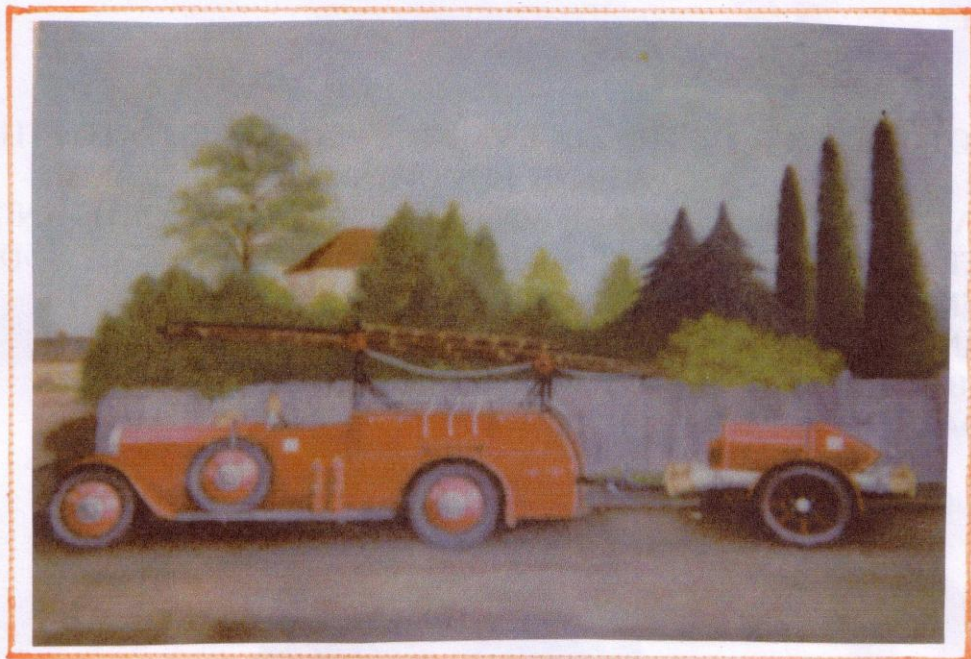


**THE STORY OF
THE**

BOROUGH GREEN

**FIRE
BRIGADE**

BOROUGH GREEN AND DISTRICT
FIRE BRIGADE
(or the Silver Ghost Rides Again)





MR. "BOB" CLOKE WAS THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND THE FORMATION OF THE BOROUGH GREEN FIRE BRIGADE, WHICH HE BROUGHT TOGETHER WITH SOME FRIENDS IN 1935. THE FULL STORY OF HIS ENDEAVOURS FOLLOWS

BOROUGH GREEN OWES A GREAT DEAL TO HIM AFTER A LIFE OF SERVICE, AND HE NOW RESTS IN THE GRAVEYARD OF WROTHAM CHURCH.

THE PHOTOGRAPH (OF THE ROLLS ROYCE FIRE ENGINE WITH THE TENDER IN TOW), WAS TAKEN IN 1939 OUTSIDE THE ORIGINAL FIRE STATION PREMISES ON THE A25, NEAR THE CROSS ROADS AND OPPOSITE THE BAPTIST CHURCH. THE HOUSE IS STILL THERE, AND THE PREMISES HAVE NEW OWNERS. THE FIRE STATION, NOW IN WESTERN ROAD, WAS TAKEN OVER BY THE FIRE SERVICE WHEN THE AMBULANCE STATION WAS CLOSED DOWN AND MOVED TO SEVENOAKS.



BOB CLOKE

BOROUGH GREEN



My favourite memory of him was when I took him and Frank Oliver, (another former member of the Borough Green Brigade) up to Chingford to the Lesney Products factory, to see models of their old Rolls Royce appliance coming off the production line in their thousands. I would have liked to know what Bob was thinking then. He had formed the Borough Green and District Brigade in 1934 and continued to serve with the National Fire Service and the Kent Fire Brigade until he retired from fire fighting in 1960.

Bob's life was one of service to the community and to his family and friends. There never seemed to be an occasion when he did not have time to help, to advise or to console. No matter how much trouble for him to attend to; no person was too old or too young for his attention.

