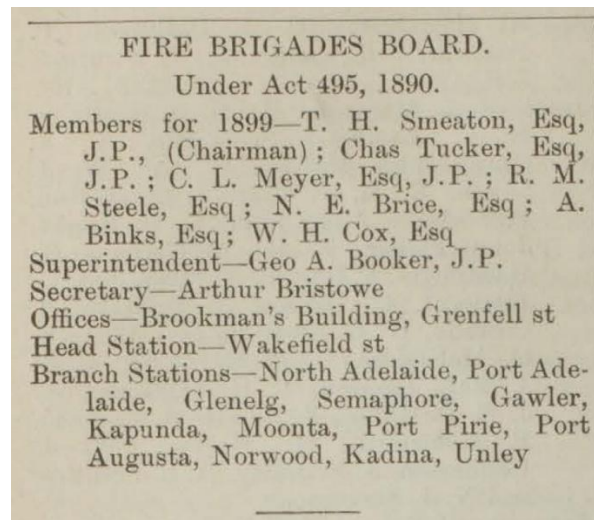


Adelaide Fire Brigade 1899

From the Sands and McDougall Directory for 1899



Sands and McDougall 1899

Advertiser (Adelaide, SA : 1889 - 1931), Tuesday 31 January 1899, page 4

A YEAR'S FIRE FIGHTING.

The annual report of the Fire Brigades Board of South Australia is always an interesting document. It is generally a satisfactory record, too, because it bears testimony to continual readiness for battle with the devouring element, and yet contains but little reference to really serious fires. Mr. Booker, the efficient superintendent, is a living exponent of the doctrine that prevention is better than cure, and all his efforts are aimed in that direction. Indeed, the chief safety of the more crowded business centres of Adelaide lies in constant attention to this principle, for unless a fire is stopped at or near the first spark it is almost sure to get beyond the strength of the brigade as at present constituted. There are now thirteen municipalities under the Board, the stations being at Adelaide, Port Adelaide, North Adelaide, Unley, Norwood, Glenelg, the Semaphore, Gawler, Moonta, Port Pirie, Port Augusta, Kapunda, and Kadina. To guard against fire in these places the force at the command of the superintendent consists of a second officer, a senior foreman, a dozen fore-men, three cadets, an engineer, three coachmen, twenty-six firemen, and eighteen auxiliary firemen, or, including himself, sixty-six persons in all; but of these only twenty, counting the superintendent and the second officer, are on duty at the head station. Of course in times of great need all the forces of city and suburbs could be concentrated, but even supposing all the suburban stations were emptied only forty-three trained men could be got together, and with a fire such as that which destroyed a block of buildings in Flinders-street, Melbourne, a little over a year ago, to cope with, even this army of expert fire-fighters would be overweighted. It must be remembered also that the force named could only be mustered by emptying every metropolitan station and leaving all other parts of the central area absolutely without help in emergency. It is pleasant to know that the force which does exist is remarkably active and well-disciplined, but it is well not to become too confident, for the moment the strength or the efficiency of the brigades is allowed to drop an urgent need for their utmost services is sure to arise. "I am again pleased to report," says Mr. Booker in his concise summary of the year's work, that we are still enjoying an immunity from serious conflagrations. At the same time I feel it my duty to draw attention to the fact that the fire risks are greatly increasing year by year." The truth of the latter statement is evident to the least observant person, for more than £100,000 is annually spent in Adelaide alone in the erection of new buildings, which, with their stocks and furniture, stand for very large extra sums of money when they are completed and occupied.

