

Advisor

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union Black and Ethnic Minority Members www.fbu.org.uk

Autumn 2008

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in B&EMM and
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Foreword

I sincerely hope you and yours are in good health and that things at work are positive. As we head into the autumn months please find time to have a break and relax. We often underestimate the positive effects of having a rest, but it's a crucial part of the work/life balance.

As ever, things are pretty busy from a B&EMM representative perspective. Since our last edition your reps have represented you at the two biggest conferences in our business calendar. Eight delegates and one observer attended the TUC Black Workers conference in Eastbourne – 18-20 April. The FBU motion was to support the United Friends and Family Campaign (UFFC) in their 10th year of lobbying and campaigning against the deaths, often unsatisfactorily explained, in police custody suffered by many families. The conference supported us unanimously. It's a great conference to introduce people to procedures of this particular arena and new national committee members Mark and Carole Brown, plus members Richard Reid (London) and Carl Petch (GMC) were a credit to our union over that weekend. I believe that Richard now has a fan club?

Four delegates and one official represented B&EMM at the FBU conference in Southport – 20-23 May. We had two motions (another one was ruled out of order) which were supported by the conference delegates – A National Positive Action/Outreach Team and FBU support for a proposed Slavery Memorial in Hyde Park, London. Thanks to Samantha (National Secretary), Dalton Powell (Notts), Mark Brown (South Yorks), Leroy Phillpotts (Gloucestershire) and Carole Brown (Kent) for taking a week out of their busy lives to represent B&EMM. Samantha and I also attended the CLG Equality and Diversity national strategy launch

We are carrying out extensive research into the BME experience of the UK fire service

on 28 May – and our warmest congratulations to our G&L section on winning a Leadership Award which was thoroughly deserved.

The conference also supported the Executive Council statement on sectional elections and the vacant B&EMM National Chair position has now gone through the electoral process. It was started where it was suspended, with both candidates going to ballot. And I am pleased to welcome Leroy Phillpotts as our new national chair.

You will read in this issue about the unacceptable treatment of Kaseem Khan. He is not an isolated case. B&EMM is determined to tackle racism against our members and for your rightful protection under the law.

We are also determined we get a picture of all of your experiences – good and bad – of the fire service and you will soon receive at your home address an FBU Survey that is exclusive to B&EMM. We are carrying out extensive research into the BME experience of the UK fire service. It will take about 20 minutes to complete the survey so please find the time to do so and return in the stamp addressed envelope provided. Full evaluation of the survey results will be sent to you in due course.

I also want to welcome our new rep in the North East – Lee Brown. The region has been consistently supportive of the Equality Sections and it's great to have a rep up there again – it's been a while! We now have 12/13 people on our national committee and with progress being made in regions without a rep, hopefully it won't be long before every region has a B&EMM rep.

Michael Nicholas, Executive Council member, B&EMM



B&EMM School 2008



Women

The theme of B&EMM School 2008, to be held at Wortley Hall October 10-12, is "Women in Colour". The aim of the school is to highlight black and ethnic minority



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Lee Brown jumped at the chance to represent BEM in the North East

Cover picture Colin McPherson

in Colour

women who are achieving in the fire and rescue service and in other areas of work and society. As usual the school is oversubscribed and promises to be packed.

Entertainment from Banner Theatre was on the cards as Advisor went to press, as was an impressive line up of speakers, including the lesbian American fire chief Jona Olsson.

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CLG working on 'culture of inclusion'

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY STRATEGY

The department for Communities and Local Government is working on guidance to push forward the new fire service equality and diversity strategy, which was launched in May with the support of the Union, fire authorities and other fire service stakeholders.

The strategy, set out in a 30-page document, seeks to support fire authorities in "establishing a culture of inclusion" and helping them to tackle "current inequalities, promoting equality, diversity and fairness". The aim is to "enable the service to meet the needs of all our diverse communities"

The strategy has a target for 2013 of bringing the percentage of minority ethnic staff in the whole organisation to the same level as the minority ethnic people in the local working population. Currently just 3.2% of the operational workforce is black or minority ethnic. Parity in retention and progression between minority ethnic and white employees is also being sought within five years.

B&EMM Secretary Samantha Samuels welcomed the strategy, which, she said, aspired to bring true

leadership and direction in the area of diversity.

"We are committed to working with other stakeholders who have an opportunity to make diversity a reality through the strategy," she went on.

"The implementation and embedding of the strategy document and all it stands for, into every brigade, workplace and individual within our service, should see the positive revival of equality.

The strategy came as a department for Communities and Local Government survey showed that a third of male and female uniformed staff had been bullied or harassed. Over half of the 1,800 respondents had witnessed verbal abuse, over 10% physical assaults, and a significant number had seen race, sex and gender discrimination.

A quarter of those who had experienced such behaviour said it affected their confidence at work, 29% said it impacted on their enjoyment at work, almost one fifth did not want to go to work and more than a quarter had thought about leaving the service, with higher proportions among lesbian, gay, bisexual and minority ethnic staff.



STEFANO CANON/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

FBU B&EMM at the June 21 anti-fascist march through London protesting against the BNP which secured a seat in the London Assembly elections in May

FBU withdraws after Mayor Johnson axes 'anti-racism' element

RISE FESTIVAL

The FBU joined other unions in withdrawing from the RISE festival in London this year following the decision to cut anti-racism from the music festival funded by the GLA. The change was forced upon the festival by the new Tory Mayor Boris Johnson.

