

Kurrajong Rural Fire Brigade is to be congratulated on 60 years of dedicated service to the community of Kurrajong and other communities across the Hawkesbury.

I would like to wish Kurrajong Rural Fire Brigade all the best for the future and look forward to their continued dedication and support in providing an outstanding service to the community.

Karen Hodges  
Fire Control Officer

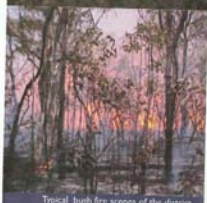
**Earliest recollections of my brigade involvement.**

- Having the Captain draw my newly earned white dot in biro on the front of my white hand me down overalls.

- Wondering why we were driving towards a fire when everyone else is driving away.

- One of the best meals I have ever shared was an old packet of 3 minute noodles found under the drivers seat of the old Land Rover, boiled up in a rusty billy cotten under the stars somewhere out on the Woanera track at 4am.

Larry Lane  
Brigade Captain



Typical bush fire scenes of the district

## A Brief History

A newspaper article (included in this booklet) from 1936 shows the great need for organised bush fire brigades to be formed in the district.

Information of the day from interviews with local residents and from news articles indicates that "a fire brigade existed in Kurrajong as early as 1936." Many people would suggest that an official brigade was definitely in place prior to the fires of 1944.

Research into our brigade history has uncovered information showing that we were an unofficial brigade until 1939, when we were sanctioned by the Colo Shire Council, thereby making the brigade officially recognised with powers under the relevant acts. (This information is also reproduced herein). This "Kurrajong Brigade" cov-

ered the "greater" Kurrajong District, with deputy captains elected in their respective localities, each with relevant powers vested by council.

As like most Bush Fire Brigades, Government funding for equipment including trucks was not forthcoming, so monies had to be raised locally by whatever means possible. Street stalls, fashion parades, proceeds from fetes and woodchops etc even doorknock appeals were the sources of these monies, with many in the community assisting. The main driving forces behind these activities were the late Mrs. Natalie Buckett and Mrs. Dorothy Buckett. Enough money was raised to purchase the R model Bedford tanker which was affectionately named "Natalie Dot" in their honour and recognition.



Shire President Mr. Forbes McKenzie at the hand over of the new shed to Mrs. Beryl McCann & Mr. Jimmy John.

EXCERPT FROM THE WINDSOR AND RICHMOND  
**Gazette**  
November 13th 1936

**SERIOUS DAMAGE  
KURRAJONG SWEEP BY  
BUSHFIRES**

BLAZE ON 4 MILE FRONT

**HOMES DESTROYED**

Bush Fires which had been burning for days on a front of about 12 miles in the valleys to the west and north west of Kurrajong Heights, advanced on a frontage of about 4 miles. Fire fighters from surrounding districts, fought a strenuous battle at various points in the area, whereas 20 police recruits from Sydney and a number of air-craftsmen from the Royal Air Force base at Richmond, arrived too late to give much assistance. Although they saved several properties, an old house, valued at about 3000 pounds was destroyed, and at Bilpin about 15 miles away a cottage, owned by Mr Peter Powell, was destroyed. Threatened on 4 sides by flames an 8 roomed house

at Wheeny creek, owned by Mr. Cooper, of Sydney, was saved by a small band of fire fighters.

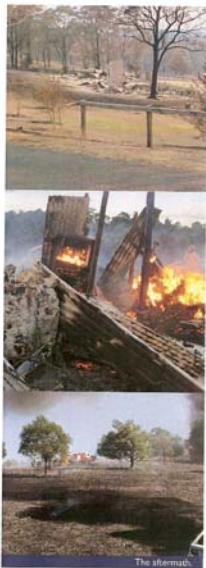
(From our Kurrajong correspondent) Most disastrous fires have been raging in the mountains beyond Kurrajong Heights and the Grose Valley for some days, and on Friday last they brought disaster and havoc to the Kurrajong district.

Despite the efforts of brave fire fighters, who worked day and night without rest and very little refreshment of any kind the Powell family lost their home and nearly the whole of the contents, also a cottage on the Bilpin estate.

The residents burnt breaks around the homes of R. M. and S. Dunston and Misses Sproule, and these were all saved.

Unfortunately, the flames swept from the mountain down to the home of Mrs Wark, while the combined forces were engaged fighting the outbreak there, a fire started in the pine trees and vines at the old Powell home. Very little help was available, and it was soon seen that nothing could save the homestead. A piano and a little furniture was saved.

Post offices in the district sent out SOS signals for help and volunteers



rushed from all parts of Comleroy, Grose Vale, Grose Wold and Navua Farm. In the meantime Mr Coopers home was completely surrounded by fiercely rushing flames and was only saved by a small band of workers. The majority of volunteers could not get to their help as the fire was between the home and them.

