



**A Celebration of the Life, Courage and Sacrifice
of**

FIREMAN CYRIL GEORGE DUTTON.

1915 - 1940.

**Fatally Injured whilst Firefighting
at premises off Foregate St, Chester**

November 29th 1940



Red Plaque Ceremony

Town Hall Chester

11am Thursday November 2nd, 2023.

11.00 Muster Inside Town Hall.

11.15 Welcome. Lord Mayor.

Fireman's Prayer.

Canon Jane Brooke. Chester Cathedral.

Address.

Matt Wrack. Fire Brigades Union.

History And Eulogy.

Tony Jones, Retired Watch Manager, Chester Fire Station.

Prayers.

Canon Jane Brooke. Chester Cathedral.

11.45 For Those Who Wish And Are Able, We Will Now Walk To Foregate Street For The Unveiling And Dedication Of The Red Plaque.

** Please Assemble Inside The Right Hand Doors Of Marks And Spencer.
(Opposite)

12.15 - 12.30 Return To Town Hall.

13.00 Buffet Served.

The Fireman's Prayer.

"When I am called to duty, God whenever flames may rage,

Give me the strength to save some life whatever be its age.

Help me to embrace a little child before it's too late,

Or some older person from the horror of that fate.

Enable me to be alert and hear the weakest shout,

And quickly and efficiently to put the fire out.

I want to fill my calling and give the best in me,

To guard my neighbour and protect his property.

And if according to Your Will I have to lose my life,

Please bless with Your Protecting Hand my children and my wife."



*The Cortège passes The Cross lead by Supt Gerald Avery,
on it's route to Overleigh Cemetery.*

CYRIL GEORGE DUTTON.

Cyril George Dutton was born in Chester on 26th February 1915. The second son of William and Anne Dutton. Elder brother William Cecil (Bill) was 5 years older. The family lived at No 50 St Anne Street Chester. Cyril attended Victoria Road School and upon leaving took employment as an accounts clerk with local clothing manufacturers Bradley's.

As the 1930s progressed, the threat of another world war hung over Britain. It was quickly recognised that such a conflict would involve sustained enemy air attacks that would put the existing fire services under tremendous pressure. In January 1938, the government passed the Fire Brigades Act which authorised the formation of the Auxiliary Fire Service (AFS), made up of volunteers. These firefighters would be trained by, and work alongside, professional fire fighters. Local authorities were given responsibility for providing an effective fire service. Rural districts pooled resources for greater efficiency.

28,000 volunteers were needed and a recruitment drive was launched. As many men were increasingly directed towards the armed forces, AFS volunteers included those too young or too old to be called up, as well as those otherwise exempt from military service. For the first time women were encouraged to join. They were not officially permitted to fight fires, working instead in non-operational roles. By the start of the Second World War in September 1939, the AFS had over 200,000 members.

Cyril joined the ranks of the newly formed AFS in 1939 alongside a number of his mates. He was later called up for Military Service where he was attached to the Royal Army Service Corps, attaining the rank of Lance Corporal. Later he was temporarily released from the Military and seconded to the AFS as a Full Time Auxiliary Fireman. This secondment was for just one month, Nov 1st to Nov 30th 1940.

Cyril had married his sweetheart Florence Leyfield in the latter part of 1939, the couple living with his parents at 50, St Anne Street. Incidentally the house once stood on the site of the present No 34

St Anne Street, exactly opposite where the new City Fire Station was to be built in 1970 and the rebuilt Fire Station stands today.

The Blitz on the UK began at about 4:00 in the afternoon on September 7, 1940, when German planes appeared over London. For two hours, 348 German bombers and 617 fighters targeted the city, dropping high-explosive bombs as well as incendiary devices. Later, guided by the raging fires caused by the first attack, a second group of planes began another assault that lasted until 4:30 the following morning. In just these few hours, 430 people were killed and 1,600 were badly injured. The first day of the Blitz is remembered as Black Saturday.

The Germans expanded the Blitz to other cities in November 1940. The most heavily bombed cities outside London were Liverpool and Birmingham. Other targets included Sheffield, Manchester, Coventry, and Southampton. The attack on Coventry was particularly destructive. On November 14, 1940, a German force of more than 500 bombers destroyed much of the old city centre and killed more than 550 people. In early part of 1941 the Germans launched another wave of attacks, this time focusing on ports. Raids between February and May pounded Plymouth, Portsmouth, Bristol, Newcastle upon Tyne, and Hull in England; Swansea in Wales; Belfast in Northern Ireland; and Clydeside in Scotland.

Although not attacked to the same degree and ferocity, Chester did suffer serious Air Raid and Fire damage on occasion as we were on the flight path to the docks of Birkenhead, Wallasey and Liverpool, particularly on the evening of November 28th 1940 when official records now released tell us that 21 HE Bombs, 2 Parachute Mines and 168 Incendiary Bombs were dropped on Chester that evening. Cyril was rostered to be off duty but on hearing what was going on he bid his wife Florence goodbye, " You stay here, I'll go and see what the lads have got, see you later ", as he ran to the Fire Station to change into his kit. He then ran to the incident off Foregate Street where the Commercial Hall was seriously involved in fire. It is unclear as to what his actual duties were at this incident but what is clear is that enemy action was ongoing. At around 23.30 hours there was a serious collapse of masonry and Cyril along with Fm John William Haynes aged 41 were seriously injured.

They were both transported to Chester Royal Infirmary. The injuries to Fm Haynes were a compound leg fracture and contusions to his back whilst sadly Cyril's injuries were later to prove fatal.

Cyril was afforded a Fire Brigade Funeral with full honours. Under the command of Supt Gerald Avery the City of Chester Chief Fire Officer, over 150 Firemen were assembled from 7 neighbouring brigades. The coffin, covered by the Union Flag on which were placed Cyril's cap and belt, was carried on an open Fire Engine. The Church service was held at a packed Christ Church in Newtown, the coffin being carried both in and out by six AFS Firemen. The cortege then slowly returned and briefly halted outside the Fire Station in Northgate Street where, as is tradition, the Station bells rang one last time. Moving off across the City, whose streets were lined with silent crowds paying their respects, to Overleigh Cemetery in Handbridge where he was laid to rest.

Thankfully Cyril was the only Fire Service fatality to occur in Chester during the conflict but is remembered as just one of almost 1,000 Fire Service Personnel who perished serving their communities.

In 1996 whilst I was on duty at Chester Fire Station I was contacted by Bill Dutton, Cyril's elder brother. We later met and he recalled the events of that fateful night and handed to me a scroll recognising Cyril's bravery and sacrifice. We had it framed and it was hung in the entrance foyer of the Fire Station.

The courage required to be a Firefighter is respected Worldwide. To perform those same duties during an Air Raid elevates that courage to another level !
Rest in Peace Cyril.

***It's a very thin line that we often tread.
God Bless.***



This scroll commemorates

Fireman C. G. Dutton
Chester Fire Brigade

held in honour as one who served King and Country in the world war of 1939-1945 and gave his life to save mankind from tyranny. May his sacrifice help to bring the peace and freedom for which he died.



Cyril is remembered by Chester's Retired Firefighters.

