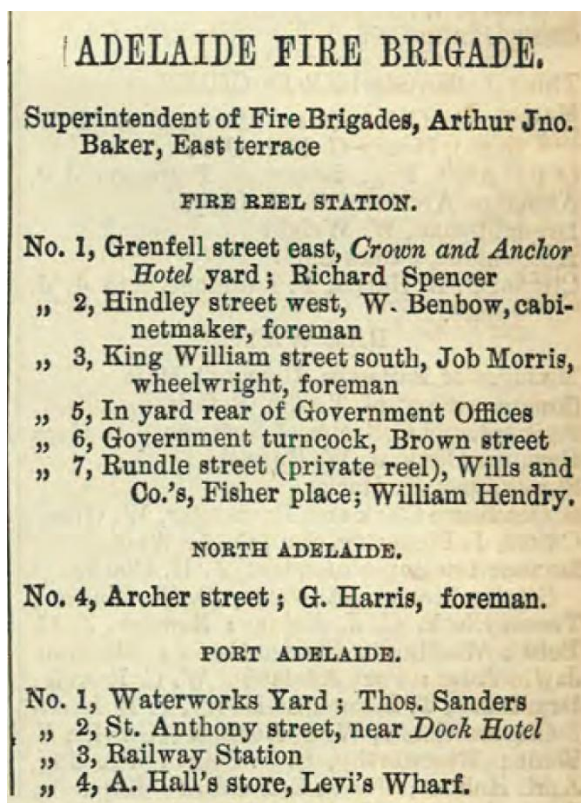


Adelaide Fire Brigade 1874

Locations of Fire Reels



Boothby 1874

Adelaide Observer (SA : 1843 - 1904), Saturday 17 January 1874, page 12

FIRE AT THE POLICE BARRACKS.

At about midnight on January 9 a lurid light, accompanied by clouds of smoke, in the heavens startled the few people who were about the streets of Adelaide and upon an alarm of fire having been raised it was found that an old building at the back of the Mounted Police Barracks on the North Park Lands was in a blaze. The structure was one of the first built in the colony, and was of lath and plaster, roofed with shingles. It was originally used in the early days of the province as the barracks, but has latterly been tenanted by the families of Troopers Medlin and Bleechmore. It has not been ascertained, so far as we could learn, how the fire originated, but it was first seen in the roof of the south-eastern corner of the building. Owing to the dry nature of the material the flames rapidly spread, and it was with great difficulty that a portion of the furniture of the occupants was removed. Even in the act of saving some articles were materially injured if not destroyed. A large crowd collected, and a number of troopers with many citizens rendered valuable aid till the members of the Fire Brigade arrived. The police reel kept in the adjoining premises was the first to play upon the flame, and subsequently horse - reels Nos. 1 and 2, hand-reels Nos. 3 and 4, and Messrs. G. & R. Wills's private reel arrived on the spot. Their combined efforts, under the direction of the Super-intendent of Fire Brigade, Mr. A. J. Baker, soon extinguished the flames. Nearly half an hour elapsed from the first alarm before a systematic attempt was made to subdue the fire, and even then it was evident that the pressure of water was very weak. We have

before had to draw attention to the absolute necessity for the establishment of means of communication with the valve-house, so as to secure sufficiently strong pressure in the event of a fire in the city or suburbs, and no time should be lost in providing this want. In the present instance, the building being comparatively isolated, danger was to a large extent averted by pulling down the fences and outhouses which would form any line of communication with the substantial and valuable erections in the immediate vicinity. Soon after the blaze began it was evident that the building must be consumed, and, inasmuch as it was an eyesore, deep regret cannot be felt at its destruction, through sympathy will be felt for those who inhabit it and have lost some of their household goods, besides suffering much inconvenience. We learn that Trooper Bleechmore was the heavier loser, as owing to the rapidity with which the flames spread it became dangerous to continue the work of salvage. The property was burning over an hour, and the flames lit up the Park Lands and a portion of North-terrace vividly. At a meeting of Mr. T. W. Lyons's singing class, held in Trinity Church Schoolroom, on Tuesday evening, January 18, it was decided that the class sub-scribe £3 3s. out of the balance from their last entertainment to a fund for aiding the Bleechmore family, who recently sustained an entire loss of property by fire.

