

Bill and Ivor Beard: Two brothers, same medal

Brothers Bill and Ivor Beard both served in the Second World War and, although involved in very different war service, were each awarded the same medal, the MBE (Member of the British Empire), for their war efforts.



Bill Beard was 33 at the start of the war, working as chief administrator for the City of Birmingham fire brigade. At that time every local council ran its own brigade. The beginning of the London blitz and the bombing of cities like Coventry and Birmingham led to the amalgamation of the brigades into the National Fire Service. Bill was largely responsible for this reorganisation in the West Midlands region. He stayed with the fire service in Birmingham during the war.

In 1948 the National Fire Service was broken up and the responsibilities handed back to the councils. In 1949 Bill was awarded the MBE in recognition of his work for the fire service.



Bill's younger brother Ivor also worked for Birmingham council, as a clerk, but he wanted something more exciting. In 1935 the RAF Volunteer Reserve was formed, and when recruitment began, Ivor was one of the first to join up, in 1937. Learning to fly took up most of his spare time. By the outset of war he was a qualified pilot with many flying hours to his credit and was called up at once.

As war progressed it became evident that maintaining the supply of pilots would be crucial, requiring an efficient and intensive training organisation. Ivor became part of this, spending most of the war at the RAF Flying Training School at Sywell aerodrome in Northamptonshire. Ivor taught British pilots as well as those from allied countries and the Free French and Polish forces. In 1945, aged 29, he also received the MBE for his war service.

The two medals are identical, except that Ivor's, which is the military version, has a gold line down the centre of the ribbon. Bill's is the civil version, and is plain.