Said General Secretary Matt Wrack: "We have supported the Rise festival as a celebration of London's diverse communities and of anti-racism. It appears that this clear message is now being lost and the FBU no longer feels able to participate. We remain committed to any genuine initiative aimed at combating racism."

Boris Johnson, who defeated long-time anti-racist campaigner and sponsor of Rise Ken Livingstone in the May elections, decided to drop the central message of the festival which was "London united against racism" from the publicity and character of the event.

Richard Barnbrook, the BNP member of the London Assembly, strongly welcomed Boris Johnson's decision. The National Assembly Against Racism said: "The BNP judged accurately in giving its second preferences votes to Boris Johnson – the first time that the BNP endorsed a mainstream candidate for Mayor.

"They were relying on Boris Johnson to dismantle the defences against racism in London and he is doing just that."

All TUC affiliated trade unions withdrew from the festival following the Mayor's decision.



DUNCAN PHILLIPS/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

London fire crew

Voice of solidarity against the BNP was deafening

STOP THE BNP

B&EMM reps Dalton Powell, Nottinghamshire, and Ludwig Ramsey, Lothian & Borders, along with Dave Green, Executive Council member for East Midlands (region 6) took part on 16 August in the march against a British National Party festival in the village of Codnor Derbyshire.

It was the second year that the three-day 'festival' has been held in the village. Joining forces with other trade unions, activists, families and people from all cultures, an estimated 400 people marched through the village shouting "Keep the BNP out".

Dalton Powell, said the voice of solidarity was deafening. "As we marched through the village toward the main entrance we were stopped short by the police who only allowed thirty or so protestors to proceed to the main entrance.

"The day went well with speeches and music. What was acknowledged, was that we provided an itch that the BNP could well do without.



A dog decked out with the BNP's colours at one of its 'festivals'

"Brothers and sisters we can ill afford to let this racist 'festival' go unchallenged. It will be back next year and we have to be ready to take them on.

"Though the message is loud and clear: This will not go away. We need more of us at these marches sending the message that they are not welcomed in our communities. To do nothing is not an option."



B&EMM reps Dalton Powell (left) and Ludwig Ramsey with a co-protestor against the Red, White and Blue Festival in Derbyshire on 16 August

In brief



ANDREW WARD

◆ FBU brigade officials and B&EMM brigade reps are to work together on how to most effectively consult with BME communities on any changes to brigade policies and procedures, such as integrated risk management plans. The move puts into action policy agreed at FBU Conference (above) that aims to "ensure that black and ethnic minorities are not overlooked during the consultation" process. In the absence of brigade reps the National B&EMM Committee will be involved.

◆ The TUC Black Workers Conference in April 2008 re-elected Michael Nicholas, FBU Executive Council member for B&EMM, to the TUC Race Relations Committee. An FBU motion on the United Friends and Family Campaign was backed unanimously. It sought support for the campaign in its tenth year and its annual silent march from Trafalgar Square to Downing Street on Saturday 25 October 2008.

◆ The 'employment gap' between black and minority ethnic (BME) workers is closing steadily, but BME poverty rates are still nearly twice as high, according to a report released in April by the TUC. The TUC report – *Ten Years After* – launched at the 2008 TUC black workers conference in Eastbourne says that steadily improving BME employment rates have reduced the 'employment gap' between BME and white workers by 2.2 percentage points over the last decade.

'Unions must act on BEM jobs gap'

TUC CONGRESS 2008

As *Advisor* went to press, TUC Congress was set to debate a motion from the TUC Black Workers' Conference that urged all affiliates "to review their bargaining work and priorities to reflect the urgent need to close the ethnic minority employment gap."

The motion called on the TUC Congress, in Brighton in September to "recognise the vital and unique role that trade unions can play in challenging and eliminating discrimination in employment".

A number of unions were also to call on Congress to press the government to extend the statutory duty on schools for the promotion of community cohesion to all public bodies and any other organisations that provide a public service; prohibit members of racist and fascist organisations from holding public office; set targets for eliminating discrimination and inequality in access to employment and the political system; and implement strategies to ensure compliance with statutory provisions relating to equality, diversity and community cohesion.

Government should also work with the TUC to develop a national strategy to tackle all forms of extremism, including racist and fascist extremism, a motion by the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers demanded.

An FBU delegation led by General Secretary Matt Wrack and including Executive Council member for B&EMM Michael Nicholas attended Congress. FBU motions raised the issue of floods and Cuba (more in *Firefighter* magazine).



Stephen-remell Coleman (left) and Harvey Sahota

Rapping firefighter's safety message goes bhangra

BROTHERS DOIN' IT

Rapping London firefighter Stephen-remell Coleman is again using his musical talents to get across important fire safety messages – this time to the Asian community.

Stephen – who in his free time performs as rap artist Controversy – joined forces with London Fire Brigade to release *Got Mine Got Yours?*, a professionally produced video that aimed its message about how smoke alarms save lives at a young urban audience. It was a massive success and received national media coverage and over 90,000 hits on Youtube.

