

Readers Letters



October Issue

Excellent Magazine Leigh, just read it.

Particularly liked the Editorial on page three, with which I entirely agree.

Kind Regards

Mike Ponsonby

London Fire Brigade bosses feel the heat

Now that a report from stage one of the Grenfell Inquiry has been published, the public can see for the first time that criticism levelled at the commissioner and senior officers of London Fire Brigade for their gross negligence and incompetence was fully justified, in that they were responsible for the deaths of all those residents who were overcome in their flats by smoke and fumes.

Without wishing to repeat any of the statements I made in an article in your magazine of August/September 2017, the decision by fire brigade bosses to instruct residents to remain in their flats at a time when all of them could have escaped in safety, must amount to criminal negligence and by any interpretation the Inquiry Report confirms this situation.

Aerial platforms were available in the London area at the time of the fire and as long ago as 2002, faced by a national Fire Brigade strike over pay, the Home Office called me when I was Managing Director of IPAF asking for help in providing a list of companies, with at least one in each county where possible, so that any Fire Brigade could hire in aerial platforms to assist the army and air force who were manning Green Goddess fire engines, but were not allowed to use Fire Brigade owned aerial platforms due to their lack of expertise in the operation of such equipment.

Within 48 hours we had provided the Home Office with a list of platform rental companies owning platforms at that time up to heights of 100 metres with names and 24 hour telephone numbers and contact details. This information was to be circulated by the Home Office to every fire brigade in the UK and I understand from subsequent reports that facilities were provided by commercial hire companies on a number of occasions where aerial platforms were needed to assist the military. I know for certain that this information gave the government the confidence to resist the strike and finally bring it to an end in 2003 with an agreed pay offer. Although that may have been 16 years ago, one would assume that this information was still available in all fire brigade control rooms, and any fire brigade with a chief officer with a true sense of responsibility could easily have updated that information and made themselves aware of the availability of large platforms from rental companies around the UK.

It is a fact that when the Grenfell Tower burned, there were at least four platforms within the London area which, in an emergency such as this, could have evacuated 150 people within one hour, assuming the platform had been

ordered as soon as the fire broke out. As we know from London Fire Brigade records, the first platform arrived at the scene 31 minutes after the first call was received and that platform, had it been positioned in the right place, might have been able to evacuate people from the 11th floor had it

arrived with the first turn out. The decision to repeatedly tell residents to stay put in their flats was about the worst piece of advice that could have been given as, had the flats been evacuated as soon as the fire fighters actually went in, it is likely that everybody in the building could have been saved, and that is the primary purpose of the existence of every fire brigade..... to save human life!

Suggestions of the use of large aerial platforms have been dismissed by London Fire Brigade's officers on the basis that they are not sufficiently manoeuvrable to have been of help in these circumstances, given that they have to travel through the streets of London. That is nonsense.....some of these platforms are mounted on standard commercial chassis and are as capable of negotiating London's streets and traffic as are the thousands of heavy commercial vehicles which travel through London every day.

Whilst I no longer have any involvement or interest in any fire appliance manufacturers' business, I have in the past tried to sell the idea of large platforms to London Fire Brigade and have always met with a wall of silence and rejection on the grounds of need, cost and unsuitability for the London streets.

London Fire Brigade used to be the world's leading firefighting establishment and led the world for many decades, and many fire chiefs from around the world obtained their basic training with the London Fire Brigade. Oh, how the mighty have fallen. Is the true reason for London Fire Brigade's resistance to moving with the times that its ability to purchase the appropriate equipment is



A Bronto 112m alongside the 86 metre 28 storey Cirrus building in Helsinki

negated by the Home Office, or is it really a case of pure ignorance, and a “we know best” attitude?

It is high time for the government to wake up to the fact that they are putting people’s lives at risk in an attitude of blind ignorance, fuelled by their determination to deprive the investment of the very funds that, had they been made available at the appropriate time, would have avoided unnecessary loss of life at the Grenfell Tower.

