New Novel commemorates the Flixborough Disaster

Tuesday 3 June, 2014

Suffering the Fire by Barry Hotson
Publication June 2014. (Cillian Press)

The 40th anniversary of the Flixborough NYPRO disaster sees the publication of a work of fiction inspired by that tragedy.

An explosion at a chemical plant and sixteen men lose their lives. Eight year old Michael will never see his father again. Inspired by true events, this is one man's deeply moving journey into the past as he uncovers the truth about his father's death and his mother's life.

Suffering the Fire is a journey of understanding, uncovering of secrets pieced together in an explosive narrative of deception and betrayal.

The genesis of the novel was not the explosion itself but the fact that by 2005 the shock and suffering appeared to have been forgotten. In that year, the fire and explosion at Buncefield oil storage depot was described by the media as "Britain's worst peacetime industrial disaster". One man at least knew that it wasn't.

Barry Hotson, a retired chemical engineer, had been personally touched by the Flixborough explosion and fire. Ten years earlier, as a new graduate, he had worked for a year at the plant. Although he had moved away, its destruction, the 28 deaths, the blasting of three villages, the shock and distress of the whole community moved him greatly. He directed his career into industrial safety, ultimately becoming safety consultant to a multinational chemical company and delegate to the International Process Safety Group, set up in the wake of Flixborough.

In 2005, he was shocked that there was no national awareness of the cataclysm that had shaken so many lives. He began researching how the Flixborough disaster was remembered locally and was saddened to find no trace of memorial events or references. Even the bronze commemorative plaque had been stolen.
He had begun creative writing as a hobby in his retirement and was disappointed that there were no novels with the manufacturing industry as their setting. For him, industrial operatives were unsung heroes who, like miners, take on demanding and dangerous work essential to the whole community. He now resolved to write about them himself, the story of a family bereaved by an industrial accident, bookended by fictionalized versions of the Flixborough and Buncefield explosions.

By 2008, he had finished his first draft but it was not until after many revisions that Suffering the Fire was completed in 2012 and, soon after, accepted for publication by Cillian Press. By poignant chance, their publication date is June 1st, 2014.

At the author's request, the novel will be launched in Scunthorpe on June 5th at the North Lincolnshire Museum and will include speakers from Cillian Press, Barry's widow Pat and finally a short address by Dr Stan Skinner, former Technical Secretary and later Chair of the International Process Safety Group.

Sadly, author Barry Hotson will not be there. He died of cancer in March after a four-year illness. Pat has, however, renewed local researches. Barry would have been heartened to know that since 2009 there has been an annual commemoration service at All Saints Church, Flixborough. This year, Pat will be there on Barry's behalf.

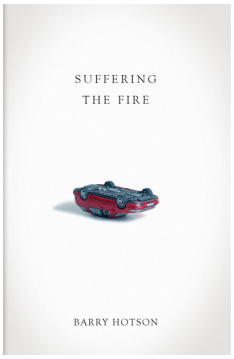
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For more information go to http://cillianpress.co.uk/SufferingtheFire/

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