

## **FIRE BRIGADE and AMBULANCE.**

In July 1877 council instructed the town clerk to write to the various Insurance Companies in Armidale 'asking what assistance would they give the Council in establishing a Fire Brigade in Armidale'.<sup>1</sup> In September, letters of reply were received from 'The United', 'The Sydney' and 'Norwich Union' Insurance Companies but no further action was taken.

On 14 March 1887, a great fire occurred in Beardy Street and five buildings were destroyed with adjacent ones damaged. William J. Trim's fine well and pump did splendid work but they proved inadequate. On the following day, a coronial enquiry was held and more than sixty residents prepared a petition to Mayor George Holmes asking him to call a meeting to discuss the formation of a Fire Brigade and the creation of a proper and efficient water supply.<sup>2</sup> A meeting was duly held on Wednesday 22 March and a committee of twelve influential Armidale residents was formed to investigate the Fire Brigade Act 1884. It was decided to ask that Armidale be placed under the provisions of the Act and on 3 May, the town clerk applied to the Colonial Secretary to have such action taken.

The Fire Brigades Act 1884 meant that the governor could extend 'by proclamation, the principles of an administrative board and fire chief to any country municipality'.<sup>3</sup> A local board comprised three members: the mayor and representatives of insurance companies and the government. Action could then be taken to apply for a government grant and expenses to be met with the three organizations represented.

A letter from the Fire Brigade asking that Armidale be brought under the provisions of the Fire Brigade Act 1884 in accordance with a resolution passed at the recent public meeting was dealt with by council in May 1887. The town clerk was instructed to make the necessary application and Mr Rutter accepted the position of Superintendent of the fire brigade in June.

Quick action was not forthcoming but Superintendent Beare of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade did visit Armidale in September 1887. The *Armidale Express*, 4 October 1887 announced the superintendent of Armidale fire brigade in Armidale has been appointed. Charles Wilson was appointed as the government representative in November. Council received a letter from the Colonial Secretary in November concerning a meeting with the Fire Insurance Companies for electing a member for the Fire Brigade Board. These companies held their meeting on 22 November and 'By the end of the year, motivated by locally

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<sup>1</sup> *Armidale Express*, 3 August 1877, p.4.

<sup>2</sup> *Armidale Express*, 18 March 1887, p.8.

<sup>3</sup> F.A. Larcome, *The Stabilization of Local Government in New South Wales 1858-1906. A History of Local Government in New South Wales. Volume 2.* Sydney University Press in association with the Local Government Association of N.S.W. and Shires Association of N.S.W., Sydney, 1976, p.113.

represented fire insurance companies, a local Fire Brigade Board was formed'.<sup>4</sup> In January 1888 the board appointed John Craigie secretary and then applied for a grant to obtain the necessary plant. The Under Secretary informed Craigie 'that the amount asked for will be included in the next estimates'.<sup>5</sup> The *Armidale Express*, 18 January 1889 announced that an amended Fire Brigades Act had been introduced to the Legislative Assembly in December 1888. The bill resulted from a Supreme Court decision that the original Act had no power to extend its provisions to municipalities. The new Act listed a number of country towns including Armidale.

On the morning of Monday 11 February 1889, another major fire occurred which destroyed the Court House Hotel (on the site of present day Imperial Hotel) and several other buildings. The *Armidale Express*, 12 February 1889 commented there was 'plenty of pluck exhibited ... but there required some system of management such as a fire brigade would give'. Nine professional and business Armidale residents petitioned the Mayor John Trim to call a meeting on Wednesday 29 February to provide a fire engine and enrol a volunteer fire company. Somewhat amazed by the fair audience, the *Armidale Express* reporter commented: 'considering the importance of the occasion ... and the disastrous effects of the late fire it was a matter of astonishment that the hall was not crowded'.<sup>6</sup> John Craigie was elected as secretary and William M. Harris, G. Holmes, S. Rutter, C.E. Smith and Charles Wilson, was elected to form a local brigade of three officers and twelve men.