Lest there be any scepticism amongst those who are not familiar with firefighting equipment and aerial platforms, the tragedy in Carlisle earlier this week, where a man was trapped upside down hanging from a ladder on the side of Dixons Chimney 88 metres from the ground, was a classic example of a high level rescue by a 90 metre aerial platform. Sadly, the man died but that death could have been avoided if Cumbria fire brigade headquarters had maintained up to date records of where such platforms could be found in an emergency. This one had to travel from Glasgow, but had it been ordered to the scene when the man was first discovered at 02:30 AM it could obviously have saved his life.

Sad as this incident was, the photographs from the scene clearly demonstrate that even when not working at full height, it was still able to rescue this man in the middle of an ancient city with narrow streets. What do we have to do to ensure that every fire chief in the UK makes his brigade fully aware of where such platforms can be hired at short notice and that they are used so widely in industry? Why cannot the fire brigade pocket their pride and recognise that rental companies in the UK, with such machines in their fleets would be only too pleased to provide assistance at any time?

A 90m Bronto from Height for Hire helps with an 88 metre rescue/recovery



With the lessons learned from Grenfell and this sad incident in Carlisle, would it now make sense for the Home Office to purchase four or five 100 metre platforms and station them in centres such as London, Birmingham, Liverpool or Manchester, Hull, and Glasgow or Edinburgh. The likely cost for five such machines would be around £6 million and if there were crews trained in the five areas where the machines were stationed, they could then readily be diverted to situations where high level rescue or firefighting was required. The cost could be maintained at the Home Office, thus relieving any individual fire brigade of the

capital cost. The returns achievable from the availability of such machines in reduced fire costs and human lives saved, would surely more than justify such a relatively small investment. Surely this expenditure could be far more readily justified than the vast sums recently expended on advertisements for Boris Johnston’s Brexit on 31st October.

One final comment which I feel needs to be stressed is that no blame should be attached to the brave members of

the brigade who at great risk to themselves went into the Tower to try and rescue as many occupants as possible once the Brigade’s high command finally realised the folly of their ways and gave the order to get the residents out. These many men and women members of the brigade worked themselves to exhaustion in a frantic bid to get everyone out, ignoring risks to themselves and we should all be proud of what these people did achieve, despite the appalling loss of life which could so readily have been avoided if the commissioner and her senior officers had comprehended the situation sooner.

No fire brigade should ever be placed in this position again, where chief and senior officers can get away with refusing to keep up to date with equipment development and availability that could avoid such loss of life. I was always under the impression that this was the remit of Her Majesty’s Inspector of Fire Brigades.

There is an old saying the “bad workmen blame their tools”, but if you do not give the correct tools to the good workmen, how can they be expected to do the job?

This level of incompetence by the command structure of London Fire Brigade must never be allowed to recur and when we have a new government in place, surely one of its first tasks should be to appoint people with serious experience of firefighting, on the ground in major cities, to ensure that funds are made available for special equipment to enable firemen to perform the job they will have in the knowledge that they are well equipped to do it. These steps should be extended to a detailed examination of the depth of knowledge available to planning authorities to make sure buildings like Grenfell Tower, totally ill equipped to cope with serious fires, can no longer be inflicted on the innocent victims who trusted the authorities that allowed such buildings to be erected in the first place.

It is rumoured that London Fire Brigade have now ordered two 60 metre firefighting platforms which, in the light of Grenfell Tower are too little, too late.

Paul Adorian

Windermere Cumbria LA23 1JQ

Mr Adorian makes a very valid point, Grenfell Tower was 67 metres, the roof/top floor was well within reach of a 90 metre platform, perhaps even a 70 metre unit some of which would almost certainly have been in the area at the time. Machines of 90 metres or more have been available for more than 18 years. Most UK fire departments receive a copy of Cranes & Access magazine, although an increasing number of regional services have stopped taking it, stating that “it is no longer required” and yet if they had consulted the September issue, they could have quickly seen which UK rental companies operate truck mounted platforms of 70 to 90 metres or more. The same would have applied to the Carlisle rescue, it took the fire department 12 hours or so to organise a platform, and only after putting out an appeal of the local and national radio! By the time the platform arrived the man Robert Longcake, 53, had sadly succumbed to hypothermia and cerebral swelling.

