



CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

A HISTORY OF TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

1974 - 2024

**Tyne and Wear Fire
and Rescue Service**

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS



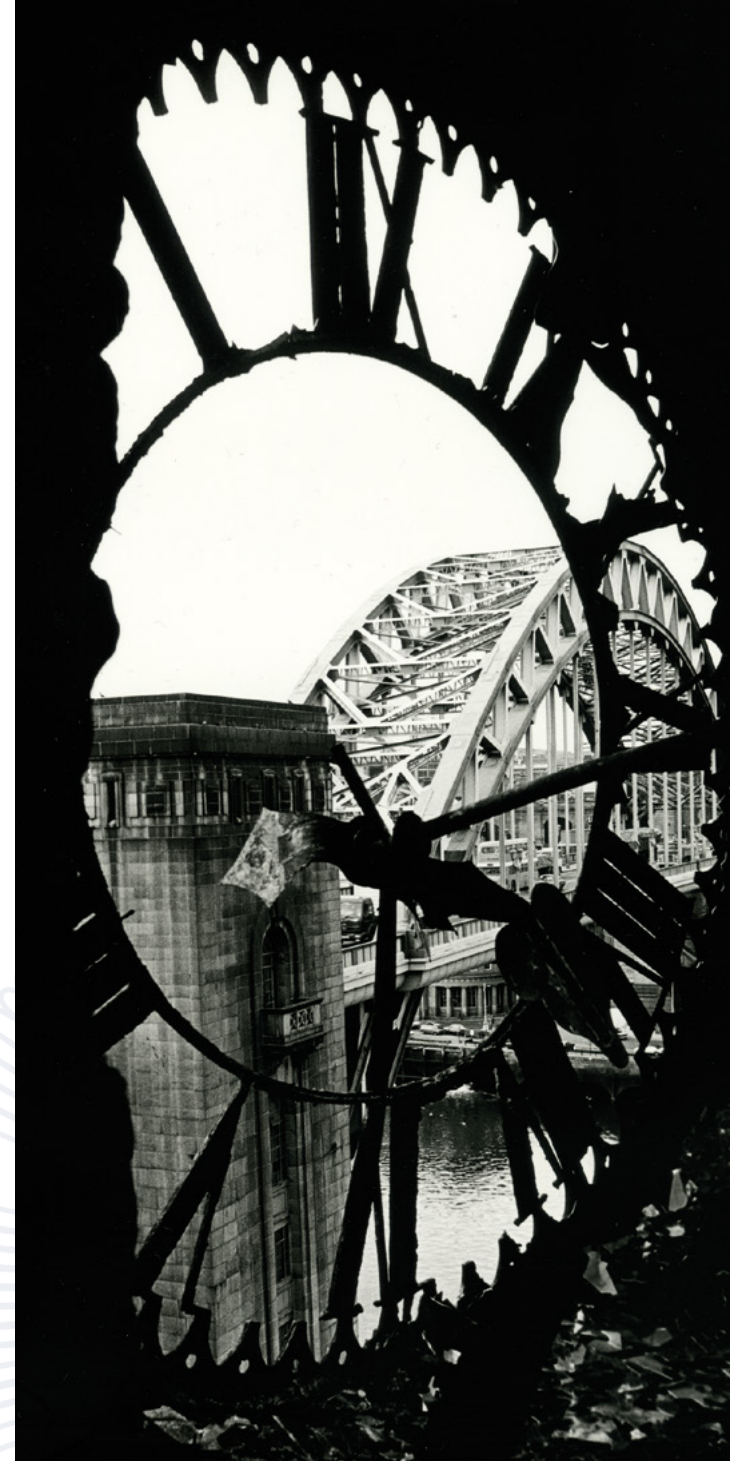


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CHIEF FIRE OFFICERS - OUR HISTORY



P. Watters QFSM FIFireE
Chief Fire Officer
1974 - 1978



M. Armstrong MBE FIFireE
Chief Fire Officer
1978 - 1981



J.F. Elton OBE QFSM FIFireE
Chief Fire Officer
1981 - 1991



W.W. Dunlop OBE QFSM FIFireE
Chief Fire Officer
1991 - 1995



R. Bull CBE QFSM FIFireE
Chief Fire Officer
1995 - 2007



I. Bathgate
Chief Fire Officer
2007 - 2012



T. Capeling QFSM
Chief Fire Officer
2012 - 2017



C. Lowther QFSM
Chief Fire Officer
2017 - 2023

FOREWORD

Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service, originally known as Tyne and Wear Metropolitan Fire Brigade, was established following local government reorganisation in 1974 and the amalgamation of six local brigades. This merger formed one of the seven metropolitan brigades in England.

