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Meet Helen Harrison, Region 7 (West Midlands) FBU Women's Rep



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# Tolpuddle Martyrs Festival



**'A fantastic experience. I'd love to do it again'**

**Laura Harrison reports from her very first festival**

This year's Tolpuddle Martyrs Festival wasn't just my first Tolpuddle but my first-ever festival.

I was a bit apprehensive about leaving my straighteners at home and the prospect of portaloos. But after I looked up the programme on the net, I was pretty excited. Managing to pack light, wellies included, I was all set to go.

There was so much going on it was a bit bewildering but in a good way. The open mic on Saturday was a constant backing track to the day's other activities, only surpassed occasionally by the drumming from the kids' field.

While some of the acts were better than others, the crowd was an enthusiastic one and everyone I saw was

warmly received.

The shopping was great as was the food and drink. My personal favourite was the fruit smoothies made with a bicycle-powered blender – healthy and eco-friendly.

The stalls and exhibits from various unions and organisations were really informative. There was a whole range of information available, some I was aware of already, like the Love Music Hate Racism campaign, and others I'd not come across before.

For me, the highlight was on the main stage on Sunday. Chumbawumba were fantastic,

**Enough people making a valid point with a unified voice can make a difference**

I'd not seen them live before and to be honest, I only really knew Tubthumping. Sadly they didn't play that one but the set was excellent, really well-received despite the rain



Migrant domestic workers dancing at the festival with Laura Harrison (insert)

# Editors' letter



Hello all and a very warm welcome to the winter edition of *Siren*. I hope that this edition finds you all well and continues to keep you informed of the work of the National Women's Committee.

Please take particular notice of the application form for the 2008 National Women's School being held on the 7-9 March 2008. We will not be sending out a separate form to your home address, so please tear off the application form, fill it out and forward to me at the address provided. The deadline for sending it back to me is 1 February 2008. If you need additional application forms then please contact your regional rep or download a copy from the NWC website at [www.nwcfbu.co.uk](http://www.nwcfbu.co.uk)

The FBU has put together a new membership pack which will be provided to new members when they are recruited into the FBU. This pack contains a leaflet written by the National Women's Committee which

The women's school is on 7-9 March 2008 – tear off and fill in the application form and send it to me

details the role of the committee within the FBU and how it can support and advise members. Please see NWC website for more details.

As you may or may not be aware, Vicky Knight (NWC EC member) who usually edits *Siren* with me is poorly at the moment and so is currently on long term sick. The National Women's Committee miss Vicky very much and we wish her well and look forward to her return when she is ready.

Due to Vicky's absence the NWC has re-shaped itself temporarily. Dona Feltham has taken on the role of acting EC member and Helen Harrison is acting Chair for the committee. Well done to both of them for stepping up and taking on these demanding roles.

So please enjoy your read and with the forthcoming AGM – and the many FBU women's meetings being held up and down the country, I hope to see you around soon.

**Kerry Baigent**  
Secretary, National Women's Committee

still happening 200 years later. The sense that enough people making a valid point with a unified voice can really make a difference was clear.

But the fact that sometimes that voice is not only ignored but actively oppressed was also there. A key quotation: "Governments can and do ignore the needs of the unrepresented"\* refers to the Chartist campaign for male suffrage in the nineteenth century.

If there is one thing I took away from Tolpuddle, it is that this point is still relevant today, but that as long as there are people prepared to represent the unrepresented and be a determined force for change then ignorance is not an option.

→ Laura Harrison is the daughter of Helen Harrison, R7 women's rep

→ \* Paula Bartley, *The Changing Role of Women 1815-1914*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1996, Pg 109

and it set up the rest of the afternoon.

The speakers were interesting, especially the trade unionist from Australia and the lady called Paulina from Goa who spoke about the plight of migrant domestic workers.

Her account of what she has endured since coming to work in Britain was shocking, moving and above all thought-provoking. It added a real sense of purpose to the afternoon and this was underlined by Tony Benn who spoke next.

The whole weekend was a fantastic experience and I would love to do it again. It seemed to underpin the sense of purpose within a union.