To have accomplished all that he set out to do, required drive and energy yet **Bob Cloke** was above all, a kind and gentle man.

PETE HALLIDAY

BOROUGH GREEN AND DISTRICT FIRE BRIGADE (or the Silver Ghost Rides Again)



Borough Green and District Fire Tender.

Photo by courtesy of Mr. F. Oliver.

Every schoolboy will be familiar with the gleaming red miniature of the Rolls Royce fire engine in the window of his local model shop – model number Y-6 in the 'Matchbox' 'Models of Yesteryear' series manufactured by Lesney Products of London. This tiny 48:1 scale replica bears the inscription 'Borough Green & District' along its sides.

"Borough Green & District? . . . Surely that's the village in North West Kent? How on earth did Borough Green come to have a Rolls Royce fire engine, and how did Lesney Products come to make a model of it?" How indeed!

In the early thirties Borough Green had no fire service and relied for cover on the brigades at Maidstone and at Sevenoaks, each some distance away – especially in terms of the time taken to reach a fire. A number of local properties had been lost in fires and it was clear that despite the best of intentions and efforts the existing brigades were just too far away to give Borough Green any real protection. And so, in 1934, the local Chamber of Trade made the decision to establish and organise the village's own volunteer brigade.

A Fire Committee was formed, and among its leading figures were the two Cloke brothers, Robert and Richard, who ran the long-established, and still flourishing, family grocery business in the centre of the village. Other founder members included Messrs A. Wilkins (Chairman), L.S. Daniels (Secretary), H. Williams (Treasurer), C.G. 'Bill' Kennett, his brother Arthur, George Andrews, Ken Ashton, Geoff Bacon, Bill Corner, G. Marchant, Fred Pierce and Harold Woods, all as firemen. John Stone was also a founder member, and, despite being well over 60, he turned out enthusiastically to every drill and practice. Chief Officer Bob Bates of the Seal Brigade was co-opted as Training Officer.

And so the village had a Brigade Committee, but at this early stage it had little else: no equipment, no premises, no funds, nothing in fact except a keen spirit, an infectious enthusiasm, and an obvious willingness to work and learn. They operated as a busy team and soon collected enough basic equipment and funds to form the nucleus of an effective brigade. They had a stand-pipe bar and key, a few lengths of hose, two extinguishers, and the use of Bob Cloke's Morris Eight grocery van. This meagre equipment was kept handy beside the van in the grocery shed, and water came from wherever was the nearest mains supply.

A few (precious) maroons were bought and a launching mortar was made from some old pipes. The Clokes' business and yard became the fire station, and when a fire call was received on the shop telephone, it was Bob's job to nip

smartly out to the yard, fire the primitive maroon to call the crew, remove the trays of eggs and sacks of spuds from his van, and quickly load the fire equipment and be 'ready'.

The Brigade operated in this way for some time, providing efficient cover and gradually increasing its range of equipment. The men quickly became proficient, thanks to the capable training of Bob Bates, and they were perfectly happy with the grand sum of one shilling a week as a retainer! They involved themselves wholeheartedly in fund raising and other voluntary activities. A branch and hose was put in a locker outside the National Provincial Bank to give better access to water in the village centre, and then came news of a portable single-cylinder water pump up for sale. The price was high and funds were still low, but pumps were scarce and the deadline for purchasing was within a week. Literally, it was a case of 'all hands to the pump' as an immediate appeal and collection was launched. A lot was raised, but not enough, and it looked as though this rare chance would be lost — that was until a last-minute benefactor generously stepped in with the balance. The deal was clinched and the pump was proudly displayed outside the grocery shop to serve as a visible sign of progress, and to highlight the need for further funds.

This was all very well, but the Brigade was still in sore need of a proper appliance and tender. All the volunteers addressed themselves to this problem, and early in 1935 Bob Cloke saw a box number advertisement in the 'Daily Mail'. A 1921 Rolls Royce Silver Ghost saloon was for sale at £30. Bob enquired and found that the vendor was Lord Kemsley, the newspaper baron, and the vehicle was to be seen at his Lordship's residence near Slough.

