

## Adelaide Fire Brigade 1852

The Cornwall Insurance Company's engine, the Police engine, and Messrs. Crawford's engine were in use at the fire at Robin's Stores, Grenfell Street, 30<sup>th</sup> November 1852.

***South Australian Register (Adelaide, SA : 1839 - 1900), Wednesday 1 December 1852, page 2***

### DESTRUCTIVE FIRE.

The most destructive fire which has yet taken place in the province broke out last evening about 7 o'clock, in the range of buildings in Grenfell-street, known as Robin's stores. It was first discovered, we believe, by Mr. Sabben, the Town Clerk, while walking up King William-street from Victoria-Square. He immediately took active steps for rousing the neighbours to immediate action. The Military, under Lieut. Travers, and the Police, soon arrived, and were most energetic and successful in saving many of the goods in the stores from being consumed. Among the first of those on the ground was Mr. Porter, the Overseer of Works, whose exertions were incessant in endeavouring to save the property contained in the stores. The Cornwall Insurance Company's engine, and the Police engine, were brought up, and Messrs. Crawford's arrived some time afterwards, and the water-carriers being incessantly occupied in fetching supplies of water from the river, the engines were enabled to go to work, but it was seen to be impossible to save the stores, of which the fire very quickly obtained complete possession. The engines were therefore principally directed to saving the opposite buildings, including the very valuable stores of Messes A. L. Elder and Co. The wind blowing fresh from the south, the flames soon enveloped the whole of the mass of buildings standing in one block, extending from Freeman-street to the Commercial Inn, and including the corn stores of Messrs. Monteith and Barry, and of Mr. Sismey, and the warehouses in the occupation of if Messrs. Disher and Milne, Messrs. Formby, and Mr. Robin. The sparks were carried by the wind across the street, and once or twice the wooden roofs of the sheds in Messrs. Elder's yard caught fire, and were extinguished by means of wet blankets. Similar precautions were also adopted to protect the adjacent houses. By 10 o'clock the fire had completely gutted the whole stack of Robin's stores. The fire first broke out in a stable attached to Mr. Sismey's premises, but how it was originated there is not known. Some of the premises were insured, but we believe not all. The agents of the various Insurance Offices were all present, and personally active in directing or furthering the necessary operations. It is admitted that the assistance of the Military and of the Police was most effective, and that the exertions of all the townspeople who were present were most praiseworthy. The goods and flour which had been hastily dragged or thrown out of the burning buildings were during the night removed to Messrs. Elders Store.



B 1029

State Library of South Australia - Grenfell Street, Adelaide [B 1029]. This picture of Acre 143 shows where Robin's Store was located, the scene of the fire on the 30th November 1852. Approximately 1864. Part of Acre 143 Collection.



B 2850

State Library of South Australia - Grenfell Street, Adelaide [B 2850], Grenfell Street, Adelaide, looking east. The building with the striped verandah is the Commercial Inn [first licensed on the 26th September, 1839, to James Masters] which gives its name to Commercial Place, just to the east of the Hotel. On the extreme right is the Advertiser building, yet to move to its premises on King William Street. Approximately 1863. Photographer, Lawton. Part of Acre 142 Collection.

***Adelaide Morning Chronicle (SA : 1852 - 1853), Monday 6 December 1852, page 3***

THE OPEN COLUMN.

"Audi alteram partem."

THE LATE DESTRUCTIVE FIRE.

Mr EDITOR,—It is sincerely to be hoped, that the extensive fire of last night will be a warning to the people of Adelaide, of which they will take due notice. For a very long period men have contented themselves with the knowledge and with expressing the knowledge that if ever a fire took place in Adelaide nothing would prevent any range of buildings adjoining its seat from being totally destroyed. Last night practically and lamentably confirmed the fact; and had the fire been on the other side of the roadway, all the buildings between King William-street and Whitmore-square must have had the fate that has befallen Robin's row in Grenfell-street.

The fire originated in a stable at the back, not immediately connected, I believe, with the row in question ; but be that as it may, if there had been a man on the roof with one dozen buckets of water at his command, those buildings might have been saved. There was not the usual excuse of a scarcity of water, because the cellars of the identical houses contained more than all that was brought from the Torrens by the carts, and there was nearly a sufficient supply by the latter means alone. The great loss of property therefore is to be attributed to there having been no one on the spot to take the command or direct the brute strength of the multitude in a proper manner, for if there had been a properly organised fire brigade, or an efficient officer in charge of the police or the military, at first, it would have been prevented. The want of this is the more to be regretted, seeing that the police station and the barracks are near.

I did not arrive until the whole mass of buildings was in a flame, but I had very good information of what had taken place, and I was the more disposed to believe as above, from noting the commandant of the military endeavouring to induce the men with one of the engines to cease playing—frolicking—with the water, and to direct it with proper effect I say endeavouring because not the least attention was paid to his words, owing to the men having done as they liked from the first, and its being then too late to bring them to order.