Editor

Watch out for thieves

Dear Leigh,

I would like to bring to your attention the escalating incidents of batteries being stolen from powered access machines whilst on hire to our customers. We have had another eight batteries removed from an HR21 during the night in which the culprits had to scale locked gates and lift the batteries over a high fence. The cost alone for the batteries is £1,850 excluding the inconvenience to ourselves and our customer and the costs of replacing the batteries with the engineer's time.

This incident is not isolated as in the past year we have had batteries stolen from machines in our depot (Genie 30/20 and Nifty HR12). We have also had batteries stolen from three 26ft Skyjacks in Wales, a 19ft in Cambridge and a HR17 in Northampton. The disruption to our business is significant and customers are increasing disputing the terms and conditions of hire, resulting in court cases and the loss of customers.

Speaking to the battery supplier (Platinum International) who replaced the HR21 batteries, they informed us that they are replacing a high proportion of batteries due to theft within our

We also received the following letter:

Hi Leigh,

It is not just Battery Theft that's on the increase, its anything without a Serial Number on it. For example....

1. Batteries are normally stolen by the pair as are tyres, but worse than that is that thieves cut through battery cables or worse still, also steal the bridging cable - as it is copper.
2. Diesel fuel is major target for thieves at circa £5.50 per gallon, so much so that we no longer fit Locking Fuel Caps, because they now punch a Hole through alloy fuel tanks, making it a £1,000+ repair cost, plus the fuel cost.
3. Thieving is on the increase, with certain types of machines clearly targeted. So much that other equipment will be moved out the way to get to the target machine such mini-diggers etc.

Motorway Service Areas are good pickings for thieves,

region. I am aware of other hire companies experiencing the same problems as ourselves and wonder how widespread this problem is.

The government has tightened up the procedure for the disposal of scrap, however it is obvious that the criminals are disposing of these batteries somewhere! With a high scrap value for lead and an easy buck to be made for certain groups who deal in scrap.

It seems that the situation will only get worse until the problem is addressed by bringing it to the attention of the Police and visiting some of these scrap yards, and manufacturers making it much more difficult to remove the batteries from machines.

Regards

Tim Williams

Access Service and Repair Ltd

We raised this in an article online introducing a poll to see how widespread the issue is. As we go to press the online poll question 'Has your company had batteries stolen from a machine in the past year or two?' had the following responses:

Yes occasionally - 34%

No - 28%

Yes frequently - 37%

with one client of mine having a complete xenon headlamp stolen overnight including the fitting screws and bulbs. Pre-Christmas is the worst time of year, with car boot sales and eBay being the best 'fencing operation' ever known on which thieves can easily sell stolen machines and/or components.

Unemployment, drug abuse and five week delays in payment of Universal Credit is part of the problem, as many turn to petty theft as a way of supplementing declining incomes.

Thank you for raising this subject.

Kind Regards

Mike Ponsonby



Sean Meade

Patrick Joseph 'Sean' Meade 1941-2019

Irish crane and heavy haulage industry pioneer Sean Meade, founder of Sean Meade & Sons, Rathcoole, Co Dublin, passed away suddenly on October 21st, he was 78.

Sean Meade spent his entire career working with cranes, and established the company that bears his full name in 1983, but it traces its history - along with sister company Meade Crane Hire - back to 1953, when Paddy Meade established Irish Tank and Pipeline, which became Meade Plant in 1975, this was followed by both Sean Meade & Sons and Meade Crane hire.

The companies provide a wide range of crane and lifting services, along with heavy transport, rigging and machinery installation.



The early Days Meade at the controls of a crane.

Ronald 'Ronnie' G. Stuart 1934 - 2019

Ronnie Stuart one of the founding fathers of the modern UK crane hire industry, rental industry veteran, owner and senior manager passed away on Saturday 16th November, having suffered several years of poor health, he was 85.

Ronnie Stuart began his career in 1956 as a graduate engineer with Lincoln-based crane manufacturer Ruston.

He left the business in 1961 in order to establish his own company - R G Stuart (plant) - in partnership with his brother Kenneth. Based in Glasgow, the company grew quickly soon becoming the leading mobile crane rental company in the region and across Scotland.