Bob and his brother Richard set off to Slough, along with Harry Carter and Bill Kennett. They were received by a chauffeur who proudly showed them the stately vehicle, parked on the broad gravel drive in front of the big house, and who was intrigued to hear that the four men wanted the Rolls to use as a fire engine. He politely reminded them that the price was £30, and when told that they had only twenty-five, he reluctantly agreed to present their case to his master. Lord Kemsley appeared on the steps, together with Anthony Eden, his luncheon guest, and a bargain was struck. Because the sale was to a charitable cause, the press baron came down to £26. But there was only £25 in the kitty, so the four men emptied their pockets and scraped together the extra pound from their collective loose change. And with but a few coppers left between them, they thanked 'the Lord' that the Rolls had sufficient petrol in its tank to get them home as they proudly drove their thoroughbred back to Kent.

On arrival the vehicle was stored and was later handed over to Mr W. Bonallack, a local resident who ran the well known coach building company in Cable Street near Tower Hill. Bonallack set about converting the limousine into a fire tender, but at quite some cost, and the Borough Green volunteers were quickly back in their familiar roles of beggars, cajolers and general fund raisers — all for a very worthy cause. Slowly the money came in and work was progressed until, in October 1938, the vehicle was ready.

The big day came on 5th November (and what better day could there be?) when the Rolls Royce appliance was officially taken into service, together with a Dennis trailer pump and a full kit of tools and accessories. Miss K. Ewart performed the commissioning ceremony, and it was thanks only to the unceasing efforts of the dozen or so Brigade members and to the generous responses from the people of Borough Green, Ightham, Seal and Wrotham — the four parishes covered by the station — that this long-held dream became a reality.

At this stage the volunteers had attended twenty-three calls and the Brigade's coffers had been swelled by the insurance bounties on fires attended — for this was their main source of outside income, and in every case each man had paid his full share of any bounty back into the Brigade's general fund — such was the spirit of Borough Green! After Munich, the air of threatening national doom swelled the Brigade's membership as many volunteers signed up, all eager to do their bit. Frank Oliver and Leslie Dryland joined at this time, both of whom were to give long and distinguished service to their community.

The converted Rolls retained its basic chassis and front end. It kept the famous 7½ litre six-cylinder engine, which gave 70 mph and was renowned for being 'quiet as a silent sewing machine', and upon whose radiator a penny could be balanced, and it kept the gracious and distinctive lines of 'the best car in the world'. From behind the driver's seat the body was rebuilt to take a small reserve water tank, hose and tool storage, ladder rack and pulleys, and (rather precarious!)

seating for the crew. In this sense a fire call was reminiscent of the early silent films, for the crew sat in line along padded bench seats facing outwards along each side of the vehicle, their feet were pressed hard-down on firm running boards fixed above the rear wings. Behind them, along the smalls of their backs, was a long brass rail to which stout rope tassels were attached as hand-holds. It was very 'Keystone Cops' but only rarely was a man lost overboard!

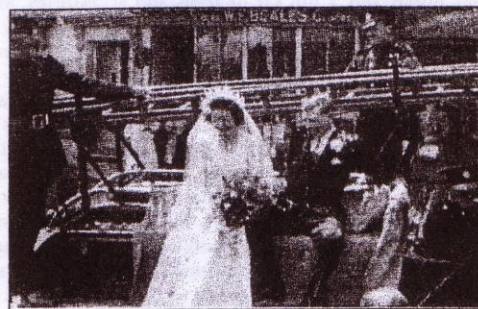
When fully laden the vehicle weighed two tons seventeen hundredweight, and it had brakes on only the rear wheels! The Dennis trailer pump weighed another seventeen hundredweight, but this spent at least half its time off the road, being dragged behind the engine with both wheels airborne as it bounced along the Kentish lanes at 60 mph!

The registration number was BH 8112 (a pity not 'BG'), and the Rolls was the pride and joy of the whole village. It was also the envy of every other fire service in Kent! It was lovingly attended and polished — gleaming bright red, with its brass and copper fittings and pipes almost worn away with devoted elbow grease. It shone and sparkled come rain or sunshine, and soon it was to become a very busy engine.