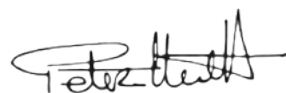
The 1st of April 2024 marks a momentous occasion – our 50th anniversary of dedicated service to the Tyne and Wear community. This significant milestone isn't just a testament to our history but also a celebration of the commitment and hard work demonstrated by every member of our team over the past five decades. The service has seen a lot of changes since 1974 and has successfully faced many challenges. As we look forward to the future, it is important to pause and reflect on all that has been achieved so far.

Throughout the past 50 years the Service has been governed by our Fire Authority which is made up of locally elected councillors from across the five local authorities that make up Tyne and Wear. Whilst the Chief Fire Officer is employed to lead the service and delivery of services to communities, it is the Fire Authority that hold the Chief Fire Officer to account on behalf of the public.

This booklet commemorates and offers a snapshot of 50 years of service to our community, celebrating the achievements of our employees, past and present, and the continued support of our partners and communities in Tyne and Wear.



Phil Tye
Chair of the
Tyne and Wear Fire
and Rescue Authority



Peter Heath KFSM
Chief Fire Officer,
2023 - present



1974 - 1979

A New Beginning



After successfully passing the application process, 21 new firefighters were enrolled onto the first recruits training course under the Tyne and Wear Metropolitan Fire Brigade in 1974.

In 2024 we celebrated the first new trainee course to pass out 50 years later.



BENWELL FLATS BLAZE

In 1975, 50 firefighters tackled a fire at a block of 31 flats in Benwell, Newcastle. Incredibly only two people were slightly injured, though the roof of the block was almost entirely destroyed. An eyewitness said: "The fire swept along the roof like a streak of lightning. It was a miracle they all escaped as windows exploded in the heat."



TYNE METRO TUNNEL BLAST

In 1976, two men sadly died when an explosion ripped through part of the £150 million underground railway (Tyne and Wear Metro) being built in Newcastle. 13 tunnellers working west of Grey's Monument were trapped. Firefighters carried the injured workers nearly 2,000 feet through a sequence of decompression doors to an entrance shaft in Forth Street, behind Central Station. The incident involved six pumps, one emergency tender, 25 one-hour compressed-air BA sets and 41 emergency service personnel.



JOSEPH RANK MILL FIRE

In 1976, two-thirds of our firefighters tackled a fire at Joseph Rank Mill (now known as the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art) in Gateshead. Before it was under control, the top two floors were gutted, the concrete roof had collapsed, and the outside brick walls on the top sections were bulging.

Sadly, the damage from the fire put the animal food production mill out of action.



CRESTS, BADGES & HISTORY

While Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service has been a household name in the North East since the rebrand in 2004, it was formerly known as Tyne and Wear Metropolitan Fire Brigade.

In 1972, the Local Government Act reformed local government in England and Wales. Fire brigades were merged and renamed as a result of the act. This brought together four small local fire services - Newcastle and Gateshead Fire Brigade, Sunderland Fire Brigade, South Shields and Tynemouth Fire Brigade - and parts of two others to form the service that exists today.

The service badge has also evolved over time from the initial new design created to represent the newly merged brigades. Two flowing lines were introduced to represent the two regional rivers, the Tyne and the Wear. The unique golden 'fish tails' were incorporated to represent the five local authorities, rather than the more usual silver star design used by other services.





1980 - 1989

Transformation and Progress

The new Brigade Control Centre relocated from Pilgrim Street to West Denton, Newcastle, and was opened by HRH Duke of Kent in 1987.

WELEPHANT

In 1986, Welephant was introduced to the Tyne and Wear Metropolitan Fire Brigade. The red elephant cartoon mascot with a firefighter's helmet was used by fire services throughout the country to promote fire safety to children.



TYNESIDE FACTORY FIRE

In 1985, 59 firefighters tackled a fire at the Hobart Rose Soft Furnishing Works in Whitley Bay, North Tyneside. The firm's 120 production employees had just left the factory when smoke was spotted coming in from the first floor of the warehouse. The fire advanced rapidly due to synthetic fibres which are highly flammable when exposed to oxygen. Nearby Metro services were halted because of the smoke from the fire, and stock valued at £500,000 was damaged.



BONDED WAREHOUSE, NEWCASTLE QUAYSIDE



TYNE THEATRE FIRE

In 1985, 100 firefighters responded to a blaze at the New Tyne Theatre, Newcastle (now known as Tyne Theatre and Opera House), on Christmas Day. The fire destroyed the stage and part of the roof of the famous Grade I-listed Victorian building. A total of 14 fire engines were used in the incident response, including relief fire engines from Hebburn and South Shields fire stations.



