

ESSEX FIRE MUSEUM ANNUAL REPORT 2008/09

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Protecting our heritage



Essex Fire
museum

1. Introduction

This is the second Annual Report of the Essex Fire Museum and its purpose is to provide the Essex Fire Authority and Chief Fire Officer with a résumé of the Museum's activities during the period 1st June 2008 to 31st May 2009 together with an outline of matters identified for future consideration and development.

2. Background

The Museum was officially opened by the then Fire Minister Angela Smith MP on 14th June 2007. 2008/09 was a successful year for the Museum which with the continued dedication and commitment of volunteers and the Essex Fire Authority enabled it to promote and develop its local and national profile.

3. Staffing

The Museum's current staffing is as follows: Collections Officer / Assistant Curator (part time – 22.5 hours per week). In addition, specialist support is provided by the Safer Communities Directorate and volunteers as and when required.

4. Finance

Pending the allocation of a specific EFM budget, expenditure is monitored by the Safer Communities Directorate budgetary procedures. It is estimated that the annual operating costs of the Museum are approximately £25,000 per annum.

5. The Year's Performance

The Essex Fire Museum has enjoyed another very successful year and has again proved to be extremely popular within the service and with countywide communities.

The continued dedication and commitment of the volunteers has greatly assisted in advancing the profile of the Museum which is now gaining national recognition.

The EFM received approximately 750 visitors during the past year. This represents a 25% increase year on year. Included in this total were school groups and various educational establishments from within Essex and beyond, as well as retired and serving members of the ECFRS. 508 visitors signed the visitors' book and made supporting comments which were gratefully received. In addition, there were 22 letters of appreciation received and no letters of complaint during the period. The visitors' book is available for inspection.

Three important donations were made to the museum during the year:

A Mrs Wood contacted the Museum regarding her great-grand father who had been the Deputy Chief Fire Officer of the Southend on Sea Fire Brigade during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Roger Pickett and Murray Beale visited Mrs Wood and received from her some very rare photographs, including a significant coloured and framed portrait of the Officer. Also donated to the Museum was Mr Wood's ebony handled fireman's axe. This is now displayed with his brass fire helmet which was already on display in the Museum. Through his close contact with the London Fire Brigade Museum, Mr Beale was also able to gain for Mrs Wood the service record of another of her relatives.

Two further very significant donations were made to the EFM during the year. These were the personal photographic collections of Station Officers Harvey and Lazell. Both of these men saw considerable service in WW2 and were able to record those years with extremely good photographs. Both collections contain some unique and historically important pictures. Stn O Harvey went on to become the first Officer in Charge of the new Basildon Fire Station in the mid 1950s (Harvey Road, Basildon is named after him). Stn O Lazell was the first Officer in Charge of the new Grays fire station in November 1954.

Various 'outside' engagements were undertaken during the last year, these included Maldon Fire Station open day on June 22nd; and Grays Fire Station open day in July when the station had in excess of 2000 visitors. 20 children and staff from the Oakfields Montessori School in Upminster, Essex visited on 10th November and a group visit by staff and pupils from the Thurrock Council 'Youth and Connexions Service' project also took place in November. Several visits were made by Mr Mike Davies of the 'Rayleigh Through the Looking Glass' project, which is an in depth historical facility relating to Rayleigh and it's past infrastructure. In addition, the EFM has given much assistance to Mr Peter Brown for a project entitled 'The South East Echo' regarding the Southend on Sea Fire Brigade from it's beginning to the early 1970s.

Many individuals have written asking for information and photographs of deceased fire service members. Approximately 27 such requests have been made and the majority have had a positive result. A number, however, have proved fruitless and some people were redirected to the Metropolitan Archives, the London Fire Brigade Museum, the Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service and the Kent Fire and Rescue Service Museum.

One person in particular had been searching for many years for pictures of his father who had served with the National Fire Service Overseas Contingent in Europe during 1945. His father had died some years ago and the gentleman had only two photographs of him. After some searching in the archives, the Museum was able to supply him with a further three photographs, for which he was extremely grateful.

A most interesting visit to the museum took place on 12 March this year when members of the Board of Trustees of the EFA Charity, accompanied by representatives from Thurrock Community Safety Partnership, held a meeting in the Museum Conference Room. The meeting was followed by a guided tour of the Museum. The success of this visit was reflected in the comments in the visitors' book

Amongst the many groups visiting the EFM during the past year have been the widely acknowledged 'U3A' (University of the Third Age) study groups. Their members make frequent visits to places of particular interest and it is refreshing to note that the EFM is a venue to which they return on a regular basis.

Other useful and informative events during the past year include:

A visit by senior members of the Fire Brigade Society resulted in the exchange of photographs and information. It has also put the EFM 'on the map' for fire service enthusiasts with a high quality magazine article anticipated.

Miss Jane Rugg, the Acting Curator of the London Fire Brigade Museum visited the EFM. The LFB Museum had been very helpful in the 'early days' of setting up the Museum, assisting with procedural information and specimen documents as well as the transfer of some very welcome artefacts. Miss Rugg was very impressed with the museum and with the progress that had been made.

A visit by members of the Fire Service Preservation Group was arranged so that members could research and study fire service equipment of the WW2 period. The EFM is accumulating a considerable quantity of unique photographs of this time period kindly donated by former fire-fighters and their families.

The Fire Heritage Network AGM at the 'Milestones Museum' Basingstoke was attended by Roger Pickett. Many important topics were discussed and a presentation on conservation and preservation of museum artefacts has already been of great benefit to our volunteer staff.

Looking forward to the coming year, the EFM is preparing to take part in the Grays Fire Station 'Open Day' in June and will also be participating in the opening of both the Corringham Community Safety Centre and the Rayleigh Weir Community Fire Station.

6. Future Strategy

The Essex Fire Museum's future management and organisation is currently under review by the Chief Fire Officer and reports will be submitted to the EFA in due course. The issues which will, however, need to be addressed include the following:

- i. Creation of management organisation (either charitable trust or direct control by the EFA)
- ii. Consideration of the Museum's staffing and accommodation requirements including succession planning
- iii. Creation of budgetary procedures and income development and insurance strategies
- iv. Preparation and implementation of Museum operating and collection policies
- v. Development of education and visitor policies and programmes including performance monitoring
- vi. Ongoing promotional activities including open day, potential development of an internet-based *virtual tour* and promotional DVD/web site
- vii. Liaison with other interested groups and partner organisations
- viii. Implementation of an appropriate IT infrastructure

7. Acknowledgements

The Museum's progress and performance would not have been possible without the positive support of elected members, Chief Fire Officer, Volunteers, Essex Record Office and serving and retired ECFRS personnel. However, particular mention needs to be made of one of our volunteers, Murray Beale, whose ongoing tireless efforts have greatly contributed to the Museum's success. In addition, invaluable ongoing practical support from members of the Safer Communities Directorate at SHQ and personnel at Grays Fire Station is greatly appreciated.