

Bradford City Fire 1985: Tales of Heroism, Community and Resilience.



Above: David Hustler, in St Luke's Hospital, wearing the Bradford Sling, invented by Dr David Sharpe.

David Hustler

David Hustler, a 45-year-old warehouse supervisor from Shipley, regularly attended Bradford City home games.

He was sitting in the upper block with friends celebrating the club's promotion when the fire took hold.

He helped evacuate the block before making his own escape. On the way he stopped to rescue two injured supporters: the first, a 69-year-old woman, and the second, a 17-year-old disabled man. In both cases he dragged them over the wall into the standing area, which involved a six-foot drop. At this point, as he recalled in an interview, 'the flames hit me across the back of my head'. They then got onto the pitch and received help from emergency services.

Badly burned to his head, face, and legs, David continued to volunteer help; he even put out the flames on the young man's coat with his bare hands, burning them in the process.

He was then taken to hospital by a police officer, where he was treated for severe burns before he was discharged the next month. This involved surgery to graft new skin onto the burned areas and twice-daily exercises on his hands.

The following year he was awarded the Queen's Gallantry Medal for Bravery. When asked if he regretted not getting out of the stand earlier to avoid getting burned, which would have meant not saving the two supporters, David replied '**I never even thought about running ... I don't regret that, not at all. That's the price of my injuries.**'



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Above: Joanne Baron, with her Children of Courage Award, meeting Princess Diana at Westminster Abbey.

Joanne Baron

Joanne Baron, a 10-year-old schoolgirl from Tong, was attending her first football match with her family.

Having become separated, with thick smoke and flames making breathing difficult, she helped an elderly male supporter escape, but received severe burns to her leg, hands and face which required multiple surgeries.

When asked if she was frightened, she said: **'I wasn't frightened at the time and just carried on trying to do what I could'.**

Joanne was the youngest person to receive an award for bravery, being presented with a Children of Courage Award by Princess Diana at Westminster Abbey in London, which she described as 'one of the best days in my life'.

She also received a Christmas present of £10 from an anonymous donor, believed to be the man she helped rescue. The letter, addressed to Joanne's mum but sent to the local newspaper, said 'Please give this to your little heroine.'

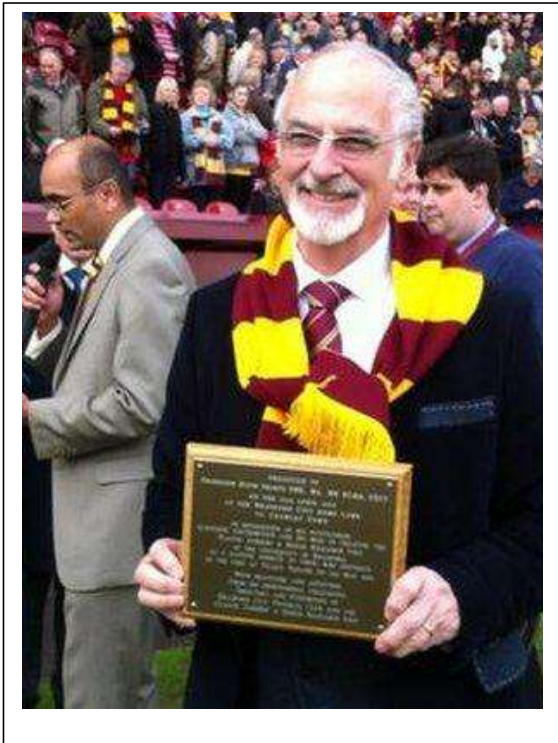


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Above: Dr David Sharpe, second from the left, demonstrating the Bradford Sling to Gerry Marsden, the singer, whose charity single, *You'll Never Walk Alone*, raised £250,000 for the Disaster Fund after getting to No. 1 in the Top 40 music charts. Also pictured are the physiotherapists and nurses who treated patients in hospital, the director of Nursing Services, and the head of Bradford University Research.

Joanne, David, and more than 250 other patients, all with burns injuries, were treated at the city's hospitals by Dr (later Professor) David Sharpe, and a team of doctors, nurses and surgeons who offered their help from across Britain.

Dr Sharpe had **'never seen burns on this scale before'**. He described the scene as being **'like a wartime situation in that they all have similar injuries which all occurred at the same time'**. Remarkably, 80 patients with serious injuries were operated on within the first 48-hours of the fire.

Also, Dr Sharpe refined his invention for treating hand injuries, which involved bandaging the hands and elevating them using straps to prevent swelling, which aided the patient's recovery. It was later named as **"the Bradford Sling"** and, after winning design awards, has been used to treat patients with hand injuries across the world.

David Sharpe was later made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire by the Queen, and helped set up the Plastic Surgery and Burns Research Unit at the University of Bradford thanks to the generous donations from members of the public to the Fire Disaster Appeal Fund. The Unit is still supported today by supporters, families and the football club.



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