As well as marking the significance of the Tolpuddle Martyrs, it also made me think about the similar struggles

# CAMPAIGN NEWS

## UK's longest serving woman firefighter retires

**SUE BATTEN**

**S**ue Batten, the longest-serving woman firefighter in the UK, retired on the 28 September 2007 after 25 years service. Joining the London Fire Brigade and becoming a firefighter in September 1982, Sue underestimated the impact her application would have on the traditionally male occupation.

Until she joined there had been no operational 'firewomen' in the London



Fire Brigade since the World War II so, completely unintentionally, she became the first. Sue's ambition was only to become a firefighter, not to be the first woman. Nevertheless, Sue handled the ensuing furore and attention admirably.

Sue left London for Avon Fire and Rescue Service in 1993 – their gain and London's loss – to be closer to her family.

She worked at Bristol Temple for 14 years until she retired.

Sue, who is a remarkable but

modest woman, remained a firefighter for her entire career and has, whether she likes it or not, become a legend in her lifetime.

She continued to stay in touch with the women of the LFB and was a stalwart in her support of other women. Gone but never forgotten. Wishing her a very long and happy retirement.

Sian Griffiths, Chair, London women's committee

Sue Batten, accompanied by work colleagues, receiving her 25 year badge from Avon brigade secretary Chris Jackson

## In short

◆ After some initial distribution issues, most women members should have received a copy of the questionnaire sent by the ICM polling organisation for its survey of current and former firefighters. The survey is now closed and initial details show that the number of women who took part is high enough to build a picture of experiences. Over the next few months ICM will report the findings to the Department for Communities and Local Government. *Siren* will keep members updated.

MARTIN JENKINSON



◆ Congratulations to Dona Feltham (above, speaking at the TUC) who has been re-elected for the third term as the NWC chair – well done Dona. Also, congratulations to Staci Leach – the Region 6 (East Midlands) NWC official – and her husband John on the birth of their third child Lily Rose. And to Emma Davis – Region 9 (East Anglia) NWC Official – on her marriage to Matt in June.

## Facilities, maternity policies and uniform to headline debates

**WOMEN'S AGM 2007**

**T**he NWC is holding its annual general meeting (AGM) for representatives of women members on 20 November at Wortley Hall near Sheffield.

Regional women's committees have submitted many resolutions which are expected to lead to lively debate. For more visit [www.nwcfbu.co.uk](http://www.nwcfbu.co.uk).

It will come as no surprise to most FBU members that resolutions

focus on good female-fit uniform, workplace facilities and maternity policies, alongside some important international issues such as the Dignity Period campaign and the campaign against the trafficking of women.

With more than 40 women attending the AGM this year we know the debates will be strong and the event will be enjoyable for all.

Three resolutions from the AGM will be chosen by the National Women's Committee to propose to the full FBU Annual Conference in 2008.

## FBU model policy soon to be launched

**MATERNITY**

**T**he FBU model maternity policy has now been rewritten by the National Women's Committee, taking into account the legislative changes that came into force in April 2007. The Union's Fairness at Work committee have made their amendments and the policy is currently with the FBU solicitors to check for accuracy. John McGhee, National Officer with the remit for equalities, will be submitting the policy to the Executive Council for their consid-

eration and endorsement. The NWC hope that this document will help officials to negotiate strong policies in their fire and rescue service.

Please note that statutory maternity pay has been extended to 39 weeks, six weeks at 90% of normal pay and 33 weeks at £112.75 (2007/08). However; currently all Grey Book employees are entitled to six weeks at 90% and a further 12 weeks at half pay topped up by SMP. Some FRS' offer better contractual rights than the Grey Book, so please check your policy for more details.

**Desperately seeking photos of women firefighters at work:** if you have recently been pictured in your local paper or other publication and would be happy for the photo to be reproduced in *Siren*, please email [kerry.baigent@fbu.org.uk](mailto:kerry.baigent@fbu.org.uk) with the name of the newspaper/publication and approximate date of publication.



Sophie, the female mannekin

# Project for made-to-fit PPE rolls on

## INTEGRATED CLOTHING PROJECT

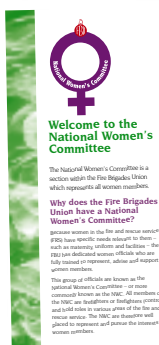
**B**ristol Uniforms has won the contract for the Integrated Clothing Project (ICP). There are 28 male and female sizes but Bristol Uniforms will individually measure if there is a need. There has been no formal agreement on the colour scheme for firefighting PPE or undress uniform, but there are two choices of colour schemes.