Adelaide Observer (SA : 1843 - 1904), Saturday 21 February 1874, page 12

FIRE IN CHESTER-STREET. (From Editor - Chesser Steet)

It seems as if Adelaide were destined to lose the enviable character she has gained of late years of enjoying an extraordinary immunity from fires, for although the year is still young several buildings have been burnt down or injured by fire since it opened. Those people who happened to be in the streets at the hour of 1.30 on Tuesday morning were about that time startled by cries of "fire" proceeding from stentorian lungs at all parts of the city, and many who were quietly sleeping in their beds were rudely awakened by the uproar. At the hour mentioned fire was seen proceeding from the rear of Messrs. James Robin & Co.'s, Grenfell-street stores. The neighbours were soon aroused, and messengers were sent in all directions to call the persons connected with the Fire Brigade. The Super-intendent, Mr. A. J. Baker, was disturbed at a quarter to 2, and at that time the flames were plainly visible from his house. The first reel on the scene was No. 7 (Hendry's); it was followed by Spencer's (No. 1), and by Nos. 2 and 3 (Benbow's and Morris's) respectively. The water, which seemed to be pretty plentiful, when the first difficulties of getting a supply were overcome, was thrown on the flames with great success, for by about half past 2 the danger, which was at first feared of the front store igniting, was over, and the flames had been entirely extinguished. The building destroyed was of limestone roofed with iron, and contained a large quantity of general merchandize, principally sugar. We believe that the damage is estimated at between £3,000 and £4,000. As both goods and building were insured, Messrs. Robin & Co.—as many people will be gratified to learn—cannot be very large losers, although of course they will suffer considerable inconvenience. Great energy was displayed by the members of the Fire Brigade in the performance of their duty, and a large number of mounted police and metropolitans under Chief Inspector Searcy and Inspector Peterswald were present to keep the crowd in check.

THE INQUEST.

On Wednesday, February 18, Mr. W. Harcus, J.P., held an inquest at the Sturt Hotel, on the fire which took place early on the previous morning in a store in Chester-street, belonging to Messrs. James Robin & Co., and attached to the rear of their premises in Grenfell-street.

Mr. R. E. Tapley attended to watch the proceedings on behalf of the South Australian Insurance Company, Mr. C. L. Meyer, jun., for the Northern Insurance Company, Mr. J. Acraman for the Royal Insurance Company, and Mr. Dunn for the Liverpool and London and Globe Insurance Company; also the Superintendent of Fire Brigades (Mr. A. J. Baker).

Mr. R. Couche having been chosen Foreman, the Jury proceeded to view the scene of the conflagration, and on their return the following evidence was taken;—Elizabeth, wife of John Willis, labourer, de-posed—I live opposite the John Bull, Currie street. On Tuesday morning, at half-past 1, I was going down Grenfell-street to the East-end Market. As I passed Mr. Robin's store I saw some smoke coming through the roof fronting Grenfell-street. Saw it come more and more with sparks from the eastward, and then screamed out "Police." Two gentlemen came up. One of them was very tipsy, and when they saw the fire they called out " Police" too. Knocked at several doors, and sent a boy for the engine.

By the Coroner—Saw nobody about till the two men came up from the direction of Hind-marsh-square. Stayed till nearly 3 o'clock. When I first went down the small street at the side of the store the gate there was burning.

Samuel Farrell, waiter, said—I live in French-street, at the back of the Gas Office. A little after 1 o'clock on Tuesday morning I was with two other gentlemen standing in front of the Sturt Hotel. Happened to see some smoke and a little fire at the back of Mr. Robin's store. Went at once to see what it was, and saw it was a fire. Went back into Grenfell-street, hollowed out " Fire," and aroused some of the neighbours.

By the Coroner—When I first saw the fire there was no one about but ourselves. The fire came through the south-east corner of the roof. The first reel was on the spot between half-past 1 and a quarter to 2 o'clock, and then there were about 50 persons on the spot.

By the Jury—The men who were with me did not go with me to see what the fire was, or take any part in subduing it.

By Mr. Tapley—They were Mr. Frazer the pianoforte-tuner and Mr. Murdoch Robinson.

Edward Dinsdale, ironworker, Grenfell-street, stated—About half-past 1 o'clock on Tuesday morning, I was aroused by a knocking at the door. Got up immediately and saw a light come from the south end of Mr. Robin's store. Went outside and saw young Mr. Schmidt standing at the corner and shouting fire. Started him off to G. & R. Wills's, where a reel is kept, to give the information, whilst I went off to the Crown and Anchor for No. 1 Reel. The first reel was at the fire at a quarter to 2 o'clock, and in less than five minutes No. 1 Reel was acting. No. 7 Reel was fully twenty minutes before it began to work. Stayed and gave what assistance I could, and about half-past 4 the danger was over.