Now Stephen – a firefighter on Wimbledon Fire Station's Red Watch – has teamed up with another multi-talented London Fire Brigade colleague, Harvey Sahota, to remix the track for a whole new audience. By day, Harvey is a fire community safety officer but produces Asian music in his spare time.

The new *Got Mine Got Yours? (Asian Streets*

Mix) is laden with Indian instruments such as dholaks (small drums) and dhols (big drums) tumbi and dulcimers. The track starts with Stephen saying "Hello" in three different Asian languages – Punjabi, Urdu and Hindi – and features Asian vocal chants.

The accompanying video, shot on the streets of Southall – the heart of one of the UK's largest Asian communities – and at Southall Fire Station, features Punjabi Bhangra dancers, and members of the public singing along to the song's chorus. Firefighters and community safety officers are also shown working with the community.

Stephen joined London Fire Brigade around two years ago and is currently carrying out his firefighter development programme at Wimbledon Fire Station.

→ View *Got Mine Got Yours? (Asian Streets Mix)* at: http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=PRho_zzMfhs
You can also view the original at: <http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=wt6hNqzOviw>



*Record breaker:
Dalton Powell in
action*

Dashing Dalton does it again!

WORLD FIREFIGHTER GAMES

Dalton Powell, a Nottingham firefighter and B&EMM rep for East Midlands, won the 100m and 200m races for the 45-49 age group at the World Firefighter Games

in Liverpool. With 23.38 seconds in the 200 metres he beat the world record.

He completed the 100m in 11.52 seconds. It is his tenth year as world 100m and 200m champion at the games.

◆ Delegates to the FBU annual conference in May supported two B&EMM motions: one committed the Union to raise at the Practitioners Forum the establishment of a national positive action strategy to “ensure best practice with the sharing of ideas, resources and more importantly personnel, especially where particular brigades have a low number of B&EM members” and allow B&EM members in a brigade to have paid time off in order to support positive action activities in another brigade. The other motion secured FBU support for a proposed slavery memorial in Hyde Park, London (see page 12).

◆ The Jamaica vs. Nigeria Comedy night – the first comedy showdown between Jamaican and Nigerian comedians for the Prestige Unity Comedy Trophy – at the Broadway Theatre, Catford in July – was such a success that the organisers have been inundated with emails, texts and phone calls from the Jamaican community requesting a rematch! Won by the Nigerian comedians Babatunde and Tunde Ednut, it raised £203 for the African Caribbean Leukaemia Trust (ACLT). On 19 July the ACLT Fundraiser Party with the Stars, raised £200. You can make a £3 donation by texting the word ACLT to 84424.

From the chair



Leroy Phillpotts, B&EMM rep for the South West, is the new chair of B&EMM

Thanks to everyone in B&EMM who without their support I would not be the National Chair.

I would also like to thank Executive Council member Tam McFarlane and the rest of FBU South West for the support they have given me and the section over the years and continue to give.

In the few weeks I have spent as National Chair I have already realised how much more work there is to be done not just for B&EMM but all the sections for under-represented groups in the Union.

My aim is to fulfil my role by supporting the Executive Council member Michael Nicholas and National Secretary Sam Samuels in progressing the work of the National Committee.

While doing this I hope to mentor other black and ethnic minority members, ‘lift as we climb’ and to develop and prepare them for when the time arises to take on more responsibility in B&EMM, just as I have done.

As an FBU rep for a number of years I recognise the difficulties of the role, especially due to the fact that B&EMM reps are not full-time. This is true for the role of National Chair but my focus is to assist the reps we have in place.

'I AM HERE TO MAKE EVERYONE SAFER. YET I FACE RACISM'

If you are racially abused in a public place then it's a hate crime. But if it happens when you are in a private dwelling and you are just trying to get on with your job the law does not protect you. Surely this can't be right? The experience of Kaseem Khan, black and ethnic minority member and Merseyside firefighter, has thrown the spotlight on a gap in the law that allows people to get away with racially abusing firefighters and other public sector workers – sparking debate and a growing awareness within the union of the need for a change in the law

When Kaseem Khan and a colleague were fitting a fire alarm at the bottom of the stairs in a terraced house in Birkenhead the householder – an elderly white man – started spouting racist abuse from the front room. Kaseem was taken aback. "This is 2008," he recalls thinking. "We're here to fit a fire alarm in this bloke's house to make everyone who lives here safer. And we are subjected to this kind of language."

Kaseem's two colleagues – one helping fit the alarm, the other with the client in the front room – were shocked by the outburst. Kaseem, as the only black person in the house, felt it more acutely, and walked off the job in protest.

The outburst began when the firefighter in the front room began talking to the householder through the ethnic monitoring form, designed to help the fire and rescue services ensure that all communities are equally protected from the threat of fire. But in trying to ascertain the man's ethnicity – asking him if he was White British – he seems to have tapped into a well of prejudice that led the man to use the "N" word and suggest, in an offensive and forthright manner, that there were "too many of them over here" – "them" appearing to be a catch-all category for everyone who is not white, whether or not they, their parents or grandparents, were born in Britain. Kaseem, a firefighter for four years, then walked out.