Unfortunately the increase in the numerical power of the brigades has not continued on a like ratio, their very smartness militating against the authorisation of the extra expenditure. Yet during the year which has just closed there were 152 alarms, of which 103 were caused by genuine fires. It is true that only 17 resulted in serious damage, and that several of these were in the country, but every one of the 86 which are returned as having done but slight damage might have developed into a serious fire had not well-organised, well-equipped, and thoroughly efficient help been promptly on the spot. In every division, save one, the alarms show an increase on the number noted in 1897. The serious burnings are seven in excess of that year, those doing slight damage have grown from 55 to 86, and the false alarms advanced by 14. Evidently flues were kept better swept than usual, or, perhaps the heat of last summer induced less expenditure in house-hold fuel, for there were two less calls to chimney fires in 1898 than there were during the previous twelve months. The brigade extended its operations during the year by the establishment of a branch at Kadina, and by the purchase and equipment of a station at Unley, where a foreman and three fire-men are now in residence. This does not seem a very powerful force for such a populous suburb, but still it is capable of doing much better work than would be likely to be performed by treble the number of volunteers whose enthusiasm of public spirit are bad substitutes for regular and complete training. As usual, all the stations have been inspected during the year, and so far as lies in the scope of the board they have been found in a satisfactory condition. At Port Pirie, however, the water supply is perilously short, and therefore it has been found necessary to purchase a steam fire-engine and appliances for the purpose of obtaining water in case of need from the river. Attempts have been made to persuade the Government to provide pillar hydrants instead of fireplugs at Port Pirie, Port Adelaide, and other thickly-inhabited centres, but false economy has delayed compliance with the request. Another evidence of State parsimony is found in the reply of the Commissioner of Police to a representation that increased police protection should be made available in case of fires in the metropolis. Mr. Madley re-cognises the reasonableness of the application, but owing to insufficiency of constables he is unable to comply with it, for the police force also is cut down to the very lowest possible limits. Another complaint which the board has to make against the Ministry is that, notwithstanding the repeated arguments of the board, strengthened by the support of the City Corporation, no attempt has yet been made to redeem the promise of a speedy introduction of a Bill to amend the "Places of Public Amusement Act" in the interest of general safety. Everything connected with the Metropolitan Brigade is constantly kept in spick-and-span order, and it has long been recognised as one of the show places of Adelaide. Day after day and hour after hour Superintendent and men are on the alert for fires are always sudden and unexpected. All the members of the brigade are sailors, and they are able to turn their hand to almost any kind of work whether of a utilitarian or a decorative character, so that the Wakefield-street station is about the cleanest and freshest building in the metropolis. The plant, much of which has been manufactured by the firemen in the central workshops, consists of three steam fire engines, a hose and coal van, nine horse-reels, seven hand-reels, three hose-carts, a telescopic ladder, 16 well-trained horses, and 14,300 ft. of hose. Last year, besides doing all necessary repairs, two new four-wheeled reels were built by the men. The brigade at the head station during the year was increased by the appointment of a second officer, Mr. H. S. Davis, late of the Sydney Metropolitan Fire Brigade, and one man. The contributors to the maintenance of the brigade are the Government the various insurance companies, the City Corporation, and the country and sub-urban councils which enjoy the services of the firemen. The chief payment last year was made by the insurance companies, who derive by far the greatest benefit from the operations of the brigade, which saves them thousands of pounds yearly by its promptitude. They paid £4,273 14s. 9d. into the general fund, the Government being close behind with £3,205 6s. Then came the 12 outside corporations previously mentioned, who contributed between them £1,159 5s., or slightly more than a fifth of the sum expended upon them. Port Adelaide, for instance, gave £300, and received £1,401 19s. 8d. Port Pirie disbursed £121 9s. 10d. and obtained £546 14s. 4d., while Unley's share of the payments was £149 6s. 5d. and her proportion of the expenditure £671 19s. The Adelaide Corporation again voted £1,000 towards the maintenance of the brigade in Adelaide, thus largely aiding in the effort to keep up its high standard of efficiency.

