

Book traces Mundaring volunteer BFB history

When researching his latest publication, historian and author Dr Ian Duckham found that two common threads were the pride volunteer firefighters had in their brigades, and their keen desire to protect the local community.

Ian said the major theme that emerged when compiling *All fired up: a history of the Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades in the Shire of Mundaring 1903-2010*, was the dedication, enthusiasm, innovation, skill and community spirit of the volunteers.

"The strong commitment of volunteer firefighters had a significant impact in keeping the Shire of Mundaring largely free of major disasters for 107 years," he said.

Ian particularly enjoyed the writing phase, moulding raw data into a readable factual history, as well as talking to people and discovering more about the topic.

He saw the main challenges as a lack of data on various brigades, collecting photographs, and integrating all the brigade stories plus the Shire and community involvement into a unified narrative.

Although the first formally organised volunteer bush fire brigade in the Shire started in 1941, ad hoc volunteer firefighting was happening from 1903.

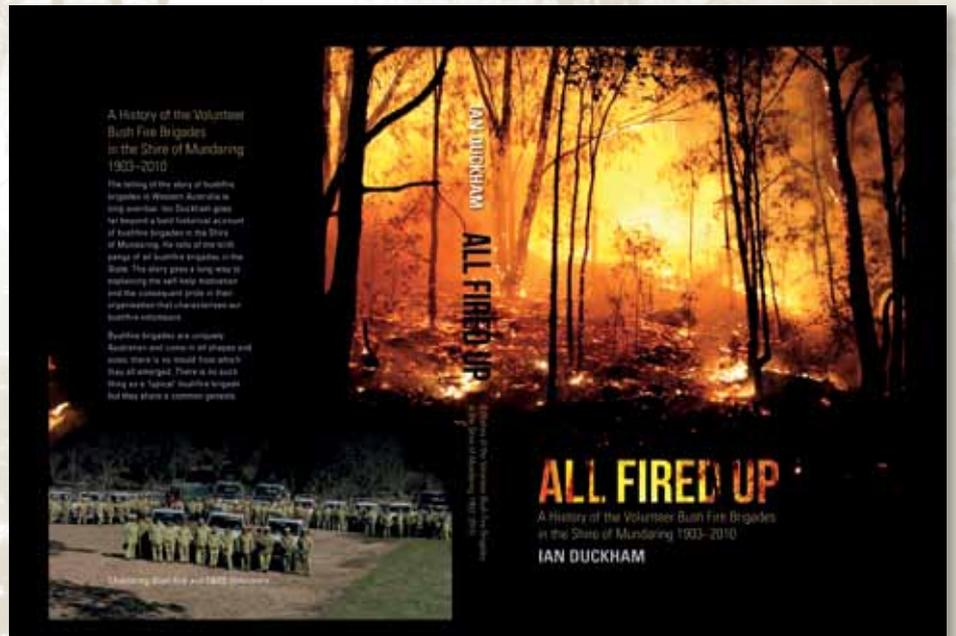
"Working with a time span of more than a century, there was a mountain of knowledge to unearth," Ian said.

Information for the book was drawn from many sources including fire reports in newspapers, archival material from the Forests Department, WA Fire Brigades Board, WA Bushfires Board, FESA and the Battye Library, as well as State Records Office files.

Ian also accessed minute books of the Mundaring Road Board and its forerunner the Greenmount Road Board, which provided limited detail on fire control in the early years.

During the period covered by organised volunteer bush fire brigades Ian relied heavily on the Shire of Mundaring's archival records, supplemented with personal interviews of people who had significant firefighting experience.

Another valuable source of information was tapping into numerous existing volunteer interviews which revealed some interesting personal stories.



At the launch signed copies of the book were presented to around 45 people who had contributed to the project, including firefighters, their families and friends.

The publication has been produced as a reference source and is available for loan in all libraries within the Mundaring Shire and also the FESA Library. In addition, each local school and bush fire brigade in the Shire will hold a copy.

There are nine volunteer bush fire brigades in the Shire, along with the Mundaring Firefighters School and Mundaring Volunteer Fire and Rescue Service, which marks its 15th anniversary this year.

With Wooroloo Bush Fire Brigade reaching a landmark 70 years in 2011, volunteers are busy planning celebrations which kick off in November. Check their Facebook page on the internet for details and updates.

Major Mundaring Shire bushfires include:

- Parkerville 2008
- Boya 2007
- Pickering Brook 2005
- Wooroloo 2004, 1999, 1996
- Glen Forrest 1997, 1975
- Chidlow/Mt Helena 1994, 1985, 1974
- Helena Valley 1978
- Darlington 1961

Extract from the foreword by John Robley, former Director Bushfires Board of Western Australia:

Ian Duckham tells of the birth pangs of all bushfire brigades in the State. The story goes a long way to explaining the self help motivation and the consequent pride in their organisation that characterises our bush fire volunteers.

Bush fire brigades are uniquely Australian and come in all shapes and sizes; there is no mould from which they all emerge. There is no such thing as a 'typical' bush fire brigade, but they share a common genesis.

The transition from wet bags and tree branches to the present day sophistication of the Mundaring brigades is graphically described.

Ian Duckham also explains the role of these brigades in fire management and the acceptance by local government that proper town planning, fire break installation and fuel reduction can play an equally important role in fire safety of the community, as does fire suppression.

Volunteer bush fire brigades are a very important part of our past, our present and our future. It is most important therefore that the work and service provided by the men and women of the bush fire brigades are recognised and recorded for posterity as a tribute to their dedication.