The police said there was nothing they could do about it. They were right. The Public Order Act 1986 as amended by the Public Order Act 1988 created a criminal offence of "using towards another threatening, abusive or insulting words and behaviour" which is "racially or religiously aggravated". This can happen in either public or private places

– apart from private dwellings, which are exempted.

As John McGhee, national official for equality, puts it: "It is completely unacceptable that public sector workers should be exposed to racism and expected to put up with it. We wouldn't expect a firefighter to fight a fire without proper protective equipment. We shouldn't expect them to carry out community fire safety without proper protection either."

"We know all attacks on firefighters are underreported. Kaseem is certainly not the only member to have suffered a racist verbal attack in the course of carrying out his duty in someone's home. If he'd been punched it would have been an offence – but the law doesn't protect when the attack is verbal, racist and offensive. It should."

Merseyside FBU brigade secretary Les Skarratts said it is unacceptable for any Merseyside firefighters to be subjected to this sort of racist abuse. As a short term local measure, members have been told they do not have to get the public to fill in ethnic monitoring forms, and the region is

raising the issue nationally to try and come up with a solution to protect firefighters across the country from racist abuse.

Samantha Samuels, B&EMM national secretary has championed Kaseem's case and the need for change. "The law is quite interesting. It is a public order offence to harass or be racist. Then there's a caveat about how it doesn't apply in people's homes," she says.

"Specifically, from a fire and rescue service perspective, our role has been evolving. It used to be mainly operational. We used to only go into someone's home if there was a fire – now we are in people's homes to prevent fires.

"That means we interact a lot more. And I don't think the authorities have considered the implications, particularly in relation to this law. I think it's a complete oversight by the Fire and Rescue Service and now that

'Kaseem's two colleagues were shocked by the outburst. Kaseem walked off the job in protest'



Kaseem Khan: I just want to get on with the job

we've highlighted it they should want to do something about it.

"It's not just black and minority ethnic staff who can be affected. White firefighters can be targets for racism too."

Samantha says there's a principle at stake. "People should be able to go to work in a safe environment and at times, people's homes are our workplace, and staff should not be subjected to abuse. If someone is smacked in the face in someone's house it would be clear and people would know exactly what to do.

"But when someone attacks you verbally – and racist insults are an attack – our employers should be either lobbying the government for change to protect emergency workers or at least be putting in some serious control measures to try and make sure it doesn't happen."

She also suggests that an equality impact assessment of collecting ethnic monitoring data in people's homes, carried out under the Race Relations Amendment Act, could have identified the potential pitfalls of exposing staff to the prospect of racist abuse when eliciting information for ethnic monitoring

forms. Better training and stricter protocols could help, she adds.

She suggests these could include sending members of the public a contract before a home visit. This could spell out that abuse and harassment will not be tolerated and that people should ensure their homes are as safe as possible so staff do not get injured on a home safety visit. Unless these terms are agreed, the visit should not go ahead. If such

'I'm sure I'm not the only firefighter in Britain who has faced racism while carrying out my duties in people's homes'

a system were adopted, she argues, the public would get the service it deserves and FRS staff would know they need not be exposed to racist abuse.

"The question needs to be asked: If people are not protected from racist abuse when

they go into people's homes in the line of duty, what have the employers got in place to protect their staff?"

She is concerned that if Merseyside or other fire and rescue services drop ethnic monitoring forms when entering people's houses, the data designed to ensure all communities are properly protected from fire risks "could well be skewed", and vulnerable minority communities could miss out on protection.

And Kaseem? "I just want to get on with the job. By going public about what happened to me, maybe we can come up with a solution.

"I'm sure I'm not the only firefighter in Britain who has faced racism while carrying out my duties in people's homes."

→ In May, a firefighter suffered racist abuse in Burton, Staffordshire, when carrying out a home fire risk assessment. The homeowner became "rude, obnoxious and made several racially offensive comments." If you have suffered similarly – let your local FBU/B&EMM rep know to help fuel the campaign for change.

Meet Carl a

“Hi, I’m 25 years old and from Manchester. I joined the fire service at 18 (foolish). I have a beautiful little boy called Kade and a little girl who was born at the end of May called Ava. I’m currently single, with a sofa, fridge and Playstation keeping me occupied.

I always wanted to be in the fire service from a very young age and got in first time. (It’s been mentioned that I got in because I was black, but that’s another story). For my first five years I didn’t get involved in Union activities, although I did go on strike and went on all the marches (where I had some good times!)

I applied for the B&EMM school in my first year, but it caused a bad environment at work. I was given my time off while others on my watch couldn’t get theirs. I withdrew my application. I went to my first B&EMM school in October 2007. I had a really good time and met great people. Richard Reid from London Fire Brigade and I have become really good friends out of it. When I got back I was really positive about doing some work within my brigade – Greater Manchester.

I strung together lots of initiatives and I had plenty of doors closed firmly on me. After speaking to other black firefighters it became apparent I wasn’t the only one to experience this. I like to say that I only realised that I was a black firefighter in this brigade when I wanted something.