ST PETERS CHURCH FIRE

After standing for hundreds of years, St. Peter's Church in Monkwearmouth, Sunderland, was struck by fire in March 1984. Crews not only had to deal with the fire, but also the risk of falling roof slates and molten lead from the roof flashings. Nine appliances, a turntable ladder, and an emergency tender were required to extinguish the blaze.

In 1989, firefighters from Tyne and Wear Metropolitan Fire Brigade attended the first of three fires at the derelict Bonded Warehouse, Newcastle. Crews utilised turntable ladders to bring the blaze under control. The site was in flames again on two occasions during the 1990s because of suspected arson.

In 1992, a collision between a petrol tanker and a minibus in Sunderland resulted in a running petrol fire caused by 34,000 litres of spilt fuel. 14 appliances and 13,000 litres of foam were needed to control the blaze.

1990 - 1999

Challenges and Changes



RELOCATION OF THE BRIGADE TRAINING CENTRE

In 1996, the Brigade Training Centre moved from South Shields to a new modern building in Barmston Mere, Sunderland. The purpose-built facility provides practical and theoretical training to firefighters and is home to a breathing apparatus training centre, two hot fire structures and external training simulations.



CROSS HOUSE FIRE RE-ENACTMENT

Newcastle's Cross House fire tragedy is still remembered today. A fire broke out in an office block in 1919. Flames on the stairwells and lift shaft trapped workers in the upper floors. The bravery of firefighters, police officers and members of the public saved many lives, but sadly, eleven people lost their lives.

In 1996, a re-enactment of the tragic event took place using vintage equipment and uniforms in use at the time of the original fire.



PLAZA BALLROOM, TYNEMOUTH



In 1996, 70 firefighters tackled a blaze at Tyneside's much-loved leisure attraction, Tynemouth Plaza. Before the crews arrived, the huge flames were already lighting up the dawn sky, and the damage caused by the fire was so severe that the 118-year-old building was completely destroyed.

In 2006, Service Headquarters moved from Pilgrim Street, Newcastle to a new site alongside the Barmston Training Centre in Sunderland. This followed a change in name in 2004, when the service was rebranded to Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service.

2000 - 2009

A New Home and New Name



COMMUNITY SAFETY

In 2000, the fire service opened SafetyWorks!, a new multi-agency interactive safety centre providing an innovative and enjoyable learning experience that enables visitors to participate safely in realistic situations illustrating everyday hazards and learning how to prevent them.



Home safety checks were launched in 2004 as an initiative to offer home safety advice to the local community and supply fire prevention equipment, including smoke alarms, sensory alarms, and fire retardant bedding. Since firefighters and the prevention team started carrying out home safety checks, the team have contributed to increased home fire safety and awareness across the region, keeping the community safe from fire and injury.

The Phoenix (2001) and the Prince's Trust Programme (2003) were launched between 2000 and 2009 as part of the fire service's new community safety initiatives.



NEAS CO-LOCATION

In 2002, Rainton Bridge Community Fire Station became the first multi-agency hub within Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service, as the station became the home of crews from the North East Ambulance Service (NEAS). This was the beginning of a successful partnership between the two blue light partners, which has resulted in six fire stations becoming multi-agency hubs for ambulance crews.



DISTILLEX, NORTH SHIELDS

In 2002, the Distillex factory fire in North Tyneside captured attention from across the globe and remains the biggest incident for the service to date. Hundreds of firefighters and 25 appliances, including support from neighbouring fire and rescue services, tackled a blaze caused by sparks from an angle grinder, which compounded with chemicals inside the factory.

As the fire spread throughout, a thick plume of smoke was visible for miles. Northumbria Police declared a major incident, and a half-mile exclusion zone was set up around the plant, causing hundreds of residents to be evacuated. Travel was also restricted near the area, including a five-mile no-fly zone over Newcastle International Airport.

Thanks to the heroic actions of the emergency services, no one was injured.

In 2012, the first of a series of national, multi-agency exercises hosted at Tyne and Wear's Training Centre took place. Exercise Genesis, Endeavour, and Black Kite showcased the combined skills and response required for large scale major incidents.

2010 - 2019

Investment and Collaboration



NEW RECRUITS AND NEW STATIONS

In 2018, firefighter recruitment restarted after a number of years of austerity. Tynemouth Community Fire Station (2010) and Marley Park Community Fire Station (2015) opened as part of the fire service's programme to modernise facilities and improve incident response times.



NORTHUMBRIA POLICE CO-LOCATION

In 2014, Birtley, Chopwell, Farrington, Hebburn and Sunderland Community Fire Station welcomed police officers from Northumbria Police. This was the beginning of another successful blue light partnership, which has resulted in five fire stations becoming multi-agency hubs for neighbourhood police teams.



