



# Heritage Newsletter



Issue 55

## Fighting Fires Since 1896

by Hugh McGrattan.

**Taken from his book “Portrush, The Port on the Promontory”**

The first Volunteer Fire Brigade was set up in Portrush on 18<sup>th</sup> December 1896 following a meeting in the Town Hall. Subsequently, a firehose cart and escape ladder, along with 200 feet of hose, helmets, axes, lamps and belts were supplied to the firemen by the Town Commissioners. Fire plugs on the mains water system were increased from five to 13 at the request of the new Fire Brigade. The word “Volunteer” had to be dropped from the title of the new unit when insurance companies refused to recognise the services of the trained firemen or to allow any claim for damage to clothes or equipment!

First captains of the Portrush Brigade were Messrs. W.J. Farren and Carton and about twelve firemen were enrolled initially. A site for a fire station was acquired at Victoria Street (with each fireman supplied with a key) and a series of practices commenced with the advice and assistance of Superintendents Parker (Belfast) and Smyth (Rye, Sussex).

Later fire stations were sited in Main Street (opposite the Presbyterian Church) and Dunluce Street (where the Portrush Discount Stores are now situated). A move from this latter site to the present Fire and Rescue Station at Eglinton Street (Golf Terrace) was made in September 1957, with enlargement and improvements carried out in the 1980s.



Main Street Fire Station: courtesy of John Moore Collection

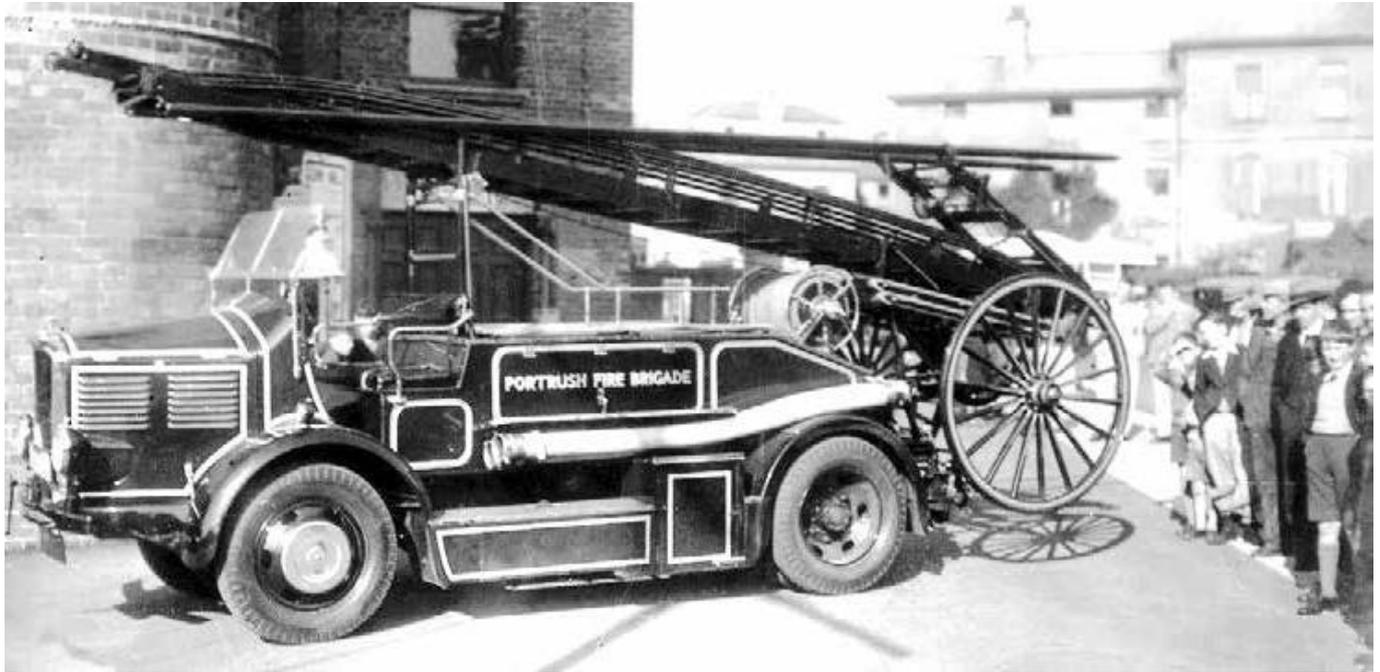


Current Fire Station at Eglinton Street

After many false alarms, on 3 January 1900 the Brigade attended its first big fire in the roof of a house at (it is believed) Mark Street. The firemen arrived on the scene ten minutes after the alarm was raised and had the fire under control in half an hour. Letters to the local press later revealed the appreciation of the town's residents of the highly professional services of the Brigade.



The first motor fire engine was received by the Portrush Fire Brigade in 1936 and is pictured below being viewed by an admiring public when on display outside the town hall before its formal handover.



The 1936 Dennis Ace motor fire engine is pictured outside the Town Hall on the day it was officially handed over. It remained in service until 1967, when it had only 2,800 miles recorded and was still using original tyres! It is believed that the historic vehicle has been restored and is still in existence.

It was unfortunate it was not available a year sooner when, on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1935, the substantial residence known as Limekiln, near the White Rocks, was destroyed by fire. The Portrush firemen were on the scene when the new Coleraine motor fire engine arrived, but its modern pumping equipment proved ineffective because of lack of water.



The scene at Limekiln, home of Mr. and Mrs. A.M. Stuart, at the White Rocks, which was destroyed by fire on Wednesday 29 May 1935. Although both Portrush and Coleraine fire units attended the blaze, lack of water prevented a proper fire fighting operation, only a well at the back of the house being available. Later rebuilt as the Kiln an Oge, the site is today occupied by the Royal Court Hotel.

Our thanks to Hugh for allowing us to reprint the above text and images from his excellent book 'Portrush The Port on the Promontory' October 30<sup>th</sup> 2021