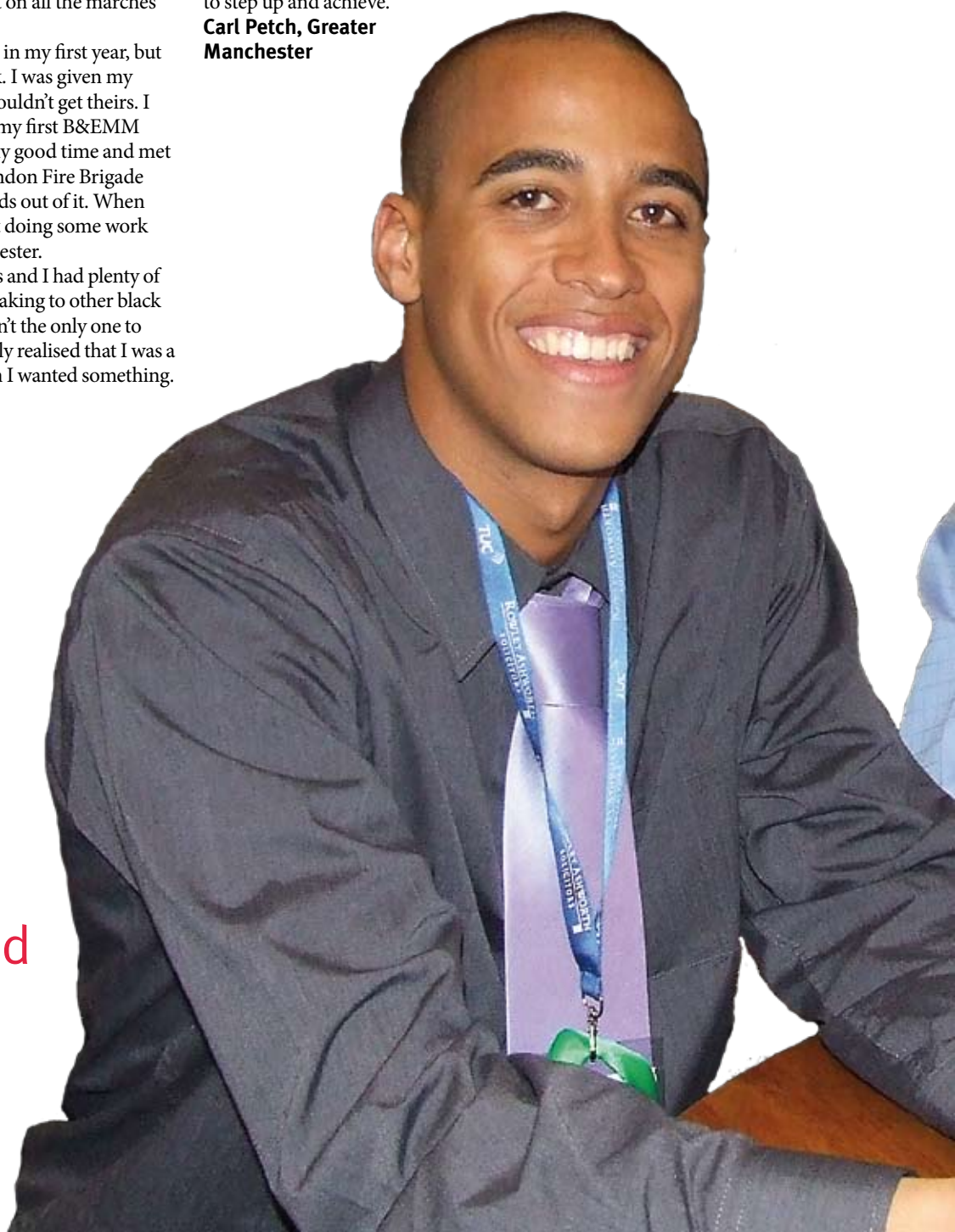
This was the start of a B&EMM steering group in Manchester. It then became clear that the steering group needed a direction so I stood up and decided to become the brigade B&EMM rep.

Hopefully now GMC will be seen to be doing some good work in raising our profile in the eyes of the public, getting more black and minority ethnic people to apply for the job and looking after and accepting the great and diverse culture that we bring.

My short-term goal though is to be the first substantive black fire officer which I hope will encourage others to step up and achieve.”

Carl Petch, Greater Manchester

‘I like to say that I only realised that I was a black firefighter in this brigade when I wanted something’



nd Richard

“After attending my first B&EMM school in 2007, I felt eager to be more active within my role as a firefighter and as a black man within my community.

At the school I met Carl Petch, a firefighter from the Greater Manchester Fire Service. It was a strange feeling as I felt as if I had found a person with a similar passion to achieve and be active like myself. Carl and I shared similar ideas and views on our responsibilities as young black men within the fire service and our communities as role models.

Last year's commemoration of the abolition of the slave trade inspired me to begin gaining knowledge of myself and to get involved with movements that need support to make changes.

So I joined the Ministry of Justice's PROUD Organisation. I carried out voluntary work with youth offenders. I promoted the fire service as a career option to school and college leavers through the Connections

Career scheme. And recently I marched against the BNP and fascism with the FBU.

I also assisted in helping Carl get his idea of having open days in the Manchester Fire Service up and running, thanks to my knowledge and experience of similar events organised by the London Fire Brigade.

In April, I attended the Black TUC workers conference in Eastbourne. This was an experience I will never forget. I was given the opportunity to represent the FBU and speak as a delegate on the issues of deaths in police custody and youth gun- and knife-related crime.