In 1968 he agreed to merge the company with Hewden Plant Hire which Matthew Goodwin (later Sir Matthew) and Frank Jamieson had established in 1962. Their focus however was on the rental of earthmoving equipment. The merged company became Hewden Stuart and was floated on the stock market, helping fund a series of acquisitions of both general equipment rental and specialist businesses, including aerial lift rental company Seymour plant and Mobilift. In those days the company was widely regarded as one of the best managed and most financially stable rental groups the UK, often being the most profitable. In 1982 he was appointed president of the Construction Plant hire Association (CPA).

Stuart stepped down as deputy chairman of the company in the mid 1990s, becoming a non-executive director, finally retired from the business in 1998.



Ronnie Stuart
as CPA president
in 1982

The following letter was received

Dear Leigh,

It is with great sadness that the passing of Ronnie Stuart was announced on Saturday 16 November. Ronnie was aged 85 and has suffered deteriorating health over recent years. Ronnie was, together with the Sparrow brothers, a founder of the UK crane hire industry that we know today.

After working for Ruston at Lincoln as a graduate engineer he established R G Stuart (plant) Ltd together with his brother Kenneth. RGS became the preeminent Scottish crane hire company based in Glasgow.

In 1968 he merged his company with Hewden Plant Hire which had been developed during the 1960's as a major earthmoving hire business by Sir Matthew Goodwin and Frank Jamieson. The merged company, Hewden Stuart was floated on the stock market and many acquisitions ensued resulting in HS being widely regarded as the best managed and most financially stable plant hire group in the UK.

I know it was with great sadness and regret that Ronnie witnessed from afar the demise of Hewden Stuart in 2016, following years of financial and strategic mismanagement since ceasing to be a public company in 2001.

Ronnie retired totally from HS in 1998 having served as a non-executive director after his earlier retirement as deputy chairman. During his retirement he concentrated on his hobbies including music (he was a very accomplished pianist) and clockmaking.

Whether it be his life as a businessman, CPA president/ chairman, private pilot or yachtsman, his meticulous attention to detail reflected his academic and engineering background.

He was also a devoted family man and is survived by his wife Maureen and family.

Ray Ledger

Gilles Marchand R.I.P

French crane veteran Gilles Marchand passed away on Tuesday 5th November following a five year battle with cancer.

With more than 45 years in the crane market, he first came to prominence as sales manager with Coles France, becoming assistant general manager in the early 1980s. Coles France was acquired by Grove in 1985 and he added the Grove Manlift aerial work platform to his portfolio. Under Grove ownership he took an increasingly significant role within the company as it became Grove Coles France, Grove France and then Manitowoc. When managing director André Faes retired, Marchand naturally took over as president of the company. After retiring from Manitowoc in 2007 he decided that he missed the crane industry and in 2009 he started up his own used crane business



travel, food wine ... he enjoyed life to the full and was very active in the Île de Noirmoutier yacht club where he was a vice president until his illness prohibited it.

Gilles Marchand was a true gentleman and total professional, and a great man in his own quiet and self-deprecating way. Consistent, thoughtful and a sheer pleasure to spend time with. The industry has lost one of the good guys. Our thoughts go out to his wife Liz and family.

called Standup. However he had more than enough hobbies and passions, in particular sailing, motorbikes, classic cars,

The following comments have been posted on Vertikal.net:

Very sad news, Gilles and I did a lot of business together on behalf of Grove Coles France "back in the day", and he was great company and a pleasure to spend time with. My sincere condolences to his family. *Repose en paix Gilles.*

Paul Richards

Great colleague and a true Gentleman. I am grateful to know him.

R.I.P. Gabi

Gabi

Sad news. A true crane guy and professional. Sail on Gilles, R.I.P.

Anon

RIP Gilles, a true gentleman and a really nice guy. A real giant of the crane industry...

Steve Barnett

It was always a pleasure to spend time with Gilles. He really was one of the good guys and will be missed.

Ian James

It's so sad to read this, great guy, good friend and colleague. Rest in Peace Gilles.

Bill Green