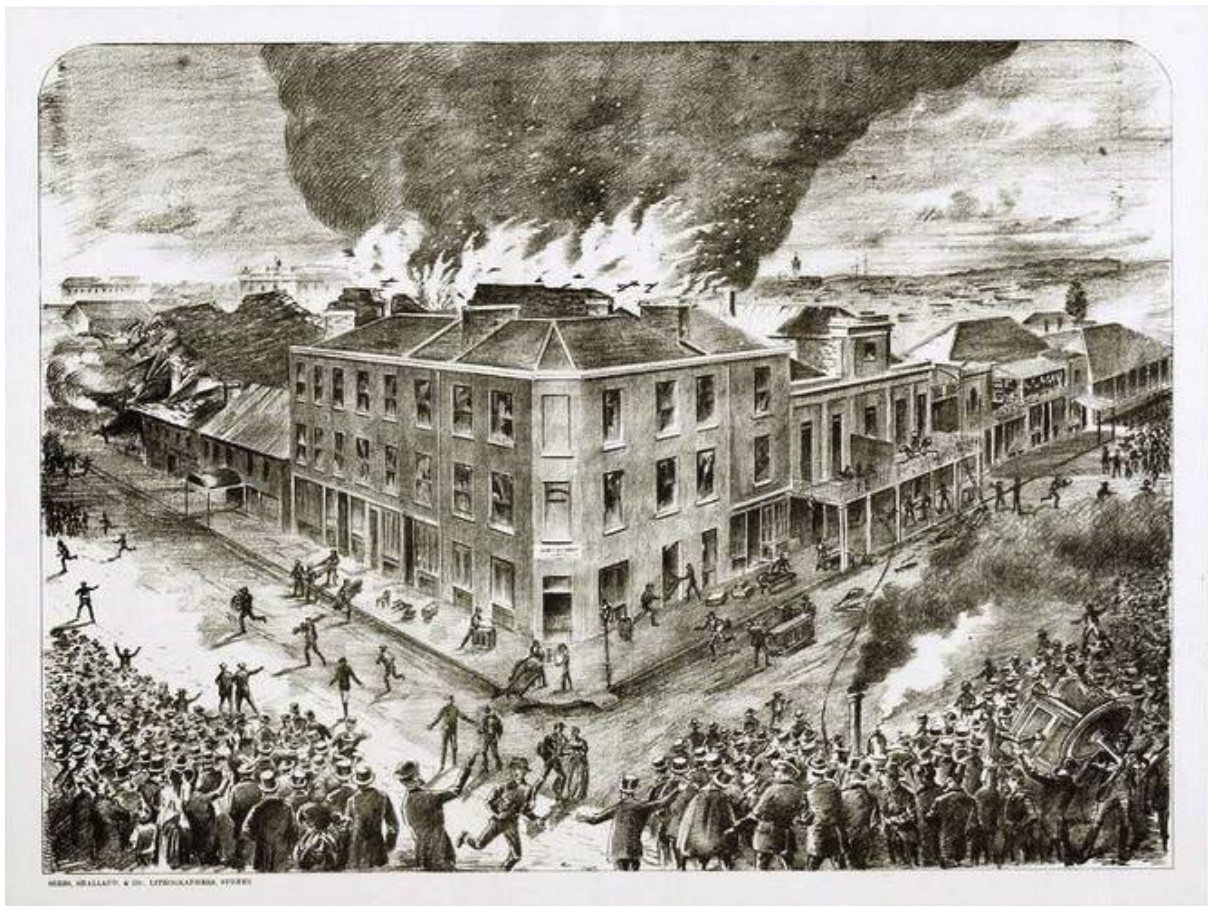


# Smoke and Ladders – early firefighting in Sydney

---



**John W. Ross**

**Cover photograph:**

Prince of Wales Theatre on fire, 1872 (City of Sydney Archives).

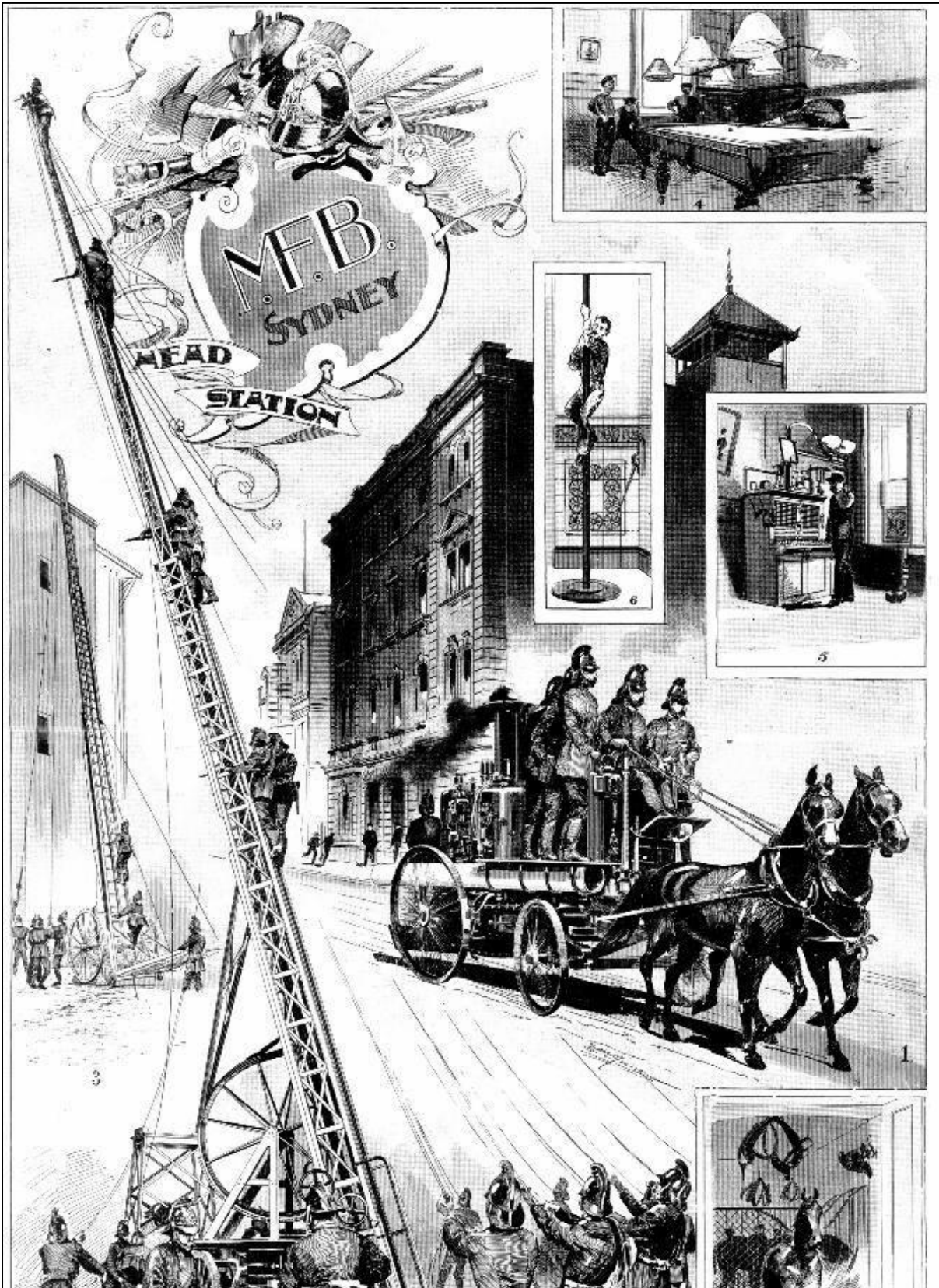


Figure 1 The Metropolitan Fire Brigade, 1896 (*Town and Country Journal*, 8 February 1896)



## Contents

Foreword .....	1
The beginning of organised firefighting .....	3
The Great Fire of London .....	3
The London Fire Office .....	3
Firefighting in the early colony .....	5
The military to the rescue .....	5
Sydney's developing water supply .....	5
The early water mains.....	7
Insurance company fire brigades .....	11
Separate insurance fire brigades .....	11
Coordinating the insurance fire brigades .....	14
Sydney Council Fire Brigade .....	16
Volunteer fire companies .....	19
Volunteer fire brigades .....	19
Victoria Theatre Fire Company .....	19
Royal Victoria Volunteer Fire Company No. 1 .....	20
Sydney Volunteer Fire Company No. 2 .....	21
Sydney Volunteer Fire Company No. 3 .....	22
South Sydney Volunteer Fire Company No. 4 .....	24
East Sydney Volunteer Fire Company No. 5 .....	25
North City Volunteer Fire Brigade .....	26
Hook and Ladder and Fire Escape Company .....	27
Industry fire brigades .....	31
Government Printing Office Volunteer Fire Brigade .....	31
Kent Brewery Fire Brigade .....	32
Standard Brewery Fire Brigade .....	34
Paddington Brewery Fire Brigade .....	35
Hudson's Fire Brigade (Redfern) .....	36
Sydney Meat Preserving Company Volunteer Fire Brigade.....	38
Inner suburban fire brigades.....	41
Newtown Fire Brigade .....	41
Glebe Fire Brigade.....	43
Waterloo and Alexandria suburban fire brigades .....	46

Mount Lachlan (later Waterloo) Fire Brigade .....	46
Waterloo and Alexandria (later Waterloo) Fire Brigade.....	47
Waterloo Fire Brigade .....	47
Alexandria Fire Brigade .....	48
Paddington Fire Brigade.....	49
Surry Hills Fire Brigade.....	51
Sydney Harbour Trust Fire Brigade .....	53
Notable early fires in Sydney .....	57
Theatre Royal, 1840.....	57
St Mary’s Cathedral, 1865 and 1869 .....	58
Prince of Wales Theatre, 1860, 1872 and 1892 .....	59
Victoria Theatre, 1880 .....	61
Garden Palace, 1882 .....	63
Great Fire in the Sydney CBD, 1890 .....	66
Notable firefighting people.....	71
Andrew Torning .....	71
Thomas and Charles Bown.....	72
Walter Liberty Vernon .....	74
Notes .....	77
Table of Figures.....	85
References .....	87
Index.....	89

## Foreword

The history of firefighting in Sydney has been well documented from the time firefighting services were brought under increasing Government regulation from 1884. But the numerous volunteer fire brigades that sprang up in the early colony before this time have not been as well documented. This history focuses on the early military and municipal firefighting efforts, the insurance company brigades, the many city and suburban volunteer brigades and the industry-based brigades. Only the suburban brigades in the ring of municipalities around the city have been included.

The cataclysmic event that kick-started the property insurance industry and its associated fire brigades was the Great Fire of London in 1666. Insurance and municipal brigades proliferated by the early nineteenth century, spurred on by monetary rewards for early attendance at fires. This system provided a model for Sydney in later years. The first steps to protect Sydney from fire were taken in 1821 when the Government purchased two fire engines, to be operated by soldiers from the barracks.

The first insurance companies were formed in the 1830s and immediately established rudimentary firefighting brigades. The Government's fire engines were handed over to the insurance brigades, which in 1851 combined into a single brigade to better coordinate their efforts. Sydney did not have a reticulated (piped) water system until the 1840s, and it was often insufficient for firefighting purposes until late in the nineteenth century.

Some types of buildings would not be insured because of high fire risk, such as theatres, printing presses and breweries. Several companies in these industries established their own volunteer fire brigades in the nineteenth century. Volunteer fire brigades sprang up around the city and inner suburbs, especially in the 1870s when several new municipalities encouraged the formation of their own brigades.

As the number of independently operating fire brigades grew, so did the conflict between competing crews eager to be awarded early arrival payments and to commandeer scarce resources such as fire plugs and ladders. In addition, there was no central control of how the available fire hoses and ladders should be most effectively deployed at a fire site. The professional insurance company brigades were keen to minimise insurance losses at fire sites, including by water damage, while the volunteer brigades tended to pour as much water as possible into burning buildings in order to extinguish fires quickly.

The increasing conflicts and lack of central management led to Government legislation in 1880 to introduce regulation to improve control and coordination of the brigades. But objections by the insurance industry delayed the passage of the bill until 1884 when the *Fire Brigades Act* finally passed into law and Sydney firefighting was placed on a better footing.

After this, the many city and suburban volunteer firemen were progressively replaced by permanent professionals, managed by the Fire Brigades Board, and by the early twentieth century the days of volunteerism were over. While the bravery and dedication of the volunteer brigades were widely admired, they were constantly plagued with difficulties in raising funds for equipment and finding sufficient firemen available to attend fires at short notice.

John W. Ross

Surry Hills, Sydney

November, 2025

email: [rossjw@ozemail.com.au](mailto:rossjw@ozemail.com.au)

## The beginning of organised firefighting

### The Great Fire of London

Serious firefighting services in England were born in the aftermath of a major conflagration that swept through central London over five days in September 1666. The medieval City of London inside the old Roman city wall was gutted, while also extending past the wall to the west. The fire started in a bakery in Pudding Lane shortly after midnight and spread rapidly.

The major firefighting method of the time for large fires was the creation of firebreaks by demolishing structures in the fire's path, but this was critically delayed by the indecisiveness of the Lord Mayor, Sir Thomas Bloodworth. By the time large-scale demolitions were ordered, the strong wind had created a firestorm that defeated such measures.



Figure 2 Great Fire of London, 1666 (Museum of London)

The fire leapt the River Fleet to threaten King Charles II's court at Whitehall Palace. The blaze was eventually put out, partly by the wind dropping, and partly by the Tower of London garrison using gunpowder to create effective firebreaks, halting the spread eastwards. After the fire, various schemes for rebuilding the city were proposed, some quite radical. In the end, London was reconstructed on essentially the same medieval street plan that exists today<sup>1</sup>.

While deaths in the fire were few, material destruction was massive: 13,200-13,500 houses, 86 or 87 parish churches, The Royal Exchange, the Customs House, St Paul's Cathedral, Bridewell Palace and other City prisons, and three of the western city gates<sup>2</sup>. The monetary value of the loss was estimated at around 9-10 million pounds (equivalent to over 2.1 billion pounds in 2023) and approximately 15% of the city's housing was destroyed<sup>3</sup>.

### The London Fire Office

One aftermath of the fire was the emergence of insurance companies, starting with Nicholas Bardon's Fire Office. Bardon, a physician, founded the company in 1680, the first in London and perhaps the world. Appalled by the loss of property and the human suffering that grew out of the

Great Fire, he came up with the idea of founding an insurance company to protect owners of homes and buildings against future fire damage.

Renamed the Phoenix Office in 1705, it initially insured buildings but not furniture, fittings or goods. He also realised that the service of an insurer should reach beyond indemnity in case of loss, so he instituted an early form of a uniformed fire brigade. His office also originated the use of fire marks where properties it insured could be identified when fire occurred<sup>4</sup>.

These insurance companies hired private firemen and offered incentives for clients who took measures to prevent fires, for example a cheaper premium for brick as opposed to wooden buildings. Two further fire offices were set up in the following decade. Each had its own fire brigade, although in the earliest days they consisted of a body of men recruited from Thames watermen, and not necessarily with a fire engine. Watermen performed an essential service, ferrying passengers and goods along the Thames in the time before widespread bridges and improved roads.

Primary evidence shows that in these early years, insurance company fire brigades evidently made little distinction between insured and uninsured properties. Daniel Defoe wrote in 1692-3 that firemen were very active in putting out fires, whether in houses insured or not insured<sup>5</sup>. Insurance companies' instructions to their firemen were to attend and help extinguish "all fires"<sup>6</sup>.

Authors later argued about why this policy was adopted: In densely populated London, fire in an uninsured building could easily spread to an insured building, rapid attendance and energetic firefighting were all good publicity for an insurance company, and extinguishing fires in the uninsured homes of the poor was deemed a charitable and humanitarian act<sup>7</sup>.

The enthusiasm for fire brigades to attend fires was undoubtedly boosted from 1707-08 by legislation introducing monetary rewards for early attendance at a fire: 30/- to the first brigade, 20/- to the second and 10/- to the third to arrive<sup>8</sup>. They were considerable sums of money at the time.

The instructions to insurance company fire brigades to fight all fires continued into the nineteenth century, and the fire marks on buildings became more of an advertising feature for the company. The legend of insurance company fire brigades standing back or even packing up and leaving a fire seemed to arise from the proliferation of insurance companies (and their associated fire brigades) as the nineteenth century progressed, which led to too many fire engines attending fires with too little water for them all to be useful.

In 1832, confusion between parish and private firefighting efforts led to the insurance companies forming a combined firefighting brigade, which would eventually become the London Fire Brigade. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, some of the insurance brigades responded to demands on the costs to their employers by handing over their duties to the newly established municipal fire services<sup>9</sup>.

## Firefighting in the early colony

### The military to the rescue

As early as 1813, Sydney newspapers complained about the lack of any fire engines, admitting that even if they were obtained, they could not be supplied with sufficient water to make them useful<sup>10</sup>. A newspaper correspondent recommended that for a moderate contribution, a chain of wells or reservoirs for rainwater should be established in every street, buckets be kept at the Watchhouse of every district and a number of persons be induced for “a very trifling premium” to act as firemen. He thought that willing neighbours would carry the water to the engines. The writer believed these were the first suggestions made on this subject in the colony<sup>11</sup>.

But the first steps made to ensure Sydney’s protection against fire did not occur until 1821, when two fire engines were purchased by the Government and arrived in the colony by the end of the year<sup>12</sup>. On 15 January 1822, the new appliances were first put to the test when a minor fire occurred at the military barracks. While it was just a small chimney fire, it was the first recorded instance of a fire engine being used in Sydney<sup>13</sup>.

One of the engines was eventually sent to the settlement of Parramatta, but on its first use in November 1827 at a stable fire, it was pronounced “incompetent and useless, despite not being an old one”<sup>14</sup>. By that time, it had fallen into disrepair, and the neighbours had to resort to drawing water from nearby wells to extinguish the fire<sup>15</sup>. But a worse fate awaited the neglected fire engine the following year when a torrential downpour caused a flood that swept the fire engine from a shed next to Government House into the river. It floated downstream and eventually sank to a watery grave<sup>16</sup>.

The first appliances had to be pulled by hand and were considered inadequate for Sydney’s needs. In any case, the water supply in Sydney caused major problems for fire fighters. In the early 1830s, a building was erected at the Police Station to house the fire appliances. This was considered a more central location than the military barracks, and coincided with better access to water across the city following the construction of Busby’s Bore from present-day Centennial Park to Hyde Park.

During the 1830s, insurance companies began to establish businesses in Sydney. There was talk of these companies establishing fire brigades as they had in England and America. For this reason, there was pressure for the Government’s appliances to be transferred to their custody and for them to take the lead in firefighting. During this time, fire brigades in London took pride in being able to attend a fire within five minutes of the fire alarm bell being sounded. But in Sydney it could take the military brigade about thirty minutes to arrive, by which time the building was well alight.

The first known serious incident involving fire engines occurred in November 1833 to deal with a shipboard fire. Their efforts, though delayed, were reported to be admirable. The *Captain Alexander* was docked at King’s Wharf and while her cargo was being offloaded it suddenly exploded. The force of the explosion engulfed the entire ship in flames. Fire engines arrived soon afterwards, and soldiers battled the growing blaze. The explosion was attributed to gunpowder stored in the ship<sup>17</sup>.

### Sydney’s developing water supply

A small stream running into Sydney Cove was the original fresh water supply for the fledgling colony of New South Wales. But the stream was unable to consistently provide water in dry weather, and

during a drought in 1790, an officer who had experienced water shortages in India suggested digging storage tanks in the sandstone beside the stream. These would be filled up in wet weather to provide a reservoir of water in dry conditions. Three such tanks were excavated, giving the Tank Stream its name<sup>18</sup>.



Figure 3 Tank Stream, 1842 (John Skinner Prout)

Despite efforts by successive Governors to keep cattle from muddying the water and avoid runoff from the settlement, it became increasingly polluted and was abandoned in 1826. By then, water was being carried in carts from the Lachlan Swamp (in present-day Centennial Park) to a watering point in Hyde Park.

The *Sydney Water Supply Act 1833* was the first piece of legislation relating to water supply in Sydney, approving the construction and maintenance of Busby's Bore to bring water from Lachlan Swamp to Hyde Park. Tunnel construction started at Hyde Park in 1827 but was not completed until 1837, although seepage into the tunnel from springs along the way provided drinking water for the city from 1830.

By 1837, the population of the city was over 20,000 and the tunnel was capable of delivering a barely adequate 1.5 million litres per day. However, there was another drought in 1838-39 and Busby's Bore could not supply enough water. There was a plan to excavate a reservoir in Hyde Park to hold 68 megalitres but it was never built. Although Busby's Bore did not run dry during the 1838-39 drought, there were very serious water shortages and people paid 6d per bucket for water during this period.

Two forms of pressure led to a change in the institutional arrangements in the colony at this time. The British Colonial Office was looking for ways to move administrative responsibility to local residents, and there was a growing discontent within the colony with the lack of urgency in fixing problems with water supply and sanitation. This led to the declaration of Sydney as a city in 1842 and a municipal council established for its administration. The primary responsibility of the council was to supply water to the rapidly growing city. Following the 1838-39 drought there was a wet period of about nine years with frequent flooding. By the early 1840s, it was clear that water from Lachlan Swamps via Busby's Bore was not capable of delivering an adequate water supply to the city<sup>19</sup>.

From 1858, the Botany Swamps Scheme pumped water from near the present Sydney Airport to the Crown Street reservoir, which opened in 1859, and to the Paddington Reservoir, which opened in 1864. But the city grew faster than the ability of its water supply to cope, and water shortages continued through the 1860s. At the same time, A Royal Commission to develop a long-term plan for Sydney's water supply resulted in the Upper Nepean Scheme from 1880.

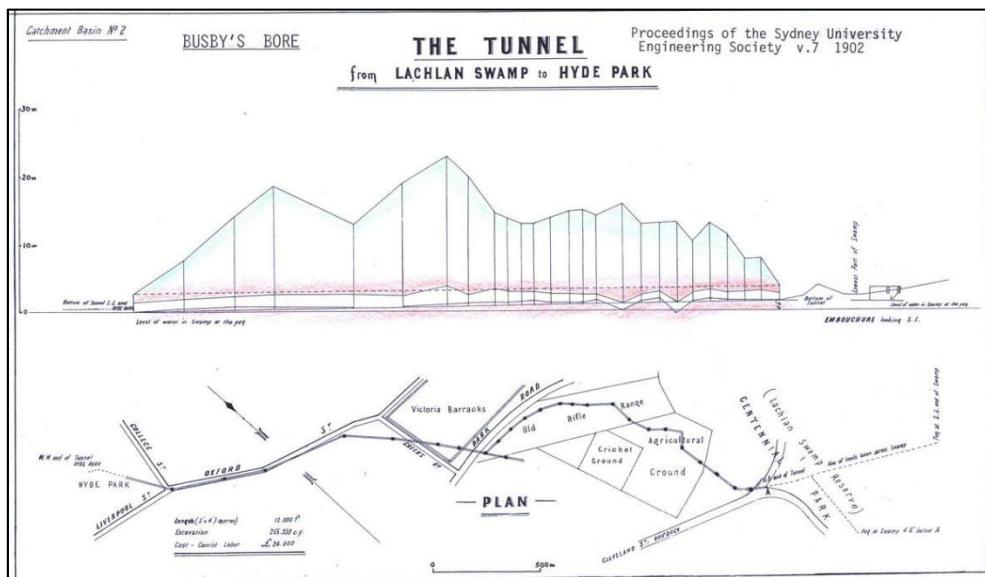


Figure 4 Busby's Bore (Engineers Australia)

Fears over drought in 1886 inspired the Hudson Brothers' Temporary Scheme, a system of temporary open water channels using gravity to move water from the partially constructed Upper Nepean Scheme to the Botany Bay Swamps. The scheme was used until 1888 when the Upper Nepean Scheme was fully operational.

The Upper Nepean Scheme was the largest engineering works undertaken in Australia in the nineteenth century. The ambitious scheme to transport water nearly 100 kilometres into the city was constructed between 1880 and 1888, with a final cost of more than £2 million. Much of this scheme is still in service and culminated in the construction of the Woronora (1927-1941) and Warragamba Dams (1948-1960)<sup>20</sup>.

### The early water mains

In 1832, the first water pipes in Sydney were laid from Hyde Park along George Street to the Dockyard on the western side of Circular Quay, to supply water for departing ships. A convenience for filling casks was fitted at the dock, avoiding the need to pull water carts a long distance in warm weather<sup>21</sup>. But not everyone was happy, as George Street was reportedly knee-deep in water and mud caused by heavy rains, exacerbated by the breaking up of the streets for laying pipes<sup>22</sup>. It was not long before pipes were being laid from the first pipe to nearby businesses.

At the end of 1832, John Busby's crew were offering to install branch pipes to business premises, and one was reportedly laid to Mr. Kemp's livery stable in York Street<sup>23</sup>. By 1836, newspapers were reporting that water pipes were being laid throughout the city with plugs attached<sup>24</sup>, starting with a pipe to the city market (on the site of present-day Queen Victoria Building)<sup>25</sup>. It was hoped that this

would be of some use to firemen in the future<sup>26</sup>, as the fire engines of the time were just water carts with mechanical pumping handles, which would run out of water at a large fire.

Sydneysiders, always on the lookout for entertainment, discovered a novel diversion in 1837 when the two stopcocks in King Street were opened at night to carry away stagnant and rusty water from the iron water mains. The water initially gushed up to 20 feet, then fell to about eight feet and was allowed to flow for two or three hours. Local men would bet each other they could stand on the upward torrent for three minutes, but could only last less than a minute, much to the amusement of bystanders<sup>27</sup>. It was a kind of aquatic rodeo ride for city slickers.

As the construction of Busby's Bore was nearing completion, the Legislative Council appointed a Committee on the Tunnel for Supplying the Town of Sydney with Water, which issued a progress report in August 1837. The tunnel itself was completed, and was wholly subterranean, about four-fifths of it running through solid rock, the rest through sand supported by chiselled masonry without cement. The water fell under gravity about one foot nine inches from the Lachlan Swamp to Hyde Park.

The tunnel was about one third longer (and took much more time) than originally estimated because deviations were required to avoid beds of sand, and most of the time was spent boring through sandstone and sinking shafts to find a rocky course for the next section to be dug. John Busby became defensive when quizzed on the long time taken to complete the tunnel, and uncharitably blamed the "unskilful, idle and worthless character of the convict labourers and overseers employed under him".

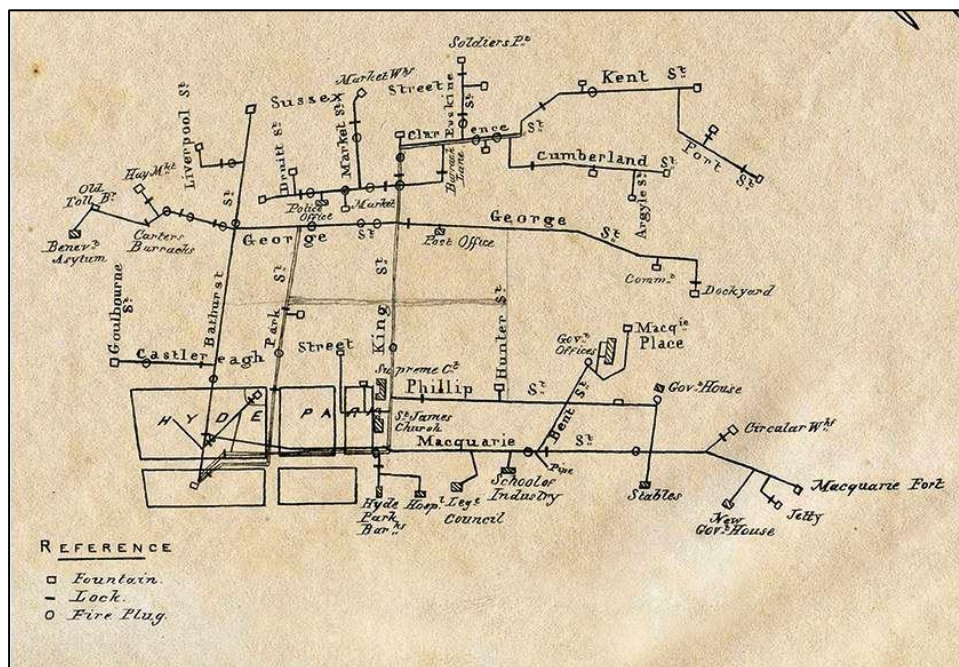


Figure 5 Sydney's water pipes, 1844 (City of Sydney Archives)

The military engineer Major George Barney told the committee that the cost of building a proposed reservoir in Hyde Park at the scale he recommended (15 million gallons, or three months' consumption for a future population of 30,000) at the present price of free (that is, convict) labour was £30,000. The population of Sydney at the current census in 1836 was nearly 20,000, an increase

in 4,000 since the previous census in 1833. The population was only about 10,000 when the plan to build the Tunnel was proposed in 1826. In the end, the reservoir was never constructed.

The Committee did not consider the expense of procuring and laying pipes for the distribution of the water throughout the town<sup>28</sup>, but by the following year, George Barney was supervising the installation of small-bore water pipes connected to the main pipes. The plan was to install taps at the corner of twenty streets, expected to be “a great benefit to the public and washerwomen in particular”<sup>29</sup>.

