a Public Auction.

3.12.1930 The Clerk reported that the Fire Brigade utensils had been sold at Nailsworth Market for the sum of £6/10/9. paid into the bank and also that a sum of £7/-/- was paid to Mr. Hutchings and the key of the engine house given up in settlement.

24.2.1931 Last payment of £2/-/- made to Brigade.

March 1931. The Minchinhampton Fire Brigade officially ceased to exist.

Sources

- (1) Churchwardens Account - P217 CW 2/2
- (2) Vestry Minutes - P217 VE 2/3 & 2/4 -
- (3) Parish Council Minutes - P217a PC 1/1 & 2/2
- (4) Stroud Journals - Extracts compiled by Mr. J. Rubenson.

Footnotes

With reference to the Local History Exhibition at the 1986 Country Fayre, may I take this opportunity of thanking the following:

Mr. Bob Ford - Brigade Captains helmet and photographs.

Mr. Ray Bateman - Identity board from the Engine.

Mr. Nick Hurst-Fire Marks, insurance documents and photograph.

Mr. John Vosper - Fire Boards.