

"JOYS" OF THE OLD BRIGADE.
Last of the Firemen's Horses
Out of Commission.
An Interesting Bournemouth Story.

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This week the last of the horses of Bournemouth Volunteer Fire Brigade go out of commission.

In their case, at any rate, the unequal race between horseflesh and petrol is finished. Petrol has won. Throughout the Brigade, horsed appliances have entirely given place to others mechanically propelled. From now onwards horses will play no part in the fire fighting activities of the future.

But the passing of the horse out of the Brigade brings with it a tinge of regret. This may be only a sentiment. To many old members of the force, past and present, it is a very real one. They were old comrades. They were as much members of the Brigade as the officers and men themselves. In their place and degree they have played their part in bringing the force to its present high state of efficiency. "Whether in turn out for serious business, for competition or for practice the horses were there, as much "Ready, aye ready" as the keenest man. They knew their business and never failed.

A RELUCTANT PASSING.

Memories of many a wild and thrilling ride behind these splendid animals straining in their collars, will come to mind of those who have ridden behind them as they read of their passing. To those men, the disappearance of the horse from the old familiar turn-out will occasion the tinge of regret of which we have written. It is true that the present animals that are being put aside are of comparatively recent introduction. Nevertheless they are the successors of those that have gone before, and as they go so will memories revive of the grand old horses—splendid pals—that carried the brigade on their business in days gone by.

The older residents too will feel regret that horses will no longer appear with the brigade. There was always a romantic glamour on the sight of the horsed engine careering through the streets. No swiftly travelling mechanically propelled fire engine, however brilliant and inspiring a spectacle it may be, can give quite the same picturesque touch, or excite the same thrill of emotion in the onlooker as the galloping horse in its bright and shiny caparisons.

"JIM" AND "FROST."

We recall the magnificent pair of blacks of the Central Station "Jim" and "Frost," with the late

Coachman Bailey handling the "ribbons," and the equally fine pair of animals from the West, "Billy" and "Ernest," with Coachman Kilby driving. Who, that has seen either pair dragging their engines, manned by squads, at almost a mad gallop through the streets of Bournemouth, has not felt a thrill of excitement and admiration as they came "clacketing" along? They were a sight to behold. With heads thrust far forward past the pole head, straining outwards on the pole chains; ears lying well back and nostrils distended; their fore legs shooting out like pistons from beneath their necks, they chunked lumps off the distance as they bounded forward to their goal. Those noble beasts knew the errand they were on and every movement of their bodies told it. The clanging of the warning gong behind told them they had somewhere to go, and they were in a tremendous hurry to get there. They needed no snatch at the bit or lash of a whip to urge them



THE 1905 COMPETITION TEAM, WITH "FROST" (nearest the camera) AND "JIM" IN HARNESS, AND THE LATE COACHMAN BAILEY HOLDING THE REINS.

on. The firemen swayed as the engine rocked or ricocheted off a tram line, or swerved at a bend of the road. A gentle "feel" on the rein was all that was necessary for them to answer to the driver's mind without checking speed. The man behind them knew his animals, and the animals knew their man. It seems almost a pity that this sight has gone for keeps. Progress and greater efficiency have ordained it, and so it comes about that Bournemouth will no longer see a horsed brigade.

AS IT USED TO BE.

There is an interesting story behind the four horses we have named and portraits of which we reproduce in this issue. There is no man better able to tell that story than Captain Ernest L. Lane, J.P. who for so many years commanded the brigade. Practically the whole of his time was spent with the horsed force. He relinquished his command in 1912 at a time when the motor vehicles were being introduced. To him we are indebted for a brief history and a few anecdotes about the horses.

"Do you want the story from before we had our own horses?" he enquired in reply to our first question.

"In those days," he continued, following our reply, "we were dependent upon hired animals, from Laidlaw's livery stables, and the result was that whilst they did their very best to meet our wants there were inevitable delays. Sometimes they hadn't a suitable pair of horses in, when we had a fire call. Sometimes, when a call came in the middle of the night, we failed to waken the resident coachman and then we were in a fix.

"I remember on one historic occasion, after waiting at the engine house for the horses to come we despatched a man to the stables in a hurry. Nobody could be found. We managed to get in and turn out a couple of horses, hooked them in and drove ourselves to a fire at Branksome Park.

THE STABLEMAN'S SURPRISE.

"After the fire was extinguished we returned, put the horses away and went home before anybody at the stables had discovered that the horses had gone. Luckily we were not had up for horse stealing. The next morning the stableman was surprised to find that two of the horses appeared to have been hard at work all night. There was a noise about it, but a few enquiries led to the discovery that we had helped ourselves."

Coming to the story of the brigade's own horses, Captain Lane said: "The fire station was then in the Triangle. When the Central Fire Station and the West Station were completed the Corporation responded very readily to our request to purchase suitable horses. That was just at the time when I took over command. The Chairman of the Horse Committee was the late Alderman Parsons, and he was a good judge of a horse. Under his guidance, and with the help of a veterinary surgeon we bought two pair of horses, one to be attached to the Central Station and one at the West.