In 1842, Barney was able to supply the water committee of the City Council with a map of several water lines in the city, showing the location of fountains and fire plugs<sup>30</sup>. A City Council map from 1844 (possibly the same one) shows water mains starting near the Oxford Street corner of Hyde Park and running along several main streets<sup>31</sup>. In 1846, Sydney Council borrowed £10,000 to finance the laying of more water mains throughout the city<sup>32</sup>, although in 1848 a City Councillor complained about the cutting up of the streets for water mains and gas pipes after large sums had already been spent on the repair of the roads<sup>33</sup>.

The replacement of Busby’s Bore with the Botany Swamps scheme as the source of the city’s water brought with it an unexpected problem. Soon after the scheme opened in 1858, it was reported that the small water pipes connected with the water mains in the city were suddenly choking up. When the pipes were investigated, it was found that most of the blockages were caused by large eels that had managed to swim from Botany along the main pipes but could not force their way through the smaller service pipes. The *Empire* reported that the service pipe to their own office was similarly blocked, and when examined, a fourteen-inch eel had become jammed at the junction of the pipes<sup>34</sup>.

Before long, about a dozen eels of nine to eighteen inches long had blocked the town’s water pipes. The suggested solution was to apply the method used successfully in England when a similar problem occurred, which was to attach a filtering device at the water inlet perforated with small holes, like the head of a watering can<sup>35</sup>.



## Insurance company fire brigades

### Separate insurance fire brigades

The first insurance company in the Australian colonies was the Australian Fire and Life Assurance Company, which was established in June 1836<sup>36</sup>. The new company called for tenders to supply ladders, buckets, axes and other equipment for the company's proposed Fire Engine Establishment<sup>37</sup>. Their advertisements from October referred to fire buckets, ladders and axes that were located in Sussex Street and Darling Harbour<sup>38</sup>.



Figure 6 Early fire engines (*Sydney Herald*, 3 October 1836)

An “assurance” company provides a predetermined amount of financial support as compensation in a covered situation, such as permanent disability or death or the expiration of the policy term. It is mainly applied to life and term policies. On the other hand, an “insurance” company provides monetary compensation for loss incurred in a covered event. It mainly includes home, motor, health, travel and property cover<sup>39</sup>.

The Government's fire engines and firemen were then placed at the disposal of the company<sup>40</sup>. At this time, the Government gave notice of a proposed Act of Parliament for regulating buildings and party walls and for “preventing mischiefs by fire within the Town of Sydney”. It was based on the *London Building Act 1774* (14 Geo. III c.78) as far as was applicable to Sydney. It included a requirement that fire engines and ladders were to be kept in known places, and firecocks (fire hydrants) to be fixed to the mains. A penalty would be imposed for chimneys allowed to catch fire<sup>41</sup>.

The insurance company announced that fire buckets, ladders and axes belonging to the company were available to superintendents. They were also placed at the Military Barracks where the Government fire engines were held in readiness to act in case of a fire<sup>42</sup>. These were moved soon afterwards to a new building beside the more centrally located Police Office<sup>43</sup>.

In July 1837, a newspaper article on the financial affairs of the Australia Fire and Life Insurance Company reported that 150 fire policies and 31 life policies had been sold by then. The company's fire brigade had incurred a small expense by extinguishing a fire in an uninsured building, but the

owner paid that back. A powerful fire engine had been ordered from England and was expected soon. In the meantime, fire engines belonging to the Government and a body of men from the Barracks to work them were, by direction of the Governor, placed at the disposal of the company in case of fire.

Ladders and buckets were fixed at three locations: in Barracks Yard, at the wharves of Messrs. Parker and Haden's and Messrs. Lamb and Parbury's wharf. The overseers of these wharves were given control over the implements lodged there and undertook to act as Superintendents of the Southern and Northern Division of the town. They were directed to employ men and water carts in case of fire<sup>44</sup>.

But the brigade's usefulness was greatly hampered by the small supply of piped water at the time<sup>45</sup>. A fire in Carters' Barracks in October 1837 required the fire engines to be resupplied from water carts<sup>46</sup>. By the end of 1837, Australian Fire and Life began to copy the idea of the London Insurance Company by placing a small plaque, or firemark, on some conspicuous part of every building insured by them. The company adopted a gilt kangaroo, about eight inches high, with the name of the company and the date of its establishment around the border<sup>47</sup>.



Figure 7 Firemark collection (Museum of Fire)

In December 1837, a large fire at Dr. Hoskin's premises in George Street was attended by three or four engines, but no water was available from the mains (because the colony was then in drought), so water had to be collected from nearby wells. A pump in Mr. Burdekin's yard was used to obtain water to put out the fire, which had reached his stables. The *Sydney Monitor* reported that the soldiers inside the burning building threw Dr. Hoskin's piano down from an upper floor, smashing it

on the ground below<sup>48</sup>. This was an example of the reckless approach taken by the military that was often reported before the insurance companies took over firefighting and made greater efforts to minimise damage to insured property.

The *Buildings Act* of 1837 ensured that the first fire brigade to put water on the fire received compensation from the government of 30 shillings, with the subsequent second and third brigades to receive 20 and 10 shillings respectively. This financial incentive (copied directly from London fire brigades) created fierce competition between insurance fire brigades to attend fire calls as quickly as possible. These incentive amounts continued until the *City of Sydney Improvement Act* of 1879<sup>49</sup>, when they were increased to 40, 30 and 15 shillings respectively<sup>50</sup>.

The Sydney Alliance Insurance Company opened in January 1839<sup>51</sup> but had ceased operation by 1846<sup>52</sup>. Other insurance companies began operations in Sydney from this time but did not all provide fire insurance<sup>53</sup>. In early 1840, a group of Sydney businessmen with property in the town decided to form an association for insurance against fire on mutual principles, to be called the Mutual Fire Insurance Association.

The chairman of the Association, Thomas Burdekin, said that he had long thought such an association would relieve the industrious tradesman and proprietor from the exorbitant premiums now being charged on insurances, apparently for the sole purpose of raising a large fund for the profit of shareholders in the various insurance companies. He said such associations worked well in England, where nobody thought of going to an insurance company to secure property, but to an organisation where it was secured by them to each other. When a fire occurred, the loss would be made up proportionately among those insured. It would be in the interest of all members to prevent fires by becoming an efficient body of firemen.

Members would be effective firefighters, as they had a financial interest in minimising the loss at each fire<sup>54</sup>. Each member of the association was required to pay 0.5% of the amount of his sum insured to form a fund for the purchase of firefighting apparatus, and for the prompt payment of damages in case of fire and other necessary purposes<sup>55</sup>. One of the main complaints about property insurance at the time was that insurance cover was limited to £3,000 per building. The Association offered insurance up to £10,000 per building<sup>56</sup>. This was more in line with the potential amount of damage caused by fires in the large warehouses being constructed to cater for the expansion of the wool trade to Britain.

In May 1842, the *Bencoolen* brought two fire engines to Sydney for the Mutual Association's use<sup>57</sup>. But so much contention arose among the members of the Mutual Association that the society was obliged to dissolve<sup>58</sup> in 1842 and its appliances were taken over by the City Council<sup>59</sup>. In August 1844, a meeting was held to form the Sydney Fire Insurance Company. Business would commence when applications to the value of £10,000 were received<sup>60</sup>. The following year, the Imperial Fire Insurance Company of London advertised that it had established a new branch in Sydney<sup>61</sup>. By the next year, this company was reportedly doing a considerable amount of business, despite its rates being noticeably higher than rival companies<sup>62</sup>.

This was followed in 1846 by the Alliance British & Foreign Life and Fire Assurance Company, which had been established in London in 1824, opening a Sydney office in George Street. It was also referred to as the London Alliance Fire Assurance Company<sup>63</sup>. Its rates were much lower than the

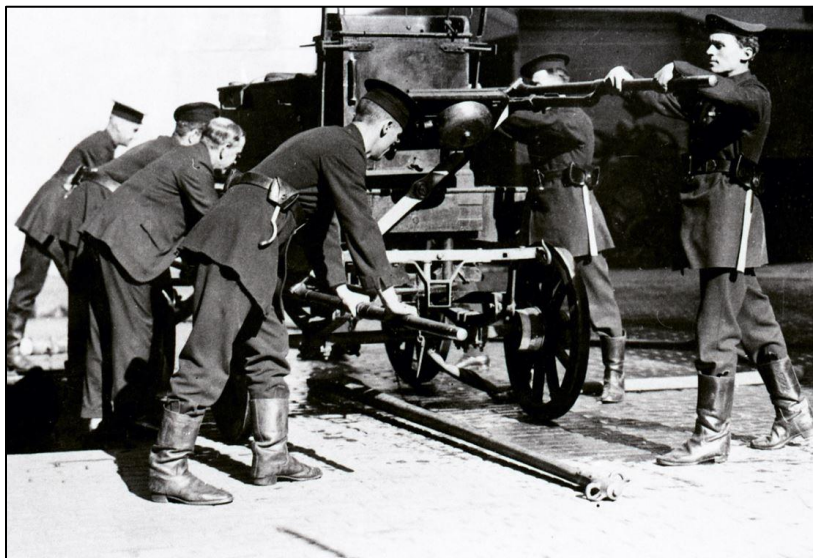
Imperial Company. The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported in August 1846 that Sydney property owners could then choose between four property insurance companies<sup>64</sup>.

This meant that there were four insurance fire brigades, as well as the Government brigade attending fires in an un-coordinated manner. By this time, the City Council's fire brigade was widely reported to be ineffective<sup>65</sup>. Its fire engine was very small and inefficient, the hose was in poor condition, and some of tools belonging to it when it was purchased were missing<sup>66</sup>.

### **Coordinating the insurance fire brigades**

Acknowledging that the system should be better coordinated, and in the absence of a useful Government brigade, three of the insurance companies (the local Sydney Fire Insurance Company, the London-based the Imperial Insurance Company and the Alliance Insurance Company) combined their resources to form the Insurance Companies Fire Brigade<sup>67</sup>, which was established in January 1851. Thomas Bown was engaged as the brigade Superintendent in January 1852. He advertised himself as an engineer and gas fitter who imported and sold patent taps and other equipment<sup>68</sup>.

By 1833, private insurance companies in England had amalgamated into a single association known as the London Fire Brigade Establishment, providing London with a single fire brigade rather than a multitude of smaller brigades. England had a turbulent history of insurance companies protecting mainly the buildings that they insured, but in Sydney it was very different. With the benefit of the London experience of assimilating their insurance brigades into a single brigade, Sydney had a good role model to follow<sup>69</sup>.



**Figure 8 Recreation of 1840s firefighting (Museum of Fire)**

In November 1853, *The People's Advocate* reported that a deputation of insurance company representatives met the Governor-General (Sir Charles FitzRoy) to request that the Government take over the various fire engines belonging to the insurance companies and establish a general fire brigade, for the efficient maintenance of which the citizens should be called upon to pay rates. The newspaper thought it was hypocritical for the insurance companies to ask the customers to pay for the risk for which they are already charged by the companies<sup>70</sup> and this proposal did not eventuate.

By 1854, public dissatisfaction with the Insurance Companies Fire Brigade was growing. Mr. J.S. Mitchell, the Secretary of the Sydney Fire Insurance Company, felt compelled to defend the insurance brigades in a letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald*. He began by pointing out that these brigades were instigated in the early days of the insurance industry for their own protection (that is, to minimise insurance losses). The companies bore all the expenses involved, and until recently could not afford a better firefighting service.

The brigade, consisting of twelve men, was paid very little at first, but the pay had recently risen in common with other classes of workers. There had been repeated complaints about the late arrival of fire engines at fires until they were out of control or even extinguished. But it took time for the alarm to reach the station and for the men, who lived in different parts of the town, to be summoned. Horses could not be contracted at that time, meaning that the fire engine had to be dragged by the firemen to the fire. He concluded with a summary of the insurance industry: his company insured about 1,400 properties to a value of over a million pounds, and the other insurance offices had about the same between them, making a total of about two million pounds of insurance coverage<sup>71</sup>.



**Figure 9 Insurance Brigades fire station, 1907 (Museum of Fire)**

By 1876, the Insurance Companies' Fire Brigade numbered 26 men and was divided into a Fire Brigade and an Auxiliary Fire and Salvage Company, which provided salvage services and training for the main brigade. The Superintendent was paid an annual salary of £250, but all the others were paid a retainer of 10 shillings a week for their services, and 1/6d per hour for attendance at fires that took more than three hours to extinguish<sup>72</sup>.

The difficulty of obtaining horses in a reasonably quick time in the middle of the night had been a problem for a long time. The response in June 1867 was for five members of the Insurance Companies' Brigade to form the Fire Brigade Omnibus Company, initially running three omnibuses with eighteen horses, serving Glebe Point and Redfern. The horses were made available at night to the brigades at short notice for hauling fire engines, a much better system than having to procure them from elsewhere with considerable delay. With so many horses, several of them would always

be in the stable, ready for any emergency. Under this system, the time and effort required for the firemen to haul the engine around town would be replaced by a fast journey to any fire<sup>73</sup>.

In 1880, the Insurance Companies' Fire Brigade led ten brigades in forming the Metropolitan Associated Fire Brigades. The first meeting held in January 1881, with Charles Bown as Superintendent. Seven dissenting brigades formed the rival United Volunteer Fire Brigades Association, which sought to counteract the insurance brigades. These were the No. 1, 2 and 3 Volunteer Fire Companies, Woollahra, Glebe, Hudson's (Redfern) and the Mount Lachlan Brigades. Between them they boasted one steam engine and eleven manual engines with all necessary plant<sup>74</sup>.

Following the passage of the *Fire Brigades Act* in 1884, the Insurance Companies' Fire Brigade joined all the other brigades to form the Metropolitan Fire Brigade under the control of the Colonial Government<sup>75</sup>.

### **Sydney Council Fire Brigade**

The fire brigade operated sporadically by the Sydney City Council (generally known as the City Fire Brigade) and those operated by the insurance companies are somewhat intertwined, and the council's brigade has already been mentioned in the section on the insurance companies' brigades. However, a separate description of the Council's involvement with early firefighting will show its troubled history more clearly.

Sydney Municipal Council (as it was first called) was established in 1842 by the Colonial Government to hand responsibility for civic infrastructure such as road building and sanitation to a municipal authority. In 1844, the Mutual Fire Insurance Association (which was formed two years earlier as a reaction to high insurance premiums and low insurance coverage and was based on the English mutual model) offered their fire engine to the Council at a reduced price when the Association was dissolved<sup>76</sup>.

The City Fire Brigade was formed in 1845 to attend fires in uninsured buildings, manned by council staff. The brigade was first reported in the press when the firemen, fully equipped and in official costume, with patent leather helmets in the Grecian style, went through the usual monthly inspection on the Racecourse, and then drove their engines round the city, in accordance with ancient custom<sup>77</sup>.

But by 1850, the Council's small fire engine was inefficient, the hose was defective and several tools belonging to it when it was purchased were missing<sup>78</sup>. In January 1851, the City Council approved the reformation of a fire brigade of twelve men<sup>79</sup>. The ineffectiveness of the City Fire Brigade and the chronic dithering by the Council about its replacement prompted the formation of a more efficient Insurance Companies Fire Brigade in March 1851<sup>80</sup>.

By November 1851, Sydney Council decided not to maintain an expensive fire brigade as there were several insurance company fire engines operating, so it decided to sell its two fire engines at auction<sup>81</sup>. The wealthy businessman Edward Flood eventually purchased the City Council's two fire engines at auction for £170<sup>82</sup>. He may have wanted to protect his own large wool store in East Circular Quay, where he eventually lost about £50,000 of wool in a very large fire in 1870<sup>83</sup>. The Colonial Government abolished the City Council in October 1853 following its inability to supply

water and sewerage services, replacing it with three Commissioners for the next four years. The Commissioners borrowed more money but were also unable to provide these services<sup>84</sup>.

The proposed *Fire Brigade Act* of 1854 was meant to enable the Council's Commissioners to establish a fire brigade, with a superintendent and other officers who could levy a fire rate to fund it. But the insurance companies objected to the Act, as they would have to pay out on any property their firemen pulled down to prevent the spread of fire<sup>85</sup>. It was not mentioned in Parliament after August 1855 and was never enacted<sup>86</sup>.

In March 1867, Charles Bown of the Insurance Companies' Fire Brigade (the nephew of Thomas Bown) wrote to the Sydney Council offering their four fire engines and equipment to the Council for their use, along with an annual subsidy of £500 towards defraying the expenses. He wrote that it cost the insurance companies more than twice this amount to keep their brigade in good repair. He thought it was proper that superintendence of fire brigades should be placed under the control of municipal bodies, as in most cities in Europe and America, they were either in this way or controlled or in the hands of the national government<sup>87</sup>.

Charles Bown's offer was not taken up, but in September 1879 the City Fire Brigade was resurrected with a head station at 316 Castlereagh Street and a fire engine on loan from the Australian Steamship Navigation Company. About twenty men enrolled in the new brigade at a meeting, the majority belonging to other brigades. The brigade already had its own band, if not its own fire engine as yet<sup>88</sup>.

The City Fire Brigade joined the Metropolitan Associated Fire Brigades on its formation in January 1881<sup>89</sup>. A few months later, the Council formed a patrol of fire watchers to detect fires as quickly as possible. The *Evening News* reported that this useful body of men was a sort of civil fire brigade that was very little known to their fellow citizens. There were fourteen who worked in a well-organised way, two of whom were on duty every night. One of these remained in the Town Hall while the other constantly passed back and forth between the Town Hall and the Crown Street Reservoir.

If the officer on patrol detected a fire or heard a fire bell, he immediately communicated with the man at the Town Hall, then ran to the fire. The stationary man ran to the nearest turncock (whose job was to turn on the water at the mains), roused him, and ran to the fire. The first turncock repeated the process with his nearest neighbour, and he with his, each running off directly after doing so, so that in less than 20 minutes a little band of experienced and able men were at work, either independently or together with the brigades.

The scheme was reportedly a very practical one and was used with excellent results<sup>90</sup>. The *Fire Brigades Act* was finally passed in January 1884 (after four years proceeding at glacial speed through Parliament), handing control of all firefighting over to the Colonial Government.



## **Volunteer fire companies**

### **Volunteer fire brigades**

Despite the establishment of fire insurance companies in Sydney from the 1830s, insurers refused to cover some types of buildings which were regarded as having a high risk of fire. These were mainly theatres (highly inflammable timber and drapery), printing presses (even more inflammable paper, solvent-based ink and heat from the machinery) and breweries (volatile and inflammable ethanol, cleaning compounds and heated liquids)<sup>91</sup>. From the early 1840s, some theatre owners decided they had to deal with their own fire risk by forming volunteer fire brigades.

Eventually, the three inner city breweries and the Government Printing Office followed suit, as did the large timber merchants Hudson Brothers of Redfern. In the mid-1850s, various factors contributed to the development of a new type of firefighting organisation in New South Wales, the volunteer fire brigade. The most significant factors were the collapse of the Council's brigade and the lack of will by Government to set up a viable long-term replacement brigade. Also, the insurance sector was unable or unwilling to create a more extensive fire protection system.

Until this time, fire protection in the Colony had followed the British trend of provision by the insurance industry and local authorities. In Britain, the strong council and police organisation were able to fill the void when provision by the insurance system was found wanting. But problems with the administration of the City of Sydney made this option difficult here<sup>92</sup>.

### **Victoria Theatre Fire Company**

The Royal Hotel in George Street and the interior Old Theatre burned down in March 1840. Four fire engines played on the fire after the mains were turned on, but the fire prevailed over the best efforts of the firemen<sup>93</sup>. One of the Government's Ordnance fire engines was the first to arrive, accompanied by about 200 soldiers from the barracks. In addition, about 300 convicts arrived from the Hyde Park Barracks and worked tirelessly for several hours, prompting praise in the news reports.

The small fire engine of the Australian Assurance Company arrived soon afterwards, followed by the Alliance Company's larger engine. There was a delay when nobody could remove the fire plug for some time. But no fire engine in the colony could reach the top of a large building like the Royal Hotel. The Victoria Theatre was at the rear of the hotel, and while its roof did catch fire once, only a few shingles were burnt<sup>94</sup>.

Soon after this disastrous fire, the owner Joseph Wyatt moved to the adjacent Victoria Theatre<sup>95</sup> and purchased a fire engine that attended several fires during the 1840s. For example, a "Theatre Engine" reportedly attended the fire at the Royal Victoria Theatre in September 1844<sup>96</sup>.

## Royal Victoria Volunteer Fire Company No. 1

In October 1854, Andrew Torning, the manager and lessee of the Royal Victoria Theatre in Pitt Street, decided to establish a volunteer fire company to extinguish fires in uninsured buildings such as his own theatre. He called it the Royal Victoria Volunteer Fire Company No. 1 and invited men to enrol in the company<sup>97</sup>.

He purchased a fire engine that had been built to protect the 1851 Great Exhibition in the Crystal Palace in London. By the following month, a corps of 32 men had been engaged to make themselves available for action whenever a fire required their services. An alarm bell was installed and a caretaker appointed to be constantly in attendance in the yard of the theatre, where the engine was housed. The members would observe a practice day each month<sup>98</sup>.



Figure 10 Victoria Theatre Fire Brigade, c1854 (Museum of Fire)

The press pointed out that Andrew Torning's model of a volunteer brigade was essentially the adoption of an American institution<sup>99</sup>. A banner was made of white silk and edged with blue cord and blue tassels, inscribed with the motto "We strive to save". This motto also adorned the rear of the fire engine. The Chief Commissioner of the Sydney Council presented the company with a map showing the location of the water plugs in the city, and the businessman Mr. Malcolm presented them with four horses for their use<sup>100</sup>.

It is likely that the idea of a volunteer brigade was put to Torning by the American actor James Stark, who was appearing at the theatre with his wife in 1854. The Starks had bad memories of theatre fires, having commissioned a theatre in San Francisco in 1851 which was lost before opening in the Great Fire the same year. Shortly afterwards, they lost another theatre in Sacramento to fire<sup>101</sup>. James Stark probably persuaded Torning to form a fire brigade to protect his uninsured theatre, while Torning would also remember the fire at the theatre in 1844 when some props caught fire, but no major damage occurred<sup>102</sup>.

Torning was officially elected Superintendent in 1856<sup>103</sup> and continued in that role until 1859 when he left for America. His departure followed a period of significant financial hardship for his company Torning & Son, which was declared insolvent in 1856<sup>104</sup>.

In March 1857, the brigade changed its name to the Australian Volunteer Fire Company No. 1<sup>105</sup>. By 1866, the brigade's annual report mentioned that the four manual fire engines attended 28 fires over the previous year, and that they were raising funds for a steam-powered fire engine<sup>106</sup>. When Torning returned to Sydney in 1867 he was again elected to the position of Superintendent<sup>107</sup>. This continued until 1876<sup>108</sup> when he was appointed Captain of the brigade<sup>109</sup>.



Figure 11 Volunteer Fire Coy No. 1 uniform, 1870s (W. H. Shroder)

From February 1868, the brigade was known as the Royal Alfred Australian Volunteer Fire Company No. 1, in honour of the first Royal visit to the Australian colonies by Prince Alfred (Queen Victoria's second son) between January and April 1868<sup>110</sup>. The Prince consented to become patron of the fire company<sup>111</sup>.

In August 1880, the brigade was one of seven dissenting fire brigades represented at a meeting to form the United Volunteer Fire Brigades and elect a superintendent-general and four assistants<sup>112</sup>. In 1884, the brigade registered with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB), the new governing body for fire brigades in Sydney. However, like many other volunteer brigades, the company was unable to maintain the requirements set by the MFB and was disbanded in 1886<sup>113</sup>.

## Sydney Volunteer Fire Company No. 2

As a result of an unspecified disagreement within the Volunteer Fire Company No. 1 (alluded to by Andrew Torning in an interview with *The Empire* in 1871)<sup>114</sup>, Volunteer Fire Company No. 2 was formed in January 1856 using a new fire engine borrowed from Messrs. Beit & Sons until the company could purchase its own<sup>115</sup>. A few months later, Governor Sir William Denison granted the company a piece of land immediately adjacent to the new Water Police Court in Phillip Street North to build a fire engine house<sup>116</sup>. This building was opened in December 1856<sup>117</sup>.

In August 1862, the United Insurance Companies Fire Brigade of Sydney donated a cheque of £25 to the Volunteer Fire Company No. 2 to mark their appreciation for the service rendered by the company at a recent fire<sup>118</sup>. It was also reported that the insurance companies had made a liberal contribution to the cost of the company's engine house in 1857<sup>119</sup>, indicating that the insurance industry saw the benefit of volunteer fire brigades who could assist their own brigades (which reportedly had fairly small fire engines at their disposal) in minimising insurance losses caused by fire.

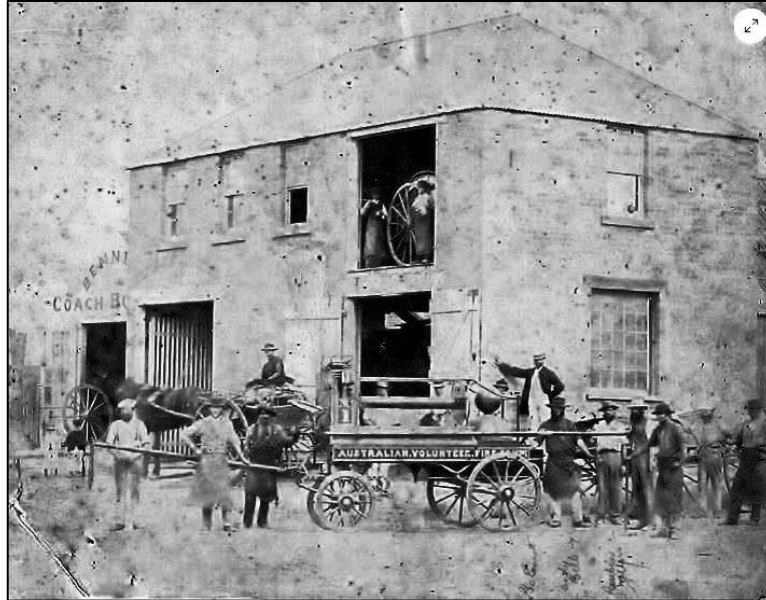


Figure 12 First Australian horse-drawn fire engine 1867 (Museum of Fire)

In June 1864, the No. 2 company was fundraising to purchase a new steam-powered fire engine<sup>120</sup>. This engine was imported in July 1865, when the company was still organising fundraising benefit concerts to pay for it<sup>121</sup>. The older manual engine was moved to a new branch fire station in Bathurst Street, while the new steam engine was kept at the Head Station in Phillip Street North<sup>122</sup>.

In its annual report in January 1878, the company declared that it had one steam fire engine, one large manual and one medium-sized manual engine<sup>123</sup>. In August 1880, the No. 2 company joined six other dissenting brigades to join the United Volunteer Fire Brigades<sup>124</sup>. In 1884, the brigade was registered with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB), the new governing body for fire brigades in Sydney.

### **Sydney Volunteer Fire Company No. 3**

The 1870s was a decade of expansion in central Sydney and the surrounding suburbs. Many small factories and warehouses were constructed, accompanied by an influx of pubs and shops. In January 1875, a meeting was held at the Barley Mow Hotel at Park and Castlereagh Streets by city residents who thought there was room for a third volunteer fire company to complement the two existing brigades<sup>125</sup>.

Those at the meeting resolved to establish the Sydney Volunteer Fire Company No. 3 using a fire engine borrowed from the Australasian Steamship Navigation Company (ASN). 22 men enrolled in

the company at the meeting. In fact, the No. 3 fire company was already active, having attended two fires, gaining bonus payments for second and for third place<sup>126</sup>.

By April, the company was trying out a new fire engine, made to order by Messrs. T J Bown and Co<sup>127</sup>. Then in August, a new fire station was opened in William Street Woolloomooloo, adjoining Rainford's Woolloomooloo Royal Hotel<sup>128</sup>. By 1879, the No. 3 company could boast a brass band, which reportedly played at a torchlight procession in aid of the Manly Volunteer Fire Brigade Band<sup>129</sup>. The members were still paying off their instruments and uniforms when a Grand Complimentary Benefit was held at the Royal Victoria Theatre to raise funds for the band<sup>130</sup>.



Figure 13 Fire Brigade smoke helmets, 1905 (Museums of History NSW)

At the annual meeting of the company in January 1880, it was reported that the brigade had two manual fire engines and a thousand feet of leather fire hose. During the past year, the 45 members of the brigade attended 89 fires, as well as 45 chimney fires and 39 false alarms. Average attendance at each fire alarm was 20 men. First to attend fires: 36, second 38 and third 45 and there was £30 in the Sick and Accident Fund<sup>131</sup>. Two months later, a benefit event was held at the Victoria Theatre to raise funds for this fund<sup>132</sup>.

In August 1880, the No. 3 Volunteer Fire Company was one of seven volunteer brigades that were unwilling to join the Metropolitan Associated Fire Brigades and instead formed the United Volunteer Fire Brigades. A meeting of these brigades was held to elect a superintendent-general (Edward Oram) and four assistants<sup>133</sup>.