In 1938, the Brigade was officially adopted as the local ARP fire unit, and when war came the station was taken over by Malling RDC. The RDC paid for the equipment and premises requisitioned, including a sum of £200 for the Rolls. This money was invested in a trust fund for the firemen to draw upon should they be injured in the course of duty, and the fund exists to this day. Thus the old Rolls passed out of the trustee ownership of the small band of volunteers and became 'official' property. Even so, the Borough Green men (and the village) still regarded her as very much their own.

The German air raids in the summer and autumn of 1940 saw the Rolls in front line action attending to many bomb incidents and air crashes, and running the gauntlet of Stukas and Dorniers in the Luftwaffe attacks on RAF West Malling.

In 1941, the National Fire Service (NFS) was formed and Borough Green came within Area No. 30 with headquarters at Maidstone. Additional tenders were allocated or 'acquired', the Rolls was used less frequently, becoming something of an 'old lady in reserve'. Late in 1942, she was taken out of service and was ignominiously laid-up in the yard, cruelly exposed to all the elements. There she languished for eighteen months or so, unused, uncared for, but not forgotten. Then, in 1944, Leslie Dryland took a wife. The Brigade was unanimous in deciding that the only vehicle fit to transport a fireman and his bride was the old Rolls, and so the men, with the help of the Boy Scouts, restored the old girl to her former glory for what was to be a fitting swan song. But there were problems, for the glycerine used in wartime cooling systems had eroded the engine water jacket gaskets, and on the short run between Wrotham Church and the wedding breakfast at the 'Pilgrims' Restaurant', the old lady had to be fed as much water as she had pumped out on to fires during her distinguished working life! But at least she was running — although, alas, for the very last time.



● The Dryland wedding: The Rolls had its last outing for Les and Frances Dryland's wedding. 1944

There the story would have ended, but for the fact that Silver Ghosts are never laid, and in 1976 Lesney Products, having been alerted to the vehicle's existence by the wide publicity given to Frank Oliver's search, made enquiries with a view to immortalising the old Rolls as one of their replica models. Mr Peter Halliday of the Kent County Council Fire Department was able to search out and co-ordinate advice, and Bob Cloke produced the original plans and blueprints from Bonallack's coach-building conversion. Frank Oliver came up with what is thought to be the only remaining photograph of the old machine, and these three worked closely with the Lesney design team. The result was a very realistic miniature of the grand old lady.

Hundreds of thousands of these models have now been produced and sold across the country and around the world. They serve as a fitting memorial to this famous vehicle, the only remaining part of which is the original brass bell, sensibly removed by a Borough Green man back in 1948, and held in secret safe-keeping to this very day!



MATCHBOX MODEL OF YESTERYEAR No. Y 6.....