"Spring Grove" the old home of William Dunston Snr was threatened, but a break was burnt and there was plenty of help available to save it. The homes of Messrs. Devine, M. Brown and G. Horn were all in danger, but these sturdy old pioneers, assisted by volunteers, burnt breaks and fought back the oncoming flames and saved their homes. Men and women rose to the occasion and did their best. Some of the men were overcome with the awful heat and were on the point of collapse. Mr Dick Dunston and his son, Russ, were rescued when, after fighting for two days and nights, their strength failed and they were dragged to safety.

Residents of Grose Vale and Grose Wold after working hard saving the homes of those in their own area for weeks previously, left their houses in danger to assist the residents of Kurrajong Heights.

Members of the airforce from Richmond and a contingent of Police from



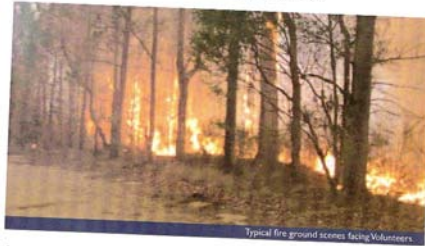
Sydney arrived too late to give any assistance. Miles of fencing and some acres of orchard have been burnt, and trees singed that will eventually die. Many tonnes of wattle bark have been destroyed.

A word of mention must be made of the generous women who supplied and served refreshments to their brave men. Some of these women had gone to Comleroy, Grose Wold and Grose Vale fires and were again to the fore at Kurrajong Heights, just doing their bit in times of "fire war".

On Sunday morning (1st November), a fire started suddenly at the farm of Mr Morgan, Grose Wold. A fire break had been burnt to save the homestead and a sharp wind caused the flames to

spread, and in a few minutes the properties of "Belmont Park", Stinson Bros, Propsting, Irving, Poole, and Creer were in grave danger. A phone message brought help from every quarter, and fortunately the fire was controlled in a few hours, but not before some damage was done to timber and fences.

Conditions in the whole of the district (one might really say Colo shire) are very serious. No rain to speak of has fallen since April. Tanks and dams are practically empty, grass is burnt up, bloom is burnt off the citrus trees and oranges are withered and dry. The present stone fruit crop is small and inferior. The man on the land in these areas seems to be faced with disaster. The damage caused by bush fires can not be estimated.



Typical fire ground scenes facing Volunteers



Latest equipment in use

## Major District Fires

Occurred in the following years:

1936 - 37	1976 - 77
1944	1979
1957	1994
1961	1997
1968	2001
1974	2003



Onmow horizon



## Gazette December 15th, 1939

### BRIGADE POWERS

#### IN FIGHTING BUSH FIRES

##### SHIRE COUNCIL DISCUSSION

An interesting discussion on the powers of authorised officer of a properly constituted bush fire brigade to enter private property to burn fire breaks took place at the Colo shire council meeting on Monday, during consideration of a letter from the Kurrajong district bush fire brigade, members of which have set the district an excellent example by their enterprise in thus preparing for emergencies which are all too common in the dry summer months. A motion to prohibit burning off between 6am and 6pm daily in certain months was defeated. And in the course of discussion it was stated under the local government act neither a council nor any officer of a brigade whose appointment as such has been approved by a council who is liable for any claim as a result of any activities in connection with the carrying out of brigade duties.

The first letter read at the meeting in connection with the subject was from the bush fires advisory committee of the department of works and local government, which wrote "in reply to an inquiry as to the powers of a bush fire brigade not under the control of a council to enter private property to fire brigade not organised by a municipal or shire council under Section 494 of the local government Act had no powers whatever. This was followed by a reading of a letter by the Kurrajong district bush fire brigade notifying council of the recent formation of that body by a large and representative meeting of citizens, and asking that council confirm the appointment of the following officials: - President, Cr. R.A. Ziems; hon. Secretary - Treasurer, Mr M.J. (Bill) McMahon; District Captain, Cr. Ziems; Vice Captains, Messrs. H.J. Peck (Kurrajong Heights), A.B. Powell (Bilpin), J. Dunston (Grose Vale), F. Upton (Kurrajong), S. Downs (Kurmond), N. Franks (North Richmond), Cr. H. J. Matheson (Grose Wold), M.J. McMahon (Comleroy Road), A. J. Turner (The Slopes), E. McMahon (Tennyson), M. West (East Kurrajong).