In April 1881, The No. 3 Fire Company helped to establish a fire brigade in Surry Hills. The Company applied to the council for a portion of land on the Crown Street Reservoir for a station, but it was not granted, as there was insufficient land for the purpose there. Mr. Cassidy of the Victoria Inn, on the corner of Botany (now Flinders) and Bourke Streets gave the brigade a portion of his premises on which a branch fire station was erected. In the new station, they placed one of their best manual engines with all other appliances for the extinguishment of fire in the neighbourhood of Surry Hills and its surroundings<sup>134</sup>.

The Surry Hills branch was reportedly formed again in August 1883, when the No. 3 company loaned it a fire engine until funds were collected in the district for its own fire engine<sup>135</sup>. The last mention of the No. 3 Volunteer Fire Brigade was in May 1886, when its members were present at the funeral of a fellow fireman<sup>136</sup>. By this time, the Metropolitan Fire Brigade was replacing the volunteer fire brigades with professional firemen.

### **South Sydney Volunteer Fire Company No. 4**

In June 1881, Mr. W. S. Kelly, the Superintendent of the No. 3 Volunteer company, chaired a meeting of people interested in forming a new volunteer fire brigade, to be called the South Sydney Volunteer Fire Company No. 4. The new company would work with the United Volunteer Fire Brigades Association. To cover expenses, it was planned to issue 300 shares at £1 each.

A deputation called upon the Lord Mayor and asked him for the use of a stall in the Belmore Markets for a fire engine station, on the same conditions as that occupied by the No. 2 Fire Company<sup>137</sup>. However, the Mayor turned down the brigade's request<sup>138</sup>. The following month, Sir Henry Parkes christened a new fire engine purchased by the brigade, accompanied by a procession of firemen and other festivities<sup>139</sup>.

By August 1883, the brigade was operating from a fire station in Campbell Street (near the corner of Pitt Street)<sup>140</sup>. A tower with a platform forty feet high was built at the back of the station, giving an extensive view of the city and suburbs<sup>141</sup>. In May 1887, the brigade was reorganised and renamed the Darlington Volunteer Fire Brigade.

The brigade operated from a temporary fire station on the corner of Calder Road and Shepherd Street, on a piece of land given by the council at nominal rent. The brigade had an efficient plant consisting of a fire engine, hose reel and other equipment, and all they needed then was a permanent fire station. The brigade was the proud owner of several trophies won on different occasions and was expected to serve both Redfern and Darlington boroughs<sup>142</sup>. Later that month, it was reported that a new fire station was being erected on the corner of Shepherd Street and Curtis Road<sup>143</sup>.

However, by the end of 1890, the Mayor of Darlington, James Spring, reported to a Council meeting complaints that the Darlington fire station was being used more as a lodging house than anything else, and that the Council may hand it over to the Fire Brigades Board<sup>144</sup>. In April 1892, the fire station was finally closed following the suspension of the fire brigade and the Darlington Council offered to lease the station premises to the Fire Brigades Board<sup>145</sup>.

The Fire Brigades Board notified the Darlington Council that owing to the erection of a new fire station in Newtown and the close proximity of the No. 2 Metropolitan Fire Brigade station in George Street West (now Broadway), it was inadvisable for the Board to continue the lease of the Darlington fire station<sup>146</sup>. The following month, the Fire Brigades Board decided to remove the telephone line from the closed Darlington fire station for the erection of two fire alarms in the district<sup>147</sup>.

By January 1893, the disbanded Darlington fire brigade had been replaced by a system of street fire alarms<sup>148</sup>. The fire station building burned down in 1901, and to the Council's surprise was found to be insured, owing to the foresight of the former Mayor James Spring many years earlier<sup>149</sup>.

## East Sydney Volunteer Fire Company No. 5

The No. 5 Volunteer Fire Company, initially called the East Sydney Fire Brigade No. 5. was formed in 1883, with a fire station located at Bourke and Botany Streets (now Flinders Street) in Surry Hills. The brigade advertised for someone to collect members' subscriptions in July<sup>150</sup>. The first annual meeting of the brigade was held at the fire station in July 1884. It was reported that, despite having no telephone communication with other fire stations in the city, the brigade had distinguished itself when called upon to extinguish fires<sup>151</sup>.

In 1887, the brigade was reformed and renamed Her Majesty's Theatre Fire Brigade. The station was relocated to Market Street alongside the theatre, where two men would sleep on the premises. Teams from the brigade under its original name won first prize at the Fire Brigades' competition in Sydney in 1885, and second prize at Newcastle in 1886. The brigade's gear consisted of a hose reel, 600 feet of hose, hydrants, branches and other equipment<sup>152</sup>.



Figure 14 Her Majesty's Theatre, c1887 (Powerhouse Museum)

It is not clear why this brigade was formed so soon before the establishment of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade in 1884, when all Sydney fire brigades were brought under Government control. Possibly the glacial speed at which the *Fire Brigades Act* had been moving through the New South Wales Parliament since 1880 led the citizens of Surry Hills to decide they could not wait any longer and so took the initiative themselves. After 1884, the volunteer fire brigades were gradually replaced by paid firemen living in or close to the fire stations.

## North City Volunteer Fire Brigade

The North City Volunteer Fire Brigade was formed in 1880 with a fire station in Queen's Place (now Dalley Street, near Bridge Street) off Lower George Street, to attend fires in the vicinity of The Rocks and Circular Quay<sup>153</sup>. In August that year, the brigade held a grand concert to raise funds for equipment and to acquire a fire engine<sup>154</sup>. By the end of 1881, the brigade wanted to erect a permanent station house in Macquarie Place and wrote to the Sydney Council requesting permission to do so<sup>155</sup>.

The brigade joined the Metropolitan Associated Fire Brigades and attended the second annual meeting of this organisation in January 1882<sup>156</sup>. By 1886, the brigade was operating from a fire station in Cumberland Street<sup>157</sup>. Then in April 1888, a new station was erected nearby in Cumberland Street near Essex Street<sup>158</sup>. In 1893, an application for registration with the Fire Brigades Board was granted<sup>159</sup>. However, by 1896 the Board was planning to withdraw the brigade's registration, but the Sydney Council sent a deputation to the Board to request that the fire station be allowed to continue. The Council argued that this would be in the best interests of many citizens in the northern part of the city<sup>160</sup>.

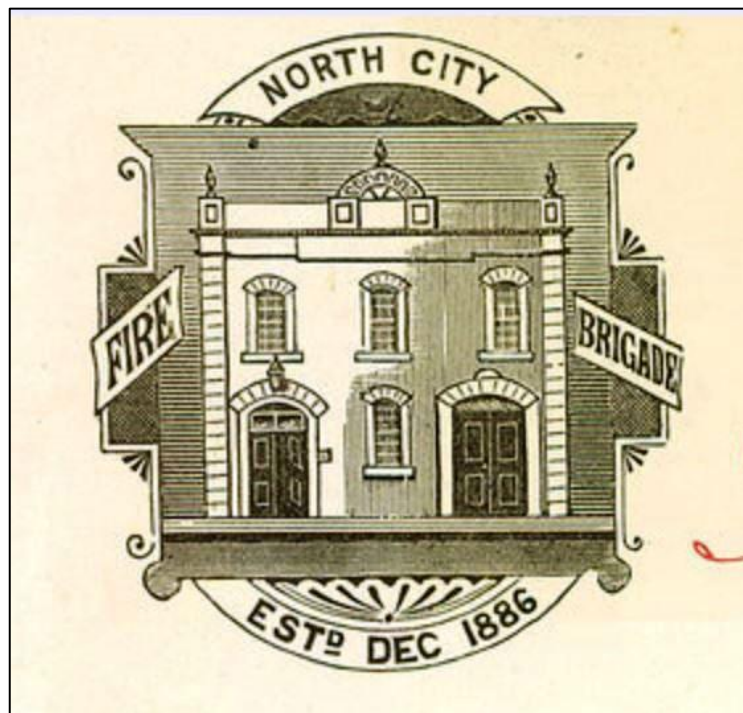


Figure 15 North City Fire Station (City of Sydney Archives)

The North City Fire Brigade continued operating for some time after this and was reported attending a fire in Princes Street in January 1897<sup>161</sup> and then holding an annual meeting in January 1903 at the station in 147 Cumberland Street<sup>162</sup>. However, by 1906 the volunteer brigade had closed, and the Metropolitan Fire Brigade reopened the Cumberland Street station to maintain a chemical hose carriage with two horses and a staff of five men<sup>163</sup>.

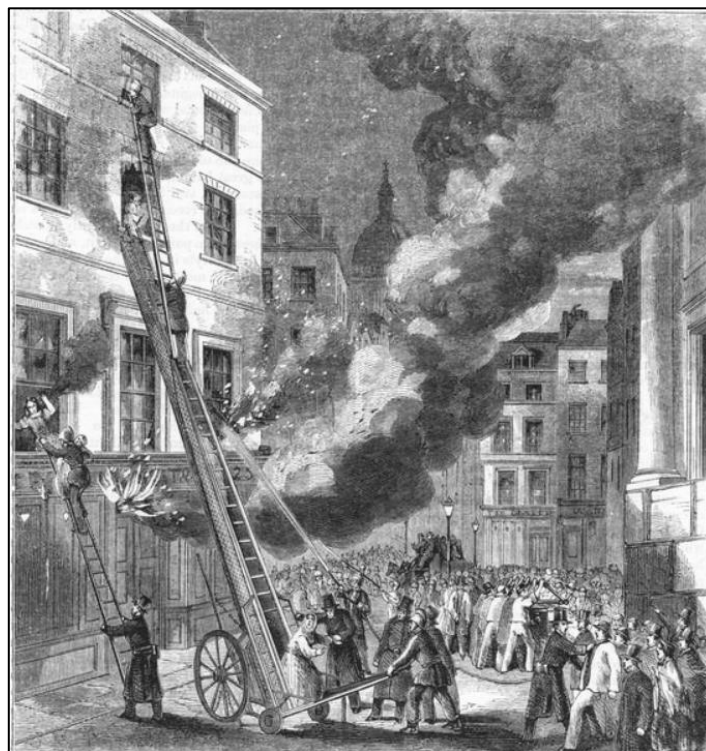
A nostalgic article in the *Daily Telegraph* in 1932 recalled the former North City Volunteer Fire Brigade. The article said that the old brigade would conjure up memories for many: the false alarms, the downhill runaways, the rush to the fire with no right to connect their hoses, and the hundred

and one pranks the local lads played on the serious-minded firefighters, led by the famous Lawrence McGuinness. The newspaper thought that their best job was parading their uniforms in various theatres during the hours of performance<sup>164</sup>.

### **Hook and Ladder and Fire Escape Company**

The first fire engines in Sydney were simply water trucks with pumps that were operated by several firemen to direct water through a hose onto a fire. Steam engines gradually replaced the manual labour of pumping, and the construction of a network of water pipes in central Sydney allowed firemen to attach their hoses directly to the water mains, however unreliable the water supply was in the early years.

But there was little equipment available for rescuing people trapped in the upper floors of burning buildings. Escape ladders were introduced to Australia in 1854 or 1855 by Thomas Bown, the Superintendent of the Insurance Companies Fire Brigade. Bown acquired a single Wivell Fire Escape Ladder unit which was used by his company for the next decade. But Andrew Torning complained in 1877 that the insurance brigades were more concerned with saving property than with saving life and hence their escape ladder was falling into disrepair from neglect<sup>165</sup>.

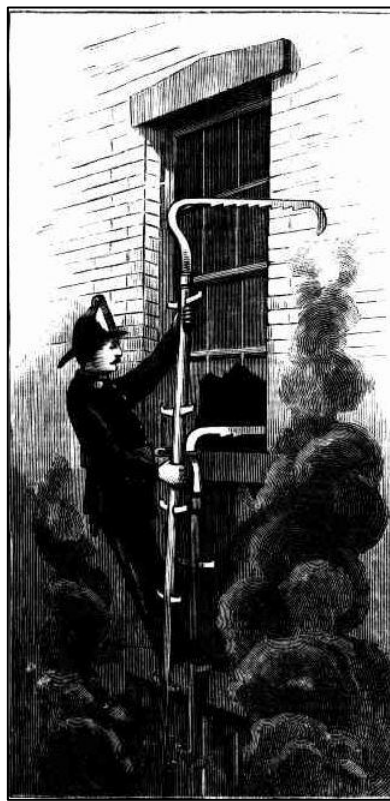


**Figure 16 Wivell's fire escape, 1860 (*The Leisure Hour*, 1860)**

Torning had seen a specialised fire rescue brigade that carried hooks and ladders during his time in San Francisco, and in 1877 he decided to form the Hook and Ladder Fire Escape Company in Sydney. While other brigades set about putting out fires, this company would rescue those trapped within<sup>166</sup>. Torning proposed the formation of a company of volunteers “specifically to assist at fires with a fire escape, or hook and ladder apparatus, so much in vogue in America”<sup>167</sup>. He offered to provide drawings of the apparatus and build it as well as train the volunteers in its use.

He set about forming such a Brigade and had locally built apparatus constructed as well as commissioning the current model of Wivell's fire escape, made by Messrs. Shand & Mason of London<sup>168</sup>. Andrew Torning advertised for volunteers to join the new Hook and Ladder Company. Young men living and working around the Town Hall were deemed the most eligible, presumably fit people with a good head for heights<sup>169</sup>. The brigade would not only enable residents to escape a burning building but would also allow firemen to climb to the upper parts of adjacent buildings, from which they could direct their hoses to the best effect<sup>170</sup>.

The main practical difficulty for a hook and ladder brigade was finding a shed long enough to fit the ladders, which were up to 45 feet long and stored on top of the truck. The undercarriage was fitted with hooks, buckets, axes and other necessary equipment<sup>171</sup>. Torning demonstrated the rescue equipment at the 1878 Metropolitan Intercolonial Exhibition in Sydney, including a wire fire escape (possibly a type of flying fox) and a hook and ladder fire escape<sup>172</sup>.



**Figure 17** Scaling ladder, New York, 1887 (*Sydney Mail*, 15 October 1887)

But the Hook and Ladder Company did not become operational for a few years and was only reported attending fires from January 1881, when the long ladders enabled firemen to get onto the roofs of attached buildings to direct water onto a fire<sup>173</sup>. During 1881, the company was widely praised in the press for their prompt attendance at city fires, and the usefulness of the equipment they provided to other firemen.

The company saved the life of a member of the Insurance Companies Fire Brigade in May 1881, when Robert McKnight was on the roof of a burning building when part of it gave way. He managed to get to a window, where he could not hold on long, and would soon have dropped into the flames below. His perilous position was noticed, and the hook and ladder company, after great exertions

with their ladders, brought the fireman to safety. He admitted that he would not have survived without the timely use of the company's tall ladder<sup>174</sup>.

The Hook and Ladder Company attended the famous Garden Palace fire in September 1882, along with several other brigades<sup>175</sup>. But by late 1882, the company was criticised in the press for its slow response in rescuing a family from a bedding factory fire in George Street, Brickfield Hill. The children were rescued from the second storey by a fire escape erected by the company, but the mother Bridget Wright died on the third storey when the rescuers said they did not know she was there<sup>176</sup>.

By the middle of 1883, the Hook and Ladder Company was rendered effectively useless because Town Hall contractors fenced in their station (to lay the foundations for the new Town Hall) after it was not relocated, despite requests by the contractors<sup>177</sup>. By the end of the year, the company's apparatus had been temporarily relocated to the Surry Hills Fire Brigade while waiting for a new station to become available<sup>178</sup>.

Despite its problems, the Hook and Ladder Company retained its usefulness to other firemen<sup>179</sup>. But a request in March 1886 to build a station on land adjacent to the Benevolent Society Asylum was not approved<sup>180</sup>. The company was not reported in the press after this.



## Industry fire brigades

In addition to the numerous volunteer fire brigades that sprang up around the city and suburbs, some industries decided to establish their own brigades to protect themselves from destructive fires. The city breweries were the most notable, as they were uninsurable for some time, and did not wish to rely on a volunteer brigade that had to travel some distance after gathering a quorum of firemen at an inconvenient hour. This may have left the breweries facing a fire that was well-established by the time a fire brigade arrived. It was more useful to have a fire engine on site with a group of firefighters ready to tackle a blaze in the early stages.

### Government Printing Office Volunteer Fire Brigade

John Kitchen was appointed in December 1840 as the first Government Printer in the newly established Government Printing Office, on the corner of Bent and Phillip Streets. He had a staff of two free men as assistant printers, with twenty convict men and boys allocated as production staff<sup>181</sup>. In October 1879, a fire at the Government Printing Office was attended by the Insurance Companies Fire Brigade from Bathurst Street, followed by Volunteer Fire Companies No. 3 and No. 2<sup>182</sup>.

A second and more destructive fire occurred in March 1882 in the Printing Office at the rear of the Treasury buildings. This fire was attended by the Newtown Brigade, followed by several more brigades who had been taking part in a fire brigades' demonstration at the Agricultural Society's showground in Moore Park<sup>183</sup>.

As previously mentioned, printing offices were uninsurable because of their perceived high fire risk, and in 1882 the New South Wales Government decided to establish a volunteer fire brigade in the Government Printing Office. A manual fire engine was purchased from Mereweather & Sons of London, and in July a public trial of the engine and associated equipment was conducted, during which the pump threw a powerful jet of water a whole storey higher than the building<sup>184</sup>.

A Government report published in 1890 mentioned that the Government Printing Office Volunteer Fire Brigade was organised for the purpose of protection from fire, not only the Government Printing Office, but also Government buildings generally, and private property in the immediate neighbourhood. It had twenty members and the necessary officers, and the Government Printer was the Honorary Captain.



**Figure 18 Government Printing Office, c1890 (Dept of Environment and Heritage)**

As the brigade was self-supporting, and its members did not receive an allowance from the authorities or from the insurance offices, it was not under the control of the Inspector of Fire Brigades. The station house was on the premises and opened into the lane at the rear. The manual fire engine, called *The Gazette*, was built to carry 26 men and could throw 115 gallons per minute to a height of 125 feet.

The Printing Office building was also supplied with the most modern fire protection appliances, including standpipes, hoses and hose connections, which were placed at convenient points on every floor, and numerous buckets were kept filled with water. It was found that a greater force of water could be achieved by connecting the hose to the tanks in the tower instead of to the water main. Frequent practice was held on the premises to keep the members of the brigade skilful in the use of the various appliances supplied by the Government<sup>185</sup>.

The Printing Office brigade was one of the many brigades that assisted at the disastrous fire at the Garden Palace in the Sydney Domain in September 1882<sup>186</sup>. The brigade was not reported attending many fires, but in September 1895 found itself having to extinguish a bushfire at the brigade's thirteenth anniversary outing at Sandringham, on Botany Bay. After several hours of effort dealing with the fire, which had threatened both the local hotel and an adjacent cottage, the firemen returned to the festivities<sup>187</sup>.

It is not known when the fire brigade was disbanded, but it was not reported attending any fires after this. It was one of a number of early volunteer brigades formed by an employer to primarily protect its own property while at the same time offering protection to the neighbourhood and was the only one set up by a Government authority<sup>188</sup>.

### **Kent Brewery Fire Brigade**

John Tooth immigrated to Australia from Kent in the early 1830s. At first, he traded as a general merchant, and then with his brother-in-law John Newnham he opened a brewery in 1835 that was located on Blackwattle Creek (now the area of the Broadway, Sydney). He named it the Kent

Brewery. In 1929, Tooth & Co acquired Resch's Limited, and Tooth's was in turn acquired by Carlton and United Brewery in 1983<sup>189</sup>. In November 1880, Superintendent Charles Bown called a meeting to recruit men over 21 to the Kent Brewery Fire Brigade<sup>190</sup>. The brigade was first reported in action when attending a fire in Barrack Street in January 1881<sup>191</sup>.



**Figure 19 Kent Brewery, 1930s (City of Sydney Archives)**

Two months later, the brigade was the first on the scene of a very unusual fire involving a gas-filled balloon that caught fire during its descent. Earlier, the daredevil balloonist Henri L'Estrange (known as the Australian Blondin) had taken the balloon up from the Outer Domain, watched by some 9,000 spectators. After a trip out and back, the balloon started drifting towards the harbour, so L'Estrange began a hurried descent, but was caught between two houses on the corner of Palmer and William Streets in Woolloomooloo. Unfortunately, a resident of one of the houses opened a door, letting gas from the balloon come into contact with a lighted chandelier, causing a tremendous explosion that blew the balloon to pieces.

Panic ensued, trampling hundreds of people underfoot. The burning balloon rose up and eventually fell back to earth in a back yard in Palmer Street. There were several minor injuries and burns among the assembled throng. The Kent Brewery fire engine was the first to arrive, and Charles Bown of the Insurance Fire Brigade directed water to the burning roof of the draper's shop and shed. Not surprisingly, the thrill-seeking L'Estrange was severely injured when he tumbled out of the descending balloon<sup>192</sup>. He reportedly gave ballooning away after that and returned to what he knew best, which was tightrope walking<sup>193</sup>.

In September the same year, the Kent Brewery fire brigade was reportedly the first to arrive at a fire in South Head Road<sup>194</sup>. The brigade became inactive after this, as referred to in a court case in April 1882<sup>195</sup>.

## Standard Brewery Fire Brigade

The former convict Samuel Terry established the Albion Brewery in 1827 on the corner of Elizabeth and Albion Streets, Surry Hills. After Terry died in 1838, his nephew took over the brewery, but it went into serious decline. Brewing ceased completely in 1852, and by the mid-1850s the company was trading as the Albion Steam Flour Mills and then from the late 1850s as the Albion Soap and Paper Works. The buildings burned down in the 1860s and the site remained vacant until the Toohey brothers purchased it in 1873.

The Irish immigrant brothers John and James Toohey ran pubs in Melbourne before moving to Sydney in the 1860s. They commenced brewing near present-day Darling Harbour and when the demand for beer soared by 1875, they established the Standard Brewery on the old Albion Brewery site in Surry Hills. The company, as Tooheys Limited, commenced brewing lager in 1930. In 1955, the brewery moved to Lidcombe<sup>196</sup>.



Figure 20 Standard Brewery (State Library of NSW)

The Standard Brewery Fire Brigade was formed in July 1883 to protect the uninsurable brewery from damage by fire. At a meeting chaired by the brigade's captain Mr. Israel, the members voted to join the Metropolitan Associated Fire Brigades<sup>197</sup>. At another meeting the following year, it was mentioned that the brigade was entirely funded by the brewery owners, and there were men on duty night and day. But they operated under the disadvantage of having no telephone. This meant they had to depend on the fire alarm bells of other fire stations in order to assist at fires in the surrounding area<sup>198</sup>.

Like a number of other fire brigades, the brewery's brigade had its own brass band, which was reported playing at a fundraising event for an injured workman in July 1884<sup>199</sup>. Despite the lack of telephone communication, the brigade was active in attending fires in neighbouring suburbs, such as a house fire in Strawberry Hills in August 1884<sup>200</sup> and in Surry Hills in April 1885<sup>201</sup>.

The ever-present danger at fire sites was highlighted in May 1886 when a fireman from the Metropolitan Fire Brigade was killed and four firemen from the Standard Brewery Fire Brigade were severely injured at a fire in Leichhardt. The injured men were taken to the Prince Alfred Hospital suffering various fractures and lacerations. When it was thought the fire had been largely extinguished and the firemen were resting and drinking a tot of spirits, the front wall of the

stationer's shop suddenly fell on five firemen with a tremendous crash, nearly burying them under a mass of brick, mortar and charred timber<sup>202</sup>.

In those days, injured firemen would receive no income while recovering in hospital or at home. To support them and their families, donations were collected from the Metropolitan Fire Brigade Benefit Club, several individuals, insurance companies and fire brigades. Superintendent William Bear closed the benefit fund with £136 collected. The Mayor of Leichhardt also donated £20, being the proceeds of concerts and collections in Leichhardt and Annandale<sup>203</sup>.

The last mention of the brewery's fire brigade in the press was in March 1895 at a farewell to James M. Toohey<sup>204</sup>. It must have been disbanded not long after this, as an article in January 1897 referred to it as the "old Standard Brewery Fire Brigade"<sup>205</sup>.

### **Paddington Brewery Fire Brigade**

The Paddington Brewery was founded in 1857 by Yorkshireman Joseph Marshall, on the corner of Oxford and Dowling Streets. He was soon selling his home brew to hotels and taverns, and his business expanded rapidly, mainly because of the excellent quality of his brew. A number of prizes were awarded at agricultural shows for his draught beer, bottled ale and porter. He won first prize at the Intercolonial Exhibition of 1876.



**Figure 21 Paddington Brewery Fire Brigade, 1894 (City of Sydney Archives)**

By the time he died in 1880, his brewery was one of the largest in Sydney. His sons kept the business going, and in 1909 the brewery property was sold and operations relocated to Leichhardt. The brewery was purchased by Tooth & Co and closed soon afterwards in 1911. The Tooth's directors weren't as interested in Marshall's award-winning ales as they were in acquiring his network of hotels for selling their own products.

Like other uninsured breweries, the Paddington Brewery owners decided to form their own fire brigade, which was established in August 1886. The land for a small wooden fire station was given by Messrs. J. and J. J. Marshall, who also paid for its construction. A large tower contained a bell which would be rung as soon as a call was received to rouse the members of the brigade. A manual engine packed with all necessary gear was kept in the station along with one of Shand Mason & Co's steam fire engines. Two men and two boys slept at the station every night, to allow prompt readiness for action<sup>206</sup>.

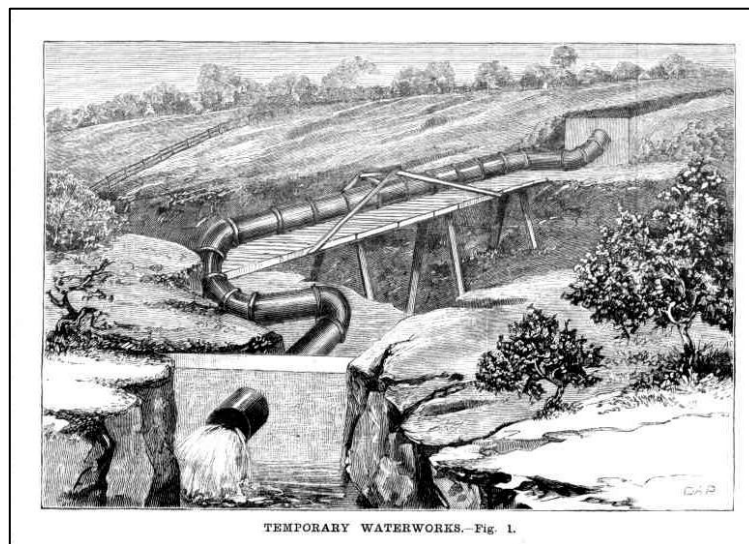
Like other industry-based fire brigades, the Paddington Brewery's unit attended fires in the surrounding area<sup>207</sup>, mainly in Darlinghurst<sup>208</sup>. While the brewery financed the initial establishment of the brigade, after this the members had to rely on fundraising events<sup>209</sup> and an annual subsidy of £100 from the Fire Brigades Board, which was reportedly insufficient to keep them in a good financial position, although they were out of debt by 1891<sup>210</sup>.

The last mention of the Paddington Brewery Fire Brigade in the press was in January 1899, when the members attended a demonstration<sup>211</sup>. The brewery was demolished in 1911 to allow the construction of T. J. West's Olympia Theatre<sup>212</sup>.

### **Hudson's Fire Brigade (Redfern)**

In 1854, the industrious carpenter William Henry Hudson opened a small shop in Regent Street, Redfern<sup>213</sup>. He eventually had so much business that he recalled his sons William and Henry from their trade occupations to join the expanded operations of his firm. The company moved to a larger site in Botany Road Redfern, and in 1866 he handed the business over to his sons, forming Hudson Brothers Limited<sup>214</sup>.

The family-owned company became the largest timber merchants and engineering company in New South Wales between 1866 and its closure in 1896, employing about 1,000 staff at its peak. Hudson Brothers worked on many large contracts for the construction of railway wagons, buildings and farming machinery<sup>215</sup>. The company also constructed the first buildings for an isolated smallpox hospital at Little Bay in 1881<sup>216</sup>, which would eventually become Prince Henry Hospital.



**Figure 22 Hudson's Temporary Scheme, 1885 (*Sydney Mail*, 12 December 1885)**

The company's letterhead in 1880 called it the "Redfern Saw Mills and Steam Joinery Works, Botany Road"<sup>217</sup>. A long article in the *Evening News* in March 1879 gave details of the company's vast reach. Hudsons' first notable work was the construction of St Paul's Church in Redfern, followed by a contract to supply the woodwork for Sydney University. They were the successful tenderers for rolling stock of Government railways, commencing in 1876. The firm constructed blacksmith and engineering shops to supply ironwork for each wagon. With their highly mechanised factory, the brothers were able to turn out over 700 wagons, 100 cattle cars, six coal wagons and 100 coal skips, among other carriages.

Despite this massive undertaking for the Government railways, the specialty of the firm was the crafting of wood into every essential timber product for house building, and their productions were seen in all the colonies in the South Pacific. In 1878, over six million feet of timber passed through the firm's doors. They employed 80 joiners, cabinetmakers, carpenters and upholsterers, 80 blacksmiths, fitters, engineers and brass finishers, 73 mill hands and machinists. A railway siding ran alongside the sawmill, and railway trucks brought immense logs from the interior<sup>218</sup>.