At the meeting

the following persons came forward and enrolled themselves as members of the brigade: Messrs F. Lambert, T. Gallegos, T. Burnham, J. Norris, G. Miller, H. Norris-Pearce, S. Bayley, R. Craigie and last, not least, Mr Frank Schaupp, Inspector of Nuisances. Mr Schaupp was received with vociferous applause.

The first Armidale Fire Board comprised C.G. Wilson (government representative), J. Moore (senior) (insurance companies representative) and Mayor W. Drew (council representative). In September the honorary secretary received a letter from Mr James Inglis M.P. 'stating that he has again urged upon the Colonial secretary the necessity for the speedy passing of a vote of money to enable the Armidale fire Brigade to be established'.<sup>7</sup> By December the board had received a government grant of £1000 and action was taken to purchase a fire engine.

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<sup>4</sup> L.A. Gilbert, *An Armidale Album*, New England Regional Art Museum Association, Armidale, 1982, p.113.

<sup>5</sup> *Armidale Express*, 20 January 1888, p.4.

<sup>6</sup> *Armidale Express*, 22 February 1889, p.4.

<sup>7</sup> *Armidale Express*, 6 September 1889, p.4.

At the council meeting on 9 December 1890 a letter was received from the fire brigade wishing to erect a shed on land at the gasworks in Beardy Street. In January 1891 council was prepared to vote £125 for a temporary water supply provided the fire brigade was prepared to vote an equal amount.

Following a potentially dangerous fire in June 1891 at the rear of an auction mart in Beardy Street, the *Armidale Express*, 9 June commented 'in view of the narrow escape experienced ... we would suggest that the fire brigade (if formed) should commence immediate practice, and that an available water supply in case of fire should receive the greatest attention'. By July the rules and by-laws drawn up by Craigie and Rutter had been revised by the board, a uniform had been decided upon and steps taken to ensure equipment for the brigade. That August, council asked the fire brigade to consider moving the station to the town hall Yard. At the time the station was a 16 by 34 feet galvanised structure in the grounds of the gasworks.

The fire brigade appeared in uniform for the first time on Wednesday 2 September 1891. Under the command of Superintendent Rutter and Captain Somers and numbering sixteen men, the brigade marched along Beardy Street to the Tattersall's hotel accompanied by the band. Displays were demonstrated scaling the verandahs of the hotel before refreshments were taken there; the engine was christened 'Jersey' by the mayor after the present Governor, Lord Jersey. Sports and further drill were then conducted at the showground before a large attendance. At that stage the board consisted of Mayor William Drew (chairman), Charles G. Wilson (government representative), John Moore Sen. (fire insurance companies representative), and J. Craigie (secretary). The by laws approved at a meeting of the Armidale Fire Brigade Board on 2 September 1891 were gazetted on Tuesday 9 February 1892.

Initially council contributed £50 each year to the Fire Brigade Board in terms of the Fire Brigade Act. At the council meeting on 1 May 1894 council decided to pay £50 to the fire brigade if the payment was matched by the insurance companies and government. Two weeks later the payment was forwarded but also determined that 'no more money be paid unless the balance-sheet of the ... Board be placed on the Council table for inspection'.<sup>8</sup> Following an application by the local Fire Brigade Board for the subsidy for the years 1898, 1899 and 1900, council paid the amount due, namely £99 in November 1900.

Messrs Purkiss Bros of Armidale supplied a new hose reel to be used in conjunction with the high pressure water supply in July 1897. But the *Armidale Express*, 11 October 1898 expressed concern about the condition of the appliances and claimed they 'are practically unfit for our high pressure water supply'.

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<sup>8</sup> *Armidale Express*, 14 May 1897, p.4.

Following the retirement of Mr Rutter, J.T.A. Webb became captain in 1898. He held this position until his death on 17 May 1924. It was he who formed the first women's fire brigade in the early 1900s and also instructed the girl's brigade at the New England Girls School and the fire squad at The Armidale School.

In October 1903 Captain Webb was granted permission to borrow the water piping valves for the connection of water for the Interstate Fire Competition to be held in December.