The PPE will be grey front and back with red shoulders and red sleeves or gold/fawn colour. The leather boots will be slip on and lace up with different types of gloves for

USAR and firefighting. Brigades will decide on helmet colour. There is an alternative to leather boots and gloves. The undress uniform includes red t-shirts, light grey shirts, dark grey trousers – with an additional maternity option.

All uniform has been tested and conforms to all the necessary regulations. Dirty PPE will be laundered on a weekly basis, even if the PPE has been contaminated. Bristol Uniforms will also inspect kit for damage. All the kit is bar coded for brigade and individual name and all this information is kept and used when PPE is condemned or repaired.

The Union has produced new materials explaining the benefits of being a member of the FBU



### What does the committee do for women FBU members?

**Offers confidential advice and support**  
We guarantee that if you contact us for advice and support you will remain in control. Requests will only be made with your agreement. We will only discuss your affairs with you or someone you trust unless you instruct otherwise.

**Provides dedicated women's meetings**  
It can be very difficult for women to have an hour each week to discuss their concerns as a majority of us are predominantly male. Because the FBU is committed to representing all its members, the NWC organises local women's meetings where you can discuss your views with each other in a comfortable environment. The NWC can also take these issues forward and represent you.

**Advices support on workplace facilities**  
Women in many jobs and sectors women off do not have their own facilities. Often just shared space. They are usually unsuitable and the NWC is leading the campaign for toilets and showers for all – women and men.

**Provides antenatal opportunities**  
Women often work in isolation in the fire and rescue sector. It can be good to have contact with other women about the same job role. If you are pregnant, we have a dedicated antenatal support group. We have a dedicated antenatal support group. We have a dedicated antenatal support group. We have a dedicated antenatal support group.

### Close advice about uniforms and PPE

The NWC has raised the issue of women's uniform with management across the UK. Women are still being made to wear clothes designed for men – and often ill-fitting. The NWC has been successful in getting management to be prepared to take action to fit the size of female firefighters. It is essential for women to be able to work in safety. It is essential for women to be able to work in safety. It is essential for women to be able to work in safety.

**Provides antenatal opportunities**  
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**Supports you through difficult times at work**  
Organising, leading and managing will give you the fire and rescue sector. If it happens to you, the FBU has made sure that you can get the support you need. We have a dedicated support group. We have a dedicated support group. We have a dedicated support group.

**Produces 'Sirens' – the FBU women's magazine**  
Sirens magazine is published quarterly to tell women members about all that we are doing for you. It is a free magazine. It is a free magazine. It is a free magazine. It is a free magazine.



## NATIONAL WOMEN'S COMMITTEE

**Our aim is a women's committee in every region**

At the end of 2006 the NWC set itself the task of organising women's meetings in 2007 in regions that did not have an active FBU women's committee.

The first region tackled was the South West and, as could be seen from the last edition of *Siren*, a fully functioning and strong women's committee was born following several brigade meetings held across the region.

Pauline Layhe is now in post as the FBU women's official for the region and is doing a wonderful job.

In Scotland, Denise Christie took over as the Scottish women's secretary and Julie Small has taken on the role of chair. Meetings are taking place up and down Scotland and women are getting more involved. Scotland has over 350 women FBU members, and with Denise and Julie at the helm the committee is growing weekly.

The Yorkshire region is currently working with the NWC to organise women's meetings across the region. The FBU is very keen to get the women's committee up and running in the region to give women the opportunity to get together with other women and talk about their issues in an encouraging and comfortable environment.

At press time, two meetings had been held. One in West Yorkshire and one in Humberside. Both meetings were really positive and saw women attending to find out more about what the NWC is for and how it can benefit them.

Information on forthcoming meetings can be found on the NWC website at [www.nwcfbu.co.uk](http://www.nwcfbu.co.uk). Go to women members calendar for dates and locations of meetings.

If you are from an area that does not seem to be holding FBU women's meetings, then please get in touch with Kerry Baigent so together we can organise a meeting in your area.

[www.nwcfbu.co.uk](http://www.nwcfbu.co.uk)

Sisters doing it...

