



Harthill Auxiliary Fire Service 1939 to 1948

Owing to the possibility of a war with Germany, and as a result of the Civil Defence Act 1937, which enabled local authorities to raise an Auxiliary Fire Service the AFS came into being. The new volunteers attended weekly training classes with regular Firemen as instructors, and the training and equipping of AFS began to advance rapidly.

The anticipation of war finally became a reality when Neville Chamberlain, the Prime Minister, read out the Declaration of War with Germany at 11.15am on September 3, 1939, 15 minutes after it was delivered by the British Ambassador in Berlin to the German Government. On the outbreak of war in 1939 the Auxiliary Fire Service was embodied in the County's ARP structure, and AFS volunteers were posted to the newly created temporary Fire Stations.



Some members of Harthill Auxiliary Fire Service

Back row left to right: George Widdison, Charles Widdison, Cecil Cape, Bill Coup,
John Swain, Bert Peat, Eric Oakton, Harry Hartley.

Font row left to right: Harold Sampson, Gilbert Edgington, Len Richardson, Ernest Lancashire, Jarvis Guest, Len Laking, George Matthews

Recorded as being members of Harthill Auxiliary Fire Service:

- George Widdison
- Charles Widdison (Coal Hewer)
- Cecil Cape (Colliery Surface Labourer)
- William Coupe (Coal Hewer)
- John Gilbert Swain (Underground Stone Ripper)
- Bertie Peat (Colliery Haulage Hand)
- Albert Eric Oakton (Licensee – Beer, Wines and Spirits)
- Harry Hartley (Dairyman)
- Harold Sampson (Colliery Hewer)
- Gilbert Edgington (Colliery Haulage Hand)
- Leonard Richardson (Coal Hewer)
- Ernest Lancashire (Grocer and Beer Retailer)
- Jarvis Guest (Colliery Banksman)
- Leonard Laking (Underground Stone Ripper)
- George Matthews (Coal Hewer)
- Frederick Smith (Photographer)
- William Martin (Colliery Surface Worker)
- George Irving Whitlam (Underground Coal Getter)
- Kirkby Rowland (Motor Driver)
- Charles Matthews (Coal Hewer)
- James Wainscoat (Underground Stone Ripper)
- Kenneth King (Colliery Bath Attendant)
- Robert Jenkinson (Farmer)
- William Stanley (Dairy Farmer)

On the night of the 12th, and the morning of the 13th December 1940, the Luftwaffe bombed Sheffield. A large number of the bombers passed over Harthill on the way in to Sheffield, and the people of Harthill could see flashes of the bursting bombs and the fires burning in the city eleven miles away.

In Sheffield the local fire service was overwhelmed and six firemen were killed. Outside help was requested, and West Riding fire pumps arrived from Mexborough, Wortley, Hoyland, Kiveton Park, Thorne, Wath, Cudworth, Pudsey, Morley, Spenborough, Pontefract, Shipley, Bingley, Keighley, Brighouse, Elland, Holmfirth, Castleford, Mirfield and Ossett. The outside help totalled 70 fire pumps and 522 men. Members of Harthill AFS would undoubtedly have been part of this assistance.

As a result of the raid 566 people were recorded as having died, and 1,817 people were injured. 2,849 houses were destroyed, 2,990 badly damaged and 71,785 slightly damaged. Eight schools were destroyed, and 106 damaged. 1,218 business premises were destroyed, and 2,255 were damaged. Eighteen churches including the Valley Road Mission were destroyed and 90 damaged. 206 water mains were broken, 8 gas holders destroyed, 50 electric substations and 850 street lamps destroyed. 31 trams and 22 buses were wrecked.

The full story is available online at [The History of Sheffield Fire Brigade \(sfbhistory.uk\)](http://TheHistoryofSheffieldFireBrigade.sfbhistory.uk)

Later on in the war, after being alerted to a fire on Loscar, by Mr Wilson Wilks. The Harthill fire tender was dive bombed on the way to the incident, and the crew had to take cover in a hedge bottom.