As there is a Governor, an Executive, a Free Press, a Legislature, three members for the City, a Mayor, Corporation, and two or three Commissions, it would ill-become me to say more. It would indeed be almost impertinence, for me to suggest a line of duty to men as very much cleverer and more experienced than I am.

So I beg leave to remain, Sir, Your obedient humble servant.

A CITIZEN.

December 1st, 1852.

***Adelaide Observer (SA : 1843 - 1904), Saturday 4 December 1852, page 6***

DESTRUCTIVE FIRE.

[From Wednesday's Register]

The most destructive fire which has yet taken place in the province broke out last evening about 7 o'clock, in the range of buildings in Grenfell-street, known as Robin's stores. It was first discovered, we believe, by Mr. Sabben, the Town Clerk, while walking up King William-street from Victoria-square. He immediately took active steps for rousing the neighbours to immediate action. The Military, under Lieut. Travers, and the Police, soon arrived, and were most energetic and successful in saving many of the goods in the stores from being consumed. Among the first of those on the ground was Mr. Porter, the Overseer of Works, whose exertions were incessant in endeavouring to save the property contained in the stores. The Cornwall Insurance Company's engine, and the Police engine, were brought up, and Messrs. Crawford's arrived some time afterwards, and the water-carriers being incessantly occupied in fetching supplies of water from the river, the engines were enabled to go to work, but it was seen to be impossible to save the stores, of which the fire very quickly obtained complete possession. The engines were therefore principally directed to saving the opposite buildings, including the very valuable stores of Messrs A. L. Elder and Co. The wind blowing fresh from the south, the flames soon enveloped the whole of the mass of buildings standing in one block, extending from Freeman-street to the Commercial Inn, and including the corn stores of Messrs. Monteith and Barry, and of Mr. Sismey, and the warehouses in the occupation of Messrs. Disher and Milne, Messrs. Formby, and Mr. Robin.

The sparks were carried by the wind across the street, and once or twice the wooden roofs of the sheds in Messrs. Elder's yard caught fire, and were extinguished by means of wet blankets. Similar precautions were also adopted to protect the adjacent houses. By 10 o'clock the fire had completely gutted the whole stack of Robin's stores. The fire first broke out in a stable attached to Mr. Sismey's premises, but how it was originated there is not known.

Some of the premises were insured, but we believe not all. The agents of the various Insurance Offices were all present, and personally active in directing or furthering the necessary operations. It is admitted that the assistance of the Military and of the Police was most effective, and that the exertions of all the townspeople who were present were most praiseworthy. The goods and flour which had been hastily dragged or thrown out of the burning buildings were during the night, removed to Messrs. Elder's store.

[From Thursday's Register.]

This serious catastrophe originated, as we mentioned yesterday, in a shed at the back of Mr. Sismey's warehouse— the last but one to the westward of those destroyed, and is supposed to have arisen from the ashes of a tobacco-pipe. Had the store been open and a supply of water at hand, the fire might have been extinguished before much mischief was done; but the difficulty of reaching the roof, and the want of a few buckets of water allowed the flames to run over the dry shingles, and it was very soon seen that the stack of buildings could not possibly be saved.

The early efforts of the Cornwall Company's engine were very judiciously directed to the houses on the opposite side of Grenfell-street, of which all have shingle roofs, and one is entirely of wood. These were soon deluged with water, and the hose was then turned with great effect upon the blazing stack of warehouses. Meanwhile, the Police engine was playing upon them from the eastern side, and Messrs. Crawford's from the south-west. They were all well manned, the first by the Company's regular servants and a number hired at the moment; the second by the Police and Military; and the third by its owners' men—

thoroughly well drilled—and by a host of efficient volunteers. The buildings to the northward were in considerable danger from the flakes of fire falling upon the shingles. The back part of Messrs. Elder's roof caught fire several times, and was extinguished by the exertions of Mr. John Gurr, the storeman, to whom the greatest credit is due. Had those extensive premises been destroyed, the loss would have been great, and would have fallen chiefly, we understand, upon the Cornwall, the Imperial, the Alliance, and the Mutual Insurance Offices.

The supply of water was not nearly so large as it ought to have been—only 20 out of about 50 carts having been in attendance. The men who rendered their assistance well, we are informed, he liberally paid by the Insurance Companies. We regret to find that Sergeant-Major Lamb, of the Police, received some injuries in his attempt to clear the goods from one of the stores.

We have not been able to ascertain with any degree of correctness the total value of the property destroyed. The outer walls are standing, and do not appear to have sustained material injury; but the whole of the roofs, floors, and other woodwork is destroyed. They were mostly filled with merchandise, chiefly consisting of grain, flour, bran, and drapery. There was also a quantity of bottled beer, and some furniture—the latter of which was wholly consumed. About 400 bags of flour were saved, and 300 bags of grain, bran, rice, and mustard. These with a large quantity of sundries were taken into a shed at Messrs. Elder's, by the storeman already mentioned, with the assistance of two men in the same employ, named James Macmann and Peter Fraser, who were indefatigable in their exertions.