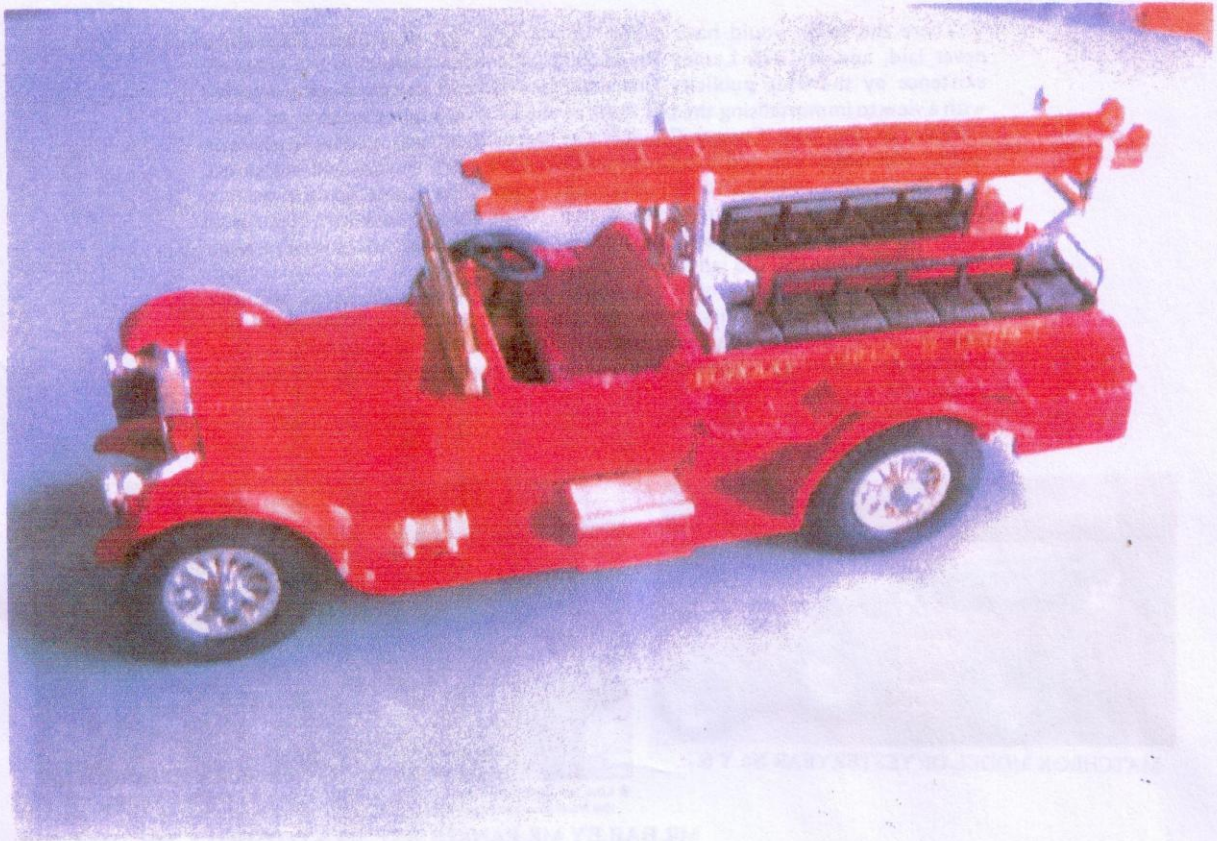


● Line up: Borough Green firemen outside the new fire station in January, 1964. In the front row are Frank Oliver, Bill Kennett (the officer in charge) and Les Drvland

MR. BAILEY. MR. PANKHURST. MR. KINGSHOTT. MR. THACKER.
MR. BOWLES. MR. DENTOR. MR. QUINELL. MR. PRENTICE.
MR. FRANK OLIVER. MR. BILL KENNETT. MR. DRYLAND.



THE BOROUGH GREEN FIRE SERVICE IN 2002. STARTED BY A COMMITTEE FORMED BY MR. BOB CLOKE BACK IN 1934 !!



THE ROLLS ROYCE FIRE ENGINE MODELS MADE BY LESNEY

THERE WERE 17 DIFFERENT VERSIONS OF THIS MODEL- SOME WITH WHITE LADDERS, OTHERS WITH ORANGE OR BROWN LADDERS WHEELS HAD 24 SPOKES ON TWO MODELS BUT NORMALLY 12 SPOKES THE COLOURS WERE BRIGHT RED ON THE EARLIER MODELS AND THEN A DARKER RED ON THE LATER VERSIONS THE SIDE SEATS WERE A BRONZE COLOUR BUT LATER MODELS HAD BLACK PLASTIC SEATS ONE VERSION HAD BRIGHT RED FRONT SEAT FITTED BUT THESE ARE VERY RARE BOXES WERE ALTERED DURING PRODUCTION WHICH LASTED FROM 1977 TO 1984 SOME BOXES WERE YELLOW/CREAM OTHERS WERE BROWN THE VERY FIRST MODELS HAD A GREEN COLOURED BOX OTHER BOXES HAD VIEW FROM BOTH SIDES

ALL MODELS HAVE THE ORIGINAL REGISTRATION NUMBER ON THE REGISTRATION PLATES



PAGE 7. VICTORY PARADE 1945. PASSING THE BLACK HORSE,
WITH BOB CLOKE LEADING THE BOROUGH GREEN FIREMEN



THE PARADE ARRIVES IN THE HIGH STREET, REFORMED WITH
THE A.R.P. FOLLOWING THE FIREMEN, WITH BOB CLOKE TAKING
THE SALUTE.