The net cost of the Adelaide service was £4,908 10s. 7d., of which £2,855 16s. 10d. went in wages, £391 15s. 9d. in rents, £224 12s. for uniforms, £182 in board fees, and £24 2s. 8d in accident assurance premiums. On the country and suburban brigades during the year £5,216 12s. 6d. was spent; Port Adelaide, the Semaphore, Glenelg, Nor-wood, St. Peters, and Unley between them being responsible for £2,436 18s. 8d. of this amount. Added to the report are appendices giving a monthly summary of the calls received, which shows that December claimed 32 of the 152 alarms, January and November coming next with 17 each, while April is at the bottom of the list with but three. The daily and hourly summary proves Saturday, with 30 alarms, to be the most prolific day, and 9 p.m., with 15 alarms, the most fertile hour. In the table as to fire alarms detailed information is given concerning every call where damage resulted. Of the 87 the central station received 30, North Adelaide 4, Port Adelaide 14, Norwood 9, Unley 4, the Semaphore 5, and Glenelg 3. All the rest were in the country.

South Australian Register (Adelaide, SA : 1839 - 1900), Friday 3 February 1899, page 6

THE FIRE BRIGADES.

A TRIP ROUND THE SUBURBS.

Beating the 'touts,*' it is asserted by sporting men, is not by any means the easy task it was in years gone by, probably owing to the fact that, at the present time there are more men 'at the game.' Perhaps cleverer, certainly more audacious, than those who reigned in former years, but notwithstanding all his great accomplishments the 'modern tout' would find it wellnigh impossible to gain the full strength of the fire brigades within the metropolitan area. Training operations are carried on almost any time, night or day, and the men have arrived at such a state of proficiency that it is difficult to estimate their real worth. Whether the genial Superintendent is anxious to arrange a match with the brigades of the neighbouring colonies, or even America, and is keeping things dark accordingly, is at present only a matter of conjecture, but the coolness and celerity with which the men perform their duties in the presence of visitors are always suggestive of one thing— that so far as smartness is concerned they have something up their sleeve. With a view to ascertaining more accurately the exact position the members of the Fire Brigades Board— there were Messrs. T. H. Smeaton (Chairman), C. L. Meyer, W. H. Cox (Mayor of Gawler), N. E. Brice, A. Binks (Mayor of Kensington and Norwood), and R. M. Steele— visited the suburban stations on Thursday afternoon. The result was on the whole highly satisfactory, and it was with pardonable pride that Superintendent Booker referred to his men, for it has been proved that 'they are true to the last of their blood and their breath.' Nor-wood was the first place of call, and as the drag jogged on past the station there the occupants were somewhat startled by some one thundering forth sonorously, 'Are you there? Call of fire from the Parade ' A couple of men were outside painting, but recognising that voice they with one accord dropped paint-brushes, bells were set ringing, a stable-door flew open, a grey horse called Sailor took up a place in the shafts of the reel, and ere 15 sec. had elapsed Sailor was galloping in great style to the scene of an imaginary fire. Directly he was freed the old grey trotted proudly back to his box, and seemed anxious to have another turnout. One or two improvements were suggested, and a note was taken. After an adjournment to the Mayor's parlour the horses' heads were turned towards Unley, which boasts of a splendid station and a two-horse reel. Another alarm was raised, but this time it was not so effective, as one of the horses got away to the rear of the premises. However, the mistake was quickly rectified, and in a short space of time the reel was being driven down the street at a hard gallop. Then the return was sounded, and the orders were 'Get to work.' A line of hose was run out, and shortly a good stream of water made its appearance. 'Look how it squirts, Johnny,' exclaimed a youngster, breathless with excitement, but when he realized the true state of affairs he said disgustingly, 'Oh, they are only playing.' On going through the premises one could not help being struck with the cleanliness of the place throughout. Glenelg was the next port of call. This aristocratic place boasts of two wheels, some 6 or 7 ft. in diameter, with a line of hose. On the occasion of the visit the alarm was given, and in about half a minute the stalwart form of a fireman, fully dressed, made its appearance, dragging after it some seconds later an alleged firereel. The

