**William John Marsden Upper Beaconsfield 1983**

William Marsden was a friendly outgoing man, always willing to lend a hand, share information and help out at local community events. He was by trade a mechanic in Panton Hill; and he was a committed member of the CFA, rising to Brigade Lieutenant at the local Panton Hill Rural Fire Brigade.

William was an experienced firefighter, but no-one could have predicted the fateful circumstances that awaited him and his fellow firefighters on the 16th February 1983, as the ferocious Ash Wednesday fires took hold across the region. As day turned to night, William and his fellow brigade volunteers had been directed to Upper Beaconsfield to contain the treacherous eastern edge of the fire around Barnes Drive across to High Street. There were some isolated properties that needed protection too. Shortly before 9pm, as the Panton Hill tanker tracked the fire along High Street, a tremendous wind change suddenly placed them in immediate and immense danger. The fire whipped up and moved towards them at speed. What happened next is not known – no-one survived to give an accurate account. But according to the official CFA Report, it was thought that the firefighters attempted to outrun the fire by travelling east along High Street, hoping to reach safety in St Georges Road. Alas, they didn’t make it. Five firefighters on the Panton Hill tanker, including William Marsden, perished.

William was 39 years old when he died, leaving his wife Gillian, and three children from his first marriage, Christine, Leanne and Tracey, behind. He died bravely in the line of duty and he will always be remembered for his tremendous contribution to the firefighting cause, for the great assistance he provided to the then Brigade Captain, and for his immense popularity as Brigade Officer.