## Contacts

### NATIONAL WOMEN'S COMMITTEE OFFICIALS

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#### NWC Region 11 (South East)

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#### NWC Region 12 (Southern)

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#### NWC Region 13 (South West)

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**Ring the FBU free confidential stress and support hotline**  
**0800 783 4778**

**FBU FREEPHONE LEGAL ADVICE LINE**  
**0808 100 6061**

The line provides advice for **personal injury, family law, wills, conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues.** For disciplinary and employment-related queries contact your local FBU representative.



**THOMPSONS**  
SOLICITORS



### HELEN HARRISON WEST MIDLANDS\* WOMEN'S REP

I think I can safely say that I wasn't "born to be" a union rep. Although it has never been discussed, I think my parents might have voted for the "other side" and they had never been in a union as they were self employed.

I didn't really "get it" in the early days of the committee. For a start, I was conned into standing for it. One of the brigade officials said "it wouldn't take up much time". So when I went to the first meeting, I wasn't surprised to find that I was totally out of my depth and that there would actually be quite a lot of work.

I did feel really welcome though. They were a great bunch of women and good fun (I thought they would all be very serious). I can remember Vicky, particularly, being friendly

**I've met some exceptional and truly inspirational women through the committee, some of whom have become great friends**

and encouraging towards us, the new faces!

I was still at the stage where I was having trouble fending off the "why do you get your own group – where is the one for white men" stuff because I didn't really think I knew! It didn't take long. I had to start learning and it was a steep curve! I was worried that sooner or later one of these women was going to ask me a question and I would be found out.

**That we have a steady stream of new faces at our meetings and schools and that women return to our school year after year says it all**

I needn't have worried, quite soon I realised that in the committee women worked together and supported each other. And it was ok not to know everything! It's a novel concept and I'm not sure it will catch on!

That was 1999. I'm still here. Why? Well, because when someone made the decision to create and integrate a committee of women, to work for women members as part of the FBU, they "did a very good thing". The very fact that our reps are representing so many women, being consulted by so many women, that we have a steady stream of new faces at our meetings and schools and that women return to our school year after year says it all.

For me, it has been an education, long hours of hard work, the emotional high and lows that representing members inevitably brings but new knowledge and new ways to move forward. I even use some of this stuff in my day job!

Most of all I've met some exceptional and truly inspirational women through the committee, some of whom have become great friends.

I didn't know what I was getting into, but I am sure glad I did!

\*Region 7

**I'm a rep**



WORTLEY HALL 7-9 March 2008

## APPLICATION FORM

**PLEASE RETURN BY 1 FEBRUARY 2008 to:**

**KERRY BAIGENT, FIRE BRIGADES UNION, 158 MULLER ROAD, HORFIELD, BRISTOL, BS7 9RE**

**ANY QUERIES CALL KERRY ON 07736 818 036**

SURNAME \_\_\_\_\_ FIRST NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

POST CODE \_\_\_\_\_

TEL NO \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

BRIGADE \_\_\_\_\_ BRANCH \_\_\_\_\_

HAVE YOU EVER HELD A POSITION IN THE UNION? \_\_\_\_\_ If yes give details \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

HAVE YOU ATTENDED A WOMEN'S SCHOOL BEFORE? \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, how many times? \_\_\_\_\_

DO YOU REQUIRE CRECHE FACILITIES \*YES / NO \_\_\_\_\_ If yes please fill in form overleaf

### FOR BEDROOM ALLOCATION

ARE YOU A SMOKER / NON SMOKER?

IS THERE ANY SPECIAL INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR NEEDS THAT YOU FEEL WE SHOULD KNOW? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

APPLICANTS SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

# Fire Brigades Union – Women’s School

7–9 March 2008



## CHILD DETAILS – TO BE FILLED IN BY CHILD AND CARER

If you need child care please return your completed form as soon as possible so we are able to let you know if space is still available.

What is your name? \_\_\_\_\_

How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_

Who is bringing you to the school? (please give full name) \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like to play in the crèche during the evening as well as the day? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you allergic to anything or do you need any medication? \_\_\_\_\_

What games do you like to play inside and outside? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have a favourite story book? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your favourite video? \_\_\_\_\_

Is there anything else you would like us to know about you so that we can look after you the best we

possibly can? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Carer please sign here – Thanks \_\_\_\_\_