One notable initiative was known as the Hudson Brothers' Temporary Scheme, a hastily constructed project to respond to the severe drought in 1885. It consisted of 16 dams, over 3 kilometres of wooden fluming (open watercourse on wooden trestles) across creeks and railways lines from the half-finished Upper Nepean Scheme to the Botany Bay Swamp Scheme<sup>219</sup>. This was considered to be a bold undertaking for a single firm and showed the enterprise and resources of the company<sup>220</sup>.

Due to the high fire risk associated with a sawmill and storage yard consisting largely of highly combustible timber, the company decided to establish its own volunteer fire brigade, which was first mentioned in the press when attending a fire at Darling Harbour in October 1879<sup>221</sup>. The investment in their own fire brigade paid off a year later when a fire broke out at about one o'clock in the morning in the carpenter's shop on the second floor. The watchman promptly raised the alarm, and the company's fire engine was quickly on the scene to put the fire out, preventing major damage<sup>222</sup>. The brigade joined the United Volunteer Fire Brigades on its formation in 1882<sup>223</sup>.

By 1887 Hudson Brothers in common with other trades was operating at a loss of more than £12,000 during the previous twelve months, and a reduction of 7.5% in employee wages was proposed. To further reduce expenses, it was decided to move the manufacturing side of the Redfern business to the Clyde works<sup>224</sup>, where many farming and pastoral implements, road and farm wagons, windmills and other equipment had been produced since 1885<sup>225</sup>.

At the half-yearly meeting of directors in February 1893, it was announced that Hudson Brothers were employing 300 men (a big reduction from the peak of 1,000 in the 1880s). New staff would work at reduced wages, and directors' fees and salaries would be cut by 10%<sup>226</sup>. Then in August it was announced that the company could not keep the workers anything like fully employed in the current general economic depression. The Railway Commissioners had stopped awarding new contracts for any rolling stock, so the company's construction shops remained idle. However, the agricultural department was doing well, and the demand for the company's farm implements was increasing<sup>227</sup>.

Hudson Brothers Limited finally went into liquidation in late 1896<sup>228</sup>. In August 1898, the large works at Clyde were sold by the liquidator for £16,000, including the buildings, plant, machinery and thirty acres of land with cottages. A few years earlier, the machinery alone had been valued at this amount<sup>229</sup>.

An article on the company's rise and fall in September 1898 remarked that it was founded in boom times, when it became successful under private management. Borrowed money was spent freely by Governments in the colonies for the construction of railways and other public works, and Messrs. Hudson obtained a good share of this work. But public borrowing was restricted during the economic depression, and the Railway Commissioners had to exercise greater economy in the replacement of their material. Competition became keener and consequently the company could

not be supported as a going concern. By contrast, Mort's Dock Engineering Company was kept busy with work supplied to them<sup>230</sup>.

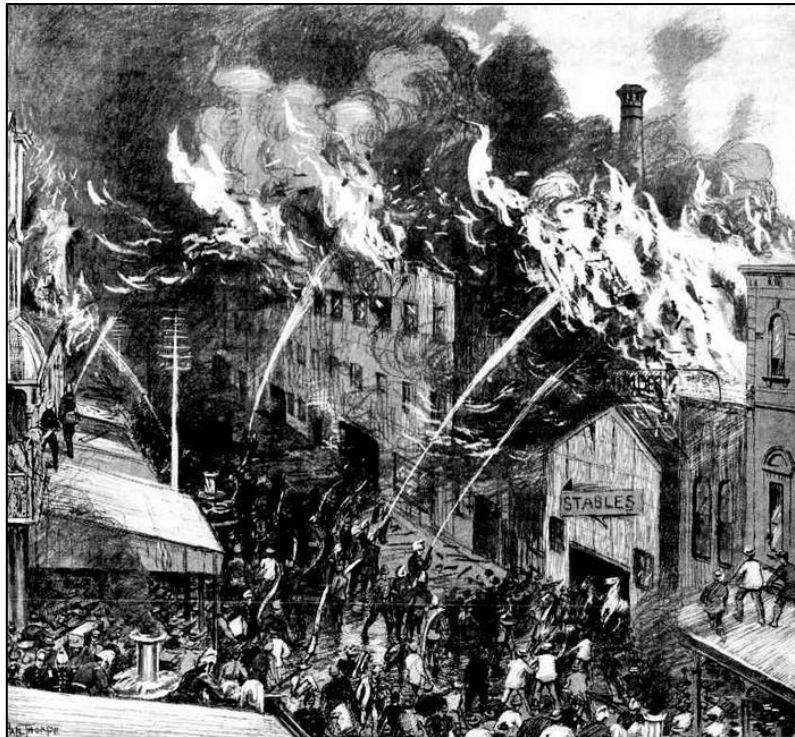


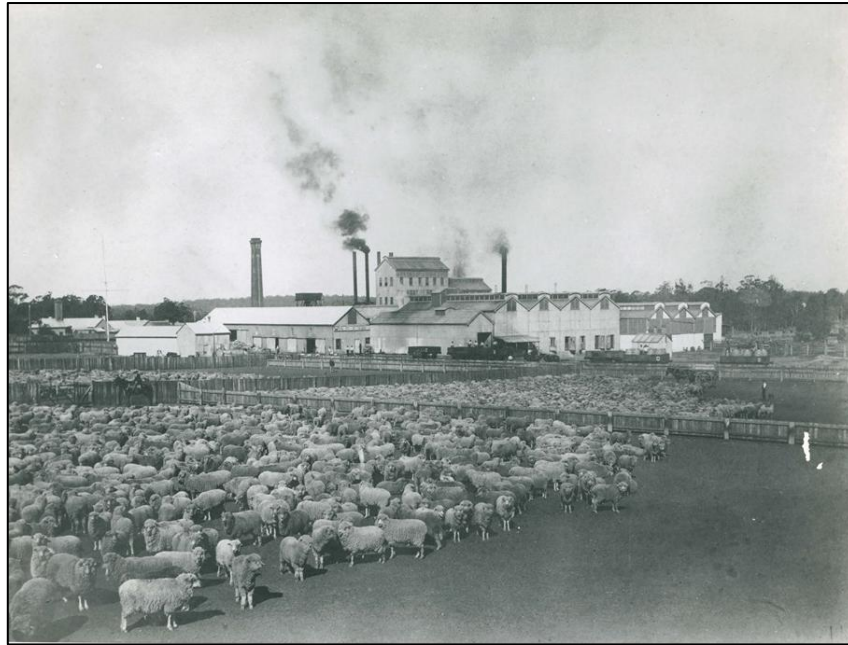
Figure 23 Hudson Bros fire, 1898 (*Sydney Mail*, 15 October 1898)

In October 1898, the former Hudson Brothers timber yards and joinery works in Redfern were completely destroyed by a large fire, apparently caused by a spark from a passing locomotive combined with a strong westerly gale that spread the flames very quickly. A bicycle manufacturer was operating in the former company fire station, and reportedly Messrs. Hudson regarded the fire brigade as a valuable safeguard to their premises<sup>231</sup>.

In its time, the company contributed the woodwork to several major buildings in Sydney in the late nineteenth century, including Prince Henry Hospital, the La Perouse Cable Station, the Garden Palace in the Domain, The Exhibition Building in Price Alfred Park and others.

### **Sydney Meat Preserving Company Volunteer Fire Brigade**

The Sydney Meat Preserving Company was established in 1869 to process excess meat and was a major company in Sydney selling a range of canned meat merchandise. Founded by pastoralists, its factory was located at Auburn, about ten miles west of the Sydney CBD<sup>232</sup>. In November 1892, a major fire at the Sydney Meat Preserving Company destroyed the plant and a quantity of meat in various stages of preservation. The fire brigades arrived and succeeded in saving a section of the works, but very heavy damage occurred, at a cost of about £8,000<sup>233</sup>.



**Figure 24 Sydney Meat Preserving Co, late 1880s (Heritage for NSW)**

Then in July 1894, a smaller fire at the works caused about £1,200 damage. The Rookwood (first on the scene), Granville and Parramatta fire brigades attended the scene and extinguished the fire<sup>234</sup>. In response to these fires, the company formed a volunteer fire brigade in January 1895<sup>235</sup>. Like other industry-based brigades, this well-equipped unit made itself available to assist at fires in the surrounding neighbourhood, but did not have a telephone to receive accurate and timely information when a fire broke out.

In February 1898, a delegation from the company's fire brigade met with the Auburn Council to request a telephone line from the Auburn Town Hall to its fire station<sup>236</sup>. The company's fire brigade was reportedly reorganised in December 1900<sup>237</sup> and its last mention in the press was in March 1905 when the members took part in a procession<sup>238</sup>. The Sydney Meat Preserving Company was taken over by F. J. Walker Limited in 1919. Business boomed during the two World Wars, but canned meat failed to be profitable after World War II. The business ceased operation in 1964, and the Auburn site was put up for sale in 1972<sup>239</sup>.



## Inner suburban fire brigades

As Sydney grew during the long economic boom following the 1850s gold rush and into the 1870s, several suburbs a few miles from the city were incorporated as municipalities. Most of the suburbs outside the inner suburban ring of Surry Hills, Pyrmont, Darlinghurst, The Rocks, Chippendale and Ultimo became municipalities, mostly in the 1860s. The Newtown, Redfern, Alexandria, Waterloo, Paddington, Macdonaldtown/Erskineville, Darlington, Camperdown and Glebe Councils often erected grandiose Town Halls and they all tried to provide municipal services, usually with limited financial resources (and so with limited success)<sup>240</sup>.

The insurance and volunteer fire brigades in the city were too far away to provide a prompt firefighting service to the fast-growing number of suburban houses and businesses, so by the 1870s some of these new municipalities established their own fire brigades.

### Newtown Fire Brigade

In March 1875, William Bailey, the Mayor of Newtown Council, called a meeting to form a local volunteer fire brigade, to be called the Camperdown and Newtown Volunteer Fire Company. A firefighting service had been needed in Newtown for years, but the Newtown Council found that the lack of a reticulated water supply stopped the forming of a company. The Council had for years tried to get the Sydney Council to supply them with water, but despite the City's assurances, this had failed to materialise.

There were a great many wells in Newtown, but water could only be obtained from them by using buckets, so they were not very helpful in a large fire. But it would be different if they had a fire company with its own fire engine. The Municipal by-laws required licensed water carriers to keep their water carts full and to take them to all fires in the borough, afterwards receiving compensation from the Corporation. However, the Mayor admitted that they had no licensed water carriers in the borough yet. He thought that if there was a local fire brigade, properties that insurance companies would not insure could then be insured, and those that were already insured would be covered in much easier terms.



Figure 25 Newtown Fire Station, 1912 (City of Sydney Archives)

Charles Bown, Superintendent of the Insurance Companies Fire Brigade was present at the meeting and explained that it was possible that even without mains water a well-operating fire company and an engine could put out almost any fire. Andrew Torning, superintendent of the No. 1 Volunteer Fire Company, was also present and outlined the formation of the first volunteer fire company formed in Sydney. He suggested the local council could excavate tanks at or near road junctions, to be filled either from rain or from water carts<sup>241</sup>.

By September, the brigade had erected a fire station<sup>242</sup>. Then in January 1876, repairs were required for their fire engine, engine house, hose and other equipment<sup>243</sup>. By April 1878, the brigade's plant consisted of a manual fire engine, five lengths of common hose, and a hand pump in the Newtown station. In the Camperdown station there were three lengths of hose and a standpipe. The brigade was reportedly in good working order and funds raised so far had put the fire engine into good repair<sup>244</sup>.

The brigade was known as the Newtown and Camperdown Volunteer Fire Company until December 1879<sup>245</sup>. From 1880, it was called the Newtown Volunteer Fire Company after incorporation into the Metropolitan Associated Fire Brigades<sup>246</sup>.

In March 1888, the Camperdown Municipal Council decided to form a volunteer fire brigade to serve the borough<sup>247</sup>. Newtown had provided firefighting services to Camperdown until then, so presumably the existing station and (very rudimentary) equipment were simply taken over by the Camperdown Council.

But the fledgling Camperdown brigade needed funds for suitable equipment to operate independently from Newtown, so a benefit event was held in April 1889. This included a cricket match (played in full firefighting uniform) between the Balmain and Camperdown brigades, followed in the evening by a parade of twelve brigades and a soiree to raise funds for new appliances<sup>248</sup>. But the Camperdown brigade struggled to make itself useful, and relied on alerting the Newtown and Metropolitan Fire Brigades with their alarm bell in the event of a local fire<sup>249</sup>. The Camperdown Volunteer Fire Brigade finally disbanded in April 1895 and donated the £10 of remaining credit to the Prince Alfred Hospital<sup>250</sup>.

In July 1890, the Colonial Secretary granted the old police watchhouse at the Newtown railway bridge to the Newtown Volunteer Fire Brigade as a fire station. But after considerable financial outlay by the Fire Brigades Board to fit it out for the brigade, the Board was notified by the Government a few months later that the site was required by the Railways Department and had to be vacated by November 1890. In June 1891, the brigade was stationed in very limited quarters in King Street, but a site for a station was reportedly purchased by the Board in Australia Street<sup>251</sup>.

However, the Newtown fire brigade's days were numbered by then, and in July 1892 the unit was disbanded at a meeting in the Australia Street fire station, presided over by Captain Charles Lane<sup>252</sup>. The Newtown Volunteer Fire Brigade was then transformed into an auxiliary branch of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, as the Fire Services Board decided that the suburb had outgrown the protection offered by a volunteer fire company<sup>253</sup>.

An article on the history of the Newtown fire brigade in the *Australian Town and Country Journal* in October 1897 mentioned that the brigade was regarded as the leading volunteer brigade in the

colony because of its first-class equipment. The plant consisted of a Shand Mason & Company improved steam fire engine for which two horses were kept at the station, an American ladder carriage, a 32-foot escape ladder, a hose reel, about 1,100 feet of hose and a small appliance for saving life. Newtown was the only suburban brigade with a steam fire engine.

There were four permanent men besides five auxiliaries. The married firemen lived close by and were in communication via electric bell in case of emergency. A fine billiard table reportedly graced the recreation room on the first floor. The station and all plant were handed over to the Metropolitan Fire Brigade on the condition that it would always be kept in the borough. Charles Lane had been in charge of the brigade for the whole of its existence and was an active fireman for 34 years<sup>254</sup>.

The Newtown Fire Brigade was back in the news in June 1942 when they were called to an unusual fire at the Newtown Court. The prisoner Alfred Sinclair had set fire to the wooden roof of his cell at the police station and climbed through the burnt hole into the court room above, from which he escaped. Sinclair was reputedly a daring (and obviously hard-working) car thief who had been known to steal and strip four cars in one day. He was on remand for thirty charges relating to the theft of wireless sets, tyres and other saleable items from stolen cars.

The car-breaking racket was a family affair, as his wife Clara had been jailed for possessing stolen automobile items, and his two younger brothers were at the time languishing in jails in two states for similar offences<sup>255</sup>. Newtown still has its own firefighting service, and Newtown Fire & Rescue operates in a building in Australia Street next door to the Police Station and Court.

## **Glebe Fire Brigade**

The Glebe Volunteer Fire Company No. 6 was formed at a public meeting in May 1875<sup>256</sup>. But the following year Charles Fenton, the late foreman of the brigade, informed the *Sydney Morning Herald* in August 1876 that the brigade had been disbanded<sup>257</sup>. Another effort was then made in March 1877 to form a new brigade of the same name. A public meeting was held, at which it was claimed that the growing importance of Glebe as a suburb and its distance from the brigades in the city made it necessary to have its own means of fire extinguishment<sup>258</sup>.

A few months later, a meeting was held in the adjacent suburb of Darlington to encourage residents there to subscribe to the Glebe brigade and to help raise funds for a fire engine<sup>259</sup>. In November, it was announced in the press that the local firm of Thomas J. Bown & Co had completed the manufacture of three new fire engines, including a manual engine for the Glebe Volunteer Fire Company<sup>260</sup>. The brigade took delivery of the new engine in April 1878<sup>261</sup>. In July 1879, the Glebe Fire Brigade offered to provide firefighting services to the Darlington Borough Council if the council erected a fire station in Darlington<sup>262</sup>.

During 1880, the brigade moved from their old premises next to the Council Chambers on Derby Place near Glebe Point Road to a new station in Mitchell Street<sup>263</sup>. At this time, when the fire brigades began to form an association, Glebe was one of the seven dissenting brigades that would not join the Metropolitan Associated Fire Brigades (which was led by the Insurance Fire Brigade), instead joining six other brigades to form the United Volunteer Fire Brigades<sup>264</sup>.

In May 1881, a torchlight procession was held in honour of Queen Victoria's birthday. The Mount Lachlan Volunteer Fire Company took part in the procession, while leaving a dozen members of the 45-member brigade at the Raglan Street fire station in case of an emergency. The Glebe Fire Brigade, on the other hand, declined to take part at all after numerous subscribers threatened to withdraw future support, as they were worried that an emergency could occur while the fire engine was absent. It was suggested that such holidays carried a greater than average likelihood of accidental fires breaking out<sup>265</sup>.

When the Metropolitan Fire Brigade was formed by Government legislation in 1884, the Fire Brigades Board was also established, and the Glebe brigade immediately applied for registration with the Board<sup>266</sup>. Registration meant that a fire brigade was prepared to place themselves under the control of the Superintendent (and the rules and regulations) of the new Metropolitan Fire Brigade. In return, the brigade would receive an annual subsidy to assist with the costs associated with the running of a brigade. The following year, the brigade received a subsidy of £150<sup>267</sup>.

In December 1884, fireman William Bickley of the Glebe Fire Brigade was charged in Central Police Court with having stolen a brooch at a fire in Forest Lodge two months earlier<sup>268</sup>. In court, Bickley testified that he had placed the brooch and a pair of earrings in his pocket to save them from the flames. He returned the earrings but kept the brooch, selling it sometime afterwards. He admitted the crime but optimistically claimed that because he was drunk at the time he was unaccountable for his actions. He was sentenced to two months imprisonment with hard labour<sup>269</sup>.



**Figure 26 Glebe Fire Station, 1892 (Glebe Society)**

By 1900, a deputation from the Glebe Fire Brigade met with the Colonial Secretary (The Honourable Sir John See, MLA) to request a grant of £100 and a new fire station. The brigade was being operated economically, and the members asked for the smallest amount possible. Members of the delegation said that if they did not receive some help from the State, the brigade would have to be abolished as a volunteer brigade and would have to be wholly financed as a member of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade.

Mr. See granted them the £100 but said that a new station required a recommendation from the Fire Brigades Board<sup>270</sup>. The brigade's request for a new station was eventually successful, and in June 1906 a fine imposing building designed by Walter Liberty Vernon was opened in St John's Road. The brigade was previously housed in inadequate premises in Mitchell Street but moved into one of the most modern stations, built at a cost of £4,551<sup>271</sup>.

The Glebe brigade was asked to attend a controlled fire in Glebe Point Road in February 1907 when a large cottage on the corner of Palmerston Road, which had been used as a diphtheria ward by the Children's Hospital, was destroyed by fire under the supervision of the local branch of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade. The hospital recently vacated the building for the Royal Alexandra Hospital for Children in Bridge Road, Camperdown. As the building could no longer be occupied without considerable danger, it was decided to use fire to completely eradicate all trace of the highly infectious disease<sup>272</sup>.

But by 1907, the Glebe Fire Brigade of nine partially paid men was struggling to provide an effective firefighting service, and the Glebe Council debated whether the brigade should be replaced with permanent staff and a steam fire engine. Several fires in recent years could not be extinguished until the Metropolitan Fire Brigade arrived. On one occasion only one man carrying a ladder attended a fire, because there were not enough men available to take the hose wagon. Large factories and sawmills were being erected along the Glebe foreshore and the local brigade would not be able to cope with a fire there until other brigades arrived to help<sup>273</sup>.

The *Fire Brigades Act 1909* ended the debates in the Glebe community, after the Fire Brigades Board was dissolved. The Glebe brigade came under the control of the newly formed Board of Fire Commissioners in January 1910. Then in December 1910, the Glebe Volunteer Fire Brigade was disbanded and replaced by a permanently staffed brigade of six members in January 1911. Firemen had to live in the station or near it, and it was left to the judgement of the officer in charge whether a fireman's house was close enough for him to run to the station and catch the fire engine when the alarm bell rang. The firemen had to pledge that they would not take any other work. As a result, the areas around the fire stations became communities of firemen and their families.

In March 1928, a new roster was introduced involving two platoons of firemen. This was a great advance in working conditions, as it allowed a fireman to live away from the fire station with his parents or wife, or to board with a family. The new roster coincided with the most famous fire in Glebe, at the former Hudson Brothers Timber Yard in Bridge Road in 1928. This fire required the attendance of over 100 firemen from nine brigades. Thousands of litres of water were poured into the 50-foot-high stacks of timber, which were extensively damaged by the fire<sup>274</sup>.

A final burst of volunteerism at the Glebe Fire Station was the formation of the Woman's Fire Auxiliary (WFA) in April 1941 as part of women's contribution to the war effort. The first members were 35- to 40-year-old recruits from the WANS (Women's Australian National Service) and trained in an eight-week course in air raid procedures, dealing with incendiary bombs, fires in the home, rescue work, first aid, operating fire alarms, and station procedures. Fire Brigade records show that eight WFA servicewomen were attached to the Glebe Fire Station. The unit was disbanded at the end of World War II. The St Johns Road Fire Station (next to St John's Anglican Church) still serves the local community<sup>275</sup>.

## **Waterloo and Alexandria suburban fire brigades**

The volunteer fire brigades in the adjacent suburbs of Waterloo and Alexandria are described here as a single history, because they were very interconnected. In summary, the first one formed was the Mount Lachlan Fire Brigade in 1877, followed by the Waterloo and Alexandria Fire Brigade in 1880. Mount Lachlan was disbanded in 1884, and when several members of the Waterloo and Alexandria brigade left in the same year, they resurrected the Mount Lachlan brigade, calling it the Waterloo Brigade.

The remaining members of the combined brigade renamed it the Alexandria Fire Brigade. It was not always clear where the fire stations for these three brigades were located at different times in their history.

### **Mount Lachlan (later Waterloo) Fire Brigade**

The Mount Lachlan Volunteer Fire Company for Waterloo and Redfern was launched at a meeting in the Waterloo Council chambers in July 1877. A committee was formed to elicit subscriptions for the purchase of the necessary plant and the cost of a temporary fire engine shed. Andrew Torning undertook to exercise and drill the members, and a considerable number of working men were enrolled<sup>276</sup>.

However, the brigade was not reported attending any fires, and in December 1879 Torning (who was the Mayor of Waterloo by then) held a meeting to resuscitate the brigade. A recent fire at the Albert Ground led many in the district to see the necessity of fire appliances close at hand, which were already established in the city and in most suburbs. Apparently, the problem until then had been the great difficulty in obtaining a site for a fire station. But this time Alderman Robert Vescys offered to grant the brigade a convenient plot of land for the purpose<sup>277</sup>.

With his customary energy, Andrew Torning called for tenders from engineers in June 1880 to build a manual fire engine for the brigade<sup>278</sup>, then for tenders from clothiers to supply uniforms – shirts, trousers, belts and caps<sup>279</sup>. This was soon followed by a grand minstrel and miscellaneous entertainment at the Guild Hall for the benefit of the brigade<sup>280</sup>. By January 1881, the brigade had acquired a commodious fire engine house with a room attached at 7 Raglan Street, and all appliances necessary for carrying out firefighting duties. A fire engine had been obtained on loan from the No. 3 Volunteer Fire Company, pending the completion of a new fire engine, then being constructed by the engineers Howe & Rose Limited of Regent Street<sup>281</sup>.

It was customary for a new fire engine to be publicly christened, and Mount Lachlan's new acquisition was no exception. In February 1881, it was ceremoniously christened the *Invincible* after a grand procession of all the city and suburban fire companies, that departed the No. 1 Company fire station in Haymarket, accompanied by three brass bands to McEvoy Street, Waterloo. It was mentioned at the ceremony that the new fire station on Mount Lachlan commanded an uninterrupted view of the city and suburbs.

Andrew Torning told the assembled throng that by then there were eighteen fire brigades in the city and suburbs. The Mount Lachlan brigade had attended eleven fires using the borrowed fire engine, which would be handed over to the Surry Hills volunteer fire brigade<sup>282</sup>. In April 1882, Superintendent W. Allen of the Mount Lachlan Brigade resolved that two members would remain at

the station every night, in readiness to act promptly upon fire alarms. This was reportedly the only suburban fire brigade who had adopted this precaution<sup>283</sup>.

### **Waterloo and Alexandria (later Waterloo) Fire Brigade**

In February 1880, a meeting was held to form a volunteer fire brigade, to be called the Waterloo and Alexandria Volunteer Fire Brigade. Several men were enrolled<sup>284</sup>. In May, a concert by the Sydney Minstrels was held in aid of the new brigade<sup>285</sup>. A request for funds to the Alexandria Council was refused, because the Council was not authorised to devote funds for this purpose<sup>286</sup>. This was a typical response when any Government funding was requested by volunteer fire brigades, as they were expected to cover their own expenses with subscriptions and fundraising events.

This changed when the Fire Brigades Board was established in 1884, at which time the Board was empowered to provide subsidies to the brigades, which were gradually professionalised by the 1890s. The brigade joined the Metropolitan Associated Fire Brigades when it was established in 1880<sup>287</sup>. The brigade finally raised enough funds to purchase a small manual fire engine in October 1881, which was christened the *Victory* by the Governor General Lord Loftus at the Alexandria Town Hall<sup>288</sup>.



**Figure 27 Waterloo manual fire engine, 1890 (Museum of Fire)**

In July 1884, the brigade offered to sell their fire engine to the Wollongong Council<sup>289</sup>. Several members left the brigade that year and decided to resurrect the Mount Lachlan Volunteer Fire Brigade as the Waterloo Fire Brigade in 1885. The remaining members renamed the combined brigade the Alexandria Fire Brigade<sup>290</sup>.

### **Waterloo Fire Brigade**

In 1885, the members who left the Waterloo and Alexandria Volunteer Fire Brigade in 1884 registered the old Mount Lachlan Fire Brigade as the Waterloo Fire Brigade. The reformed brigade attended fires through the 1880s and 1890s until the members resigned in 1901, placing the station completely under the control of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, which installed permanent firefighters at the station in 1902.

In 1905, Crown land was obtained on the corner of Elizabeth and Bourke Street for a new fire station, which was completed and occupied in 1907. The Board of Commissioners of New South Wales purchased land opposite this station to construct a new station, which opened in January 1918 and operated as Waterloo until 1975<sup>291</sup>. This building is now the Zetland Mosque.

### **Alexandria Fire Brigade**

In 1885, the remaining members of the Waterloo and Alexandria Fire Brigade renamed the brigade to the Alexandria Fire Brigade. But things did not go well, and the members went out on strike in February 1886 when they were unhappy with the subsidy given to the brigade by the Fire Brigades Board, complaining that it would not cover their expenses for the year. They were forced to make up the difference themselves last year and were determined not to do so in 1886. Also, if the Board would not grant them a subsidy of £100, they would disband. The Board placed men in charge of the station in case of fire during the dispute<sup>292</sup>.

Superintendent William Bear talked to the Alexandria Fire Brigade and found that there was a split among the firemen and that some of them would not attend drill or attend the fire station. He thought the best way was to make the brigade an auxiliary one by employing ten or twelve good men on a retaining fee of 10/- per month, with an extra amount for attending fires. He said he had done everything he could for the brigade. The Mount Lachlan brigade was subsidised £100, but the plant belonged to them (whereas the Alexandria Fire Brigade apparently did not own their appliances). His conclusion was that the brigade could not work again as a volunteer one, that their old plant was worthless and the men were disrespectful to the Board<sup>293</sup>.

The brigade continued to operate and was registered with the Fire Services Board in 1887 with an increased annual subsidy from £75 to £100<sup>294</sup>. Meanwhile the brigade maintained a brass band<sup>295</sup> and from 1892 a cricket team<sup>296</sup>. By 1895, the Alexandria Fire Brigade's fire station was reportedly located in Gerard Street, Alexandria, on land granted by the Council in 1886<sup>297</sup>.



**Figure 28 Waterloo fire station, 1973 (Museum of Fire)**

One of the dangers in racing to a fire was reported in July 1895 when the brigade's fire engine collided with a Chinese market gardener's cart while speeding to a fire in Cleveland Street. Most of the firemen were thrown from the fire engine by the impact and the engine was smashed and rendered useless for the time being<sup>298</sup>. A newspaper report on the fire brigades of Sydney in

February 1896 recorded that the Alexandria fire brigade consisted of seventeen members, one manual fire engine and a hose reel<sup>299</sup>.

In January 1897, the whole brigade resigned in protest after their performance was criticised at an inquest into the death of a girl named Jessie Delohery in a burning building at Waterloo earlier in the month. Several witnesses told firemen there was a girl in the building, but no steps were taken to rescue her until it was too late. Also, although the brigade possessed ladders and other lifesaving appliances, they never took them to fires a short distance from the station. The firemen claim they did their best to rescue the girl but were beaten back by smoke and flames<sup>300</sup>.