WHEN THE ROLLS ROYCE WAS LAID UP THIS LATER FIRE ENGINE ARRIVED ,AND IS SEEN HERE AT THE OLD FIRE STATION WHICH WAS NEAR THE CROSS ROADS.

THE PARADE ARRIVES IN 7TH HIGH STREET, MILDENHURD WITH
THE A.P. FOLLOWING THE FIREMAN, WITH BOB CLARK TAKING
THE CALL



A GROUP OF BOROUGH GREEN FIREMAN WITH THEIR LATER ENGINE.

Mr Ref. 18/3/JNC/MCR

To: 6147 L.Fm. Bailey, E.L.

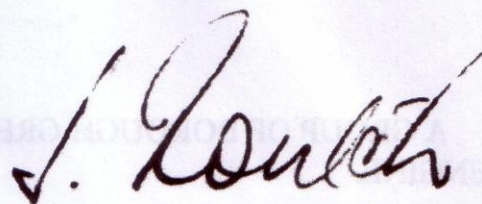
via Officer-in-Charge,
C67. Borough Green.

From: Divisional Commander,
"C" Division.

Fire Brigade Long Service &
Good Conduct Medal.

Her Majesty the Queen has been pleased to award you the Fire Brigade Long Service and Good Conduct Medal as a mark of her appreciation of long and meritorious service.

Pending the issue of the medal you are authorised forthwith to wear the ribbon and a preliminary issue is enclosed.



Divisional Commander.

21st June, 1974.



LEADING fireman Ted Bailey and his eight fellow part-timers at Borough Green had good cause to set the village alight this week.

For Kent's fire chief Mr William Babington made a special trip to their station on Tuesday night for a presentation ceremony.

The man at the centre of attention was Mr Bailey, 46, of Spencer Cottages, Borough Green, who has been awarded the brigade's 20-years long service medal.

He volunteered for "retained" duty back in 1954 when the village crew was way below strength.

Most of his former mates have now left, and as he says: "We are still three men short."

"Under Sub Officer Ron Thacker we have a very good team, but we could do with a few more young men."

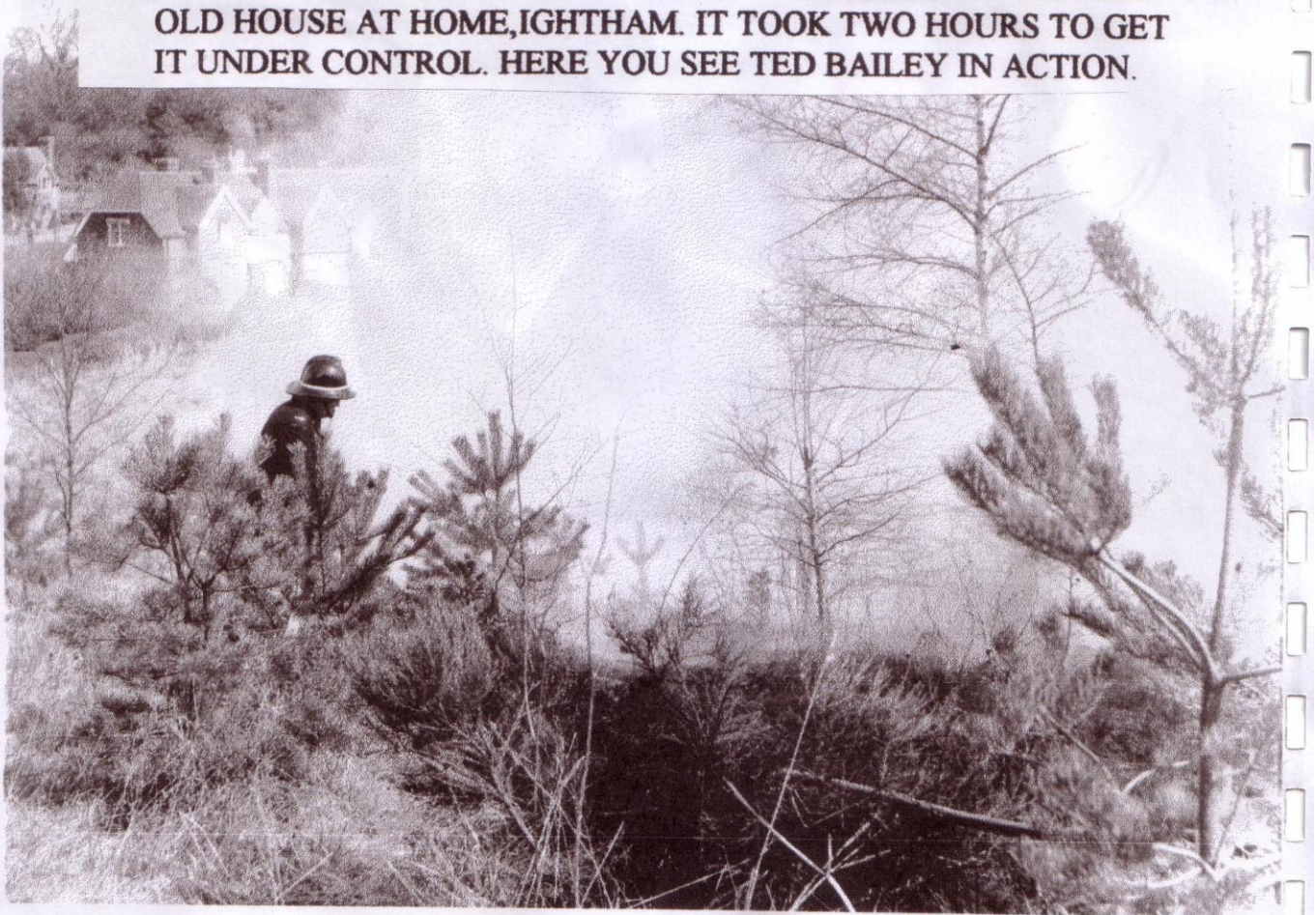
When he worked locally as a gardener, Ted was on full time call. Since becoming a driver,