party had compassion on the poor fellow, and did not ask him to drag the cumbersome machine far. he simply had to go to the nearest fireplug and throw up a stream of water. All this occupied but 2 min. 24 sec., but had the man to run with the reel half a mile or so he would be utterly unfit for his work. There is plenty of room for a horsereel, and although the expense might be considerably more, the Glenelg authorities might well try to meet this, and thus provide the town with proper precautions against fire. As at pre-sent constituted a couple of buckets of water in every house would probably be as efficient as the 'Glenelg firereel.' At the invitation of the Chairman the party par-took of light refreshments at his residence, and then the drive to the Semaphore was begun. Everything went well until between Henley Beach and the Grange, Here the road was in a disgraceful state. The driver broke his whip, and one of the horses, in endeavouring to pull the drag through many years' accumulation of sand, broke a trace. This was replaced by rope, but the troubles were not over, for the inspectors had to foot it through many and many yards of sand. However, the Semaphore was reached, and the fire alarm rang, Here the instruments with which they light the fire are even worse than at the Bay. It would doubtless be a great advantage to have a lift to lower the firereel, or box, on to the street. As it is at present it is dangerous, for the Mayor of Norwood, in his enthusiasm to see the turn out. got in the way and was— well, nearly killed. The ceiling was found to be in want of repair, and one or two other minor improvements were suggested. Eight terais, a straw hat. and a belltopper, covering the heads of ten venerable gentlemen, then proceeded to the Port, but the wearers of the hats had a rude shock when crossing the bridge owing to a small boy calling out, in a dont-care sort of style, 'Oh, they're all Adelaide doctors.' It was debateable, and the question of whether it was a compliment or an insult was never really settled. At Port Adelaide the reel turned out in fine style, but the need for extra men and horses is painfully apparent. Bidding adieu to the Port, the party drove to Kermodestreet. North Adelaide, where the city and North Adelaide reels were called out. As was expected, the latter was first on the scene, the journey taking 2 min. 15 sec., while the city men. who had close on a mile and a half to travel, were only four minutes behind that time. When it is remembered that allowance has to be made for delay in telephoning from North Adelaide to headquarters this is indeed a creditable performance. Superintendent Booker reminded one of a trainer when giving final instructions, but with this exception his instructions were always carried out to the letter, and in such a way as reflected creditably on the manner in which the men had been trained. The party reached the city shortly after half-past 8. well pleased with what they had witnessed. but it is probable that some improvements will be made in the near future.

Chronicle (Adelaide, SA : 1895 - 1954), Saturday 4 February 1899, page 10

Superintendent Booker reports thus concerning the operations of the South Australian fire brigades during the last year: — "The total number of calls to fires or sup posed fires, received by the various stations during the year has been 152— of these 32 were false alarms, 17 were chimney fires, and 103 were calls to fires, of which 17 resulted in serious damage, and 86 in slight damage. The fires of 1898, compared with those of the previous year, show an increase of 7 in those resulting in serious damage, an increase of 31 in those resulting in slight damage, in false alarms an increase of 14 and in chimney fires a decrease of 2. During the past year the municipalities of Kadina and Unley came under the pro-visions of the Fire Brigades Act; both of these places have been provided with the necessary appliances and accommodation for the firemen. Fire alarm communication has been established in these towns, also in Queen and Albert wards, Port Adelaide. I hope that during the year 1899 your board will be able to authorise the erection of more fire alarms in important districts. I am again pleased to report that we are still enjoying an immunity from serious conflagrations. At the same time I feel it to be my duty to draw your board's attention to the fact that the fire risks are greatly increasing year by year. I regret that during the past year the Government has been unable to comply with the re-quests of the Fire Brigades Board to replace the fire-plugs by pillar hydrants at Port Adelaide, Port Pirie, and suburban municipalities. The water pressure in some of the country towns (notably in Port Pirie, where the risks are great) is totally inadequate for coping with an out-break of fire. Unless the board can pro-cure better appliances and increase the strength of the brigade at Port Pirie, serious