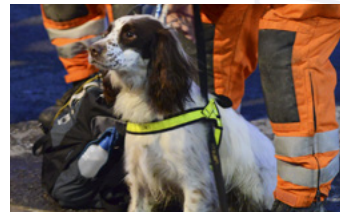
HMICFRS INSPECTION



In 2018, our first His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) took place. The inspection programme assesses the fire service's performance against three criteria pillars: effectiveness, efficiency and people. It also provides the opportunity to highlight successes and identify any areas of improvement. In 2018, the service achieved 'GOOD' in all three pillars.

SPENCER, THE FIRST USAR DOG

In 2013, Spencer the Springer Spaniel was the fire service's first urban search and rescue dog. Spencer played a major role in Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service's national resilience programme and response across the country for over 10 years.



SMILES RECYCLING, SUNDERLAND



In 2018, a blaze broke out at Smiles, the former recycling plant in Sunderland. At the height of the incident, 54 firefighters and ten fire engines were on scene tackling 30,000 tonnes of refuse at the disused Alex Smiles plant. The fire took nearly a month to put out.



2020 - 2023

Adapting and Responding

In 2022/23, the fire service introduced new front-line appliances fitted with state-of-the-art equipment, including high-tech thermal imaging cameras, as well as purpose-built clean cab lockers for dirty or used PPE to help reduce contaminants.

COVID-19

In 2020, firefighters and corporate colleagues supported the community of Tyne and Wear throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Employees invested 4,378 hours in the three vaccination centres - Nightingale, Racecourse and Eagles. 350 hours were spent at North Tyneside secondary schools and community collection points. 456 vaccines were delivered to care homes, 477 lateral flow tests and 9,076 vaccinations were administered by Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service employees.



CROFT CARE HOME FIRE

In 2020, 43 firefighters were dispatched to Croft Care Home, Sunderland, after a fire broke out on the roof of the building and flames had spread quickly due to the warm, dry conditions. Firefighters entered the building using breathing apparatus to rescue seven residents stuck inside, and none of the patients taken to hospital suffered life-threatening injuries.



FOCUS ON DECONTAMINATION

In 2023, firefighters from Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service became the first in the UK tested for cancer in new life-changing research into decontamination. The ground-breaking research carried out by the University of Central Lancashire, in partnership with the Fire Brigades Union, was the driving force behind the service's pioneering work into the reduction of firefighters' exposure to contaminants. New appliances that offer clean cab technology were introduced as part of the programme, as well as decontamination lockers and welfare decontamination packs installed at all stations.



UKRO CHALLENGE

In 2021, Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service hosted the UKRO 2021 challenge at the Quayside, Newcastle and Gateshead. The national event is a chance for emergency services employees to share techniques across all rescue disciplines, and rescue teams from fire and rescue services across the UK are invited to compete in different rescue challenges. Challenges include vehicle extrication, rope, water, urban search and rescue and trauma care.

Hebburn Tri-Station marks the beginning of a new era of collaboration and sustainability. It's the first of it's kind to be carbon-neutral, whilst providing a combined base for crews from Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service, Northumbria Police, and the North East Ambulance Service.

2024 - THE FUTURE

Taking the Service Forward



HEBBURN TRI STATION

The new multi-functional emergency services facility, which houses Northumbria Police and North East Ambulance Service, is the first station of its kind in the country to be completely carbon neutral.

The sustainable station boasts a range of sustainable features, including roof-mounted solar panels, electrical charging ports and a rainwater harvesting system. A wildflower meadow and pond has been introduced to help increase the local biodiversity.



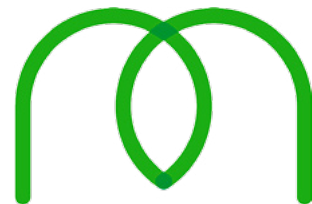
CLINICAL EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

An innovative practice within the service and an example of our joint partnership with our blue light partners, the North East Ambulance Service has provided a paramedic on secondment to Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service to fulfil the role of Clinical Education and Development Officer.

This programme positively impacts our communities by reducing risk and aims to deliver Emergency Care Level 3 (IEC) to operational firefighters and first aid at work training to corporate employees.

MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AIDERS

Our Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) programme cements our commitment to developing and maintaining an inclusive workforce. Since 2020, the service has provided in-house Adult MHFA training, youth MHFA courses and refreshers. We have approximately 80 Mental Health first-aiders equipped with the skills and capabilities across the service.



MHFA England

ADOPTING NEW TECHNOLOGY

We seek to utilise and develop technological processes to assist with our engagement within the community. One technology we are driving towards utilising is Virtual Reality (VR).

The system will be used to educate fire safety employees in a number of areas, including fire development (in a safe, controlled and environmentally considerate situation). It will also be used as a training aid by fire safety, operational employees and flexible duty officers, within the workplace and the local community.

Virtual Reality has the capacity to be developed by other departments within the service to enhance their training and development.





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