1974





WHAT THE BOROUGH GREEN FIREMAN DO BEST - FIGHTING FIRES. FIRE SWEEPED OVER 5 ACRES OF SCRUBLAND NEAR THE OLD HOUSE AT HOME, IGHTHAM. IT TOOK TWO HOURS TO GET IT UNDER CONTROL. HERE YOU SEE TED BAILEY IN ACTION.





TED BAILEY IN ACTION AGAIN AT A FIRE STATION OPEN DAY INSTRUCTING THE CHILDREN ON FIRE FIGHTING. YOUNG ANDREW RAYNER LEARNING WITH HIS FRIENDS WATCHING. THIS WAS IN 1968.





FROM A CAUSAL THOUGHT IN 1935 BY A FEW MEN IN BOROUGH GREEN, LED BY MR BOB CLOKE, CAME THE FIRE SERVICE WE HAVE TODAY
HERE YOU SEE TODAYS FIREMEN ON MAINTENANCE WORK 2004



THEY ALL TURN OUT TO GIVE BOB CLOKE A PRESENTATION WHEN HE RETIRES AT THE AGE 60 AFTER TO LONG TIME SERVING BOROUGH GREEN

What happened to the Lord's Rolls?

'Engine was a one-off

ALTHOUGH the man who ran the fire station in the old days was never mentioned in the story for the brigade's magazine, it is still alive and connected with the fire brigade and lives in Maidstone.

He knew Bob Cloke, who died in 1992, and other members of the brigade who were fighting a fire.

He knew Bob Cloke, who died in 1992, and other members of the brigade who were fighting a fire.

The Borough Green Rolls was a one-off fire engine which was first set up in 1934 by Bob Cloke who ran the local grocery store Clokes Bros Ltd, now run by Bob's son Gerald.

Bob was a leading light in the Chamber of Trade which saw the need for a service in the village after a number of

MYSTERY still surrounds the appearance of the Lord Kemsley's Rolls, Borough Green's first fire engine.

The fire service in the village was set up in 1934 by Bob Cloke who ran the local grocery store Clokes Bros Ltd, now run by Bob's son Gerald.

