

Auxiliary Fire Service (AFS)



John Newing aged 16 in his uniform in Elham 1942

Frederick "John" Newing

Residence: Church Cottage, Elham

Memories of my father by Anne Craig

These are the memories of my father, Frederick Newing, known as John. He is 93 and now lives independently in Ash, having lost Mum, Eva, over 2 years ago.

Dad was born 14th August 1926. At the time my grandparents lived at Redoak, near Bladbean, Elham. Dad's father was a woodman, cutting down wood in the Covert woods and selling it for various uses, along with his brothers. The finished items, spiles, faggots bean and pea sticks, and wattles were brought down from the Covert by horse and cart where they were loaded onto a train at the Wingmore siding. They then went onto Canterbury where they were sold.

My grandparents moved to Church Cottages, Elham (they were two cottages at the time). Dad says that they lived in the cottage nearest the churchyard. He remembers that a Mr "Si" Castle lived next door, he was a carpenter and worked for George Boughton (Derek's Grandfather).

Dad attended Elham School until the age of 14. He worked on various farms in the Elham area, as a farm labourer. Dad never actually took a driving test, but he just watched his uncles and could drive most vehicles. One day he was driving a tractor and trailer up the hill towards Piercely (Herbie Palmer's bungalow at North Elham.) When he met a car, who couldn't back out of the way, of course Dad, put the tractor in reverse and backed down the hill, so they could pass. Apparently, the driver of the car was looking for Dad, he wanted to see if Dad was capable of driving a lorry. But on seeing him back the tractor and trailer, he said there was no need, he congratulated Dad on passing the test and took a packet of cigarettes out of his pocket, took one for himself and his passenger and handed the rest to Dad. Annoyingly, Dad would often tell me to get out of the driving seat and he would back the car into his drive.

Unfortunately he had to stop driving at 90, due to his bad legs.



The Old Chapel before the doorway was enlarged

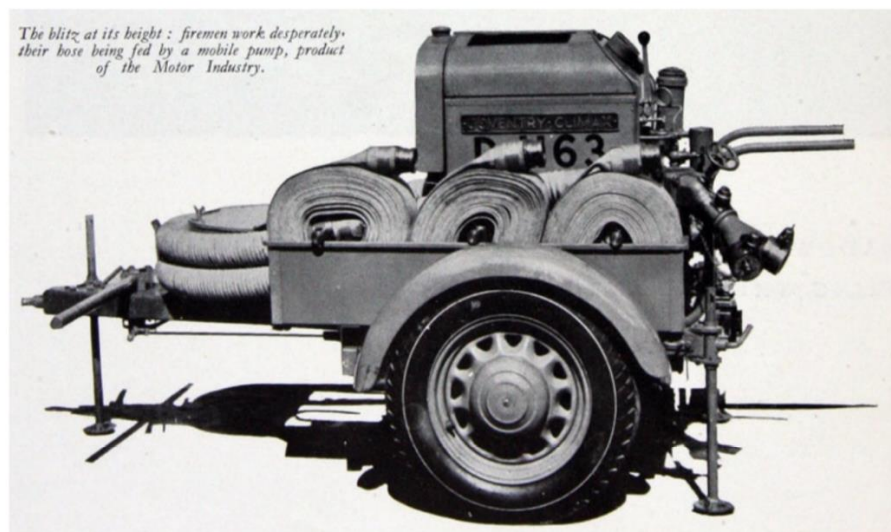
Dad joined the Auxiliary Fire Service in Elham, later the National Fire Service when he was about 16. The station was in the old chapel, along the back row. He was on duty on alternate nights, from 7pm to 7am. There was a rota of 4 men on every night. Dad remembers the names of his colleagues, there was Reg Masters, Rex Ames, Dick Ames, Jack Verney (who followed his father in the tailoring shop in the village) and "Boulter" Baker who was the blacksmith.

The uniform, only one set, was navy jacket and trousers and cap. They were also given a very heavy overcoat, which I remember as a child, was put on top of me in bed, as it was so cold in the old house where we lived at Park Gate Farm. It got so cold in the winter that the toothbrushes froze in the night. Life was a lot harder then and no central heating!

Dad never threw anything away that could be useful, and it certainly kept me warm.

All four men on duty, slept on a mattress with a blanket, on bunks. Dad being the youngest had a top bunk. Dad remembers "Boulter" Baker being a terrible snorer, often having wellies thrown at him in the night.

At the time, Dad was working for George Clayson on his farm at Silverdale, Exted, where he farmed 75/80 acres of dairy and arable. Dad had to leave earlier in order to milk George's cows.



WWII Coventry Climax Fire Pump as used in Elham

Dad was able to drive by then, so he often drove the fire engine. He remembers it being a Coventry Climax Pump towed by a large Hillman or Humber saloon car. Practice took place on Sunday mornings in Folkestone and Cheriton.

On one occasion they had to practice rescuing someone from the roof of Bobby's (later Debenhams) in Sandgate Road.

Dad, being 'the whippersnapper' was the one being rescued. Unfortunately, the rescuer missed his step on the ladder, Dad froze, which wasn't the best thing to do, and he was nearly dropped from the roof. Dad has hated heights ever since. As well as being called to incidents of bombs dropping in the Elham area, they were also on standby to go to Canterbury when it was being bombed. They were alerted by a telephone in the station.

One night Dad remembers being called out to an unexploded bomb, that was thought to have been dropped at Exted.

They couldn't find it, but next day it was discovered behind the back row, near the windmill. It was diffused safely.

Dad stayed in the Fire Service until the end of the war, when the station was closed down.

Dad has always regretted not playing a bigger part in the war. He had wanted to join up, but it was decided that he was more useful staying here and working the land.

He is a member of the British Legion at his local branch in Staple, and the family were very proud recently, when he was made Vice President of the Branch.