The Fire Brigade Act of 1902 reconstituted the Armidale Fire Brigade Board. The newly constituted Board of Fire Commissioners was now to control all brigades in the state registered under the Act. Ald. Fitzgerald was elected to act on the Fire Board in May 1904. That month council was informed that the telephone to the fire station had been disconnected as there were no funds to pay the telephone exchange. Because many municipalities had meagre financial resources, councils often questioned expenditure of fire brigades and Armidale was no exception. In September the secretary of the Fire Brigade Board forwarded the balance sheet for 1903. He estimated that the brigade's expenditure for 1904 would be £217 and asked council for its one third contribution. In the discussion that took place, aldermen expressed concern about the expenditure of the brigade and the consequent increase in council's contribution. The mayor was chairman of the board and did not feel that a telephone was justified. Council forwarded their payment but the mayor promised 'he would exercise the strictest supervision over every account sent to the Board'.<sup>9</sup>

The council meeting held on 25 September 1906 received a letter from the government concerning the proposed Fire Brigades Act. A special committee consisting of Mayor Jones and Aldermen Claverie, Higinbotham and Watson was formed to consider and report on the Act. A month later, the committee reported on the provisions of the Act but it had been withdrawn by that time. The Fire Brigade Act of 1909 meant that control was transferred to the N.S.W. Board of Fire Commissioners as from 1 January 1910. Prior to this date, the brigade was financed by donations from the government, Fire Underwriter's Association and the local council. The 1909 legislation meant that each of the organisations maintained the brigade in equal proportions. The rate of contribution was changed by the Fire Brigades Amendment Act 1927 for the government and council to contribute one fourth each and the insurance companies one half.

In August 1908 council was informed that nine firemen had resigned and the gasworks employees were instructed to attend to the fire alarm and sound the fire whistle in case of alarm. The turncock was also instructed to attend all fires and help find hydrants. The Works Department informed council in September 'the general fund may be used in the establishment and maintenance of fire brigades and stations'.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Armidale Express*, 30 September 1904, p.2.

<sup>10</sup> *Armidale Express*, 25 September 1908, p.3.

The Fire Brigades Act also standardised drill and equipment and divided the state into eight areas in charge of a divisional officer whose task it was to organise and instruct the brigades in standardised procedures. At the time of the transfer in 1910, the station equipment consisted of one six inch manual fire engine, two hand hose reels, a cart and a forty foot telescope ladder. During a visit by Inspector Watson of the Fire Brigade Board to Armidale in November 1912, council objected to the plan by the board to purchase a new motor fire engine. Alderman felt that the expenditure was not justified as the town was fully supplied by an adequate water supply and Armidale ratepayers should not subsidise equipment which was to attend fires outside the municipality. Mayor, Ald. Solomons also discussed possible sites for a new fire station with Inspector Watson and proposed that the board accept a leasehold tenure for the land for a definite number of years.

Council also objected in June 1913 to the contemplated action of the Minister for Lands in vesting a 66 feet frontage to Rusden Street near the town hall to the Board of Fire Commissioners for a fire brigade site. Part of the market square was offered to the board for a site. The Fire Commissioners visited Armidale in April and May 1915 to investigate sites for a new building. They considered the market square as well as sites in Rusden and Faulkner Streets. By that stage, council supported the plan and recommended portion of the town hall site fronting Rusden Street. The board accepted the proposal in July and the site in Rusden Street was dedicated as a site for a fire station on 17 November 1915.

The board informed council in August 1920 that the erection of a new fire station was included in the board's building program. In March 1921 council was informed instructions had been issued for the preparation of building plans for the station. Council approved construction of the new Armidale Fire Station with an upper storey residence in Rusden Street in September. The Board of Fire Commissioners accepted in November the tender price of £3020 of the Sydney firm, Building Construction Undertaking, for erection of the building. The board agreed to exchange the old buildings on the new fire station site for the old fire brigade buildings in July 1922. In August the board approved council's offer to purchase the old fire station building for £50. Council accepted tenders for the removal of the shed in the station yard that month by G.L. Davies for £19. The new Fire Station was opened on 27 October. This building became the Armidale City Art Gallery when the present Fire Station was opened in Barney Street in 1974.