After resigning, the brigade captain immediately contacted the Metropolitan Fire brigade to ask for replacement men to be sent out to take charge of the station. Superintendent William Bear placed an officer and four men there and said he intended to make improvements to the station building, to erect four fire alarms in the borough, and install an auxiliary fireman in charge of the telephones. The station would become known as the Alexandria Branch of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade<sup>301</sup>. This was the end of the Alexandria Fire Brigade as a volunteer unit, and it joined the growing trend to professionalise all fire brigades.

### **Paddington Fire Brigade**

In February 1878, the large grocery store owned by the Loutit Brothers on the corner of Oxford and William Streets in Paddington was completely destroyed by fire. James Loutit lived in the two-storey brick building with his family, but they were away at the time. Unfortunately, the local Woollahra fire brigade's fire engine was undergoing repairs, and by the time the Insurance Companies Fire Brigade arrived from the town, very little could be saved<sup>302</sup>. The Paddington Brewery Fire Brigade had not been formed at the time.

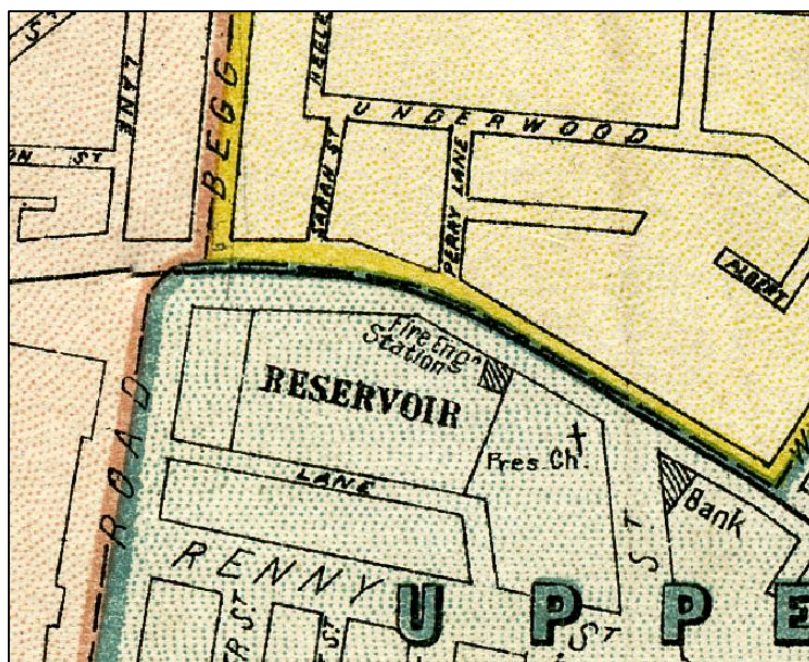


Figure 29 Paddington Fire Station, 1885 (Higinbotham & Robinson map)

An inquiry into the fire by the City Coroner could not determine the cause of the fire but noted that an illegal number of 110 tins of kerosene were being stored at the shop<sup>303</sup>. This disastrous fire

prompted calls for a volunteer fire brigade based in Paddington, to reduce the reliance on the only brigade in the district (Woollahra) and the more distant brigades in the centre of town<sup>304</sup>. The Paddington Volunteer Fire Brigade was formed soon afterwards in April 1878 and immediately made plans to purchase a fire engine<sup>305</sup>.

The Woollahra Dramatic Society gave a benefit evening in aid of the fledgling brigade in May 1878<sup>306</sup>, and two months later, tenders were called for the supply of 25 or more suits for the brigade: coats and trousers of blue serge and caps of blue cloth<sup>307</sup>. By the following year, the brigade's annual meeting reported that a manual fire engine and appliances had been acquired, and a small wooden fire station erected next to the Paddington Reservoir<sup>308</sup>.

When the Metropolitan Associated Fire Brigades was formed, the Paddington fire brigade joined the association and was subsidised with £25 per annum. Until then, the members had been obliged to pull the heavy manual engine to all parts of the area, but with the first year's subsidy they were able to purchase a horse and harness for this onerous task<sup>309</sup>. In February 1886, the Fire Brigades Board granted a subsidy of £130 for the Paddington fire brigade<sup>310</sup>. By then, the brigade had its own brass band, which was reported playing at the funeral of a firefighter who was killed while fighting a fire in Leichhardt<sup>311</sup>.

The brigade began to have problems in September 1892 when they were asked to vacate their fire station, because it encroached about six feet on the Paddington side of the boundary with the Sydney City Council. The brigade responded to this by asking the Council if they could use a vacant piece of land on the corner of Oxford and Victoria Streets for a replacement fire station. But the Fire Brigades Board objected to such a move, saying they were the proper body to deal with it, not the Council<sup>312</sup>.

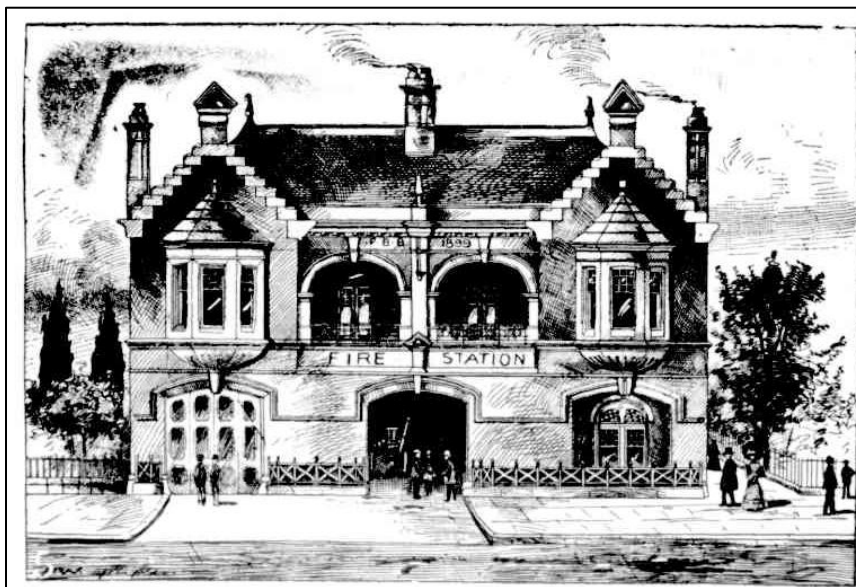


Figure 30 Paddington Fire Station, 1900 (*Town & Country Journal*, 23 June 1900)

Then in January 1898, the Water and Sewerage Board gave the Paddington Volunteer Fire Brigade one month's notice to give up possession of the land occupied by their fire station at Paddington Reservoir, which it intended to lease to the Fire Brigades Board<sup>313</sup>. At about this time, the Fire Brigades Board decided to economise and reduce the brigade's subsidy. This caused discontent

among the members, who reportedly lost almost all interest in the brigade. In response, the fire station and appliances were taken over by the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) in April 1899 and a branch was formed under its supervision.

The MFB decided to erect a new fire station and supply up-to-date appliances, because Paddington contained many handsome buildings by then, and should be supplied with the latest equipment<sup>314</sup>. The Board obtained a grant of land on the reserve adjacent to the Paddington Reservoir and erected a suitable building. The old wooden structure was moved to a different part of the reserve. A steam fire engine was temporarily housed there, and metropolitan fireman installed. In September 1899, the foundation stone for a new station was laid<sup>315</sup>.

The plan was that the new fire station would accommodate the district officer and seven firemen with a powerful steam fire engine with four horses, fire ladders and all necessary hose and other appliances. Electricity would be used to open stable doors, trapdoors and ringing the alarm bells. The officer in charge would be in telephone communication with the headquarters station and all the stations in his district, and by means of several fire alarms already erected would be in close touch with every part of the locality under his control<sup>316</sup>.

In 1951, the Paddington fire brigade was transferred to the Woollahra fire station in Moncur Street, which had been closed during the 1940s and was being used as a training school for probationary firefighters. The Paddington fire station was then closed and used for training purposes. The Woollahra Fire Brigade continues to operate from this fire station, which was built in 1905<sup>317</sup>.

### **Surry Hills Fire Brigade**

In November 1880, the Surry Hills Volunteer Fire Company was formed under the auspices of the Metropolitan Associated Fire Brigades (MAFB), and enrolled members at a meeting in Kelsey's Queen's Arms Hotel, Bourke and Oxford Streets (now the Courthouse Hotel)<sup>318</sup>. A further meeting was called in December 1880 during which it received widespread support and new members<sup>319</sup>.



Figure 31 Victoria Inn, 1907 (City of Sydney Archives)

But on the same night, the United Volunteer Fire Brigades (UVFB) held a meeting in the Wesleyan School in Botany Street to form a volunteer fire brigade to operate in Surry Hills<sup>320</sup>. In the end, the Volunteer Fire Company No. 3 (a member of the UVFB) organised a branch station in the suburb. By then, the UVFB and MAFB had started to organise competing brigades in the same areas, and the contest over areas of control intensified.

In 1881, the Volunteer Fire Company No. 3 (part of the UVFB) applied on their behalf to the Sydney Council for a portion of land on the Crown Street reservoir for a station, but it could not be granted, due to insufficient room for the purpose. However, Mr. Cassidy of the Victoria Inn in Taylor Square handed over a portion of his premises, on which the brigade erected a branch station and placed one of their best manual fire engines with all necessary appliances<sup>321</sup>.

The rival Surry Hills Fire Company, operating under Superintendent Charles Bown of the MAFB, secured an eligible site at 306 Palmer Street in Darlinghurst and erected a fire station, which housed a new powerful manual fire engine and complete appliances. Mr. Cohen was the collector for this company and had been very successful in eliciting subscriptions<sup>322</sup>. By 1889, several volunteer fire brigades had been disbanded and permanent paid firefighters installed by the Fire Brigades Board, including the two Surry Hills brigades<sup>323</sup>.

## Sydney Harbour Trust Fire Brigade

By 1900, the New South Wales Government was concerned that the annually increasing maritime traffic<sup>324</sup> and commercial activities along the Sydney Harbour foreshore should be managed by a single authority. Other concerns were fires on board ships in the harbour and the bubonic plague that caused panic when it arrived in the docks in January that year. In July it was pointed out in the press that most of the other Australian colonies had a Trust to manage their harbour arrangements<sup>325</sup>.

In response to these calls for better management of the harbour, the New South Wales Government introduced the *Sydney Harbour Trust Act* in November 1900, to come into effect the following year. Three Commissioners would be appointed to govern the Trust, which would be responsible for the preservation and improvement of Sydney's port.

The Trust would regulate the movement of vessels and the handling of cargo in the port through a Harbour Master, carry out dredging, remove wrecks, grant licences to erect piers, and maintain wharf facilities and swimming baths. It would also manage firefighting and other safety equipment within the harbour. The Trust operated until 1936 when it was wound up on the establishment of the Maritime Services Board.

One of the initiatives of the Sydney Harbour Trust was to arrange for the construction of a firefighting tug and associated machinery. It was thought that fighting fires on board ships was more effectively done from the harbour than from land (and was essential if the burning ship was away from shore). In addition, the growing number of sawmills, factories and warehouses along the harbour foreshore would benefit from an endless stream of sea water from a boat in the event of a fire, rather than relying on Sydney's limited reticulated water system.

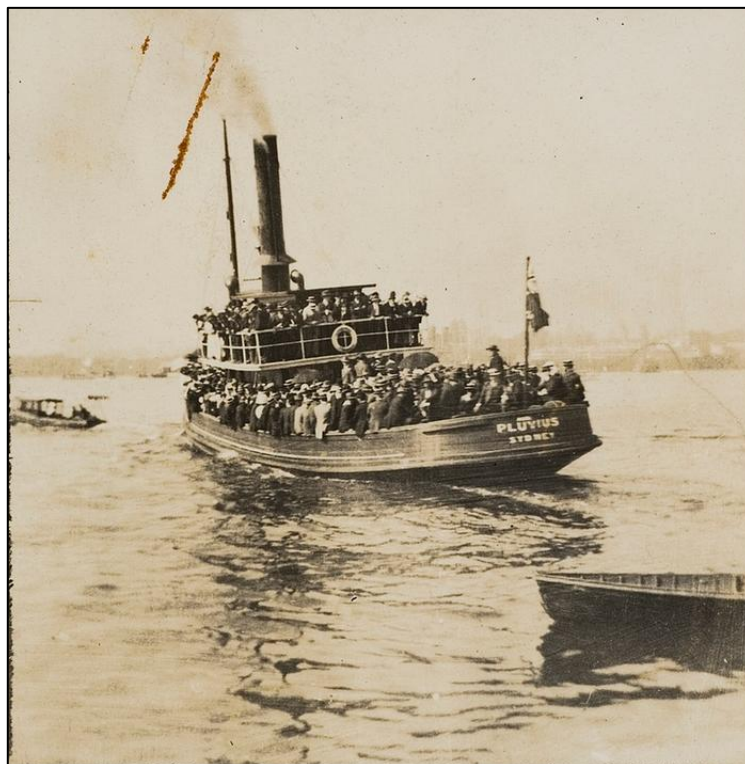


Figure 32 *Pluvius* during ferry strike, 1913 (State Library of NSW)

The fire tug, to be named *Pluvius* (after the name given to the Roman god Jupiter when invoked as the bringer of rain), whose hull was constructed at the engineering works of Mr. W. Dunn in Berry's Bay, was brought into service in April 1903. The tug was 100 feet long, with a beam of 20 feet and a draught of 10 feet. It was constructed of hardwood with kauri decks and compound type engines. The fire pumps were constructed by Messrs. Mereweather & Sons of London (who did good business supplying many of the Sydney fire brigades with fire engines). The pumps could lift 2,500 gallons of water per minute. The vessel was fitted with six connections for ordinary 2.75-inch fire brigade hose and one connection for 3.5-inch hose.

Arrangements were being made at this time for a 7-inch suction hose for salvage purposes. There were 1,000 feet of 2.75-inch fire brigade hose, 100 feet of 7-inch suction hose, and a full set of nozzles. At night, the boat would be stationed at the dredge depot at Goat Island, where enough men to work the boat and hose would be provided with residences, to be available at a moment's notice in case of fire.

Goat Island was chosen as the most central location in the harbour for such duties, being equidistant from all the shipping centres (the wharves and quays). The station was also connected with the telephone exchange at Balmain. The Harbour Master, Captain Charles Bird, would live in a new residence on the island, and he would take charge of the appliances in the event of a fire<sup>326</sup>.



Figure 33 *Pluvius* testing pumps, 1930s (City of Sydney Archives)

At a public demonstration of the fire hoses of the *Pluvius*, the Premier Sir John See said that it was important to provide Sydney with a plant to fight fires on or next to the harbour because the wharves and sheds in the port of Sydney were built of wood. The Premier also said that quotes had been obtained from England for a floating fire engine similar to those used on the River Thames, but they were between £12,000 and £13,000 delivered to Sydney and could only be useful for firefighting purposes.

The Trust commissioners decided that it would be more economical to simply obtain another harbour tug and install a fire engine. Such a boat could then be used for towing purposes when not required for firefighting. The additional cost of providing firefighting equipment in the *Pluvius* was only £1,600<sup>327</sup>.

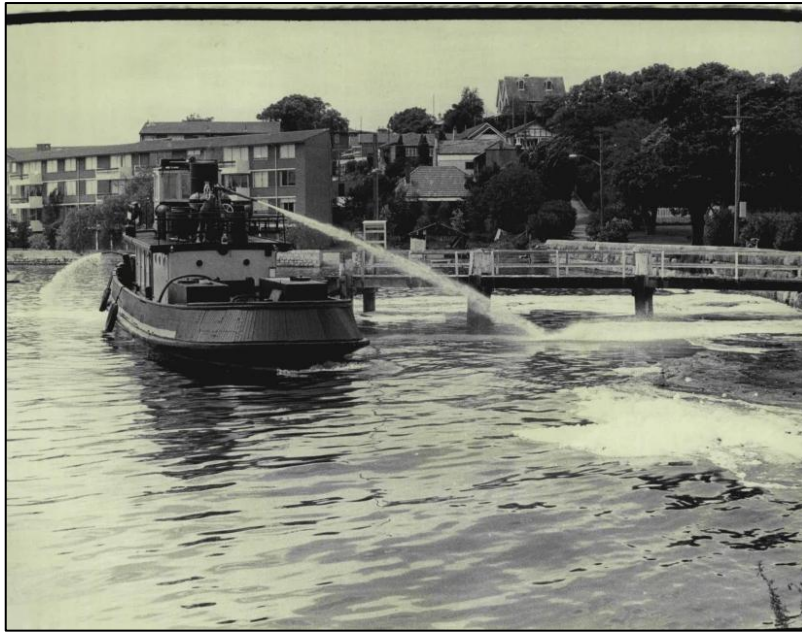
The *Pluvius* was soon in action in May 1903 when the pastoralist Henry Dangar's steam yacht *Nora* caught fire at about one o'clock in the morning and sank in Sydney Harbour, about 250 yards off Potts Point. The Water Police launch *Biloela* also proceeded to the scene, but the whole yacht was alight and it was impossible to extinguish the flames. It was decided the best way to avoid complete destruction of the yacht was to sink her in comparatively shallow water<sup>328</sup>.

The salvage hose of the *Pluvius* was brought into action in August 1903 following a serious collision in Sydney Harbour between the Indian liner *Argus* (which was departing for Calcutta) and the *Mildura* of the Australian United Steamship Navigation Company (which was arriving from Brisbane and Newcastle). Water was pumped from the stokehold of the *Argus* which was taking in water from a hole in the bow. The captain ran the leaking vessel ashore at Goat Island to prevent further sinking. The *Pluvius* then conveyed the passengers to shore<sup>329</sup>.

In February 1906, a very large fire destroyed a timber yard in Blackwattle Bay, in an area where the whole of the timber industry was centred. Every firefighting appliance in the metropolitan area was brought into operation and the *Pluvius* poured salt water on the fire all night. Superintendent Alfred Webb of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade said afterwards that while the town water supply was sufficient for the fire engines attending, it would be more effective if salt water could be thrown from a fire-float, as used in America. Salt water had greater extinguishing power than fresh water, and inflammable material did not so easily catch fire again if it was soaked with salt water<sup>330</sup>.

Superintendent Webb said that Sydney needed a large fire-float similar to the one in use in New York to deal with very large fires such as the timber yard in Blackwattle Bay. He acknowledged that the *Pluvius* did good work, pouring 2,500 gallons of water a minute onto flames, but the New York fire float was capable of delivering 9,000 gallons of water a minute. The nozzles had steel shields attached to them, so the men handling them could move up close to the flames and pour water right into the heart of the blaze<sup>331</sup>.

In June 1907, a new fire-float named the *Powerful* assisted at a fire aboard the steamer *Varzin* in Woolloomooloo Bay. The fire was fought by the combined efforts of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, the Harbour Trust firemen, detachments of Navy's blue jackets (sailors) from Garden Island and the crew of the steamer. It was supposed that the spontaneous combustion of a cargo of copra caused the fire. When all appliances were working, there were twenty streams of water being poured into the vessel, totalling about 4,000 gallons per minute<sup>332</sup>.



**Figure 34 Fire-float in Berry's Bay, 1973 (Fairfax Media)**

It was announced in March 1912 that a third fire-float was soon to be completed at Cockatoo Island, which would complement the *Pluvius* and *Powerful* that were already in the Harbour Brigade<sup>333</sup>. This was probably the *Hydra*, which was reported attending a fire at Blackwattle Bay in January 1914<sup>334</sup>.

In March 1913, a ferry strike paralysed much of Sydney for a few days, especially those who lived in the North Shore and worked in the city. The Government arranged for several of their own boats to run a free service carrying as many passengers as possible back and forth across the harbour during the strike. The *Pluvius* ran a service every quarter of an hour between Milsons Point and Fort Macquarie (present-day Bennelong Point)<sup>335</sup>, and the *Hydra* ran between McMahon's Point and Dawes Point<sup>336</sup>. The *Pluvius* reportedly carried up to 300 passengers at a time, packed like sardines, in an exercise which apparently went well with the help of constables and Harbour Trust staff who did their best to minimise the inconvenience to the working populace during the transport crisis<sup>337</sup>.

A fourth fire-float, the *Cecil Rhodes* was attending fires in the Harbour by December 1921<sup>338</sup>. The advantage of having multiple firefighting vessels was highlighted in January 1926 when the *Pluvius* ran aground on the reef on the western side of Shark Island and was left high and dry by a fast-ebbing tide. Its sister tug *Hydra* then pulled it free on the next high tide<sup>339</sup>. Two fire-floats attended the huge fire that destroyed Hudson's timber yards and mills on Bridge Road Glebe in March 1928<sup>340</sup>. The *Pluvius* continued to serve as a fire-float until about 1976<sup>341</sup>.

In 2024, the Port Authority of New South Wales took delivery of two new firefighting vessels, built in Port Macquarie. These are the *Burra* and the *Girawaa*. The fast aluminium monohull vessels are designed to respond quickly to major on-water incidents. The Port Authority responds to over 1,000 incidents in Sydney ports each year, including vessel fires, oil pollution incidents and water mishaps requiring rescue. The water pumps are capable of discharging 16,000 litres (4,200 gallons) of sea water per minute over a distance of 85 metres<sup>342</sup>.

## Notable early fires in Sydney

### Theatre Royal, 1840

Barnett Levey (1798-1837) was a Jewish English-Australian merchant and theatre director. He was born in London and arrived in Sydney in December 1821 to join his brother Solomon, a prosperous emancipist. The first free Jewish settler in the colony, he established himself as a merchant and opened a store in George Street. In 1825 he married Sarah Emma Wilson.

From 1826, Levey became interested in the cultural activities of Sydney and set about establishing the first permanent theatre in the colony. In March 1828, he erected a temporary theatre at the rear of his George Street property<sup>343</sup>. In March 1829, to raise money after neglecting his businesses to develop the theatre, he opened a splendid hotel in George Street, called the Royal Hotel<sup>344</sup>.



Figure 35 Royal Hotel and theatre, 1838 (State Library of NSW)

A small theatre was opened inside the hotel with a temporary stage constructed in the saloon in December 1832, fitted up with a tier of boxes and seats for the pit<sup>345</sup>. In 1833, Levey finally raised enough money to build the first real theatre in Australia on land at the rear of the hotel, called the Theatre Royal, seating about 1,000 people. But he was soon in financial trouble, and lost control of his theatre to other lessees. By 1837, he was sick, tired and worn out by his efforts to make the theatre pay. He died in October 1837 at the age of 39<sup>346</sup>, leaving a widow and four small children in poverty<sup>347</sup>.

Barnett Levey was an idealist who sacrificed his fortune and health but failed to reach his goals. But the *Sydney Times* acknowledged after his death that “to his spirit and perseverance are the public indebted for the introduction of theatricals into New South Wales”<sup>348</sup>. His widow Sarah carried on performances at the Theatre Royal as well as she could<sup>349</sup>, until she closed it abruptly in March 1838<sup>350</sup>. It was reported that the old theatre’s paraphernalia had been taken over by the entrepreneur Joseph Wyatt after he purchased the lease of the theatre from Sarah Levey<sup>351</sup>. He had just constructed a theatre in Pitt Street that was initially called the New Theatre Royal<sup>352</sup>.

Sarah Levey issued a public notice thanking the public for their patronage since the premature death of her husband. She assured them that indisposition and a weak constitution arising from the exertions in managing of the theatre obliged her to forgo further support for the present, and to close the theatre for some time<sup>353</sup>. The *Commercial Journal and Advertiser* acknowledged that the old Theatre Royal “had given birth to legitimate theatre in Sydney”<sup>354</sup>.

Disaster struck on St Patrick’s Day 1840, when a huge fire destroyed the large Royal Hotel and the old Theatre Royal inside. The loss was estimated at £25,000, of which reportedly only £3,000 was insured<sup>355</sup>. After the fire alarm was given, about 200 soldiers turned out from the barracks, bringing with them one of the Ordnance fire engines, the first engine to arrive.

About 300 convicts also arrived from the Hyde Park Barracks, and their conduct in working tirelessly over several hours was highly spoken of. But no fire engine in the colony could reach the top of a large building like the Royal Hotel. Joseph Wyatt’s Victoria Theatre was at the rear of the hotel but only suffered a few burnt shingles on the roof<sup>356</sup>. This near miss prompted Wyatt to acquire a manual fire engine to protect his theatre from fires in the future<sup>357</sup>.

### **St Mary’s Cathedral, 1865 and 1869**

In November 1821, Governor Lachlan Macquarie laid the foundation stone of the first Roman Catholic Chapel in the colony at a site to the east of Hyde Park, to be known as St Mary’s Chapel<sup>358</sup>. The church was a simple cruciform sandstone structure with Gothic windows and pinnacles. The building was consecrated by Bishop John Bede Polding in June 1835<sup>359</sup>. Lack of funding for the construction and materials meant that in July 1836, when it was renamed St Mary’s Cathedral Church, it was still only half finished<sup>360</sup>. In June 1838, it was called St Mary’s Cathedral in an article which mentioned that funds for its completion were still in a “reduced state”<sup>361</sup>.



**Figure 36 First St Mary's Church, 1840s (State Library of NSW)**

In June 1865, a fire that was reported to be the largest and most disastrous in Sydney resulted in the total destruction of the Cathedral. A meeting in St Mary’s Seminary the following month began the task of collecting subscriptions for the purpose of restoring or replacing the church<sup>362</sup>. In August,

preparations commenced for the erection of a temporary building in the garden of the Archbishop's residence, at the corner of College Street and St Mary's Road. It would be constructed of colonial hardwood on stone foundations and would take about two months to complete. The preparation for the design of the permanent structure was entrusted to William Wardell, the Colonial Architect of Victoria<sup>363</sup>.



Figure 37 St Mary's Cathedral fire, 1865 (Illustrated Sydney News, 15 July 1865)

In January 1866, the temporary timber church was taken down and rebuilt in a portion of the enclosure nearer to Woolloomooloo because its site was required for the new cathedral<sup>364</sup>. Then in January 1869, the temporary Cathedral was totally destroyed by a fire between 3 and 4 am. The fire was so great that when the fire engines arrived they had no effect. The wooden building took only half an hour to completely burn<sup>365</sup>. Construction of another temporary cathedral, this time constructed of more substantial brick with a slated roof, commenced in February 1869<sup>366</sup>.

The foundation stone for the permanent cathedral on the site of the first temporary cathedral was laid in May 1869 by John Bede Polding, by then the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Sydney<sup>367</sup>. The temporary Cathedral was formally opened the same month<sup>368</sup>. Construction of the new cathedral took a very long time due to lack of funds, and the first report of construction coming to a standstill was in January 1872, although fundraising was continuing<sup>369</sup>. The flooring was reportedly laid in January 1883<sup>370</sup>.

The Cathedral was formally opened in September of the same year, although the building was still only partially completed, and only £100,000 of an estimated £500,000 for completion had been raised and spent<sup>371</sup>. Final completion of the building in September 1928 was marked with an official opening, almost sixty years after the foundation stone was laid<sup>372</sup>.

### **Prince of Wales Theatre, 1860, 1872 and 1892**

The Prince of Wales Theatre in Castlereagh Street opened in March 1855, managed by John Gordon Griffiths. The owner was Joseph Wyatt, who previously owned the Victoria Theatre until the end of the lease, when he could not secure favourable terms for a renewal. He decided to construct a rival

theatre, the largest in the Australian colonies, which was built at a cost of almost £30,000. It was capable of seating 3,000 people<sup>373</sup>.

In October 1860, a disastrous and extensive fire broke out, causing the entire destruction of the theatre and several adjoining buildings, resulting in the death of two people and the serious injury of others. Smoke and flames were first seen issuing from the bakery at the rear of a shop in King Street, adjoining the south-west corner of the theatre. The strong south-westerly wind accelerated the spread of the flames into the theatre.

Three of the Insurance Companies' fire engines attended, and then the No. 1 and No. 2 Volunteer Fire Companies'. Despite the efforts of the firemen, all hope of saving the theatre was abandoned after a very short time. The theatre was insured for only £8,000, of which £5,000 was by the Liverpool and London Fire Insurance Company and £3,000 by the Sydney Insurance Company<sup>374</sup>.

After the fire, it was pointed out by the *Empire* that the interior fittings and other structures in a theatre were made of highly inflammable materials, such as dry softwood in the audience seats, painted canvas and various kinds of light drapery. Any spark was often enough to lead to the destruction of the entire theatre. The staff emphasised the contrast between the evening before when the theatre was filled with a joyous and delighted audience, gay chandeliers glittered from the roof and loud peals of laughter rewarded the mirthful efforts of the actors. But less than twelve hours later the theatre was a dreary, tottering ruin, the neighbourhood was convulsed with terror and two humans lay burnt and suffocated beneath the smoldering remains<sup>375</sup>.

Ten months later, Robert Fitzgerald purchased the land occupied by the former theatre, and set about rebuilding it<sup>376</sup>. The newly built, spacious and handsome Prince of Wales Theatre was opened in May 1863. The front of the building on Castlereagh Street was the only part to survive the fire, so this was not rebuilt<sup>377</sup>.