Bob was a leading light in the Chamber of Trade which saw the need for a service in the village after a number of

Janet Weston recalls the intriguing history of Borough Green's first fire engine

local properties has been lost in fires after existing brigades had to come from Maidstone and Sevenoaks.

The chamber then decided to establish and organise the village's own volunteer brigade. A fire committee was formed and among its leading figures were the two Cloke brothers.

Writing in Bygone Kent magazine in April, 1981, Nicholas Wright said: "And so the village had a brigade committee, but at this early stage it had little else; no equipment, no premises, no funds, nothing in fact except a keen spirit, an infectious enthusiasm and an obvious willingness to work and learn."

They assembled some basic equipment and the Clokes business and yard became the fire station. When a fire call was received on the shop telephone, their delivery van was emptied of produce and quickly loaded with fire equipment.

The brigade carried on like this for some time but it was apparent that it was in sore need of a proper appliance. Then Bob saw an advert in the Daily Mail for a 1921 Rolls

Royce Silver Ghost saloon, on sale for £30.

The owner turned out to be the newspaper baron Lord Kemsley and the Cloke brothers set out to see it at his home in Slough with their brother-in-law Harry Carrier and fire fighting colleague Bill Kennett.

Lord Kemsley, who was entertaining Anthony Eden for lunch, agreed that because the sale was to a charitable cause, he would come down to £26.

As there was only £25 in the kitty, the four men turned out their pockets and scraped together the extra pound from loose change. With only a few coppers left, they thanked 'the Lord' that the Rolls had enough petrol in its tank to get them home.

More money then had to be raised to convert the limousine and on November 5, 1938, the appliance was launched to serve the parishes of Borough Green, Wrotham, Ightham and Seal.

That year, the brigade was officially adopted as the local Air Raid Precautions fire unit. When war broke out the station, which since 1938 had been located in Maidstone

Road, was taken over by Malling Rural District Council.

The council paid for the equipment and premises requisitioned including £200 for the Rolls. As the war progressed other vehicles were allocated or "acquired" and the Rolls was used less often becoming something of an "old lady in reserve."

She was eventually taken out of service as she did not have brakes on all four wheels in favour of a more modern appliance and an old barn behind the Spring Tavern became her resting place. It remained hidden behind the hay until one of the firemen Les Dryland married his wife, Frances, at St George's Church, Wrotham, in 1946.

Soon afterwards, the authorities insisted the engine was produced for disposal and it was taken away and simply vanished.

Bob Cloke was the first sub officer in charge at Borough Green under the Kent brigade, which was formed in 1948. He retired in 1960 and was succeeded by Bill

● The Dryland wedding: The Rolls had its last outing for Les and Frances Dryland's wedding.



Kennett, then Frank Oliver in 1965.

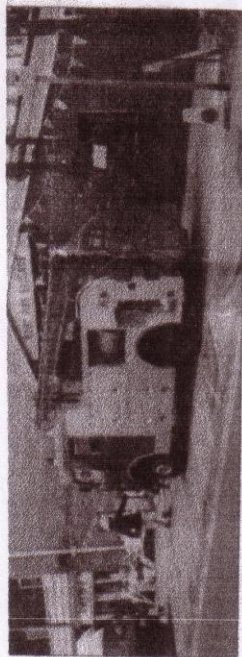
He retired in 1968 and set about searching for the old Rolls with the idea of finding and restoring her. He tracked her down to Guildford where she was taken from Maidstone but then the trail went dead despite wide publicity and national appeals.

In the early 70s hopes were raised when the television personality Alan Whicker reported having seen an old Rolls fire engine in America. However further investigation revealed it had no connection with the missing Borough Green vehicle.

The tale might have ended there if the Lesney Brothers, manufacturers of the famous Matchbox toys, alerted by Mr Oliver's search, decided to make a replica of the engine.

Original plans and blueprints of the conversion job were produced and Mr Oliver also came up with what is believed to be the only remaining photo of the old machine.

The toys were then made and sold by the local toyshop where locals bought it for their children and grandchildren, thereby immortalising the engine.



● Up to date: Borough Green fire station pictured by local historian Frank Bungay at a fun day last summer to commemorate its 30th birthday

What happened to the two...

...



...