"Three of these horses were in the fire service twelve or fourteen years. The pair at the Central Station were a magnificent couple of blacks. We call one 'Jim' after the late Captain Worth and the other 'Frost' after the then Mayor, Dr. G. Frost, who is now a member of the bench of magistrates.

"The pair at the West Station were called 'Billy' and 'Ernest.' I don't know who 'Billy' was named after, but 'Ernest' was after me—and as you will readily understand were an excellent pair."

With a twinkling eye, appreciative of the significance of his words, Captain Lane added: "It might be suitable to remark here that 'Ernest' was the steadier of the pair, but 'Billy' had the most go in him."

"LULU" AND "DODO."

"Later on," he continued, "we bought a very fine pair of grey mares from Tillings, who trained and supplied horses for the London Fire Brigade. These were named 'Lulu' and 'Dodo,' after relatives of the Chief Officers.



COACHMAN KILBY WITH "BILLY" AND "ERNEST."

After a while 'Frost' did not stand the work so well as 'Jim' and 'Lulu' also dropped out of the front line. So 'Jim' and 'Dodo' became associated and ran together for many years. They were a magnificent pair."

In reply to further questions, Captain Lane said that "Jim" was a great favourite with all the men, and particularly of the late Coachman Bailey, who was devoted to this black horse, and, what was more, the horse was fond of him. He had a number of tricks, and was sometimes not altogether gentlemanly. He was a splendid horse for the work and was absolutely ideal for a fire engine. He had pluck and courage for anything, and it was those qualities that made him beloved of all the firemen.

VERY KNOWING.

"Yes," said Captain Lane, "he knew perfectly well what was the matter when the firebell went. He knew what was wanted of him, and was alert and ready at once, but (and here the speaker's eye twinkled again) he would be dressed first. I mean he would be harnessed before 'Dodo.' Bailey knew this and humoured him. I remember on one occasion a substitute coachman was on duty and he rushed to collar up 'Dodo' before he went to 'Jim.' He raised a big noise and beat such a tattoo on the stall board with his fore feet that the coachman had to leave 'Dodo,' run round and fix up 'Jim,' and then return to the other. That satisfied him and he was quite all right."

JUST HANG ON!

"When these horses were younger," continued Captain Lane, "it was a sight to see these animals start off. 'Jim' and his mate would hurry to the pole and stand there perfectly quiet until the doors of the station were swung open. Then it was a leap or a bound forward, out and away, and all the coachman and the others had to do was to hang on. We never had to touch the horses with a whip, they were just as eager to get to the fire as the men on the engine were."

Reminded of the horse's tricks the Captain again smiled and said: "Although 'Jim' was a ticklish horse for a stranger to get near he was like a child in Bailey's hands. He would take his cap off when told to, would lift his heels and pick things out of his shoe with his lips, and would take a pull at Bailey's pipe.

DIED IN HARNESS.

"He was a dear old thing. Full of pluck and he died on service. Although he was six years old when he was bought he ran for about fifteen years and was in the engine at the end of that time. He seemed as if he was going on for all time, but one night going home from drill he fell down in his harness and died. That was the end of poor old 'Jim,' and when he had gone everybody felt they had lost a chum."

"The two at the West Station were trained by Coachman Kilby. He had taught them their job so well that when harnessed they would rush to their places at the pole, stand perfectly still whilst the sway bars were fixed and then bound away with a great dash. Although they were such a fine pair of spirited horses, and grand animals for service they were so quiet that the station fireman's children would play about their legs without the slightest danger of getting hurt. They seemed to know they had got to be careful. 'Billy' and 'Ernest' were absolute pets of all the men at the place, and Kilby was as fond of them as a father would be of his children."

"PADDY" FROM IRELAND.

When other animals got past service with the brigade they were drafted off for other Corporation work. There was one, perhaps the best class horse we ever had. He was called "Paddy," because he came from Ireland, He was much too aristocratic for us. He was a beauty and was mated with another of his kind. Those two were one of the finest pair of animals in the town. "Frost" was transferred to Winton and used in a one-horse vehicle attached to the depot in Maxwell-road. The only four that stuck the engine work well were "Frost," "Dodo," "Billy" and "Ernest."

Asked what happened if the regular drivers were absent, the Captain said: "We always managed. On one occasion the engine was turned out from the West Station and we had no driver on duty. One was fetched from the nearest livery stable. He was a little bit timid of the kind of stuff we had in horse flesh. On the return journey he would not drive and it fell to me to take the 'ribbons.'"

IN EMERGENCIES.

"I didn't know much about driving, but I got them back with the other fellow on the engine. None of us knew what was going to happen, but we managed to get safely back.

"So all the horses are gone," said Captain Lane in conclusion. "Well, we had many exciting rides behind them and they did good service for the town.