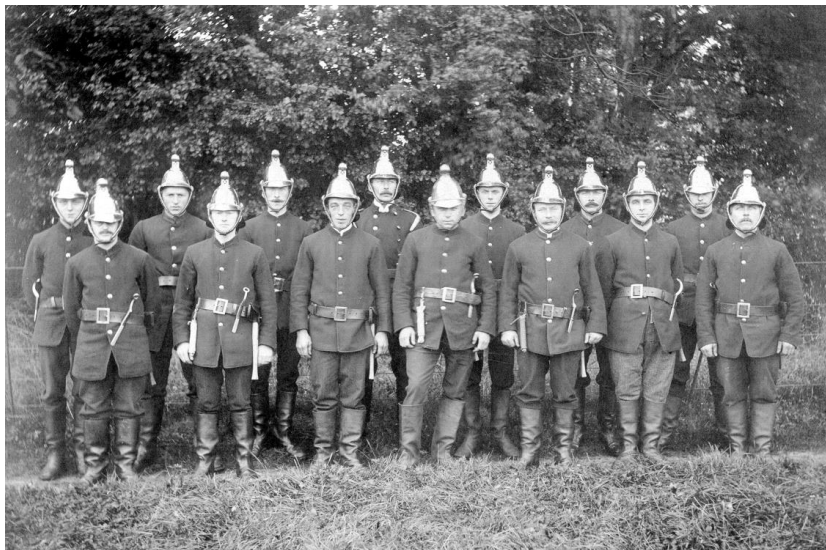


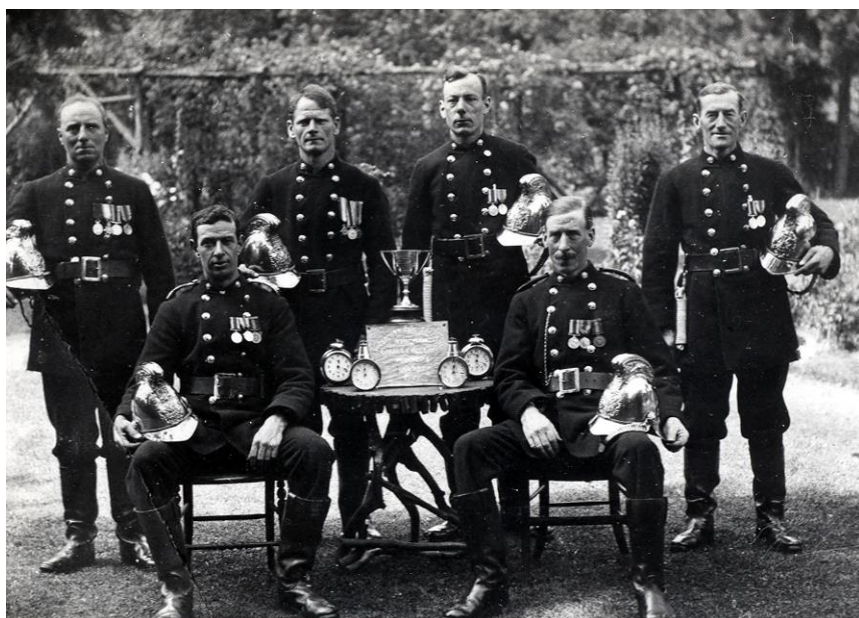
The Westcott Volunteer Fire Brigade

The Westcott Volunteer Fire Brigade was formed in 1898 and was one of many such brigades serving individual villages and 'estates', including Bury Hill, Denbies, Ranmore and Wotton. The Westcott firemen had no 'pump' to start with, and until 1914 had to fight fires by drawing water from hydrants. At the outbreak of the First World War, however, they were given Dorking's surplus 'manual' engine, which dated from 1870!

When a fire occurred a warning was given by ringing the fire bell, and later by operating a klaxon horn. All the volunteer firemen who heard this would dash home to put on their uniforms - smart blue jackets, well polished brass helmets with chains under the chin, shining leather jack boots and leather belts on which were held small axes. It was not the done thing to attend a fire without being properly dressed!

