

# THE HISTORY OF THE FIRE BRIGADE

The modern day fire and rescue services are widely regarded as heroic lifesavers, rescuing people from fire and enforcing fire safety legislation. However, the earliest fire brigades were formed by fire insurers solely to protect the property they insured.

"Fire marks" were fixed to buildings to "mark" them as being insured by a particular "fire office". On arrival at a fire, fire brigades would only deal with the fire if the building was marked as being insured by their company. Cooperation by the fire offices in

London resulted in the formation of a brigade for London in 1832, although in 1824 a single "fire engine company" had been formed in Edinburgh.

It wasn't until World War 2 that a National Fire Service was formed, with control of the brigades reverting to local authorities after the war. Today, there are nearly 60 fire and rescue services in the UK, although some of these may amalgamate in the future. ■

For example, Mr Desmond Fennell, in his investigation into the King's Cross fire in 1987, which resulted in the deaths of 31 people, observed that ".....the management remained of the view that fires were inevitable on the oldest and most extensive underground system in the world. In my view they were fundamentally in error in their approach..." Fennell was even more assertive regarding the views of Dr Ridley, London Underground Limited's then Chairman and Managing Director.

In his report, Fennell stated that "In effect he (Dr Ridley) was advocating fire precaution rather than fire prevention. It is my belief that this approach is seriously flawed...."

Fire prevention is often a matter of simple common sense and need not always involve sophisticated measures or high technology; perhaps this is why it is often overlooked. In order to prevent fires, there is a need for some understanding of the causes of fire. This will be the subject of a future issue of *Burning Issue*. The three most common causes of fire in non-domestic premises are arson, electrical faults and smokers' materials. It is, therefore, essential that measures to control these causes of fire are considered in a fire risk assessment. Other significant causes of fire that need to be considered are cooking activities, use of portable heaters and contractors' activities, particularly "hot work". Future issues of *Burning Issue* will also consider the measures that can be taken to control the various causes of fire and the sources of guidance on fire prevention that are available. ■

## Trading Tip!

Make sure 'Fire Prevention' features in your advice to your customer. Demonstrate to them that you care for their safety - you're not just there for the money - and they'll respect you for it!