

Adelaide Fire Brigade 1841

South Australian Register (Adelaide, SA : 1839 - 1900), Saturday 16 January 1841, page 2

OLD GOVERNMENT HUT DESTROYED.— The thatched building occupied by Governor Hindmarsh, as his residence, and more recently used as the Private Secretary's Office, was destroyed by fire on Tuesday evening last. A great mass of official documents has been burnt, and we regret to add, that many papers of great private value to the Governor, have also been lost. Strong suspicions exist that the fire was wilful. Mr Macpherson who resided at Government House for a considerable time after his arrival in the colony, and who for some time past has been considered in a state of partial lunacy, was charged on Wednesday last before Captain O'Halloran, Commissioner of Police, and several other magistrates, with the crime of wilful fire-raising, and has been committed for trial for the offence at the ensuing assizes. We understand that application is to be made to the Judge to-day to admit Mr Macpherson to bail.

The above accident has called for the following letter from an intelligent correspondent:— To the Editors of the South Australian Register. GENTLEMEN—The burning of the old Government House on Tuesday night, and the indifferent and almost ridiculous efforts made to subdue it, calls loudly for the formation of a voluntary corps to whom the sole management of such important matters might be confided. To the vigilance of the police, as police, every disinterested person must render ample acknowledgment; but as fire-men they are totally ineffectual. With regard to the fire of Tuesday night several persons pointed out the most expeditious mode of subduing the flames, and saving the property within; namely, to bombard the pisey walls with a few posts and rails, or any other commonest missile, when the walls yielding, the burning roof would fall in and be extinguished by the pisey. This suggestion, though plain, simple, and easily effected, did not meet the approbation of the men of stripes, who preferred exercising themselves with the fire-engine, which they only succeeded in bringing into operation after the roof, doors, and partitions were almost gone. Providence favored us, for the wind kept steadily in the most desirable point; had it shifted, the surrounding out-officers must have been destroyed. I do unhesitatingly say that had the fire taken place in any of the closely built portions of our city—under similar indecision and delay, the devastation must have been fearful.

I am, Gentlemen, AN EYE WITNESS.

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FIRE AT THE OLD GOVERNMENT COTTAGE.— A "wise acre," who subscribes himself "An Eye Witness," labouring under the cacoethes scribendi, put forth his lucubrations in the "Hue and Cry"—that receptacle of dissatisfaction, and discontent—on Saturday last, complaining that his advice, and that of others equally wise with himself, was not taken, as "the most expeditious mode of subduing the flames at the Government Cottage." The Police, forsooth—to gainsay the advice of a man who has shewn himself ignorant of the facts upon which he writes. For instance, the walls were not "piésy," as he asserts, but wooden frame work plastered. Again, the police did not "exercise themselves with the fire engine" to save the premises, which they saw to be useless, but simply to extinguish, as far as possible, the blazing ruins. Never could men have done better under such circumstances ; and it afforded us great pleasure, therefore, in our last to record his Excellency's thanks. We are sorry to hear that many important public documents are destroyed, and that both his Excellency and Mrs Gawler have been great losers of private property. Mr M'Pherson has been duly committed on the charge of being the incendiary, but at the instance of his friends, the Governor has directed an application to the Judge for a writ de lunatico inquirendo, which will probably issue in Mr M'Pherson's being returned to England.

FIRE.—Last night a fire broke out in a thatched pisé house, between Hindley-street and Currie street. Numbers of persons were at once attracted to the spot, but help was unavailing,

the whole premises being destroyed. We really hope the Corporation will take steps to put an end to thatched houses in the city.

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THE LATE FIRE AT GOVERNMENT HUT.—SERIOUS DESTRUCTION OF PUBLIC DOCUMENTS.— FIRE RAISING.

It is with extreme regret that we announce that nearly all the records and documents connected with the legislative and executive departments of the Governments, have been destroyed by the late untoward burning of the old Government hut. We cannot but think that the keeping records of as much public importance in a hut, not merely reed thatched, but partitioned and almost entirely composed of the same dangerous material, exhibits an indefensible recklessness. With a government residence, built at an expense exceeding £10,000, of the best stone-work, and affording ample accommodation; with public offices fire-proof, and where also every precaution for the safe keeping of the colonial archives had been provided at a cost of £15,000, it seems unfortunate that a combustible hut should have been chosen as the proper place to deposit the public documents. It is reported that these papers were actually removed from Government House to the hut a few days before the conflagration, for the purpose of making room, in the former place, for Lady Franklin. We are sorry to add, that there is strong ground for suspecting the fire to have been wilful. Mr McPherson, who is at present imprisoned on suspicion of being the guilty party, is said to be out of his mind, and a writ de lunatico inquirendo has been issued. We submit, however, if Mr McPherson has been committed to take his trial for arson — or even if he has been remanded on that charge — that such a step is altogether illegal. Insanity maybe pleaded in bar of punishment ; but it has never yet been permitted to [?] trial or conviction. We have already had quite a sufficient contempt for established law dis-played in South Australia. It shall be our business to take care, without respect of persons, that no more of the constitutional and recognised safeguards of person and property, be violated with impunity.

South Australian Register (Adelaide, SA : 1839 - 1900), Saturday 6 February 1841, page 3

TOWN COUNCIL PROCEEDINGS.

Thursday, February 4.

WATER CARTS. The Mayor read a letter from the Colonial Secretary, stating that the Governor is of opinion that water carts ought to be licenced, and a provision of the licence be that in case of fire they should be required to assist in carrying water to the fire engines. Mr Neil suggested that a premium should be offered to the first water cart that should arrive loaded with water, and smaller premiums for the second and third. Referred to the Bye-law Committee.