fires must be anticipated — as was clearly demonstrated at the late fire in Alexandra street. As in former years, considerable repairs have been carried out by the brigade staff in the workshops at the head station, including the construction of two new four-wheeled reels. I have visited and inspected the country stations, all of which are as efficient as your board can expect, considering that they are manned by auxiliary firemen with the exception of the permanent officer who is in charge." We are informed that Mr. T. H. Smeaton has been re-elected to the position of chairman of the Fire Brigades Board for the ensuing year.

Evening Journal (Adelaide, SA : 1869 - 1912), Wednesday 22 March 1899, page 3

AN ALARM OF FIRE.

On Wednesday morning at about 1 o'clock the Fire Brigade received a call from a Rundle-street alarm. When they arrived on the scene the men found only the chimney of a house in Nelson-street, at the back of Chalmers Church, on fire. They entered the premises through the back gate and got into the kitchen, where they aroused an old man who rented the room and slept there. The compartment was already filled with smoke, and had he not been disturbed by the Fire Brigade the aged tenant might have been suffocated whilst he slept. The old man was affected by the kindness of the firemen coming to his aid that they were favoured with the history of his relatives, who appeared to have been more successful in life than he had, for his bed was a few rags spread on the floor. He informed the men in helmets that he had received notice to quit, and thought the best thing he could do would be to pack up his "things" and go up north, towards London! There was, he added, no Chelsea in Adelaide. The firemen spoke encouragingly and left the man, who assured them that he would "square up things in the morning."

Herald (Adelaide, SA : 1899 - 1910), Saturday 20 May 1899, page 10

OUR FIRE BRIGADE SYSTEM.

Our new Governor is losing no time in making himself acquainted with our various institutions, and last week he took an opportunity of visiting the Adelaide Fire Brigade Station. What he saw there both surprised and interested him, and no wonder it was so, as the station itself was a picture of neatness, the men in a high state of training, and the whole of the apparatus clean and bright looking. This was not because it was a show day. Go at any time of the night or day and it is always the same. The occasion of his Excellency's visit is an opportune one for a short account of our fire brigade system, together with a word about



THE SUPERINTENDENT OF FIRE BRIGADES, MR. GEORGE ALEXANDER BOOKER.

The whole system is controlled by a board consisting of representatives from the Government (who contribute three-ninths of the necessary expenses), corporations (who contribute two ninths), and insurance companies (who make up the balance, four-ninths). There are seven members on the board, which controls all fire brigades which have or may come under the Fire Brigades Act of 1890. At present its field covers Adelaide, North Adelaide, Norwood, Unley, Glenelg, Semaphore, Port Adelaide, Gawler, Kapunda, Kadina, Moonta, Port Pirie, and Port Augusta. Of course the principle station is the one visited by His Excellency, Adelaide. Here Mr. Booker has under his charge 19 men, including officers and cadets. It is well to mention in connection with the latter that the employment and training of cadets for the fire brigade service is entirely a new departure. The superintendent believes that it will be in the interests of the rising generation, and will be followed elsewhere. The idea was for the first time carried into practical effect about three years ago, and provision is made for the engagement of lads, not exceeding seventeen years of age, of good physique, with a sound education and good character, to be trained as officers in a manner very similar to that adopted in the royal navy. These cadets receive during the first year's training 12s. 6d. per week, for the second 15s., during the third 20s., and for the fourth 22s. 6d., with uniform and quarters in each case. They have during this period the benefit of theoretical and practical training in the science—for it has become a science—of fire extinguishing and life saving. If at the expiration of their time they have proved their fitness to take positions of trust they will be drafted off to occupy such positions whenever vacancies occur. Up to the present, Superintendent Booker has been more than satisfied with the result of this unique experiment. Besides the men and officers mentioned, the superintendent has under his immediate charge six horses (almost as highly trained as the bipeds), two steam fire engines with all the necessary plant, two hose carriages, and a fire escape. It may be interesting to note that the fire engines have quick steaming boilers capable of generating 125 lbs. of steam in the incredibly short period of 7½ minutes from cold water. Locomotive and other engine drivers will know what this means.