A key man was Jim Mansfield who had a cartage business and provided the horses that pulled the pump. The following photographs were taken c 1914.





In 1924 the Westcott Brigade won the Kingham Challenge Cup.

In this photograph can be seen the alarm clocks that each man was given as a prize.

Westcott Fire Station

On 24th February 1907 the Trustees of the Reading Room entered in to an agreement with Frederick Dixon (Provision Merchant), John Johnson, senior (Licensed Victualler) and Charles Jeater (Plumber) all of Westcott and appointed to represent the Westcott Fire Brigade, to let a small piece of land with a fifteen foot frontage to the main road and a depth of twenty two feet (being part of the Reading Room Trust property) at a rental of 10/- per annum, upon which an iron and wood shed was to be erected to house the Westcott Fire Brigade.

The shed housed the Brigade's horse drawn fire 'engine' until the 6th February 1930 when the agreement was terminated and the Dorking Fire Brigade motorised fire engine assumed responsibility for the Westcott area.

The building was subsequently leased to the Westcott Scouts for use as their 'den'. Following the closure of the Scout Troop

in the early 1990's the Dorking and District Operatic Society used it for the storage of costumes but in 2000 a refuse cart attempting to exit the Reading Room car park damaged it beyond repair.



Fire Brigade references in the Dorking Advertiser

1900 In January a Fire Brigade soiree in the Reading Room in aid of the Soldiers and Sailors Families Association included entertainment by Miss Tucker (piano), Mr G Sawyers (piccolo), Mr A Ryde, who sang The Absent Minded Beggar, and from Miss Tugg, W Sellman, Mr Eveleigh and G Warren.

1921 The Westcott Fire Brigade was called out to attend to a burning hayrick at Milton Farm (dealt with by using the Vicarage hydrant and running out a ¼ mile of hose), and to Mr Mansfield's rick in Kiln Meadow. It also attended a big blaze at A J Canter's builder's yard¹. This could have had fatal results as the fire quickly spread to the rooms above Dr Maw's garage, which was separated from the yard by a narrow passage only 2 or 3 feet wide, where Mr Canter and Mr Reynolds were sleeping. The fire was eventually brought under control with assistance from the Dorking Brigade. Afterwards there was much concern about the inadequate water pressure from the Westcott hydrant and the Dorking Brigade's equipment was also criticised; "There were eleven leaks, large and small, in the 200 yard hose and at least 20% of the water pumped never reached the nozzle."

1923 In June a successful 'fete and fancy fair' was held at the Red House by permission of Mr & Mrs Cory Wright. There was plenty to see and do with displays of folk dancing under the direction of Miss Rate, a Girl Guide exhibition organised by Miss Colam and the Westcott Fire Brigade being put through their paces by Chief Officer W Brooks. Mr & Mrs Carlisle and Miss Dunn entertained with songs and dramatic sketches while the Red Triangle Club supplied the music. There were numerous races for boys and girls and a comic race for the firemen, who also competed with the Red Triangle Club and the British Legion in a tug of war competition.

1926 The Volunteer Fire Brigade were not very happy. At their annual meeting in April there was another call for a motor fire engine to replace the old manual machine. This was 'useful in its way for encouraging the men in their drill' but was markedly inferior to the new motors, as was clearly demonstrated when the Holmwood Brigade proudly brought their new Ford fire engine across to Westcott.

In July, Chief Officer P Ryde, the recently appointed Chief Officer, and 8 men responded promptly with a patent extinguisher when Mr and Mrs Colam's car caught fire in Westcott Street, but the ability to fight a chimney fire at Park Farm, Wotton, in December, for which Second Officer W Martin and the full brigade turned out in 3 minutes, was seriously handicapped by the lack of horses to pull the manual pump!

1929 In September, after 31 years, the Westcott Fire Brigade was disbanded. The local paper announced that in future fire alarms by telephone should be put through to Dorking 6.

¹ Subsequently developed for W Songhurst and now the HQ of the RSG Group.