I was extremely honoured when the Race Relations Committee voted for me to close the TUC conference. That conference allowed me to bond and fuse working relationships with schoolteachers, parents and BECTU staff at the BBC to do what I can to assist the youth of today in being positive and work-minded.

These activities have made me want to be a better firefighter so I can develop my career and assist others.

My watch members and B&EMM representatives and activists Samantha Samuels, Brian Amos, Leroy Phillpotts, Tyrone Robinson, Delroy Bryant and Carl Petch amongst many other members of B&EMM have played an important role in what I have put my mind to so far and what I aim to go on to achieve.”

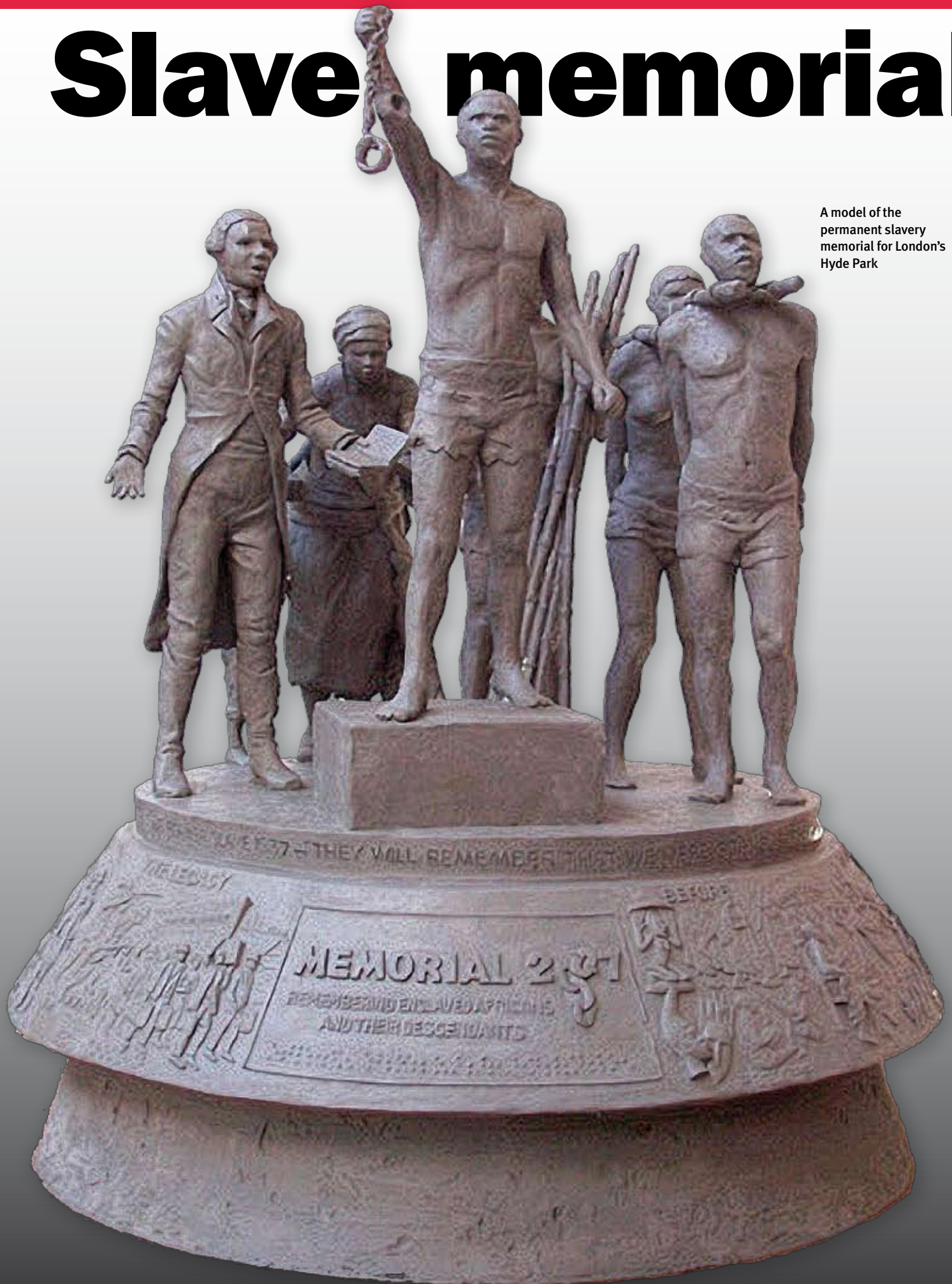
Richard Reid, London Fire Brigade

‘I felt eager to be more active in my role as a firefighter and as a black man in my community’



Slave memorial

A model of the permanent slavery memorial for London's Hyde Park



campaign builds

The campaign for the UK to officially recognise the transatlantic slave trade with a Slavery Memorial Day on 23 August continues apace.

The UN marks International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition on 23 August and the hope is that the government in the UK, as the chief historic player in the trade, will follow suit.

An important part of the campaign is the creation of a permanent slavery memorial statue in Hyde Park. The voluntary group Memorial 2007 needs to raise £1.5m to finance the sculpture and memorial garden. The park's Rose Garden has been chosen as the location for the statue, which will be created by the sculptor Les Johnson.

