

# Roscrea Fire Brigade

---

by Joe Coughlan

Roscrea Fire Brigade has a long and sometimes colourful history going back almost 75 years. It was formed in 1939 when the county council local area engineer Mr P M Barnett decided that Roscrea needed an air raid protection unit as they were being set up at the time by volunteer groups around the country in anticipation of an outbreak of war affecting Ireland. After a meeting with some council workers the Roscrea A.R.P was formed with some of the first members being Michael Bohan, Jack Moloney and Michael Fletcher from Limerick St. The equipment they had was very basic and consisted of a hand cart, a garden hose, four lengths of canvas hose, a standpipe and two buckets of sand. They acquired part of the old jail in the castle yard and were housed there for the next forty-two years. After the Germans bombed the North Strand in Dublin on May 5<sup>th</sup> 1944 members of the local brigade went by train to Dublin to help with the fires.



**The Model T Brigade in an Easter Parade 1943**

In 1942 a local man received a large sum in compensation after suffering a serious accident. He decided to buy a Model T Ford and start a hackney business. After some time he realised there wasn't enough demand for his services and so in 1943 after a lot of persuasion the county council bought the car for Roscrea Fire Brigade to convert into the town's first fire engine. This was converted by Paddy O'Meara of

Limerick St. who had by now joined the brigade. Paddy cut away the back section to carry men, hoses and a ladder; he also devised an ingenious swivel system on which the ladder would sit and could be turned and raised on the back of the engine. At this time they also acquired a portable pump which was so heavy it had to be carried on a separate trailer. This pump was on hire from the department of defence and records had to be kept of each time it was used and they were charged accordingly. Petrol at this time was scarce and expensive so the pump was used very sparingly. About this time they were joined by Joe Fitzpatrick, John Kenny, Dick Moloney and Joe Ryan.

In 1947 the Co. Council bought a Ford Thames which had been used during the war in Belfast. It was in use up until the early 60s and is now in the transport museum in Dun Laoire. Many people will remember it being stored in an open shed beside the hospital for years until it was taken away in the late 70s. When it arrived it had a royal crest emblazoned which was like a red rag to a bull as many of the members came from a republican background. They painted over it several times but it still came through. Some of the firemen recruited at this time were Billy Lalor, Billy Bergin, Jack Downey, Joe Fitzpatrick Jr, Martin Kenneally, Peter Tobin and my grandfather Pat John Ryan.

In the 60s they got a new Land Rover which had its own pump fitted and was in use up until 1978 when the engines became bigger and carried their own supply of water.



**The Roscrea Fire Brigade late 60s. L/R: ? , Tommy Shanahan, Paddy O'Meara, Mick Donaghue, Joe Fitzgerald, ? , Paddy Ryan, John Joe Coughlan, Connie McLoughlin, Kevin Maloney, Donie O'Meara.**

In 1981 a new station was built on the Birr Road and in 2011 a plaque was unveiled to all the firemen who served since 1939. Today they have 3 engines one of which is equipped with the latest emergency and cutting equipment, a water tanker, a



jeep, lighting trailers and access to two hydraulic platforms or turntable ladders. It's a long way from the hand cart of 1939.



**The Crew – Early 1970's L/R: Andy Mason, Patrick Maher, Jack Downey, Connie McLoughlin, Noel O'Meara & Mick Donaghue**

The brigade have dealt with hundreds of serious and fatal incidents over the years one of which was in 1976 when 5 teenagers were killed at Borris-In-Ossory and another in 2011 when 4 people were killed at Ballaghmore. They answer an average of 130 calls per year.



**Crew Members from the early 1970's - Andy Mason, Noel O'Meara, Patrick Maher, Jack Downey & Connie McLoughlin**

A story which was told to me by one of the senior men is of a fire which occurred in the Monastery Mill in the 40s. The local brigade at the time did not have the equipment to handle the fire so a brigade was brought down from the army at the Curragh. They were there for a few days and were fed and given beds in the Monastery. When the fire was out one soldier stayed behind and joined the order. He was later one of the monks who helped to found a new monastery in Tarrawarra near Sydney Australia in 1954.