Then at about 3:30 in the morning in January 1872, a fire alarm was raised at the Prince of Wales Theatre and the building was on fire again. When it was rebuilt in 1863 after the earlier fire, the walls were made very thick at three feet throughout and sixty feet high. Ironically, every precaution was taken to make the structure as free as possible from all likelihood of danger from fire. The building was surrounded on all sides by closely packed hotels, shops and private houses. The block included some 18 or 20 separate houses, almost in contact with the burning theatre<sup>378</sup>.

Three or four houses were crushed by the falling of one of the theatre walls. The fire caused at least £50,000 worth of damage to properties and threw more than a hundred people out of work, and a number of families were turned out of their homes. The falling of the south wall caused the death of two young men and seriously injured at least two others<sup>379</sup>.

Inquests were held into the two fatalities<sup>380</sup>. A letter to the *Evening News* a week later complained of bad behaviour by the firemen attending the fire. Witnesses heard arguments, threats and bad language during a struggle between No. 1 and No. 2 companies over the use of a fireplug. During the dispute, the brigades wasted valuable time by spraying water at their rivals rather than at the fire, which was gaining ground on all sides.

The correspondent worried that Sydney was degenerating into the old American volunteering style, when it was reputedly not unusual to stop attending a fire to have a good fight and to cut hoses and

smash engines<sup>381</sup>. It was announced a week afterwards that a third man had died from injuries received by the falling of the theatre's southern wall<sup>382</sup>. The three young men who lost their lives were dragging a fire engine along the centre of King Street at the time<sup>383</sup>.

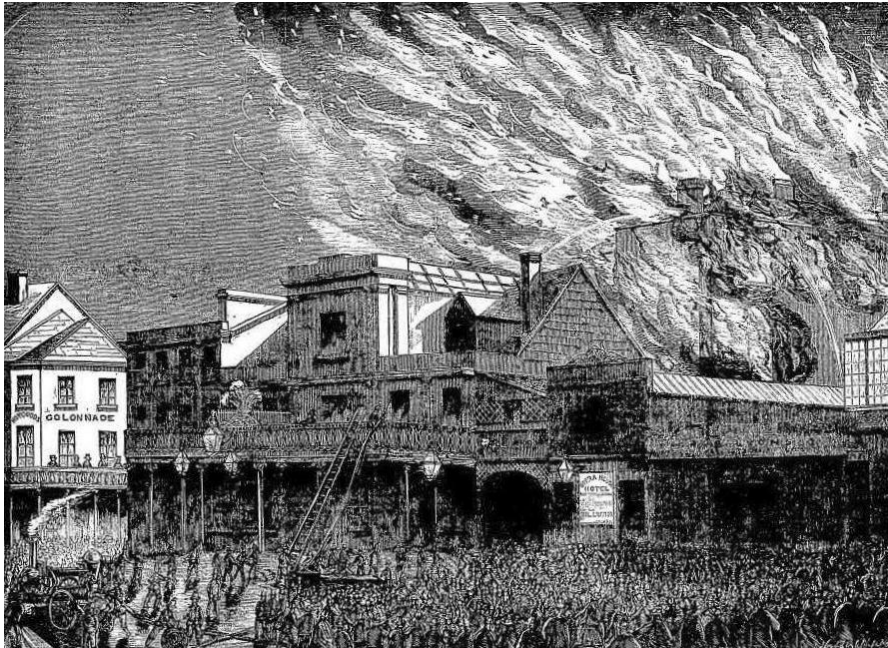


Figure 38 Prince of Wales Theatre fire, 1872 (Town & Country Journal, 13 October 1872)

The theatre was rebuilt a second time, and reopened as the Theatre Royal in December 1875, managed by the enterprising Samuel Lazar<sup>384</sup>. The theatre continued to operate until June 1892, when the auditorium was totally destroyed by a fire which started at about 4 am. This was the third time theatres built on this site had burned down. On previous occasions, there was loss of life, and a great deal of adjoining property was destroyed. This time, although the theatre itself was a wreck, no lives were lost, and the fire was kept well within the building where it originated<sup>385</sup>.

The theatre reopened in January 1893. It was reported to be greatly improved, with an enlarged dome, a higher roof, the whole house redecorated, and some 600 electric lights installed ready for illumination<sup>386</sup>. After a long (and uneventful) life, the theatre finally closed in April 1972, on the expiry of J. C. Williamson's lease on the building. The theatre had been sold to Lend Lease in 1969 and was to be demolished to consolidate the site in order to make way for the MLC Centre.

At the final event there was a rallying of support to "Save the Theatre Royal", which ultimately led to a replacement theatre being incorporated in the development. The new Theatre Royal opened in January 1976. It closed in March 2016 and was in danger of being demolished and replaced by an apartment block. After rallying the public and years of business negotiations, the theatre reopened in 2021<sup>387</sup>.

### **Victoria Theatre, 1880**

In September 1836, Joseph Wyatt laid the first stone of a new theatre in Pitt Street, built at the rear of the Royal Hotel<sup>388</sup>. When the theatre opened in March 1838, Wyatt decided to name it the Royal Victoria Theatre, in honour of the young queen, who had ascended the British throne the previous

year<sup>389</sup>. By January 1854, Andrew Torning was the lessee of the theatre<sup>390</sup>, and it was for the protection of this theatre that Torning established the Volunteer Fire Company No. 1 in 1854<sup>391</sup>.

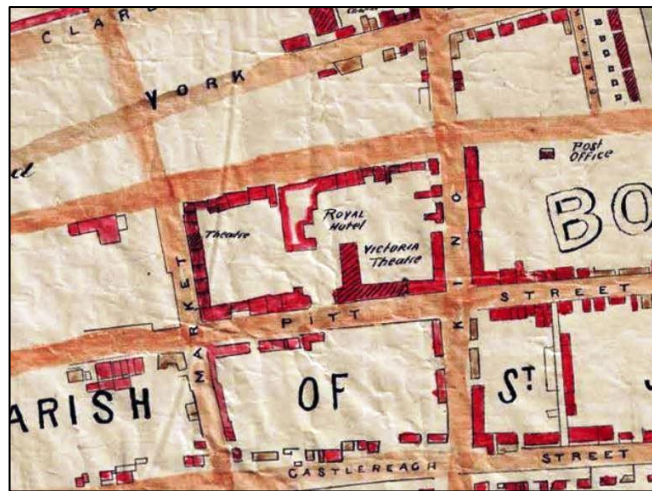


Figure 39 Victoria Theatre, 1845 (Sheilds Sydney Map)

Disaster struck in July 1880, just after the evening's performance had concluded at 11 pm when a fire alarm rang throughout the city to signal that the Victoria Theatre was on fire. Fire engines came from every fire station, but their efforts were in vain for some time. The building was old and constructed of materials that fell easy prey to fire. The water supply was insufficient, and as usual the direction of affairs was defective. The fire companies, able and skilful as they were, acted without control or coordination.

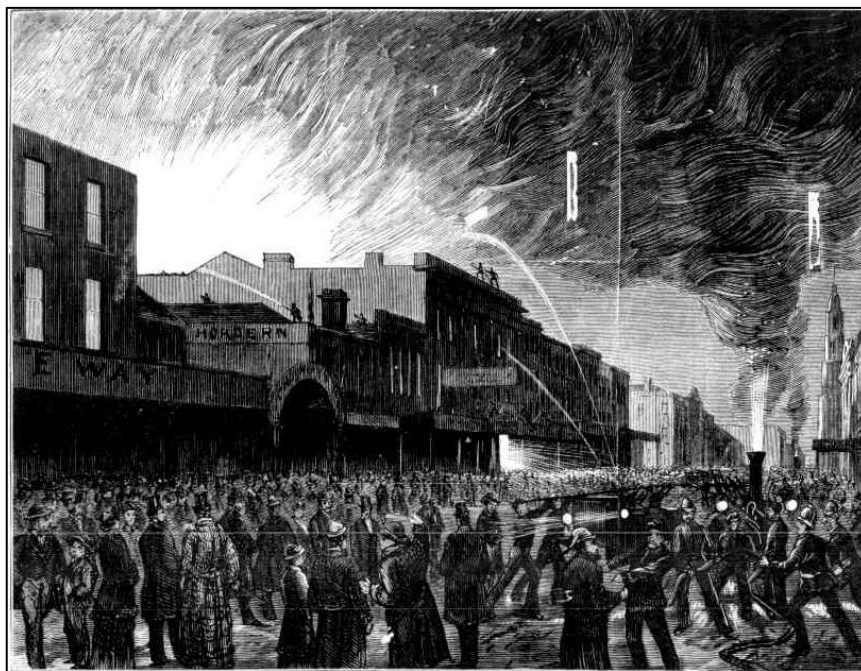


Figure 40 Victoria Theatre fire, 1880 (Sydney Mail, 31 July 1880)

The old and highly popular theatre ended in total destruction. After everybody had left after the night's performance and it was locked up, about 20 past 11 o'clock it was discovered that the rear part of the building was on fire and the auditorium was filled with smoke. Initially the fire brigades

were at a standstill for nearly half an hour for want of water, and when it was turned on the pressure was quite inadequate for such as emergency<sup>392</sup>. The premises adjoining the theatre were also considerably damaged. The total cost was estimated at £50,000 and the theatre was not insured. Two hotels, a restaurant, a hairdresser and a tobacconist were also damaged<sup>393</sup>.

Discussion in the newspapers after the fire was centred on the inadequate water supply to fight a fire of that magnitude in Sydney, and the lack of organised action by those attending fires in those days<sup>394</sup>. Another news report mentioned that the theatre, by then the oldest in the colony, was constructed with walls that for 20 feet upwards from the basement were a little over three feet thick (the length of four bricks), and from there to the top were three bricks thick, or nearly 2' 6". Substantial walls such as those were not being constructed by the 1880s, and the strength of the walls contained the fire to a limited area<sup>395</sup>.

While it was common to rebuild a theatre after it burned down, the owners of the land on which the Victoria Theatre once stood announced that they did not intend to construct another theatre. They planned to offer the land for sale, either in a single block or in suitable allotments<sup>396</sup>.

### **Garden Palace, 1882**

The Garden Palace was a magnificent building that was constructed to host the 1879 Sydney International Exhibition. The design was intended as a reworking of London's Crystal Palace and was reminiscent of a cathedral, being cruciform in shape with nave, transepts and a central dome. It was built of iron, glass and wood on a brick foundation, and was estimated to have cost £192,000 by the time of opening<sup>397</sup>. It had a grandeur that dominated the city skyline, stretching from the site of the current State Library of New South Wales to the Sydney Conservatorium<sup>398</sup>.



**Figure 41 Inside the Garden Palace, 1880 (Museums of History NSW)**

After the Exhibition closed in April 1880, the building was used as an auditorium and gallery and to house the first mining and technological museum<sup>399</sup>. It also provided office space for several Government departments, and the basement was used to house many official records. The ground

floor covered just over five acres, and with the basement, galleries and tower floors made a total area of 8 1/3 acres of floor space.

At about 5:40am on 22 September 1882 a fire broke out, and in about 40 minutes had totally consumed the building<sup>400</sup>. The fire was so ferocious that the windows in the terrace houses along Macquarie Street cracked with the heat and sheets of corrugated iron were blown as far away as Elizabeth Bay. Many Government documents were lost, including the colony's unpublished census of 1881. An official enquiry was unable to explain the cause of the fire, although it seems likely to have started in the basement<sup>401</sup>.

When the fire was first noticed, one of the watchmen called the No. 2 Volunteer Fire Company, with which it was directly connected by phone. The other watchman rang the alarm bell. Standpipes, hoses and a manual fire engine were distributed around the building, but only one standpipe could be used. Fire brigades arrived from all parts of the city, with steam and manual engines, hoses and all necessary equipment. But they could only stand and gaze powerlessly at the fearsome spectacle facing them.



**Figure 42 Garden Palace fire, 1882 (*Illustrated Sydney News*, 25 October 1882)**

It was thought the Art Gallery was in danger, and a body of firemen were stationed in its vicinity, but their services were not required. The Art Society of New South Wales was to hold its annual exhibition in the Garden Palace in early October, and about 300 paintings had already been sent there. They had recently been insured for £3,000. The destruction of these artworks was yet another reminder that paintings, sculptures and ceramics should have been stored in a more substantial building than this one, which was shown to be a tinderbox.

Many pastoral leases and other land documents were destroyed in the fire, after the Occupation of Lands Branch was moved to the building a few months earlier. Also lost were many plans for proposed extensions and modifications to the railway network. The Linnaean Society's library was lost, along with the valuable collection of plants belonging to the members, and all of its publications.

The New South Wales Colonial Census taken in 1881 was still in preparation for the release of the collation of the collected information, at a cost of some £24,000. Legislators had recently expressed frustration that New South Wales was the last colony to furnish this information, and it was all now lost to the flames. As it happened, John Byron, the compiler of the Census, was to have placed much of the information already collated in the hands of the Government Printer the following day. This would have represented about half of the information in the Census. An effort would be made to obtain any duplicated copies of the census returns that were made by the enumerators and stored elsewhere.

The building was constructed by John Young's building company with the large amount of timber installed by Hudson Brothers. A bronze statue of Queen Victoria was located under the dome and was going to be moved to Hyde Park after the Exhibition had finished. But this had not been done, and it was destroyed in the fire<sup>402</sup>.

A month after the fire, the New South Wales Government announced plans to build a permanent palace on the site of the late Garden Palace, which would be a National Gallery of Art and Science for the entertainment and instruction of the people. The building would also meet the requirements of a great exhibition, as some national demonstrations would be taking place at the centenary of New South Wales in 1888<sup>403</sup>. However, this grand plan did not eventuate.

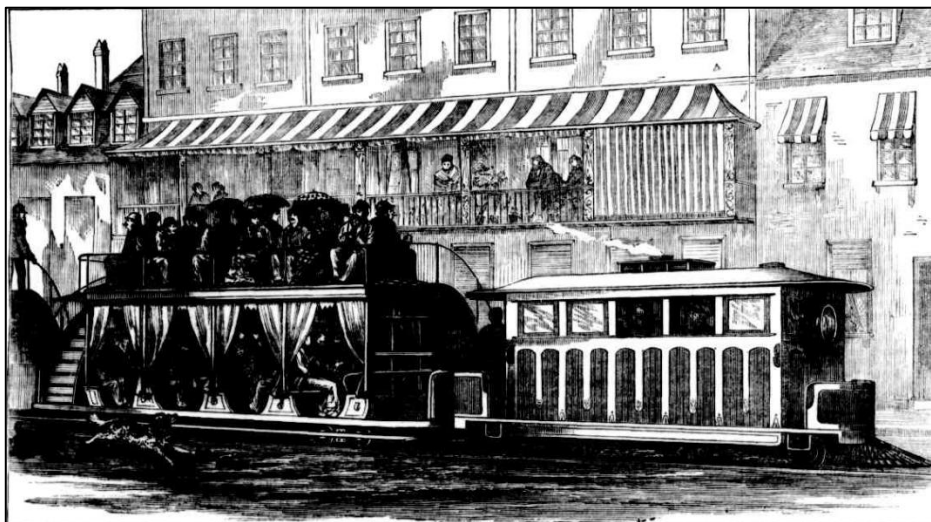


Figure 43 Sydney Exhibition tramcar, 1879 (*Town & Country Journal*, 21 June 1879)

Probably the most lasting legacy of the building was the tram track laid from Redfern railway station (the railway terminus at the time) to the Exhibition site. Four steam trams were imported to carry visitors arriving by train to the Exhibition. Intended as a temporary installation, the trams proved to be very popular and became the genesis of a larger tram network. After the first horse-drawn tram running on a raised track from the railway terminus to Circular Quay along Pitt Street in 1861 was

not a success, it took the 1879 Exhibition to resurrect Sydney's tram system. The network then expanded rapidly through the city and inner suburbs during the 1880s and 1890s.

### **Great Fire in the Sydney CBD, 1890**

At 2:30am on 2 October 1890, one of the most destructive fires ever seen in Sydney broke out at Gibbs, Shallard and Company's printing and lithographic works between Pitt and Castlereagh Streets. Before any fire engines arrived, the fire spread with consuming rapidity along the block of buildings in the direction of Castlereagh Street. In a few minutes, the No. 1 fire engine of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade was stationed at the entrance of the lane (Hoskin Place) leading to Gibbs Shallard's premises. Other engines arrived soon afterwards, and under the supervision of Superintendent William Bear additional efforts were made to cope with the fire.



**Figure 44 Great CBD Fire, 1890 (*Leader*, 11 October 1890)**

But in less than five minutes, the fire had descended from the upper to the lower stories, and the whole six-storey structure was burning. By then, additional fire engines had taken up positions in Castlereagh Street. However, the water supply at this location did not reach higher than the middle storey of the building. It was soon realised that it was impossible to prevent the entire destruction of the building, which was one sheet of flames, while falling bricks, glass and other debris made it extremely difficult for the firemen to work in the narrow lanes surrounding the building. A light southerly breeze fanned the flames, although it was not strong enough to be really dangerous.

The same building had been partly gutted by fire some months earlier, although the present conflagration was a much more serious one than the previous one. The whole upper portion of the building was occupied by Messrs. Gibbs Shallard and Co for their printing and stationery business, while the basement was used as a restaurant, called the Diner-de-Paris. The insurance details of the buildings could not be ascertained at the time, but the loss must have been enormous.

By 3:15am, the Southern Club at the rear was in flames. The Athenaeum Club and adjacent buildings were for some time kept from catching fire by the firemen continuously playing water on them. About 3am, the building occupied by Messrs. Feldheim, Gotthelf and Co on the opposite side of the lane leading out of Castlereagh Street caught fire. The billiard room of the Southern Club also caught fire and burnt fiercely. At 3:30am the southern wall of the building fell in, injuring a fireman, who was taken to hospital.

The wind then increased, and the southern wall of Gibbs Shallard and Co fell, injuring another fireman. By 4am, the breeze had increased further, driving the flames across the lane. Lark & Sons store caught fire, and five minutes later the furniture store of Lawson Brothers in Pomeroy Chambers was threatened. Messrs. Feldheim and Gotthelf's warehouse, a brick structure filled with inflammable materials, burnt with great fierceness, the flames leaping across the lane.

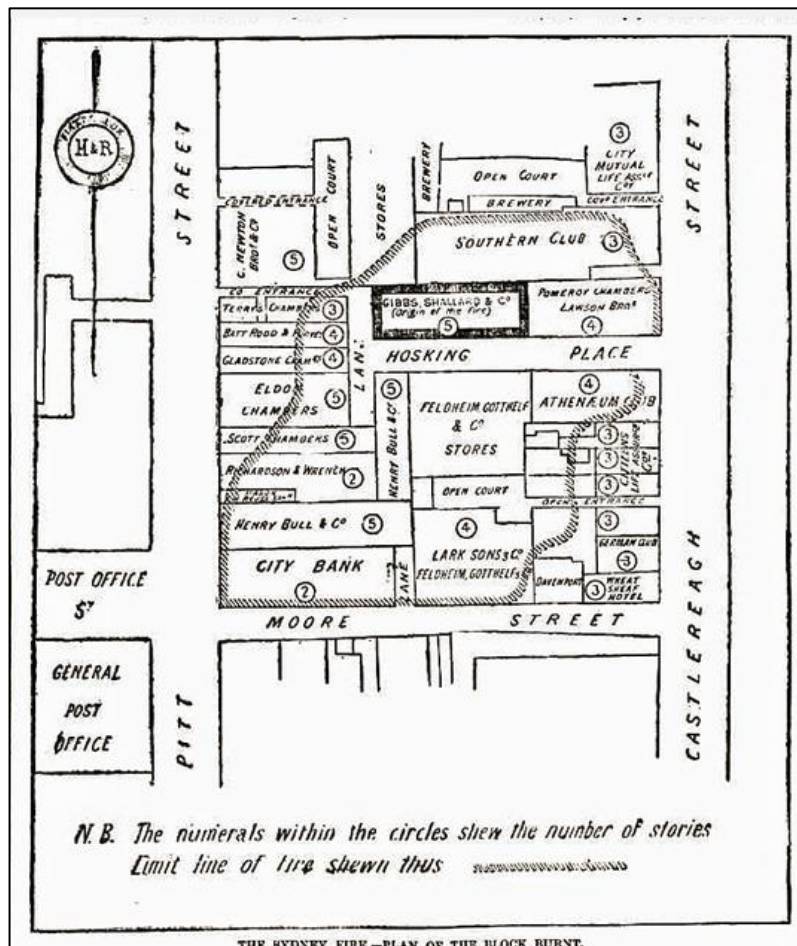


Figure 45 Block burnt in the Great Fire, 1890 (*Leader*, 11 October 1890)

At 4:10am, the wall of Feldheim Gotthelf & Company fell in and Messrs. Park and Lacey's building was seen to be burning. Soon after 4am, the wind shifted to the north, increasing the danger. Messrs. Henry Bull and Co's warehouse in Pitt Street was then fully aflame, and there was no hope of saving the contents. The City Bank in Pitt Street then gave way to the invincible flames.

A large police force and a number of mounted troopers were by then on the spot. Richardson and Wrench's premises had just caught fire, injuring three firemen severely, and they were taken to

hospital. A number of volunteer brigades had arrived and were doing their best to assist. Staff from Messrs. Richardson and Wrench managed to save their valuable stock of lithographs.

By 4:30am, the fire had spread along Pitt Street to Bull & Co's offices and the City Bank, and an extra force of firemen laid on all the water at their command. But the ravages of the fire could not be checked, the front of Lawson's furniture warehouse was ablaze, and the eaves of the Athenaeum Club roof were burning. By 5am the fire was raging with considerable ferocity<sup>404</sup>.

The following evening, a summary of the damage and destruction was published in the *Evening News*:

- Gibbs, Shallard and Co's printing and publishing establishment: completely destroyed. The Pitt Street premises were only slightly damaged.
- Lark & Sons and Co, Moore Street: warehouse and stock totally destroyed. Enormous loss of stock, estimated at about £150,000, partly insured.
- Feldheim, Gotthelf and Co, Moore Street: warehouse and stock destroyed.
- The City Bank, Pitt and Moore Street: roof and upper and back portions destroyed. The back room damaged by water and refuse.
- Richardson and Wrench, auctioneers of Pitt Street: premises totally destroyed.
- Henry Bull & Co: warehouse and stock totally destroyed. Heavily stocked, very great loss, partly insured.
- Cyrus Mason and Co, stock and share brokers of Pitt Street: premises partly destroyed.
- Joseph Palmer, stock and share broker of Pitt Street: premises partly destroyed.
- Eldon Chambers (offices): partly destroyed.
- Christopher Newton & Co, warehousemen: a large amount of stock destroyed.
- Athenaeum Club, Castlereagh Street: roof and top storey completely destroyed, first floor and walls almost completely destroyed, ground floor rooms damaged by water. Library slightly damaged by water.
- Lawson Brothers: premises and stock destroyed. The walls of their furniture warehouse could collapse at any moment.
- Southern Club, Castlereagh Street: damage to roof and billiard room.

The newspaper also provided a list of the injured firemen:

- William Rigby, 38, Waverley Fire Brigade: burnt thigh and scalp wound, severe injuries.
- Benjamin Morris, Metropolitan Fire Brigade: scalp wound, admitted to hospital.
- Albert Colley, 31, Metropolitan Fire Brigade: cut head, admitted to hospital.
- Ephraim Stoneham, captain of the Waverley Brigade: cut head.
- George H. Dodd, Metropolitan Fire Brigade: cut head.
- Thomas Cutts, 31: burnt arms and legs.
- Arthur Mount-Stephen, 22, Waverley Brigade: scalp wound, admitted to hospital.

Owing to the strong wind, large quantities of sparks and burning wood were blown over the neighbourhood of Elizabeth Street, frequently igniting roof shingles and other inflammable material. Large quantities of water promptly applied by the residents averted the danger, and the flames were

put out. The fire was at the worst time of year for Messrs, Lark Sons & Co, as their warehouse was very heavily stocked that month. Henry Bull & Co's warehouse was also heavily stocked.

A spectator remarked that the conflagration just before dawn was a splendid spectacle that looked like a premature sunrise. All nearby houses reflected yellow light, and the taller buildings seemed to be magically transformed into solid gold. The large crowd was too deeply enthralled by the brilliant spectacle for any display of lamentations<sup>405</sup>. A city valuer estimated the total loss in buildings and stock at between £500,000 and £750,000<sup>406</sup>.

After the fire was contained, and was gradually burning out the following day, Superintendent William Bear of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade was interviewed by the *Sydney Morning Herald*. He pointed out that no fireproof shutters were used in buildings erected in narrow lanes and streets. The fact that Gibbs Shallard and Co's building had unprotected windows was undoubtedly the cause of the fire spreading as much as it did. He also pointed out that the lack of bond in the brick walls caused them to fall much sooner than they otherwise would. In Britain it was compulsory to use a hoop iron band in the walls to keep the bricks together. As for the water supply, the Superintendent said that the pressure was first class in Castlereagh Street but only fair in Pitt Street. About £500 worth of hose was lost under the fallen buildings.



**Figure 46 Superintendent William Bear (Museum of Fire)**

Nearly all members of the Metropolitan Fire brigade had bruises and burns to show for their exertions, and battered helmets and burnt clothing to testify to the trying ordeal they underwent. The volunteer fire brigades in attendance were, in order of attendance: Alexandria, Ashfield, Balmain, Glebe, Darlington, Leichhardt, Newtown, North City, Paddington, Paddington Brewery, Standard Brewery, Waterloo, Waverly, Woollahra and Manly. The police assisted greatly in maintaining order: throughout the day about 50 foot-police, 20 troopers and nearly 200 special constables were present<sup>407</sup>.

The fire had affected several properties in Moore Street, a small thoroughfare that ran between Pitt and Castlereagh Streets. This street was already part of a plan to widen it and eventually extend Martin Place from George Street to Macquarie Street. This plan had been legislated in 1890 as the *Moore Street Improvement Act*. But it had not been acted upon since its inception, and now the owners of properties destroyed in the fire were calling for tenders for the erection of new replacement buildings<sup>408</sup>.

The fire spurred the Sydney City Council into action, and in June 1891 the councillors voted to obtain an estimate of the cost of such improvements in the Act and of the resumption of land as part of the plan<sup>409</sup>. The *New South Wales Government Gazette* then published a notification that the Council intended to widen Moore Street to 100 feet. Properties to be resumed under the *Moore Street Improvement Act* included the City Bank (land and ruins), Henry Bull (vacant land), Lark & Sons (land and ruins), and the land and buildings of Robert Reid, the trustees of John Hughes and J. T. Starkey<sup>410</sup>.

The widened Martin Place in front of the General Post Office from George to Pitt Street was officially opened in September 1892. It was named after the Chief Justice and former New South Wales Premier Sir James Martin. Moore Street between Pitt and Castlereagh Street was widened and renamed Martin Place in 1921. The extension of Martin Place from Castlereagh Street to Macquarie Street, proposed by the Council in 1923, required extensive demolition of properties and faced concerted opposition from landowners. Many took legal action to prevent the resumption of their land, and the extension was not completed until 1935<sup>411</sup>.

## Notable firefighting people

### Andrew Torning

Joseph Wyatt, owner of the Royal Victoria Theatre in Sydney, decided in 1841 that he needed some fresh performers for his theatre so he travelled to England to recruit some. London-born Andrew Torning (1814-1900) was an actor and a painter of theatrical backdrops. Andrew had been acting and his wife Eliza had been dancing at a small theatre in London when Joseph Wyatt offered them jobs with much higher pay in Sydney.

The Tornings and their two children left England and arrived in Sydney in October 1842. They saw this as an opportunity for greater financial security and to become more engaged in the theatre. Andrew Torning thus began his theatrical career in Sydney, where in his time he would show himself to be an actor, dancer, comedian, animal trainer, entertainer and theatre manager. Beside him was his wife who danced, acted and sang<sup>412</sup>.

In September 1854, Torning announced his desire to form a Volunteer Fire Company<sup>413</sup>. The London Exhibition Fire Engine had been imported to Sydney by the commission agents Smith Croft & Co, and Torning purchased it. He admitted years later that he established a volunteer fire brigade of the kind used in the United States.