Michael Nicholas, FBU Executive Council Member for black and ethnic minority members, championed the issue in his speech on behalf of the TUC Race Relations Committee at TUC Congress in



B&EMM Committee members Sam Samuels, Dalton Powell, Brian Amos and Leroy Phillpotts attended this year's Slavery Memorial Day event in Liverpool

September 2007 in Brighton, and since then the campaign has continued in strength.

Even the new Conservative mayor of London Boris Johnson has added his support for the campaign. A design of the statue was unveiled at London's City Hall to mark International Slavery Memorial Day on 23 August and the exhibition will remain at City

Hall until 1 December.

Attending a Slavery Memorial Day event on 23 August in the historic slave port of Liverpool were B&EMM Committee members Sam Samuels, Dalton Powell, Brian Amos and Leroy Phillpotts. Among the day's events were a powerful display of chattels used to restrain slaves and a libation and invocation ceremony, a traditional African ceremony calling on the ancestors to bless the event. The offering of libation involves the pouring of liquid, which can be water or wine, in a special pattern while homage is paid to the ancestors.

"It was a poignant ceremony," said Sam Samuels. "It recalled the great and tragic sea journey that our ancestors made from Africa across the Atlantic to the Americas."

"I urge members to join in the campaign for Slave Memorial Day and participate more broadly in learning and passing on knowledge about black history."

Windrush – 60 years

An array of events will take place across the UK to mark Black History Month this October. Black History Month has been celebrated across the UK every October for over 30 years, each year growing from strength to strength.

It is a time when we highlight and celebrate the achievements of the black community and uncover hidden history about our communities.

A historic moment in Britain's Black History was marked in June 22 this year – 60 years since the MV Empire Windrush disembarked at Tilbury Docks in Essex (right).

The ship had made an 8,000 mile journey from the Caribbean to London with 492 passengers on board from Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and other islands.

The passengers were the first large group of West Indian immigrants to the UK after the Second World War. In 1948, the Windrush was en route from

Australia to England via the Atlantic, docking in Kingston, Jamaica.

An advert had appeared in a Jamaican newspaper offering cheap transport on the ship for anybody who wanted to come and work in the UK.

There was plenty of work in post-war Britain and industries such as British Rail, the National Health Service (which also celebrates its 60th anniversary this year) and public transport recruited almost exclusively from Jamaica and Barbados.

As part of the celebrations, a major Windrush Exhibition is running at The Imperial War Museum (Imperial War Museum, Lambeth Road, London SE1 6HZ 13 June 2008 to 29 March 2009 10am – 6pm). It tells the personal stories of the involvement of Caribbean men and women in the First and Second World Wars.

→ www.blackhistorymonthuk.co.uk/
www.bbc.co.uk/london/faith/communities/black_london/



Some of the Jamaican men, mostly former Royal Air Force servicemen, aboard the Empire Windrush, before they disembarked at Tilbury on June 22, 1948

EDDIE WORTH/AP/PA PHOTOS

'I couldn't sit back



Mike Ackah has just retired from the fire and rescue service after 30 years – and is launching himself in a new career as a virtual life coach, specialising in emergency service staff. And his membership of B&EMM over the past decade has, he says, been a key factor in his personal development – helping equip him with the skills needed for his new role

Firefighters from minority ethnic groups are still under-represented in the service, but things are not as bad as they used to be. Thirty years ago it was rare to see a black crew member out fighting fires. Mike Ackah reckons he was the only black firefighter not only on his watch or station, but in the whole of the Merseyside and Cheshire region, when he first joined the brigade. Watch photographs down the years show he was always in a minority of one on his watch.

It didn't seem that unusual for Mike though. After leaving Ghana as a young child, he was brought up in a white leafy

'Late into the night on watch, a colleague challenged me to name black people who'd achieved things in fields other than sport. I was stumped'

suburb in Liverpool where his father worked as a university lecturer.

He remembers one woman being startled when she came across crew members and a fire engine at a petrol station. After looking Mike up and down, she said, addressing another crew member: "Oh, you've got an ethnic fireman!" And even the woman Mike was to marry couldn't quite believe there

were black firefighters when they first met.

Mike comes across as a self-confident and relaxed bloke and says he never really had any problem being the only black crew member. He developed strong friendships on his watches – 26 and a half years on White Watch at Runcorn and three and a half years on Blue Watch at Birchwood station in Warrington. He loved the job.

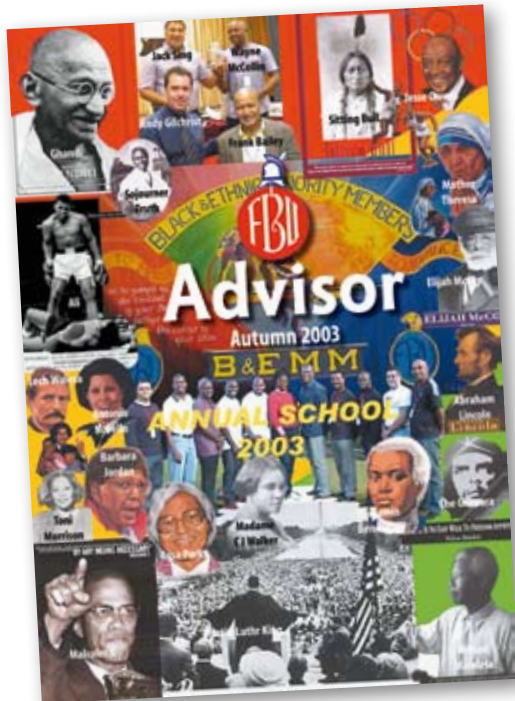
When another black firefighter joined another station in the region, he returned from the first B&EMM meeting at Wortley

Hall fired up with enthusiasm, and keen to spread the word and encourage Mike to join. "It was good to meet another black firefighter, but my view then was I didn't really need something like B&EMM. I was happy at work, and if I'd got any problems, I'd sort them out myself."