The tower and alarm-bell system is completely discarded, and a complete electrical system introduced, which we understand is the only one of its kind known. A complete electrical circuit is established in connection with every station under the control of the board for use in each particular district, and most of them have a similar system as that explained to the Governor at the Adelaide station. It is briefly de-scribed as follows :—On an alarm being given at any one of the numerous red painted pillars established in the city, which can be done by the merest tyro by breaking the glass and turning the handle, the position of the fire is located, the time accurately recorded on an electrical clock for after-reference if necessary, the general gong is sounded at the station and a bell set ringing in every room of the building. In addition, the gas is turned up if the alarm is given at night, the stable doors unbolted and thrown wide open, whips descend on the horses backs and they at once gallop out of their stalls and take their positions under the swinging harness invented by Mr. Booker and suspended over the engines and hose carriages. The men in the meantime have got into their own harness and into their places, a cord is pulled, the front doors fly open, and horses and men are off to the scene of the fire.

No one, except those who have seen the brigade turning out on an alarm of fire, would credit the celerity with which all these operations are con-ducted. To the uninitiated it appears little short of marvellous. The shortest time on record for a turn out is six and two-tenth seconds, but this was of course under special circumstances and everyone was ready waiting the signal which was momentarily expected, but under ordinary circumstances the time never exceeds 25 seconds, and usually runs from 12 to 15 seconds. It has been stated more than once that our Adelaide Fire Brigade " doesn't give an honest fire a chance."

The comfort of the men under the immediate charge of Mr. Booker is carefully considered. The married men have separate quarters, and the single ones are comfortably housed. They have a billiard and music room on the premises, and have every opportunity when off duty for social enjoyment. A brass band was initiated a short time ago, and its progress has been some thing wonderful. The instruments were procured by means of private subscriptions.

Nearly all the work of the establishment, including the necessary repairs and new plant, with the exception of course of the engines, is done on the premises by the firemen. The interior decorations, including the beautifully painted panels which so forcibly strike all visitors, have all been carried out by some of the men, and the exterior painting has also been done by them without any outside assistance. What it was possible to do appears to have been done by Mr. Booker with the means placed at his disposal by the board, but as time goes on numerous additions and improvements will have to be effected in all stations.

Mr. Booker himself is a man of striking personality. Born at Liver-pool on October 9, 1854, he is now in the prime of life. He has had a large experience of a seafaring career, and is still an officer of the naval reserve. He has had experience in fire brigade work in his native town, America, and Sydney. In 1887 he received the appointment of Superintendent of the South Australian Fire Brigades, a position which he has held ever since. He is constantly visiting the stations under his control, and is a highly efficient as well as an observant officer. He can be honestly congratulated upon the success of his efforts in the direction of furnishing colonists with a highly trained fire-fighting brigade.

Advertiser (Adelaide, SA : 1889 - 1931), Monday 25 September 1899, page 4

A small fire occurred in Rundle-street east on Sunday morning. Shortly before 4 o'clock a constable noticed flames in a shop occupied as a general store at the corner of Synagogue-place and Rundle-street. A fire alarm is close by, and he gave the necessary warning to the Fire Brigade, with the result that the metropolitan reel was quickly on the scene, and the North Adelaide and Unley reels followed shortly afterwards. The place was well alight when the firemen arrived, but they had the conflagration under control in about 10 minutes. The shop is occupied by Messrs. McGavin & Co., general store keepers, and considerable damage was done by both fire and water to building and stock. It is believed that insurances have been effected, but at present the amounts are not known. The Coroner has been notified.