In verbally amplifying this letter, Cr. Ziems said that some months ago the citizens concerned held a meeting, at which the speaker was not present, when it was decided to form a bush



Typical fire trial and terrain.

fire brigade. The original mover and organiser was really Constable Hicks, of North Richmond, and after the preliminary decision to form a brigade he had had to interview various citizens to ascertain if they would act as officials. At the meeting of the brigade on the previous Wednesday evening the speaker had pointed out that any appointments were inoperative under the act, unless confirmed by the council. To fully legalise the position, it was necessary for the shire clerk to write to each of the officers, to notify him of council's confirmation of his appointment. It might be thought in perusing this list of names that some of the men were rather young to accept such responsibility, but the majority had had experience of fighting fires.

It would perhaps be wise, the speaker continued, for council to give these of-

ficers authority to go into private property and burn breaks when considered necessary. Cr. Bailey said he entirely agreed with the whole scheme, which he considered was "the best move yet for fighting fires". He therefore moved that the request of the writers for confirmation of the appointments of the officers of the brigade be granted.

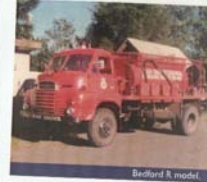
The President (Cr. A. Buckland) seconded, and the motion was carried unanimously. To an inquiry by Cr. Matheson, the President said that the passing of this resolution meant that council was vesting in the officials of the brigade in their respective centres absolute authority to decide where breaks were required, and this authority could not be overruled by any owner.

60 years protecting our community

## Major Events

1944

Reportedly the highest impact fires recorded in District.



Bedford R model.

1962

Kurrajong Public School main building lost to fire.



Change over day R model to PFR Bedford.

1963

Hurst's shop in main street burnt down. (November 22).

1969

Old Woodhill's shop burnt down on Grose Vale Road where Pansy Junction stands today. It was being used as a textiles factory by Mr Alan Gobert.



Tankers circa 2004.

1975

Kurrajong Heights Hotel burns. Flames were visible in Sydney as the largest timber structure in the southern hemisphere is razed.

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## Our Vehicles & Equipment

Originally, hand beaters and green tree branches were the main tools to put fires out along with common garden tools. The first equipment to assist fire fighters carry water was a 100 gallon canvas "belly bag" which could be put in a utility or trailer then filled with water.

A Navy surplus Series I Land Rover was acquired from Sydney. It was a 1948/49 model with a canvas top. It was picked up by Reg Hurst, the captain of the day, and Norm Minturn. This vehicle was kept behind "Hurst's shop" in the main street until November 1963 when the shop burnt down. The Land Rover towed a trailer with water tank and pump and carried a few knapsacks and some hand tools. Men (and boys) would fit where they could on the way to a fire, in the back and even sitting on the A-frame drawbar of the trailer.

Another ex-army vehicle was acquired some time later, a Ford Blitz fitted with a water tank and pump. The source of this vehicle is not clear, although it has been suggested it was an ex Colo Shire Council water cart after the war. This truck was powered by a V8 petrol motor. This truck was kept

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in a garage beside Woodhill's shop, down the drive beside today's pizza shop.

The first of our purpose-built trucks, an "R model" Bedford 4x4 replaced the Blitz in 1968 or 1969. This truck was powered by a 6 cylinder petrol motor. (Affectionately named Natalie Dot). Crew accommodation was restricted due to 18 inches being cut off the tray to allow the truck to fit in the shed.

A Toyota Landcruiser tray back replaced the Land Rover, circa 1978/1979. This was petrol powered with a galvanised tank and petrol pumpset.

The second purpose-built heavy Bedford MFR 4x4, powered by a "Heavy Duty Holden V8" motor and fitted with a 2 stage "Davey Tankmaster" pump replaced the "R model" in August 1981. It had open crew accommodation between the cabin and the water tank. (Also called Natalie Dot)

An Isuzu Twin Cab 4x4 powered by a diesel motor and fitted with a diesel pump replaced the MJR. This truck seated 7 crew in air-conditioned comfort. (Natalie Dot 2)

## Our Vehicles & Equipment

A Mitsubishi Canter Twin Cab replaces the Toyota, powered by a diesel motor and fitted with a diesel pumpset. This vehicle is still in our use today, carrying a crew of 4 in air-conditioned comfort.

A second Isuzu replaces the original unit, with a number of modifications including a turbocharged diesel motor and various plumbing alterations to make these vehicles safer for crews. They retained diesel powered pumpsets. This truck is still in our use today.



Our fleet in action.



Impending burn over.



An example of community contribution. Peels Perfection Milk supplies bulk water for tankers

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EXCERPT FROM THE WINDSOR AND RICHMOND  
**Gazette**  
May 17th, 1940

**FIRE REGULATIONS**

EXTRACT FROM ARTICLE:

"... The Kurrajong bush fire brigade had not been in existence for twelve months, the speaker (Cr. Ziems) continued yet, in that time he, as its Captain, had travelled 117 miles, worked 43 hours (plus 5 hours travelling time), and spent from his own pocket 17/3 in telephone calls summoning assistance in connection with bush fires."



