

Ferndown before the Bulldozers

Less than 60 years ago Ferndown was just a village, with gravel roads, a scattering of shops and not even a set of traffic lights. Then the bulldozers arrived and much of Ferndown's history disappeared forever. Part autobiography and part history, these articles are a fascinating glimpse of a village in transition.

Ferndown's first Woman Firefighter

With such a dire shortage of manpower during and just after the war, it might have been expected that anyone offering their services as a firefighter would have been welcomed with open arms. But this was far from the experience of Joyce Wareham, who lived in Ferndown.

Joyce badly wanted to join the retained firemen, mainly local shopkeepers who would shut up shop and race to any emergency. Joyce, whose parents ran a fish and chip shop not more than a couple of hundred yards from the fire station, argued that she could get there and change into uniform as quickly as any of the men.

She admits to being a tomboy, and managed to get a small foot in the fire-service door when she was taken on as a telephonist in 1941. She was based in the "new" fire station which had been converted from a Methodist chapel when it suffered a big loss of congregation and was sold to the local council for £1,250.

She worked six-hour shifts for 1s 6d (7½ pence) a shift. But her ambition was to be a real firefighter. She said: "In those days



Joyce seated - bottom row - right

women were never allowed to ride on the appliances. Then just after the war I was told by Station-officer Chick that I could remain with the brigade and attend at the station for fire calls and drills, though without pay. But the men generously gave me sixpence (2½p) each from their 10 shillings (50p) turnout money."

Eventually, after quite a battle to be allowed to take her place on the fire-engine, Joyce became the first female firefighter in Dorset. She remained in the service for 30 years. "I loved the job," she said.

Many fires around Ferndown were heathland blazes, and in 1953 one of them resulted in a few red faces at the station. Flames had raced through the crackling pine trees gorse and heather, and suddenly they enveloped the parked fire appliance which was completely destroyed. "For Whom the Bell Told" declared the story in the following day's Daily Mirror.

An embarrassing moment, but Ferndown's firefighters were far from incompetent, and in the same year won the Dorset Fire Service major pump drill competition.

The book is available from Brian Davis, 31 Whinams Way, Billericay CM12 0HD, price £13.99 + £2 p&p.