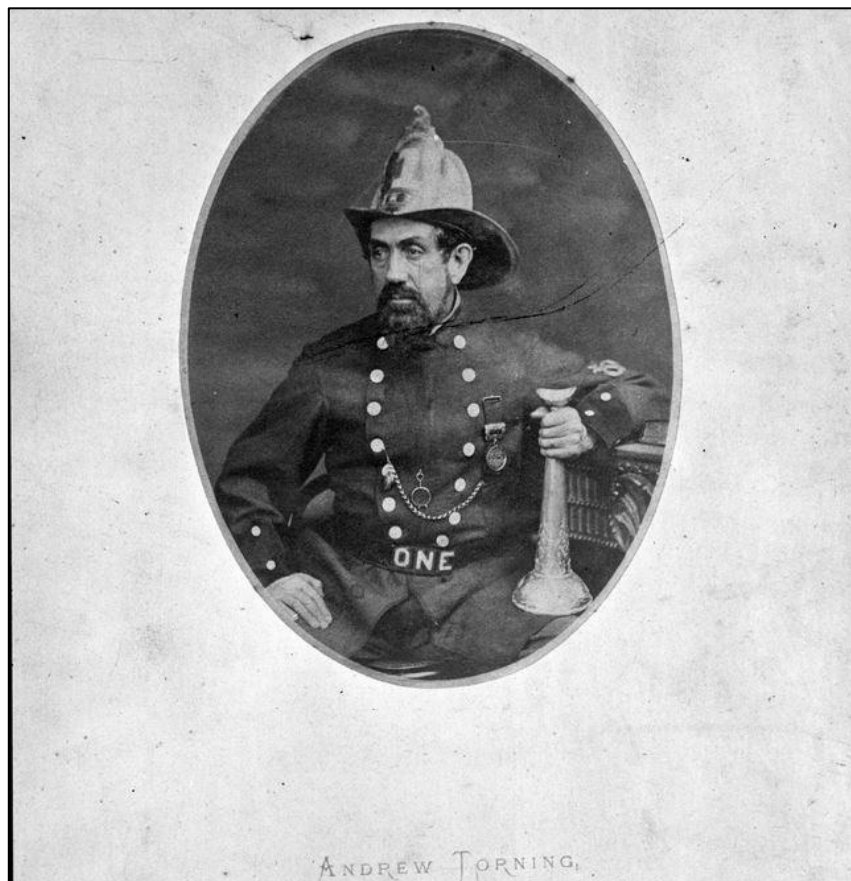


Figure 47 Andrew Torning (Records NSW)

It was mentioned in the section on the Royal Victoria Volunteer Fire Company No. 1 that the American actor James Stark, who was appearing at the theatre with his wife in 1854, and who had

bad memories of theatre fires in America, probably persuaded Andrew Torning to establish his own fire brigade to protect the uninsured theatre.

Torning was officially elected Superintendent of the brigade in 1856 and continued in that role until 1859 when he left for America<sup>414</sup>. His departure followed a period of significant financial hardship for his company Torning & Son, which was declared insolvent in 1856. When he returned to Sydney in 1867, he was elected again to the position<sup>415</sup> in which he continued until 1876<sup>416</sup>, when he was appointed Captain of the brigade<sup>417</sup>.

Torning was very active in the firefighting scene in Sydney and was closely involved in the formation of several volunteer fire brigades. In May 1877, he wrote in a newspaper that he had long wanted to train a company that specialised in assisting at fires with a fire escape, or a hook and ladder apparatus, as he had seen used in America. If sufficient funds become available, he would be willing to design and superintend the building of a hook and ladder truck<sup>418</sup>. The following year, Torning exhibited a wire fire escape and a hook and ladder fire escape at the Sydney Metropolitan Intercolonial Exhibition<sup>419</sup>.

Torning was among those who proposed the formation of the Newtown Fire Brigade in 1875 and suggested that water tanks be excavated at road junctions to provide a water supply in the absence of piped water from the town<sup>420</sup>. In 1877, he offered to exercise and drill the members of the newly formed Mount Lachlan Fire Brigade<sup>421</sup>. He then called for tenders to build a manual fire engine<sup>422</sup> and supply uniforms for the brigade<sup>423</sup>.

Andrew Torning served on the Waterloo Municipal Council for Waterloo 1879-1881, 1884-1886 and was Mayor in 1879. He lived in Elizabeth Street in Waterloo in the 1870s and 1880s and in Manly at the time of his death in 1900<sup>424</sup>. Torning has been called the father of Sydney firefighting, and with his initiative and boundless energy he made an invaluable contribution to the creation and expansion of the volunteer fire service in the city.

## **Thomas and Charles Bown**

Thomas James Bown (1810-1872) served as a firefighter in London before arriving in Sydney in 1842, becoming the colony's first professional fireman. He was handpicked and brought to Sydney (along with fellow fireman Edward Harris and two fire appliances) by the Mutual Fire Insurance Association, which was established in 1841. However, the Association did not last long and disbanded in 1843. Thomas Bown was then transferred to the City Corporation Brigade for a short while<sup>425</sup>. He was the chief engineer and Superintendent of Water Works for the City Council but resigned both positions in 1844<sup>426</sup>.

In 1843, he set up his own engineering and plumbing business, T. J. Bown & Co, on the corner of George and Bathurst Streets. Advertisements showed that the company specialised in firefighting equipment, from appliances through to individual brass fittings. In 1851, he was approached to manage the newly formed Insurance Companies Fire Brigade. Part of his factory was used as the brigade's fire station as he continued to operate his business from the premises.

By 1861, Thomas Bown owned Barwon Park, consisting of an inn and gardens on Cook's River Road at St. Peter's. Throughout the 1860s, he advertised himself as a brass founder and plumber in Bathurst Street. He was a City of Sydney Alderman from 1864 to 1871, just over a month before his

death<sup>427</sup>. He retired from his position as Superintendent in 1867 and returned to England, when his nephew Charles took over the business.

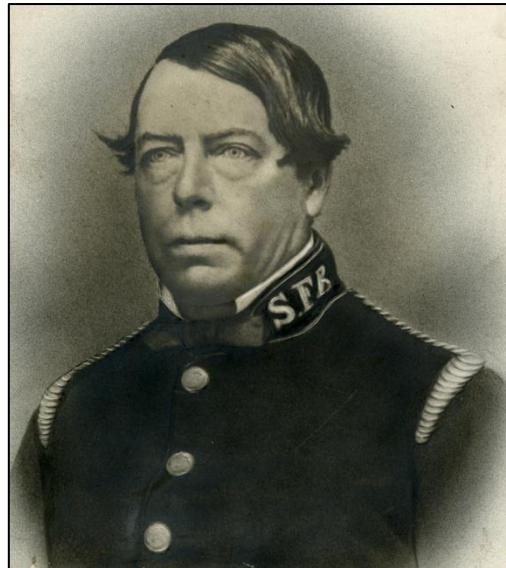


Figure 48 Thomas Bown (Museum of Fire)

Thomas's nephew Charles Bown (1836-1918) arrived in Sydney from London in 1857 to work at T. J. Bown & Co and went on to pursue a notable career in firefighting. He first joined the Insurance Companies Fire Brigade while Thomas was Superintendent. Charles was appointed Assistant Superintendent in 1862 and took over as Superintendent when Thomas retired in 1867. He held this position until 1884 when the Insurance Companies Fire Brigade disbanded. That year, he became the first Chairman of the newly formed Fire Brigades Board. He remained in this position until 1910 when he became the first President of the Board of Fire Commissioners of New South Wales<sup>428</sup>.

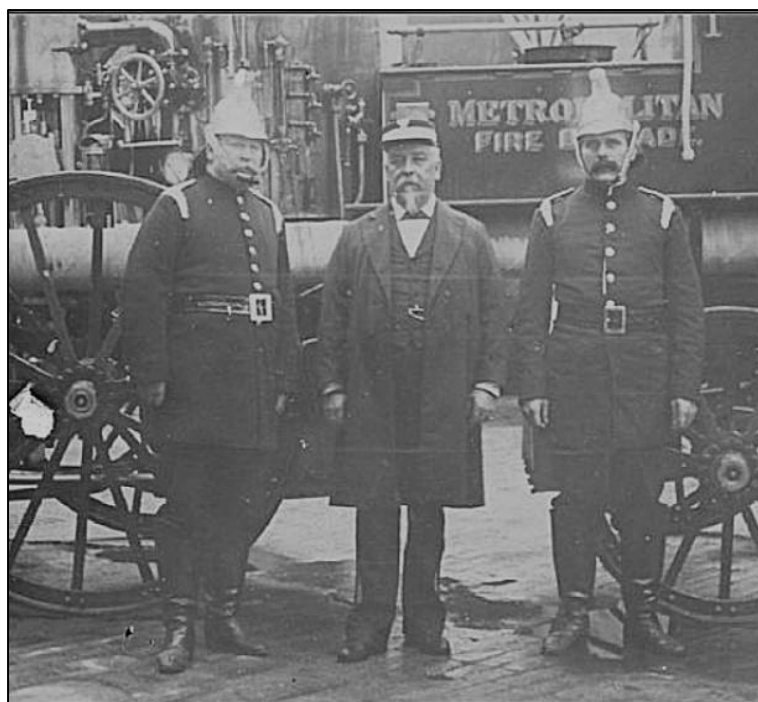
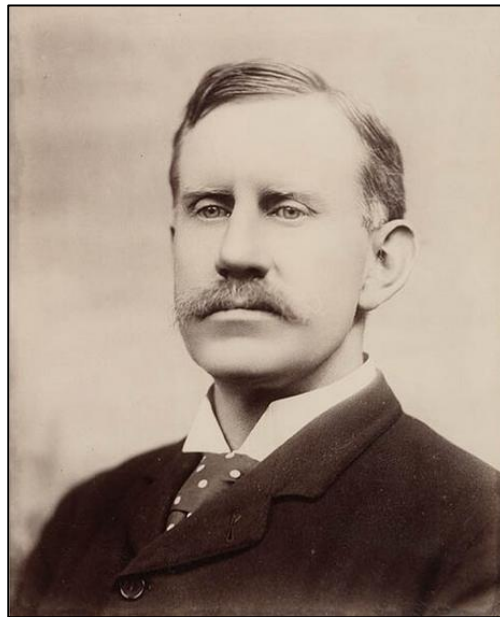


Figure 49 Charles Bown (centre), 1887 (Environment NSW)

As well as establishing firefighting as a professional activity on his arrival in Sydney, Thomas Bown was active in supplying the growing number of city and suburban fire brigades with fire engines and necessary accessories from his factory in George Street. On taking over the management of the Insurance Companies Fire Brigade, then the Fire Brigades Board and eventually the Board of Fire Commissioners of New South Wales, his nephew Charles played a central role in the evolution of firefighting in Sydney from a disparate collection of uncoordinated volunteer brigades to a professional service with better management of brigade resources at fire sites.

### **Walter Liberty Vernon**

The architect Walter Liberty Vernon (1846-1918) was not directly involved in firefighting, but he left a significant legacy in the design of many suburban fire stations in the early years of the twentieth century. He was born in Buckinghamshire, England, and was articled to an architect in 1862. He then worked for the architectural firm of Habershon & Pite and in 1869 took charge of their branch office in Wales. After suffering from recurring bronchial asthma, he was advised to leave England. His family migrated to Australia, reaching Sydney in November 1883.



**Figure 50 Walter Liberty Vernon (State Library of NSW)**

In August 1890, he was appointed government architect in the new branch of the Department of Public Works which was created to allow private architects to compete for the design of public buildings. The government architect would then supervise the construction. Commissions for public buildings lapsed during the economic depression of the 1890s but revived by the mid-1890s.

Vernon saw major city public buildings as “monuments to Art”, large in scale and finely wrought in stone, such as the main façade of the National Art Gallery of New South Wales which he designed in 1904-06. Suburban buildings took on the scale and character of their surroundings, such as the Darlinghurst Fire Station in the Federation Free Style in 1910<sup>429</sup>.

From about 1906, he designed many suburban fire stations, along with many other public buildings in Sydney and regional New South Wales. Ten of these stations can be located in online records, and

they represent a mixture of Federation Free, Federation Free Classical and the Arts and Crafts architectural styles. In chronological order, they are:

- Pyrmont Fire Station, 1906.
- Glebe Fire Station, 1906.
- Leichhardt Fire Station, 1906.
- Kogarah Fire Station, 1907.
- Crows Nest Fire Station, 1907.
- Alexandria Fire Station, 1907.
- Randwick Fire Station, 1908.
- Neutral Bay Fire Station, 1909.
- Drummoyn Fire Station, 1910.
- Darlinghurst Fire Station, 1911.



**Figure 51 Darlinghurst Fire Station, 1912 (State Library of NSW)**



## Notes

- 
- <sup>1</sup> T F Reddaway, *The Rebuilding of London after the Great Fire*, 1940.
  - <sup>2</sup> Stephen Porter, *The Great Fire of London*, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2006.
  - <sup>3</sup> Jacob Field, *London, Londoners and the Great Fire of 1666*.
  - <sup>4</sup> Nicholas Bardon, Insurance Hall of Fame website.
  - <sup>5</sup> Daniel Defoe, *Of Assurances*, in *An Essay upon Projects*.
  - <sup>6</sup> Union Fire Office Board Minutes, 26 October 1715.
  - <sup>7</sup> Blackstone, *A History of the British Fire Service*.
  - <sup>8</sup> Walford, *The Insurance Cyclopaedia*.
  - <sup>9</sup> Paul J Sillitoe, *Did Insurance Fire Brigades let uninsured buildings burn?*.
  - <sup>10</sup> *The Sydney Gazette*, 4 September 1813.
  - <sup>11</sup> *The Sydney Gazette*, 30 October 1813.
  - <sup>12</sup> From the Ground Up – Sydney’s Earliest Fire Protection, Museum of Fire Heritage Team, Museum of Fire website, 2021.
  - <sup>13</sup> *The Sydney Gazette*, 18 January 1822.
  - <sup>14</sup> *The Australian*, 16 November 1827.
  - <sup>15</sup> *The Australian*, 5 December 1827.
  - <sup>16</sup> *The Australian*, 26 September 1828.
  - <sup>17</sup> From the Ground Up – Sydney’s Earliest Fire Protection, Museum of Fire Heritage Team, Museum of Fire website, 2021.
  - <sup>18</sup> The Tank Stream, Dictionary of Sydney.
  - <sup>19</sup> Donald Hector, Sydney’s water sewerage and drainage system, *Journal of the Royal Society of New South Wales*, June 2011.
  - <sup>20</sup> Water, Dictionary of Sydney website.
  - <sup>21</sup> *Sydney Herald*, 12 July 1832.
  - <sup>22</sup> *Sydney Herald*, 9 August 1832.
  - <sup>23</sup> *Sydney Monitor*, 5 December 1832.
  - <sup>24</sup> *Sydney Gazette*, 13 December 1836.
  - <sup>25</sup> *Sydney Gazette*, 1 December 1836.
  - <sup>26</sup> *Sydney Monitor*, 14 December 1836.
  - <sup>27</sup> *Sydney Monitor*, 20 March 1837.
  - <sup>28</sup> *The Colonist*, 9 November 1837.
  - <sup>29</sup> *Commercial Journal and Advertiser* (Sydney), 17 March 1838.
  - <sup>30</sup> *Australasian Chronicle* (Sydney), 15 December 1842.
  - <sup>31</sup> The history of Sydney Water – a timeline, Sydney Water website.
  - <sup>32</sup> Letter, Loan for the laying of water mains throughout the city, 1846, City of Sydney Archives, 10 February 1846.
  - <sup>33</sup> *Sydney Chronicle*, 1 February 1848.
  - <sup>34</sup> *Empire*, 17 May 1858.
  - <sup>35</sup> *The Maitland Mercury*, 18 May 1858.
  - <sup>36</sup> *Sydney Herald*, 24 September 1836.
  - <sup>37</sup> *The Sydney Monitor*, 2 July 1836.
  - <sup>38</sup> *Sydney Herald*, 3 October 1836.
  - <sup>39</sup> Difference between Insurance and Assurance, TATA AIA Life Insurance company website.
  - <sup>40</sup> *The Sydney Monitor*, 24 September 1836.
  - <sup>41</sup> *New South Wales Government Gazette*, 27 July 1836.
  - <sup>42</sup> *Sydney Herald*, 3 October 1836.
  - <sup>43</sup> *Sydney Monitor*, 14 December 1836.
  - <sup>44</sup> *Sydney Gazette*, 22 July 1837.
  - <sup>45</sup> *Sydney Herald*, 4 September 1837.
  - <sup>46</sup> *Sydney Monitor*, 18 October 1837.
  - <sup>47</sup> *Sydney Herald*, 23 November 1837.
  - <sup>48</sup> *Sydney Monitor*, 4 December 1837.
  - <sup>49</sup> Insurance Brigades 1837 to 1884, Museum of Fire website.
  - <sup>50</sup> *City of Sydney Improvement Act 1879*, Australian Legal Information Institute website.

- 
- <sup>51</sup> *The Australian*, 22 January 1839.
- <sup>52</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 August 1846.
- <sup>53</sup> *Sydney Gazette*, 3 March 1840.
- <sup>54</sup> *The Colonist*, 4 April 1840.
- <sup>55</sup> *The Colonist*, 29 April 1840.
- <sup>56</sup> *Australasian Chronicle*, 29 October 1840.
- <sup>57</sup> *Australasian Chronicle*, 14 May 1842.
- <sup>58</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 August 1846.
- <sup>59</sup> Michael Andrew Wright, *Contested Firegrounds*.
- <sup>60</sup> *The Australian*, 5 August 1844.
- <sup>61</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 October 1845.
- <sup>62</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 August 1846.
- <sup>63</sup> *The Australian*, 16 July 1846.
- <sup>64</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 August 1846.
- <sup>65</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 28 November 1850.
- <sup>66</sup> *The Maitland Mercury*, 4 December 1850.
- <sup>67</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 November 1850.
- <sup>68</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 January 1852.
- <sup>69</sup> Insurance Brigades 1837 to 1884, Museum of Fire website.
- <sup>70</sup> *The People's Advocate (Sydney)*, 19 November 1853.
- <sup>71</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 May 1854.
- <sup>72</sup> Michael Andrew Wright, *Contested Firegrounds*.
- <sup>73</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 June 1867.
- <sup>74</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 February 1881.
- <sup>75</sup> Michael Andrew Wright, *Contested Firegrounds*.
- <sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>77</sup> *The Australian*, 21 January 1845.
- <sup>78</sup> *The Maitland Mercury*, 4 December 1850.
- <sup>79</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 23 January 1851.
- <sup>80</sup> *Empire*, 10 March 1851.
- <sup>81</sup> *The People's Advocate (Sydney)*, 8 November 1851.
- <sup>82</sup> *The Maitland Mercury*, 26 January 1853.
- <sup>83</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 February 1870.
- <sup>84</sup> History of Sydney Council, City of Sydney website.
- <sup>85</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 October 1854.
- <sup>86</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 August 1855.
- <sup>87</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 9 March 1867.
- <sup>88</sup> *Evening News*, 3 September 1879.
- <sup>89</sup> *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, 11 January 1881.
- <sup>90</sup> *Evening News*, 4 April 1881.
- <sup>91</sup> Insurance Brigades 1837 to 1884, Museum of Fire website.
- <sup>92</sup> Michael Andrew Wright, *Contested Firegrounds*.
- <sup>93</sup> *Sydney Gazette*, 19 March 1840.
- <sup>94</sup> *Sydney Herald*, 20 March 1840.
- <sup>95</sup> *Sydney Monitor*, 18 December 1840.
- <sup>96</sup> *The Australian*, 26 September 1844.
- <sup>97</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 October 1854.
- <sup>98</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 November 1854.
- <sup>99</sup> *Empire*, 5 December 1854.
- <sup>100</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 December 1854.
- <sup>101</sup> Jane Kathleen Curry, *Nineteenth-century American women theatre managers*.
- <sup>102</sup> *The Australian*, 26 Sep 1844.
- <sup>103</sup> *Empire*, 1 November 1856.
- <sup>104</sup> Andrew Torning, *Philanthropists and Philanthropy* website.
- <sup>105</sup> *Empire*, 9 March 1857.
- <sup>106</sup> *Empire*, 14 November 1866.

- 
- 107 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 July 1868.
- 108 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 July 1876.
- 109 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 October 1876.
- 110 *Empire*, 24 February 1868.
- 111 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 March 1868.
- 112 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 February 1881.
- 113 From Fire Station to Café, Museum of Fire website.
- 114 *Empire*, 12 January 1871.
- 115 *Empire*, 23 January 1856.
- 116 *Empire*, 14 April 1856.
- 117 *Empire*, 24 December 1856.
- 118 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 August 1862.
- 119 *Empire*, 16 June 1857.
- 120 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 June 1864.
- 121 *Empire*, 25 July 1865.
- 122 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 November 1865.
- 123 *Evening News*, 15 January 1878.
- 124 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 February 1881.
- 125 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 January 1875.
- 126 *Empire*, 9 January 1875.
- 127 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 April 1875.
- 128 *Evening News*, 23 July 1875.
- 129 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 January 1879.
- 130 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 February 1879.
- 131 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 January 1880.
- 132 *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, 15 March 1880.
- 133 *Evening News*, 13 August 1880.
- 134 *Evening News*, 7 April 1881.
- 135 *Evening News*, 2 August 1883.
- 136 *Globe (Sydney)*, 27 May 1886.
- 137 *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, 1 June 1881.
- 138 *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, 21 June 1881.
- 139 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 July 1881.
- 140 *Sands' Sydney Directory*, 1883.
- 141 *Evening News*, 3 August 1883.
- 142 *The Daily Telegraph*, 30 May 1887.
- 143 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 May 1887.
- 144 *Evening News*, 8 November 1890.
- 145 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 April 1892.
- 146 *Evening News*, 9 May 1892.
- 147 *The Australian Star*, 24 June 1892.
- 148 *The Daily Telegraph*, 3 January 1893.
- 149 *The Daily Telegraph*, 14 November 1901.
- 150 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 October 1883.
- 151 *Evening News*, 2 July 1884.
- 152 *Evening News*, 26 August 1887.
- 153 *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, 10 June 1880.
- 154 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 August 1880.
- 155 Dec 1881: Letter: Luther Smith, Honorary Secretary North City Fire Station, City of Sydney Archives.
- 156 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 January 1882.
- 157 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 December 1886.
- 158 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 April 1888.
- 159 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 January 1893.
- 160 *Evening News*, 9 March 1896.
- 161 *The Australian Star*, 8 January 1897.
- 162 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 January 1903.

- 
- <sup>163</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 June 1906.
- <sup>164</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 19 March 1932.
- <sup>165</sup> The history and evolution of ground ladders, *Fire and Rescue International* Vol 8 No. 1, May 2025.
- <sup>166</sup> Andrew Torning (1814-1900), From Fire Station to Café, Museum of Fire website.
- <sup>167</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 April 1877.
- <sup>168</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 December 1877.
- <sup>169</sup> *Evening News*, 2 May 1877.
- <sup>170</sup> *The Armidale Express*, 4 May 1877.
- <sup>171</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 June 1877.
- <sup>172</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 May 1878.
- <sup>173</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 January 1881.
- <sup>174</sup> *Evening News*, 12 May 1881.
- <sup>175</sup> *The Monaro Mercury*, 27 September 1882.
- <sup>176</sup> *The Sydney Daily Telegraph*, 4 October 1882.
- <sup>177</sup> *Evening News*, 16 August 1883.
- <sup>178</sup> *The Sydney Daily Telegraph*, 11 December 1883.
- <sup>179</sup> *Globe (Sydney)*, 19 January 1886.
- <sup>180</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 March 1886.
- <sup>181</sup> On This Day, Museums of History NSW website.
- <sup>182</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 October 1879.
- <sup>183</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 May 1882.
- <sup>184</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 July 1882.
- <sup>185</sup> *The Government Printing Office*, New South Wales Government, 1890.
- <sup>186</sup> *Evening News*, 23 September 1882.
- <sup>187</sup> *Evening News*, 12 September 1895.
- <sup>188</sup> Michael Andrew Wright, *Contested Firegrounds*.
- <sup>189</sup> Tooth and Company History, Archives Library, Australian National University website.
- <sup>190</sup> *Evening News*, 2 November 1880.
- <sup>191</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 January 1881.
- <sup>192</sup> *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, 16 March 1881.
- <sup>193</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 April 1881.
- <sup>194</sup> *Evening News*, 3 September 1881.
- <sup>195</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 April 1882.
- <sup>196</sup> Tooheys Breweries website.
- <sup>197</sup> *Evening News*, 7 July 1883.
- <sup>198</sup> *Evening News*, 10 June 1884.
- <sup>199</sup> *Evening News*, 1 July 1884.
- <sup>200</sup> *Evening News*, 21 August 1884.
- <sup>201</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 April 1885.
- <sup>202</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 26 May 1886.
- <sup>203</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 September 1886.
- <sup>204</sup> *The Australian Star*, 25 March 1895.
- <sup>205</sup> *The Australian Star*, 20 January 1897.
- <sup>206</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 August 1886.
- <sup>207</sup> *Evening News*, 20 September 1886.
- <sup>208</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 28 November 1887.
- <sup>209</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 February 1887.
- <sup>210</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 7 January 1891.
- <sup>211</sup> *Lithgow Examiner*, 6 January 1899.
- <sup>212</sup> *Evening News*, 11 April 1911.
- <sup>213</sup> *Evening News*, 10 March 1879.
- <sup>214</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 January 1866.
- <sup>215</sup> Hudson Bros entry, Dictionary of Sydney website.
- <sup>216</sup> *Goulburn Herald*, 14 July 1881.
- <sup>217</sup> Letter: The Hudson Volunteer Fire Brigade as requested sends in details for claims for attending fires, August 1880 City of Sydney Archives.

- 
- <sup>218</sup> *Evening News*, 10 March 1879.
- <sup>219</sup> Hudson Bros entry, Dictionary of Sydney website.
- <sup>220</sup> *Cumberland Mercury (Parramatta)*, 30 May 1885.
- <sup>221</sup> *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, 29 October 1879.
- <sup>222</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 October 1880.
- <sup>223</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 February 1882.
- <sup>224</sup> *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 19 February 1887.
- <sup>225</sup> *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 21 February 1885.
- <sup>226</sup> *The Australian Star*, 28 February 1893.
- <sup>227</sup> *Evening News*, 30 August 1893.
- <sup>228</sup> *Light Railways* (magazine), Number 155, October 2000.
- <sup>229</sup> *The Armidale Chronicle*, 24 August 1898.
- <sup>230</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 September 1898.
- <sup>231</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 10 October 1898.
- <sup>232</sup> Sydney Meat Preserving Company Limited, Australian National University Archives Collection.
- <sup>233</sup> *Barrier Miner (Broken Hill)*, 21 November 1892.
- <sup>234</sup> *Evening News*, 30 July 1894.
- <sup>235</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 January 1895.
- <sup>236</sup> *Evening News*, 22 February 1898.
- <sup>237</sup> *The Cumberland Argus (Parramatta)*, 22 December 1900.
- <sup>238</sup> *Auburn News*, 25 March 1905.
- <sup>239</sup> Sydney Meat Preserving Company Limited, Australian National University Archives Collection.
- <sup>240</sup> Former Municipalities, Sydney's Aldermen website.
- <sup>241</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 March 1875.
- <sup>242</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 September 1875.
- <sup>243</sup> *Sydney Mail*, 22 January 1876.
- <sup>244</sup> *Evening News*, 12 April 1878.
- <sup>245</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 December 1879.
- <sup>246</sup> *Evening News*, 13 August 1880.
- <sup>247</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 March 1888.
- <sup>248</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 April 1889.
- <sup>249</sup> *Evening News*, 23 September 1889.
- <sup>250</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 29 April 1895.
- <sup>251</sup> *Evening News*, 22 June 1891.
- <sup>252</sup> *Evening News*, 6 July 1892.
- <sup>253</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 7 July 1892.
- <sup>254</sup> *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 30 October 1897.
- <sup>255</sup> *The Newcastle Sun*, 25 June 1942.
- <sup>256</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 May 1875.
- <sup>257</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 August 1876.
- <sup>258</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 March 1877.
- <sup>259</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 June 1877.
- <sup>260</sup> *Sydney Mail*, 17 November 1877.
- <sup>261</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 April 1878.
- <sup>262</sup> *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, 4 July 1879.
- <sup>263</sup> *Sands' Sydney Directories, 1879-1880*.
- <sup>264</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 February 1881.
- <sup>265</sup> *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 28 May 1881.
- <sup>266</sup> *Metropolitan Fire Brigades Annual Report, 1884*.
- <sup>267</sup> Glebe Fire Brigade, Dictionary of Sydney website.
- <sup>268</sup> *Evening News*, 16 December 1884.
- <sup>269</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 18 December 1884.
- <sup>270</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 5 June 1900.
- <sup>271</sup> *The Australian Star*, 14 June 1906.
- <sup>272</sup> *The Australian Star*, 19 February 1907.
- <sup>273</sup> *The Australian Star*, 9 October 1907.