William Simms, junior clerk at Mr. J. Robin's, said he left the store with Afford, the storeman, at ten minutes to 6 o'clock on Monday evening.

By the Coroner—We were the last to leave. Mr. Robin left two or three minutes before us from the front. We went out at the back into French-street, and took the keys to Thomas the baker's. Walked through the store, and every thing seemed right. Do not smoke; the storeman does not smoke on the premises. No match was lit before we left. At the south-east corner of the store sugar was kept, nothing else. There were a few tin boxes of matches in the store, but they were at the opposite corner. Do not know whether they were in original cases or not. Believe matches in wooden boxes were kept in the other store.

By Mr. Baker—Should think the sugar was about five or six feet from the roof—it might be more.

By the Jury—There was no kerosine in that store; it is always kept in the cellar.

By Mr. Acraman—It is likely that some of the cases of matches were open.

Robert Afford, storeman, at Mr. Robin's, corroborated the evidence of the last witness, and added, in answer to the Coroner—Persons sometimes smoke in the store, but I saw no one smoking there on Monday. In the back store there were sugar, sago, lemon-peel, pea flour, chicory, vermicelli, macaroni, pimento, ginger, treacle, vinegar, ink, matches in tin boxes, bales of paper, salts, and one ullage case of kerosine, which had not been put into the cellar. One of the boxes of matches had been opened.

Thos. O'Leary, Corporal of Police, said—On Tuesday morning, at about quarter to 2, was on North-terrace on duty. Heard the cry of fire, and seeing the reflection in the direction of Grenfell-street, told the constable on duty at Government gate to report at the Police Barracks that there was a fire. Went to Grenfell-street as fast as he could, and found the store in a blaze. No. 7 Reel was the first that came, but the men could not fix the standpipe on to the plug, and I had to send for the turn cock.

James Robin, merchant, deposed that he left his store on Monday at about half-past 5. Simms and Afford only remained. They were accustomed to lock up. Smoking is strictly prohibited in the store. Cannot at present estimate the value of the goods that were in the store. The premises and stock were insured. Cannot form any idea how the fire originated.

By the Jury—The store was lighted by a bullseye in the roof and openings about the size of a brick in the south wall. Do not know how much kerosine was in the cellar, which is under the front store.

By Mr. Baker—There were 40 tons of sugar, more or less, and a few bales of paper in the store.

R. Afford, recalled, said he had only been at the place a fortnight, and did not know how many cases of kerosine were in the cellar. There might have been 15 or 20.

The Coroner, in summing up, said it appeared to him there was no possibility of getting at the origin of the fire, and it seemed the only verdict they could arrive at would be to that effect, for it did not appear there was the slightest blame or suspicion to be attached to any one.

The Jury immediately returned a verdict "that there was no evidence to show how the fire originated,"

The Superintendent of Fire Brigades informs us that the reason why the standpipe of No. 7 Reel could not be attached to the fireplug at once was in consequence of the men who brought the reel not being firemen, but merely those who had gone to give the alarm.

Adelaide Observer (SA : 1843 - 1904), Saturday 26 December 1874, page 7

THE WEEK'S NEWS.

Cemetery Fire—About noon on Friday, the 18th, a fire was noticed at the south-west side of the West-terrace Cemetery, A number of people soon assembled, and after an hour's hard

work the flames, which had a firm hold on the dry grass, were extinguished. Mr. A. J. Baker, the Superintendent of the Fire Brigade, with two reels, arrived at the scene just as the danger was over; but in any case he could have rendered little additional assistance, as no plugs are provided in the Cemetery. Fires occur there nearly every season in the burial ground, so that an ample supply of water ought to be provided, with proper plugs, for serious damage might be caused by one of the outbreaks in hot weather. Owing to the prompt aid rendered the flames were confined to about an acre of ground. The fire arose on the Park Lands, and catching the thick kangaroo hedge soon made its way into the grass. The cause of the conflagration is not known, but it is supposed that the grass in the Park was lit by youngsters, who were there minding cows, and who may often be seen smoking and carelessly throwing lighted matches on the ground.