

Crypt Plaque Unveil

Wednesday 27th March 2019

Terry Sutton

The night of March 27th 1977: I remember it well. As a result of an early tip-off, I was the only reporter on the scene as fire ripped through the well-known Crypt Restaurant. I watched as bodies were removed from the charred, smouldering debris.

On March 27th 2019, the 42nd anniversary of the disaster, nearly 200 Dover people and firefighters returned to the ugly remains of The Crypt in Bench Street for a ceremony to remember the seven, including a fireman, who died as a result of the blaze that terrible night.

Highlight of the ceremony was the unveiling of a plaque carrying the names of those died including Leading Fireman John Sharp who gave his life trying to save the others. The plaque, on the wall of the A20 underpass, was unveiled by the fireman's widow, Mrs Glenda Sharp.

The ceremony, attended by more than thirty Kent Fire and Rescue firefighters, serving and retired, was the initiative of town councillor Graham Wanstall, whose efforts resulted in the formation of a support group



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including retired firemen.

He recalled the names of those who died that terrible night in March 1977: Leading Fireman John Sharp (31), Marion Clay (32), Shane Clay (6), 18 month old Charlotte Clay, Anita Lee (19), Janusia Ashton (7) and 43-year-old Phyllis Conlon, her grandmother.

Fire service officer Sean Bone-Knell, on behalf of the Kent fire and rescue service, spoke of Mr Sharp's bravery, while retired fireman James Wraight recited the Fireman's Prayer. Dover's mayor Sue Jones was among those in the large congregation, which included relatives of those who died in the fire.

Father Jeff Cridland of St Paul's RC church led prayers for those who died that night. It was said six of the seven were Roman Catholics.

The scene of the commemorative ceremony once more reminded everyone of the terrible state of the site where The Crypt once stood. Forty-two years after the disaster vegetation and litter still covers charred wooden frames, while scaffolding covers a neighbouring wall; all this in Dover's main street.

Mr Wanstall and his plaque organising committee would be delighted to see the site turned into a commemorative garden.

The Dover Society pays tribute to the initiative of Mr Wanstall in organising this event. A proud Dovorian, he has campaigned for a number of issues, not always with success. When others doubt him in the future he can always point to the success of organising this event.