- 
- <sup>274</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 March 1928.
- <sup>275</sup> Glebe Fire Brigade, Dictionary of Sydney website.
- <sup>276</sup> *Evening News*, 6 July 1877.
- <sup>277</sup> *Evening News*, 6 December 1879.
- <sup>278</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 June 1880.
- <sup>279</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 June 1880.
- <sup>280</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 June 1880.
- <sup>281</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 January 1881.
- <sup>282</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 February 1881.
- <sup>283</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 April 1882.
- <sup>284</sup> *Evening News*, 18 February 1880.
- <sup>285</sup> *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, 17 May 1880.
- <sup>286</sup> *The Sydney Daily Telegraph*, 19 June 1880.
- <sup>287</sup> *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, 20 July 1881.
- <sup>288</sup> *Evening News*, 17 October 1881.
- <sup>289</sup> *Illawarra Mercury*, 10 July 1884.
- <sup>290</sup> Michael Andrew Wright, *Contested Firegrounds*.
- <sup>291</sup> Station Focus: Alexandria Fire Brigade 1877-2024.
- <sup>292</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 12 February 1886.
- <sup>293</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 27 February 1886.
- <sup>294</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 22 March 1887.
- <sup>295</sup> *Evening News*, 24 September 1887.
- <sup>296</sup> *Evening News*, 22 April 1892.
- <sup>297</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 29 January 1895.
- <sup>298</sup> *Evening News*, 23 July 1895.
- <sup>299</sup> *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 15 February 1896.
- <sup>300</sup> *Sunday Times*, 31 January 1897.
- <sup>301</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 1 February 1897.
- <sup>302</sup> *Evening News*, 15 February 1878.
- <sup>303</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 March 1878.
- <sup>304</sup> *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 23 June 1900.
- <sup>305</sup> *Evening News*, 6 April 1878.
- <sup>306</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 May 1878.
- <sup>307</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 July 1878.
- <sup>308</sup> *Evening News*, 14 April 1879.
- <sup>309</sup> *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 23 June 1900.
- <sup>310</sup> *Evening News*, 17 February 1886.
- <sup>311</sup> *Evening News*, 27 May 1886.
- <sup>312</sup> *The Australian Star*, 23 September 1892.
- <sup>313</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 20 January 1898.
- <sup>314</sup> *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 23 June 1900.
- <sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>316</sup> *The Sydney Mail*, 7 October 1899.
- <sup>317</sup> Woollahra Volunteer Company No. 1, Museum of Fire website.
- <sup>318</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 November 1880.
- <sup>319</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 December 1880.
- <sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>321</sup> *Evening News*, 7 April 1881.
- <sup>322</sup> *Evening News*, 10 June 1882.
- <sup>323</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 June 1889.
- <sup>324</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 January 1900.
- <sup>325</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 July 1900.
- <sup>326</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 April 1903.
- <sup>327</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 9 April 1903.
- <sup>328</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 May 1903.
- <sup>329</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 August 1903.

- 
- <sup>330</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 February 1906.
- <sup>331</sup> *Evening News*, 23 February 1906.
- <sup>332</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 June 1907.
- <sup>333</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 March 1912.
- <sup>334</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 January 1914.
- <sup>335</sup> *The Grafton Argus*, 24 March 1913.
- <sup>336</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 March 1913.
- <sup>337</sup> *Sunday Times*, 23 March 1913.
- <sup>338</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 December 1921.
- <sup>339</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 January 1926.
- <sup>340</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 March 1928.
- <sup>341</sup> Pluvius, Dictionary of Sydney.
- <sup>342</sup> Vessel review, *Burra and Girawaa*, Baird Maritime website, 27 May 2024.
- <sup>343</sup> Barnett Levey, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.
- <sup>344</sup> *The Sydney Gazette*, 7 March 1829.
- <sup>345</sup> *Sydney Herald*, 27 December 1832.
- <sup>346</sup> *The Australian*, 3 October 1837.
- <sup>347</sup> Barnett Levey, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.
- <sup>348</sup> *Sydney Times*, 21 October 1837.
- <sup>349</sup> *The Australian*, 6 October 1837.
- <sup>350</sup> *The Sydney Gazette*, 24 March 1838.
- <sup>351</sup> *The Sydney Monitor*, 26 March 1838.
- <sup>352</sup> *The Sydney Gazette*, 15 March 1838.
- <sup>353</sup> *The Sydney Monitor*, 28 March 1838.
- <sup>354</sup> *Commercial Journal and Advertiser*, 28 March 1838.
- <sup>355</sup> *The Australian*, 19 March 1840.
- <sup>356</sup> *Sydney Herald*, 20 March 1840.
- <sup>357</sup> Colin Adrian, *Fighting Fire: A century of Service*.
- <sup>358</sup> *The Sydney Gazette*, 3 November 1821.
- <sup>359</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 June 1865.
- <sup>360</sup> *The Australian*, 15 July 1836.
- <sup>361</sup> *Commercial Journal (Sydney)*, 23 June 1838.
- <sup>362</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 8 July 1865.
- <sup>363</sup> *Sydney Mail*, 12 August 1865.
- <sup>364</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 January 1866.
- <sup>365</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 January 1869.
- <sup>366</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 February 1869.
- <sup>367</sup> *Sydney Mail*, 15 May 1869.
- <sup>368</sup> *The Pastoral Times (South Deniliquin)*, 22 May 1869.
- <sup>369</sup> *Illawarra Mercury*, 30 January 1872.
- <sup>370</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 8 January 1883.
- <sup>371</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 September 1883.
- <sup>372</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 September 1928.
- <sup>373</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 March 1855.
- <sup>374</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 October 1860.
- <sup>375</sup> *Empire*, 4 October 1860.
- <sup>376</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 August 1861.
- <sup>377</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 May 1863.
- <sup>378</sup> *Evening News*, 6 January 1872.
- <sup>379</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 January 1872.
- <sup>380</sup> *Evening News*, 8 January 1872.
- <sup>381</sup> *Evening News*, 15 January 1872.
- <sup>382</sup> *Empire*, 22 January 1872.
- <sup>383</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 January 1872.
- <sup>384</sup> *Evening News*, 13 December 1875.
- <sup>385</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 June 1892.

- 
- <sup>386</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 January 1893.
- <sup>387</sup> Theatre Royal (1875-1972), *The Australian Live Performance Database*.
- <sup>388</sup> *The Sydney Monitor*, 10 September 1836.
- <sup>389</sup> *The Australian*, 2 March 1838.
- <sup>390</sup> *Empire*, 19 January 1854.
- <sup>391</sup> *The People's Advocate (Sydney)*, 21 October 1854.
- <sup>392</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 July 1880.
- <sup>393</sup> *The Burrowa News*, 23 July 1880.
- <sup>394</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 July 1880.
- <sup>395</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 July 1880.
- <sup>396</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 7 August 1880.
- <sup>397</sup> *The Illustrated Sydney News*, October 1882.
- <sup>398</sup> The Garden Palace, State Library of NSW website.
- <sup>399</sup> The Garden Palace, Australian Encyclopaedia (3rd Edition).
- <sup>400</sup> Garden Palace Fire, 1882, Museums of History NSW website.
- <sup>401</sup> The Garden Palace, State Library of NSW website.
- <sup>402</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 September 1882.
- <sup>403</sup> *Clarence and Richmond Examiner (Grafton)*, 7 October 1882.
- <sup>404</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 January 1890.
- <sup>405</sup> *Evening News*, 2 October 1890.
- <sup>406</sup> *Goulburn Penny Post*, 2 October 1890.
- <sup>407</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 October 1890.
- <sup>408</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 3 January 1891.
- <sup>409</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, 5 June 1891.
- <sup>410</sup> *New South Wales Government Gazette*, 23 June 1891.
- <sup>411</sup> Martin Place, Dictionary of Sydney.
- <sup>412</sup> Andrew Torning (1814-1900) a not very useful addition?, Philanthropists and Philanthropy website.
- <sup>413</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 September 1854.
- <sup>414</sup> *Empire (Sydney)*, 1 November 1856.
- <sup>415</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 Jul 1868.
- <sup>416</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 Jul 1876.
- <sup>417</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 October 1876.
- <sup>418</sup> *The Armidale Express*, 4 May 1877.
- <sup>419</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 May 1878.
- <sup>420</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 March 1875.
- <sup>421</sup> *Evening News*, 6 July 1877.
- <sup>422</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 June 1880.
- <sup>423</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 June 1880.
- <sup>424</sup> Andrew Torning, Sydney's Aldermen website.
- <sup>425</sup> History Week 2020 Special Feature, Museum of Fire website.
- <sup>426</sup> Thomas John Bown, Sydney's Aldermen, City of Sydney website.
- <sup>427</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>428</sup> History Week 2020 Special Feature, Museum of Fire website.
- <sup>429</sup> Walter Liberty Vernon, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

## Table of Figures

Figure 1	The Metropolitan Fire Brigade, 1896 ( <i>Town and Country Journal</i> , 8 February 1896).....	3
Figure 2	Great Fire of London, 1666 (Museum of London) .....	3
Figure 3	Tank Stream, 1842 (John Skinner Prout) .....	6
Figure 4	Busby's Bore (Engineers Australia) .....	7
Figure 5	Sydney's water pipes, 1844 (City of Sydney Archives).....	8
Figure 6	Early fire engines ( <i>Sydney Herald</i> , 3 October 1836) .....	11
Figure 7	Firemark collection (Museum of Fire) .....	12
Figure 8	Recreation of 1840s firefighting (Museum of Fire).....	14
Figure 9	Insurance Brigades fire station, 1907 (Museum of Fire).....	15
Figure 10	Victoria Theatre Fire Brigade, c1854 (Museum of Fire) .....	20
Figure 11	Volunteer Fire Coy No. 1 uniform, 1870s (W. H. Shroder).....	21
Figure 12	First Australian horse-drawn fire engine 1867 (Museum of Fire).....	22
Figure 13	Fire Brigade smoke helmets, 1905 (Museums of History NSW) .....	23
Figure 14	Her Majesty's Theatre c1887 (Powerhouse Museum) .....	25
Figure 15	North City Fire Station (City of Sydney Archives).....	26
Figure 16	Wivell's fire escape 1960 ( <i>The Leisure Hour</i> , 1860) .....	27
Figure 17	Scaling ladder, New York 1887 ( <i>Sydney Mail</i> , 15 October 1887) .....	28
Figure 18	Government Printing Office, c1890 (Dept of Environment and Heritage).....	32
Figure 19	Kent Brewery, 1930s (City of Sydney Archives) .....	33
Figure 20	Standard Brewery (State Library of NSW) .....	34
Figure 21	Paddington Brewery Fire Brigade, 1894 (City of Sydney Archives).....	35
Figure 22	Hudson's Temporary Scheme, 1885 ( <i>Sydney Mail</i> , 12 December 1885) .....	36
Figure 23	Hudson Bros fire, 1898 ( <i>Sydney Mail</i> , 15 October 1898).....	38
Figure 24	Sydney Meat Preserving Co, late 1880s (Heritage for NSW) .....	39
Figure 25	Newtown Fire Station, 1912 (City of Sydney Archives).....	41
Figure 26	Glebe Fire Station, 1892 (Glebe Society) .....	44
Figure 27	Waterloo manual fire engine, 1890 (Museum of Fire) .....	47
Figure 28	Waterloo fire station, 1973 (Museum of Fire).....	48
Figure 29	Paddington Fire Station, 1885 (Higinbotham & Robinson map).....	49
Figure 30	Paddington Fire Station, 1900 ( <i>Town &amp; Country Journal</i> , 23 June 1900).....	50
Figure 31	Victoria Inn, 1907 (City of Sydney Archives) .....	51
Figure 32	<i>Pluvius</i> during ferry strike, 1913 (State Library of NSW).....	53
Figure 33	<i>Pluvius</i> testing pumps, 1930s (City of Sydney Archives) .....	54
Figure 34	Fire-float in Berry's Bay, 1973 (Fairfax Media) .....	56
Figure 35	Royal Hotel and theatre, 1838 (State Library of NSW) .....	57
Figure 36	First St Mary's Church, 1840s (State Library of NSW).....	58
Figure 37	St Mary's Cathedral fire, 1865 ( <i>Illustrated Sydney News</i> , 15 July 1865) .....	59
Figure 38	Prince of Wales Theatre fire, 1872 ( <i>Town &amp; Country Journal</i> , 13 October 1872).....	61
Figure 39	Victoria Theatre, 1845 (Sheilds Sydney Map) .....	62
Figure 40	Victoria Theatre fire, 1880 ( <i>Sydney Mail</i> , 31 July 1880) .....	62
Figure 41	Inside the Garden Palace, 1880 (Museums of History NSW).....	63
Figure 42	Garden Palace fire, 1882 ( <i>Illustrated Sydney News</i> , 25 October 1882) .....	64

Figure 43	Sydney Exhibition tramcar, 1879 ( <i>Town &amp; Country Journal</i> , 21 June 1879) .....	65
Figure 44	Great CBD Fire, 1890 ( <i>Leader</i> , 11 October 1890) .....	66
Figure 45	Block burnt in the Great Fire, 1890 ( <i>Leader</i> , 11 October 1890).....	67
Figure 46	Superintendent William Bear (Museum of Fire).....	69
Figure 47	Andrew Torning (Records NSW) .....	71
Figure 48	Thomas Bown (Museum of Fire) .....	73
Figure 49	Charles Bown (centre), 1887 (Environment NSW).....	73
Figure 50	Walter Liberty Vernon (State Library of NSW).....	74
Figure 51	Darlinghurst Fire Station, 1912 (State Library of NSW) .....	75

## References

National Library of Australia – Trove digitised newspaper archive, 1803 to 1955.

Archives, City of Sydney website <http://archives.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/>

*Sands' Sydney Directories*, 1858 - 1933.

Peter Reynolds, 'Vernon, Walter Liberty (1846–1914)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/vernon-walter-liberty-8916/text15667>, published first in hardcopy 1990, accessed online 21 October 2025.

G. F. J. Bergman, 'Levey, Barnett (1798–1837)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/levey-barnett-2352/text3075>, published first in hardcopy 1967, accessed online 23 October 2025.

Paul J Sillitoe, *Did Insurance Fire Brigades let uninsured buildings burn?*, December 2022.

George Healy, Where's the Fire? The History of Fire-fighting, *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland* 9 (1), 1970.

Michael Andrew Wright, *Contested Firegrounds: paid and unpaid labour in NSW firefighting between 1850 and 1955*, University of Sydney, 2008.

Jacob Field, *London, Londoners and the Great Fire of 1666: Disaster and Recovery*, London, 2017.

Stephen Porter, The Great Fire of London, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2006.

Union Fire Office Board Minutes, 26 Oct 1715, London Metropolitan Archives, and Westminster Fire Office Directors' Rough Minutes, 5 Dec 1717, City of Westminster Archives.

Daniel Defoe, Of Assurances, in *An Essay upon Projects*, 1692-3.

G. V. Blackstone, *A History of the British Fire Service*, 1957.

Cornelius Walford, *The Insurance Cyclopaedia, and the Regulation of Buildings Act*, 1763.

Jane Kathleen Curry, *Nineteenth-century American women theatre managers*, 1994).

The history and evolution of ground ladders, *Fire and Rescue International* Vol 8 No. 1, May 2025.

*The Government Printing Office*, New South Wales Government, 1890.

*Light Railways* (magazine), Number 155, October, 2000.

*Metropolitan Fire Brigades Annual Report*, 1884.

Colin Adrian, *Fighting Fire: A century of Service 1884-1984*, 1984.

T F Reddaway, *The Rebuilding of London after the Great Fire*, 1940.



## Index

- Agricultural Society, Moore Park, 31  
Albert Ground, Redfern, 46  
Albion Brewery, 34  
Albion Soap and Paper Works, 34  
Albion Steam Flour Mills, 34  
Alexandria Fire Station, 75  
Alexandria Volunteer Fire Company, 47, 48, 49, 69  
Alfred, Prince, 21  
Allen, W., Superintendent, 46  
Alliance British & Foreign Life and Fire Assurance Company, 13  
*Argus*, ocean liner, 55  
Art Society of New South Wales, 64  
Ashfield Volunteer Fire Brigade, 69  
Athenaeum Club, 67  
Auburn Council, 39  
Australasian Steamship Navigation Company, 17, 22  
Australian Assurance Company, 19  
Australian Fire and Life Assurance Company, 11  
Australian United Steamship Navigation Company, 55  
Auxiliary Fire and Salvage Company, 15  
Balmain Volunteer Fire Brigade, 69  
Bardon, Nicholas, physician, 3  
Barley Mow Hotel, 22  
Barney, Major George, 8  
Barwon Park, St. Peter's, 72  
Bear, Superintendent William, 66  
Bear, William, Superintendent, 35, 48, 49, 69  
Beit & Sons Company, 21  
*Bencoolen*, ship, 13  
Benevolent Society Asylum, 29  
Bickley, William, fireman, 44  
*Biloela*, Water Police launch, 55  
Bird, Charles, Harbour Master, 54  
Blondin, Charles, tightrope walker, 33  
Bloodworth, Lord Mayor Sir Thomas, 3  
Board of Fire Commissioners, 45, 73  
Botany Swamps Scheme, 7, 37  
Bown, Charles, Superintendent, 16, 17, 33, 42, 52, 73  
Bown, Thomas, Superintendent, 14, 17, 27, 72  
Bridewell Palace, London, 3  
British Colonial Office, 6  
*Buildings Act*, 1837, 13  
Bull & Company, 67  
Burdekin, Thomas, 12, 13  
*Burra*, firefighting vessel, 56  
Busby, John, engineer, 7  
Busby's Bore, 5  
Byron, John, statistician, 65  
Camperdown and Newtown Volunteer Fire Brigade, 41  
Camperdown Volunteer Fire Brigade, 42  
*Captain Alexander*, ship, 5  
Carlton and United Brewery, 33  
Carters' Barracks, 12  
Cassidy, Mr., publican, 23, 52  
*Cecil Rhodes*, fire-float, 56  
Charles II, King, 3  
Children's Hospital, Glebe, 45  
Christopher Newton & Company, 68  
City Bank, Pitt Street, 67, 70  
City Fire Brigade, 16, 72  
*City of Sydney Improvement Act*, 1879, 13  
Cohen, Mr., subscription collector, 52  
Colley, Albert, fireman, 68  
Committee on the Tunnel for Supplying the Town of Sydney with Water, 1837, 8  
Courthouse Hotel, 51  
Crown Street Reservoir, 7, 17, 23  
Crows Nest Fire Station, 75  
Crystal Palace, London, 20, 63  
Customs House, London, 3  
Cutts, Thomas, fireman, 68  
Cyrus Mason and Co, stockbrokers, 68  
Dangar, Henry, 55  
Darlinghurst Fire Station, 74  
Darlington Volunteer Fire Brigade, 24, 69  
Defoe, Daniel, writer, 4  
Delohery, Jessie, 49  
Denison, Sir William, Governor, 21  
Department of Public Works, 74  
Diner-de-Paris, restaurant, 66  
Dodd, George H., fireman, 68  
Drummoyne Fire Station, 75  
Dunn, W, Berry's Bay, 54  
East Sydney Fire Brigade No. 5, 25  
Eldon Chambers, 68  
Exhibition Building, Sydney, 38  
Feldheim, Gotthelf and Company, 67  
Fenton, Charles, brigade foreman, 43  
*Fire Brigade Act*, 1854, 17

Fire Brigade Omnibus Company, 15  
*Fire Brigades Act, 1884*, 16, 17, 25  
*Fire Brigades Act, 1909*, 45  
 Fire Brigades Board, 24, 26, 36, 42, 44, 47, 73  
 Fire Office, London, 3  
 firemark, 12  
 Fitzgerald, Robert, landowner, 60  
 FitzRoy, Sir Charles, Governor, 14  
 Flood, Edward, businessman, 16  
 Garden Palace, 38  
 Garden Palace fire, 1882, 29, 32, 63  
 General Post Office, Martin Place, 70  
 Gibbs, Shallard and Company, printers, 66  
*Girawaa*, firefighting vessel, 56  
 Glebe Fire Station, 75  
 Glebe Volunteer Fire Company No. 6, 16, 43, 44, 69  
 Government Printer, 65  
 Government Printing Office, 19, 31  
 Government Printing Office Volunteer Fire Brigade, 31  
 Granville Fire Brigade, 39  
 Great Exhibition, London, 1851, 20  
 Great Fire of London, 1666, 3  
 Great Sydney CBD Fire, 1890, 66  
 Griffiths, John Gordon, theatre manager, 59  
 Habershon & Pite, architects, 74  
 Harbour Master, 53  
 Harris, Edward, fireman, 72  
 Henry Bull & Company, 70  
 Her Majesty's Theatre Fire Brigade, 25  
 Her Majesty's Theatre, Market Street, 25  
 Hook and Ladder Fire Escape Company, 27  
 Hoskin, Doctor, 12  
 Howe & Rose Limited, 46  
 Hudson Brothers Limited, 19, 36, 65  
 Hudson Brothers Timber Yard, 45  
 Hudson Brothers' Temporary Scheme, 7, 37  
 Hudson, Henry, sawmill owner, 36  
 Hudson, William Henry, carpenter, 36  
 Hudson, William, sawmill owner, 36  
 Hudson's Volunteer Fire Brigade, 16  
 Hughes, John, 70  
*Hydra*, fire-float, 56  
 Imperial Fire Insurance Company, Sydney, 13  
 Inspector of Fire Brigades, 32  
 Insurance Companies Fire Brigade, 15, 22, 27, 28, 31, 42, 49, 60, 72  
 Intercolonial Exhibition, 1876, 35  
 Israel. Mr., fire brigade captain, 34  
 Kelly, W. S., Superintendent, 24  
 Kelsey, Mr., publican, 51  
 Kent Brewery, 33  
 Kent Brewery Fire Brigade, 33  
 Kitchen, John, Government Printer, 31  
 Kogarah Fire Station, 75  
 L'Estrange, Henri, balloonist, 33  
 La Prouse Cable Station, 38  
 Lachlan Swamp, 6  
 Lamb and Parbury Company, 12  
 Lane, Charles, Brigade Captain, 42  
 Lark & Sons Company, 67, 70  
 Lawson Brothers, 67  
 Lazar, Samuel, theatre manager, 61  
 Leichhardt Fire Station, 75  
 Leichhardt Volunteer Fire Brigade, 69  
 Levey, Barnett, theatre owner, 57  
 Levey, Sarah Emma, 57  
 Levey, Solomon, businessman, 57  
 Linnaean Society, 65  
 Liverpool and London Fire Insurance Company, 60  
 Loftus, Lord, Governor General, 47  
 London Alliance Fire Assurance Company, 13  
*London Building Act 1774*, 11  
 London Exhibition Fire Engine, 71  
 London Fire Brigade, 4  
 London Fire Brigade Establishment, 14  
 London Insurance Company, 12  
 Loutit Brothers, grocery, 49  
 Loutit, James, grocer, 49  
 Macquarie, Lachlan, Governor, 58  
 Manly Volunteer Fire Brigade, 69  
 Manly Volunteer Fire Brigade Band, 23  
 Maritime Services Board, 53  
 Marshall, Joseph, brewer, 35  
 Marshall, Messrs. J. and J. J., 35  
 Martin, Sir James, politician, 70  
 McKnight, Robert, fireman, 28  
 Mereweather & Sons Company, 31, 54  
 Metropolitan Associated Fire Brigades, 16, 17, 23, 26, 34, 43, 47, 50, 51  
 Metropolitan Fire Brigade, 16, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26, 34, 42, 44, 47, 49, 51, 55, 66  
 Metropolitan Fire Brigade Benefit Club,, 35  
 Metropolitan Intercolonial Exhibition, 1878, 28  
*Mildura*, ship, 55  
 Mitchell, J. S., Secretary, 15  
 MLC Centre, 61  
*Moore Street Improvement Act, 1890*, 70  
 Morris, Benjamin, fireman, 68

Mort's Dock Engineering Company, 38  
 Mount Lachlan Volunteer Fire Company, 16, 44, 46, 47, 48, 72  
 Mount-Stephen, Arthur, fireman, 68  
 Mutual Fire Insurance Association, 13, 16, 72  
 National Art Gallery of New South Wales, 74  
 National Gallery of Art and Science, 65  
 Neutral Bay Fire Station, 75  
 New South Wales Colonial Census, 1881, 65  
 Newnham, John, brewer, 32  
 Newtown Council, 41  
 Newtown Court, 43  
 Newtown Volunteer Fire Brigade, 31, 42, 69  
*Nora*, steam yacht, 55  
 North City Volunteer Fire Brigade, 26, 69  
 Occupation of Lands Branch, 65  
 Olympia Theatre, Paddington, 36  
 Oram, Edward, Superintendent-General, 23  
 Paddington Brewery, 35  
 Paddington Brewery Volunteer Fire Brigade, 35, 49, 69  
 Paddington Reservoir, 7, 50  
 Paddington Volunteer Fire Brigade, 50, 69  
 Palmer, Joseph, stockbroker, 68  
 Park and Lacey Company, 67  
 Parker and Haden Company, 12  
 Parkes, Sir Henry, politician, 24  
 Parramatta Fire Brigade, 39  
 Phoenix Office, London, 4  
*Pluvius*, firefighting tug, 54  
 Polding, John Bede, Bishop, 58  
 Port Authority of New South Wales, 56  
*Powerful*, fire-float, 55  
 Prince Alfred Hospital, 34, 42  
 Prince Henry Hospital, 36  
 Prince of Wales Theatre, Castlereagh Street, 59  
 Pymont Fire Station, 75  
 Queen Victoria Building, 7  
 Queen's Arms Hotel, 51  
 Randwick Fire Station, 75  
 Reid, Robert, trustee, 70  
 Resch's Brewery Limited, 33  
 Richardson and Wrench, auctioneers, 67  
 Rigby, William, fireman, 68  
 Rookwood Fire Brigade, 39  
 Royal Alexandra Hospital for Children, 45  
 Royal Alfred Australian Volunteer Fire Company No. 1, 21  
 Royal Exchange, London, 3  
 Royal Hotel, George Street, 19, 57, 61  
 Royal Theatre, George Street, 19  
 Royal Victoria Theatre, Pitt Street, 19, 23, 61, 71  
 Royal Victoria Volunteer Fire Company No. 1, 20, 71  
 San Francisco Great Fire, 1851, 20  
 See, Sir John, politician, 44, 54  
 Shand Mason & Company, 28, 35, 43  
 Sinclair, Alfred, 43  
 Sinclair, Clara, 43  
 Smith Croft & Co, commission agents, 71  
 Southern Club, 67  
 Spring, James, Mayor, 24  
 St Mary's Cathedral, 58  
 St Mary's Cathedral Church, 58  
 St Mary's Seminary, 58  
 St Paul's Cathedral, 3  
 St Paul's Church, Redfern, 36  
 St. Mary's Chapel, 58  
 Standard Brewery, 34  
 Standard Brewery Volunteer Fire Brigade, 34, 69  
 Stark, James, actor, 20, 71  
 Starkey, J. T., trustee, 70  
 State Library of New South Wales, 63  
 Stoneham, Ephraim, fireman, 68  
 Surry Hills Volunteer Fire Company, 29, 46, 51  
 Sydney Alliance Insurance Company, 13  
 Sydney Conservatorium, 63  
 Sydney Fire Insurance Company, 13, 15  
 Sydney Harbour Trust, 53  
*Sydney Harbour Trust Act, 1900*, 53  
 Sydney Harbour Trust Fire Brigade, 53  
 Sydney Insurance Company, 60  
 Sydney International Exhibition, 1879, 63  
 Sydney Meat Preserving Company, 38  
 Sydney Meat Preserving Company Volunteer Fire Brigade, 38  
 Sydney Metropolitan Intercolonial Exhibition, 1878, 72  
 Sydney Minstrels, 47  
 Sydney University, 36  
*Sydney Water Supply Act 1833*, 6  
 T. J. Bown & Company, 23, 43, 72  
 Tank Stream, Sydney, 6  
 Terry, Samuel, financier, brewer, 34  
 Theatre Royal, 57, 61  
 Toohey, James, brewer, 34  
 Toohey, John, brewer, 34  
 Tooheys Limited, brewery, 34  
 Tooth & Co, brewers, 35

Tooth, John, brewer, 32  
 Torning & Son Company, 72  
 Torning, Andrew, Superintendent, 20, 27, 42, 46, 62, 71  
 Torning, Eliza, actress, 71  
 tram system, Sydney, 66  
 United Volunteer Fire Brigades, 16, 21, 22, 23, 24, 37, 43, 52  
 Upper Nepean Scheme, 7, 37  
*Varzin*, steamship, 55  
 Vernon, Walter Liberty, architect, 45, 74  
 Vescys, Robert, Alderman, 46  
 Victoria Inn, Surry Hills, 23, 52  
 Victoria Theatre, Pitt Street, 19, 58, 59  
 Victoria, Queen, 21, 44, 65  
 Volunteer Fire Company No. 1, 16, 21, 42, 60, 62, 71  
 Volunteer Fire Company No. 2, 16, 21, 31, 60, 64  
 Volunteer Fire Company No. 3, 16, 22, 31, 46, 52  
 Volunteer Fire Company No. 4, 24  
 Volunteer Fire Company No. 5, 25  
 Walker, F. J. Limited, 39  
 Wardell, William, architect, 59  
 Warragamba Dam, 7  
 Water and Sewerage Board, 50  
 Water Police, 55  
 Water Police Court, Phillip Street, 21  
 Waterloo and Alexandria Volunteer Fire Company, 47  
 Waterloo Volunteer Fire Company, 46, 47, 69  
 Waverly Volunteer Fire Brigade, 69  
 Webb, Alfred, Superintendent, 55  
 Wesleyan School, Surry Hills, 52  
 West, T. J., theatre owner, 36  
 Whitehall Palace, London., 3  
 Williamson, J. C., 61  
 Wilson, Sarah Emma, 57  
 Wivell Fire Escape Ladder, 27  
 Woman's Fire Auxiliary, 45  
 Women's Australian National Service, 45  
 Woollahra Dramatic Society, 50  
 Woollahra Volunteer Fire Brigade, 16, 49, 51, 69  
 Woolloomooloo Royal Hotel, 23  
 Woronora Dam, 7  
 Wright, Bridget, 29  
 Wyatt, Joseph, theatre owner, 19, 57, 59, 61, 71  
 Young, John, builder, 65  
 Zetland Mosque, 48