In September 1922 Ald. Webb appealed to council to support the provision of a new motor fire engine because the present manual fire engine, christened 'Jersey' was brought into operation thirty years ago. He informed council it was heavy to haul and needed relays of twenty men every 20 minutes to work it. 'After debate,

the Council decided to refer the proposal to the Fire Brigade Board for an expression of opinion'.<sup>11</sup>

The loss of the property Bishops Court by fire in May 1923 raised the whole issue of the use of Armidale's fire brigade outside the town's boundary and the water pressure available for use by the brigade. Captain Webb felt that a pressure of 70 lbs was necessary to deal with the average fire but on the thickly populated gaol and north hills the pressure was only 28 lbs. The correspondent in the *Armidale Express*, 25 May 1923 felt 'that the shire authorities subsidise the municipal council, the subsidy to legally entitle those residents within a defined radius of the municipal boundary to adequate protection on the case of fire'. Council decided to ask the Board of Fire Commissioners to expedite the despatch of a motor fire engine to Armidale and the mayor agreed to discuss the matter with the president of the Dumaresq Shire. But the finance committee recommended in October that the extra amount of £28 not be paid because the properties likely to benefit from a motor fire engine were situated outside the municipality.

The 1920 balance sheet from the Board of Fire Commissioners showed that council's one third share of the upkeep and administration of the brigade was £218 and in 1922 council's contribution was £313. The board estimated the expenditure for 1924 would be £954. The charge for property was £200 and the estimated debt balance was £9. In March 1925, the annual statement of receipt and expenditure showed a revenue of £972 13s 3d and expenditure £655 16s.<sup>12</sup>

In May 1924, 'the Brigade was placed under the command of an officer of the permanent staff'.<sup>13</sup> A No 68 Garford motor engine was installed in October 1926 which in turn was replaced by a No 250 Dennis motor engine in December 1933. In August 1938 this was replaced by a 300 to 400 gallon motor fire engine.

The Fire Brigades Amendment Act 1927 reconstituted the board. The membership was increased to eight with the appointment of two additional insurance representatives and a member chosen by the permanent firemen for the first time. The act also determined that the insurance companies will now pay one half of the cost in lieu of the previous one-third payment but 'the increase in insurance representation gave the companies a greater voice in the administration of fire prevention'.<sup>14</sup>

The estimated expenditure for the brigade in 1929 was £1456. A statement from the board in February 1931 showed revenue for 1930 was £1459 with a

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<sup>11</sup> *Armidale Express*, 22 September 1922, p.6.

<sup>12</sup> *Armidale Chronicle*, 4 March 1925, p.3.

<sup>13</sup> *Armidale Express*, 5 April 1926, p.10.

<sup>14</sup> F.A. Larcombe, *The Advancement of Local Government in New South Wales 1906 to the Present. A History of Local Government in New South Wales: Vol. 3*, Sydney University Press in conjunction with the local Government Association of New South Wales Association of New South Wales, Brisbane, 1978, p.337.

government contribution £364, insurance companies £728 and council £364; expenditure was £1389. A reduction in maintenance costs was shown in the estimated expenditure for 1932; the expenditure was £1312 as against over £1400 in the previous year.

A tragic chapter in the fire brigade's history occurred on the night of 18 May 1932 when the premises of F. Braund and Co. Ltd. at the corner of Beardy and Dangar Streets were destroyed. Two volunteer firemen William Robinson and Beresford F. Jones were killed by an explosion and sub-station officer Captain F. Maizey was seriously injured. As a direct result of the Armidale tragedy, the Fire Brigade Headquarters created in September 1932 'a decoration styled the N.S.W. Fire Brigades Medal for Conspicuous Bravery'.<sup>15</sup> On 6 June 1933 the Board conferred the new medal on all eight members of the Armidale brigade including two posthumous awards to Robinson and Jones. A memorial stone was subsequently laid at the fire station in July 1933.