Helicopter refilling from tank.

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**Honour Roll**

**BRIGADE PATRON**

Mrs Dorothy Buckett

**LIFE MEMBERS**

Mr Peter Minturn OAM  
Mr Peter Jones

**CURRENT MEMBERSHIP**

70 including active fire-fighters and support members

**BRIGADE CAPTAINS**

Mr Marshall Brown  
Mr Roy Ziems  
Mr Bob Want  
Mr Reginald Hurst  
Mr Jim Vincent  
Mr Norman Minturn  
Mr John Marshall  
Mr Peter Jones  
Mr Larry Lane (present)

**DISTRICT FIRE CONTROL OFFICERS**

Mr Billy Burgess  
Mr Noel Powell  
Mr Bill Rodger  
Ms Karen Hodges (present)

EXCERPT FROM THE WINDSOR AND RICHMOND  
**Gazette**  
May 6th, 1942

**DEFENCE MEASURE**  
**MORE BUSH FIRE BRIGADES**

Supporting the contention already made by this newspaper regarding the local defence necessity of forming more bush fire brigades in the district an official request to that effect was made to the Colo shire council at its last meeting. The council decided to get in touch with leading citizens in various centres and ask them to assist in forming these brigades.

The letter was from the bush fires advisory committee of the department of agriculture, and asked that council, as a defence measure, undertake the formation of bush fire brigades at Bilpin, Upper Colo, Colo, Lower Portland and St Albans it was also asked that members of the brigades be selected from men who are not liable to military service or other special duties.



Inter agency co-operation.



Water bombing activities

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**Inter District Excursions**

Our brigade has travelled to many districts within the state including the south coast, New England and south west corner. Numerous trips into neighbouring districts have been made.

C. 1970 our Bedford was requested to go to Cobar. It was to be transported by RAAF Hercules and was taken to Ham Common for preparation. It had no water, half a tank of fuel and half deflated tyres. The air transport didn't eventuate so the vehicle had to be made trip ready again and was driven to Cobar and deployed in the Cobar and Balranald districts. The tired crew arrived home at 5pm on Christmas Eve after 6 days away and a 14 hour drive. Accommodation was not provided and catering almost non-existent.

**Errors and Omissions**

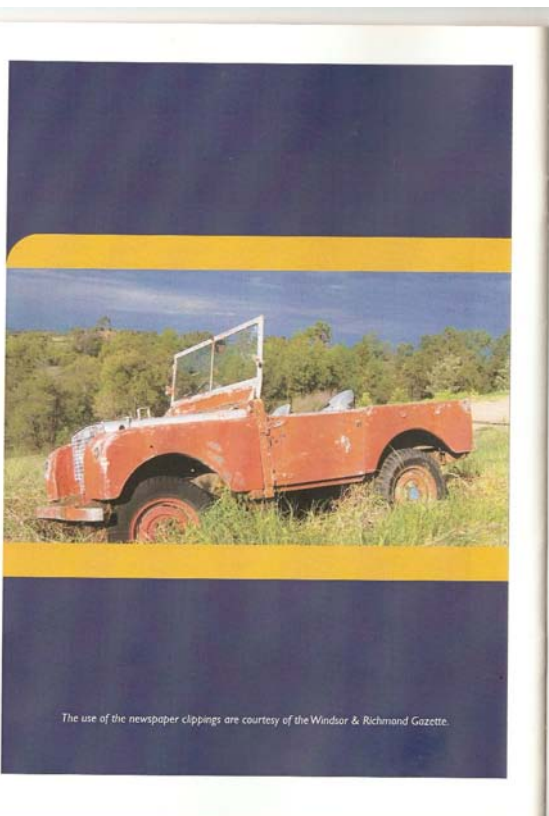
It is with regret that due to missing/lost brigade and council records etc. that some information has not been collated or verified. Accuracy of information is easily lost in interpretation. The older the documents, the less information is recorded but rather committed to memory. Given time constraints, not all relevant information has been included in this booklet, nor was it the intention BUT we will most likely, (due to recently uncovered records verifying our inception date) be celebrating our 70th anniversary in 2009.

Brigade contact details have been included in this booklet and we will be most appreciative of any corrections, additions including photographs, stories both serious and humorous etc. All contributions will be gratefully received. Hopefully our next booklet will address many of these shortcomings.

To submit any contribution to our 70th, please contact us or send information to the below:

**email to:**  
info@kurrajongrfs.org.au  
**or post to:**  
Po Box 187  
Kurrajong 2758 NSW

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The use of the newspaper clippings are courtesy of the Windsor & Richmond Gazette.