We believe that about half the buildings were protected by insurance, and some portion of the goods. Besides the salvage we have mentioned, 100 casks of bottled beer were rolled out into the street, whence a portion of them are said to have mysteriously disappeared. It is supposed that the entire loss will be fully £10,000; but we doubt, as we have already said, whether this has been correctly ascertained.

During the fire the houses along the western side of Gawler-place, and the back premises of Messrs. Carruthers, Rundle-street, were in the most imminent danger, and were only preserved by the untiring care of the inhabitants. Had the roofs of the old chapel and school-room ignited, which several times seemed probable, the others could hardly have escaped; and in that case a very little wind would have cleared Rundle-street to the eastward, or carried the flames westward into the heart of the city.

***South Australian Register (Adelaide, SA : 1839 - 1900), Saturday 18 December 1852, page 3***

MUNICIPAL COUNCIL.

Thursday, 16th December.

FIRE BRIGADE.

Mr. Solomon gave notice that at the next meeting of Council he would move "that the Corporation take immediate steps for the establishment of a fire brigade of 12 men, together with the purchase of engines, and a fire annihilator, for the use of the City ; and that for the support of the same, a special but small rate be levied on all city properties, and that the various Insurance Offices be requested to contribute a portion of the amount necessary for carrying the same into effect at 3.

Adjourned at 6 o'clock, till Thursday next

***South Australian Register (Adelaide, SA : 1839 - 1900), Saturday 25 December 1852, page 3***

FIRE BRIGADE.

Mr. Alderman Solomon introduced the motion of which he had given notice for the establishment of a Fire Brigade, and submitted estimates of expense. It was calculated that, with the pecuniary assistance which they might reasonably anticipate from the Insurance Offices, a rate of one penny in the pound would be more than sufficient to meet the annual cost. He had Mr. Scott's authority for stating that the Insurance Company with which that gentleman was connected would grant a fire-engine for the use of the Council, besides some assistance in money for the establishment of the Brigade.

***South Australian Register (Adelaide, SA : 1839 - 1900), Tuesday 28 December 1852, page 3***

WATER-WORKS.

Whatever indication may present itself of the probable chance of the early attainment of that paramount metropolitan desideratum, an improved system of water supply for the good city of Adelaide, will be hailed with unbounded satisfaction by its inhabitants. And such, we would venture to hope, is the fact that the Municipal Council are now seriously considering what steps should be taken to satisfy the public anxiety and impatience on this score. Independently of the great benefit and comfort in such a climate as this of an abundant and cheap and constant supply of good water for domestic purposes, the vast importance of having a sufficient quantity of water immediately at hand at any moment for the suppression of fire is but too obvious. The recent disastrous conflagration in Grenfell-street, which threatened the destruction of a great portion of the city has rendered the public mind more than ever alive to the duty of taking some energetic steps to avert the possibility of such extensive damage as would inevitably ensue if such a fire should again break out under certain and by no means unusual conditions of our weather in the summer season. The risks of such an appalling catastrophe may, we fear, be considered as materially increased by the probability of our soon receiving an unwelcome accession to that portion of our population from whose carelessness or habits of intoxication such dangers principally arise. Such a deplorable destruction of property and such an amount of individual loss, as were occasioned by the late fire, must doubtless have impressed the sense of danger with peculiar vividness upon the minds of the Members of the Municipal Council, and will cause them to use all practicable expedition in providing the means of comparative safety from the recurrence of any such lamentable event. The only requisites are a proper supply of water at all hours on the spot, and the organization of a Fire-Brigade, which latter branch of the subject we are glad to perceive has been brought before the attention of the Council by Mr. Alderman Solomon. But besides the incalculable advantage of having a large supply of water in case of fire, another very considerable benefit would accrue to the citizens from the facilities which would at the same time be afforded for the establishment of public baths on an adequate scale of completeness. Among the sanitary precautions which no city in the latitude of Adelaide ought to neglect, one of the foremost certainly is a provision for enabling all classes to enjoy the constant opportunity of refreshing and purifying themselves by means of the bath. Large swimming baths on some central acre in the town would undoubtedly conduce very materially to the general health of the inhabitants; whilst the erection of fountains in each of the squares would be a most useful and ornamental

attraction to the respective neighbourhoods. All these objects, at any rate the two first-mentioned, it must now be within the power of the Municipal authorities to make provision for, with some assistance from the Government, which they may reasonably demand, until they have conceded to them by the Legislature the desirable power of raising money, if necessary, for effecting public improvements by way of loan. We are glad to learn that detailed proposals for a better supply of water are already before the Committee of Streets, Sewers, and Bridges, who will probably recommend some practicable scheme for immediate approval. It is understood that a plan somewhat similar to that which was some time ago suggested and advocated in our columns is likely to be adopted by the Council, viz. : — that of constructing several capacious reservoirs in the City, to be supplied by means of a steam-engine, from the Torrens, and that the water carts should fill from such reservoirs at a moderate charge. An ample supply would thus be provided for the present necessities of the inhabitants, and the works could all be rendered available for the operations of the Undertakers under any Waterwork Act that the Legislative Council may pass at some future day.