In response to criticism by the *Armidale Express* in December 1933 concerning the condition of the fire hydrants, the mayor presented a report of the Fire Commissioners to council in December.

The estimated expenditure of the Board of Fire Commissioners in the Armidale fire district for 1934 was £1189 plus administration costs of £88. The board's estimate for 1935 showed the cost of upkeep of the Armidale station was £1171 with an additional £81 for administration. That year the municipality's share of maintenance was £313 and the total income £1330 18s 9d. Expenditure was £82 11s 2d less leaving that amount to be carried forward for the current year.<sup>16</sup>

The statement of estimated expenditure for 1936 was £1212 and council had to pay one quarter of that amount. Council received advice from the Board of Fire Commissioners in December that the expenditure on the Fire Brigade for 1937 'was estimated at £1200, of which the municipality provides one-fourth'.<sup>17</sup> The 1938 annual report revealed that the expenses of Armidale brigade was £1235: salaries £427; payments to volunteers £109; insurance £40; travelling, cartage and freight £66.

The Board of Fire Commissioners informed council in August 1938 that approval had been given for the installation of a No. 200 Dennis motor fire engine to replace the existing one. The board advised council 'that estimated expenditure for the Armidale fire station for 1940 was £1,180'.<sup>18</sup> By that time, the fire brigade was paid off but there was no provision for a building this year.

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<sup>15</sup> *Armidale Express*, 14 June 1931, p.7.

<sup>16</sup> *Armidale Express*, 4 March 1936, p.3.

<sup>17</sup> *Armidale Express*, 9 December 1936, p.7.

<sup>18</sup> *Armidale Express*, 6 December 1939, p.8.

The Board of Fire Commissioners estimates for 1941 were: receipts £1202 and expenditure £1180. Four years later the board estimated costs for 1945 were £1219. The chief items included salaries £540; clothing £40; hose £30; payment to volunteers £120 and fire appliances £56.<sup>19</sup>

Because of the change in the award, the Board of Fire Commissioners considered transferring their permanent officer in charge of the Armidale fire station. The Armidale Chamber of Commerce appealed to council 'to take steps to have Mr Hartnett's recall cancelled'.<sup>20</sup> Council believed that a second permanent officer should be appointed and the move was supported by the Accident Underwriter's Association. The board reviewed the situation and decided to appoint an additional fire officer to Armidale in November.

The expenditure for 1946 was £1964 and council paid about £440. That December the board advised council the estimated expenditure for the municipality of Armidale in 1947 was to be £2128 with council to contribute one quarter.

Following a visit from the Board of Fire Commissioners in April 1948, council recommended to the board that the fire station be staffed by one permanent officer and a volunteer brigade. The change was recommended because of the reduction of weekly hours from 84 to 56 under the fire officer's award and the additional costs of appointing permanent officers. By August it was up to the discretion of the officer-in-charge for the brigade to attend fires outside the city boundary. The Local Government Association informed council in November that 'its application to the Arbitration Court to allow the employment of one permanent fire officer and volunteers in country towns had been granted'.<sup>21</sup> Thus in January 1949, council requested the board in January 1949 to reduce the staff at the Armidale Fire Station from three full-time officers to one.

The fire brigade estimate for 1950 was £2112 with salaries of £730 a principal item. Council's share was one eighth; the government one eighth and insurance companies three-quarters. The *Armidale Express*, 16 December 1949 reported, 'Where previously the council paid about £600, it will now pay approximately £260'. In 1951 council's contribution was £312 and Armidale's share of the fire station expenditure for 1954 was £403..

The Fire Brigade made a dramatic save of the New England County Council administrative building in Beardy Street in June 1952. The fire burnt out part of the second storey of the building and was 'unofficially estimated at between £3000 and £4000'.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Armidale Express*, 15 November 1944, p.8.

<sup>20</sup> *Armidale Express*, 17 October 1945, p.8.

<sup>21</sup> *Armidale Express*, 24 November 1948, p.3.

<sup>22</sup> *Armidale Express*, 27 June 1952, p.8.