But next year, he went along to Wortley Hall and was "horrified to hear some of the things other black members were having to put up with. When we got back, I thought I can't just sit back and do nothing and decided



and do nothing'



Mike Ackah's research into black achievement resulted in a special cover for Advisor five years ago

His own history is recorded in pictures from an October 1978 training school, at Washington Hall, in Chorley, Lancs (below); from 1984 (right), when a reporter (centre) came to do an article on his station; and from another picture from the same era



to get involved."

It's a decision that has paid dividends, boosting confidence, forging firm friendships and bolstering Mike's knowledge of black history and achievements – knowledge he put to good use designing a cover for Advisor, celebrating black inventors.

These included Elijah McCoy, who developed and patented a way of lubricating engines while they were still running. Others tried to copy his invention, but couldn't match its performance. Some people believe

this is the source of the phrase The Real McCoy.

"I realised I didn't know enough about black achievement when late into the night on watch, a colleague challenged me to name black people who'd achieved things in fields other than sport, and told me not to start talking about the Egyptians either. I admit I was stumped and decided to find out more, and there's lots to find out."

Mike is quick to acknowledge how important B&EMM has been for him, despite his

initial scepticism about the need to join. "I thought I was quite happy and in some ways I was. But it was good to know that I was not alone. It was amazing walking into Wortley Hall that first time and seeing so many black firefighters, then hearing about some of the struggles people were having.

"I can remember going on FBU marches in the past and seeing just a few black faces scattered throughout the march – it was very hard to make contact. Now B&EMM is there it's a lot easier for people to get in touch – unity is strength. And there is lots to be done – equality and diversity have to be about more than box ticking, and it's good to

'It was amazing walking into Wortley Hall and seeing so many black firefighters, then hearing about some of the struggles people were having'

know B&EMM is out there for those still in the brigade."

Mike is now launching himself as a virtual life coach – he already has a few clients he meets face to face. And it's hardly surprising that his chosen niche is emergency service workers – firefighters a speciality.

→ www.fulfilledcoaching.com





LEE BROWN, NORTH EAST

Lee Brown jumped at the chance to be a regional B&EMM rep. As well as being in a better position to challenge unacceptable behaviour, he also wanted the chance to network with other regional reps

I am a crew manager stationed in Seaham, Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service. I have been in the service now for a little over five years.

I suffered racist abuse as a child growing up on a pretty rough council estate where there were and still are only a very small number of ethnic minority families.

I suffered it as an adult during my first year serving in the army – I

I am under no illusions that the role I have undertaken is at times going to take a great deal of hard work, patience and time

found people were more than happy to make such comments in my presence as at first glance I'm not obviously from an ethnic background as I have a white mum and black dad. I decided I wanted to be in a better position to challenge such behaviour.

I have only had to challenge unacceptable behaviour on one occasion since I joined the fire service. Although this is once too

many it is a huge improvement on my previous experiences.

After a couple of years I was offered a position on the service equality and diversity setting group for Durham and Darlington, where many things are discussed and implemented in relation to all strands of equality and diversity.

When a position for a regional B&EMM rep in the North East recently came up I jumped at the chance. As well as being in a better position to challenge unacceptable behaviour, I also wanted the chance to network with other regional reps.

The information available to me now and in the future will be invaluable when I campaign to try and encourage more people from minority backgrounds to take up positions within the service and to become members of the FBU – for it is the help of the various minority sections that put the FBU in the best position to offer support.

I am under no illusions that the role I have undertaken is at times going to take a great deal of hard work, patience and time. But I am looking forward to the challenge and believe the personal satisfaction and sense of achievement gained will be worth all of the effort.

Personal

PROMOTIONS

- Kam Basi – Derbyshire (Group Manager)
- Les Bowman – London (T/Stn Manager)

CONDOLENCES

- Jeanetta Edwin – London (Family bereavement)

CONGRATS

- Sami Chaudrey – Dumfries and Galloway (FBU Brigade Chair)
- Dalton Powell – Notts (newly married)



- Marley Jones – London (birth of baby son, Rio)
- Carl Petch – on the birth of daughter, Ava Rose.

GOODBYE

- Tennyson Turney – Cambs

If members have news of congrats and promotions don't be shy about it – please get in touch. Your progress is an inspiration to us all.

Contact B&EMM Executive Council member Michael Nicholas: mickn@fbu.org.uk

STRESSED AT HOME STRESSED AT WORK?

Ring the FBU free confidential stress and support hotline 0800 783 4778

FBU FREEPHONE LEGAL ADVICE LINE

0808 100 6061



THOMPSONS SOLICITORS