The Fire Brigade Amendment Act 1958 reduced the Board to five members: a government appointed president, an insurance member and representatives of local government as well as volunteer and permanent firemen. Insurance representation was reduced but their contribution was increased to 75%.

The fire boundaries had remained unaltered for the past twenty years prior to November 1957. In that month, an application was made for the extension of the fire boundaries to coincide with the municipal boundaries.

In September 1960 the Board of Fire Commissioners informed council it could not cede a portion of the land at the rear of the fire station for the purpose of widening the rear entrance to the council chambers.<sup>23</sup> By September 1968 an agreement was reached between the City Council and the Board of Fire Commissioners to allow the tennis court at the rear of the station to be added to the Cinders Lane parking area. In return the fire brigade wanted a reasonable amount of Elizabeth Park to be set aside for a demonstration training area with hydrants and lights.

In 1970 further legislative changes increased the Board to seven: a government appointed president, a deputy president, two insurance members and representatives of local government, volunteer and permanent firemen. In the 1970s pressure continued by local government associations for the abolition of statutory contributions by councils but no action had been taken by 1977 and the fire quota remained. Then it was announced, 'Consistent with its centralization policy, the government has foreshadowed legislation to place the board under ministerial control'.<sup>24</sup>

Initially the board wanted to establish a new fire station at a site on the corner of Brown and Dangar Streets. Because of opposition from residents and little support from council, an acquisition officer arrived in Armidale in May 1970 to find alternative sites. Council received news in July that the board was contracting to purchase land at 66 Barney Street and council decided to offer no objection to the proposed site. Following an approach by council for the Rusden Street site, the Board of Fire Commissioners agreed in December 1971 provided council paid the valuation of \$35 500 for the actual site and \$9100 for the block of land in Cinders Lane behind the station.

Building of the new fire station began in January 1973 at cost of \$102 950. It was occupied in 1974 by the Fire Brigade under the control of station officer Ron Norton.

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<sup>23</sup> *Armidale Express*, 14 September 1960, p.6.

<sup>24</sup> F.A. Larcombe, *The Advancement of Local Government in New South Wales 1906 to the Present. A History of Local Government in New South Wales: Vol. 3*, p.337.

## **ARMIDALE AND DISTRICT AMBULANCE.**

The 1919 Act gave council power to establish an ambulance service and the concept of an Armidale District Ambulance was mooted at a public meeting called by the mayor Ald. Morgan Stephens in 1927. The *Armidale Express*, 20 May 1927 announced the arrival of the ambulance car in Armidale. In June the council finance committee recommended that no subsidy be paid in connection with the ambulance because council did not have the funds. Disappointed with the response, Superintendent Julian of the Armidale Motor Ambulance Transport Committee sought permission to speak to the council that month. In his speech he spoke of the need for two ambulances and two men. Acting on the recommendation of Superintendent Julian, the N.S.W. Ambulance Transport Board approved the establishment of a station in Armidale. It commenced its operations in a house given rent free by a foundation member of the committee Stanley C. Wilson in Butler Street, opposite the Armidale and New England Hospital .

In 1929 council again refused support for the ambulance whilst the Guyra Shire Council paid a donation of £50 towards their funds. More commodious premises for the ambulance service were obtained in Butler Steet in August 1931. A new ambulance station in Rusden Street was occupied in November 1933 and opened by the Minister for Education, the Hon. D.H. Drummond MLA on Saturday 2 December. The £3000 two storey building opened with a small debt of under £300. At the opening the Mayor Ald. M.H. O'Connor said: 'the council appreciated what the service had done. The station was a credit to the town, and added to its architecture'.<sup>25</sup>

These premises 'proved adequate until two years ago, when they were considerably extended'.<sup>26</sup> This building remained until it was demolished to make way for construction of a two storey car park.

The Health Commission Act 1972 restricted council's power to conduct an ambulance service and an Ambulance Board resumed the undertaking.

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<sup>25</sup> *Armidale Express*, 4 December 1933, p.4.

<sup>26</sup> *Armidale Express Centenary Supplement*, April 1956, p.23.