

120



120 YEARS OF WA FIRE SERVICE HISTORY

Semper Paratus





Acknowledgments to Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the country, on which the original Perth Fire Station stands today, are the Whadjuk Noongars and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We pay our respects to their elders past, present and emerging.

Acknowledgments

This information booklet detailing the old Perth Central Fire Station was developed because of the foresight of former employees of the Western Australian Fire Brigades (WAFB) Board. These people saw the value in protecting records and collecting physical items such as photographs, documents, microfiche, journals, appliances and special equipment knowing one day, they would be of historic value to the Fire Brigade and the Western Australian community.

The foresight of former Chief Officer Bill Moylan QFSM to initiate this historic development was the catalyst that remains his legacy today. His vision was followed by other retired officers and staff including Chief Officer John McMahon AFSM, Assistant Chief Officer Arnold Bryant QFSM, District Officer George Stewart, Station Officer Les Schenberg, District Officer Frank Pratt AFSM, Fireman Bob Cook AFSM, District Officer Bill Rose AFSM, Ms. Su Ferreira, Mrs. Pam Stewart, in addition to all other paid staff and volunteers who

have given their support over the years, either at the original Perth Fire Station or as a member of the Vintage Vehicle Restoration Team.

The author of this booklet, retired Superintendent Ron Harley AFSM is due special mention as without his vision and passion for the Fire Brigade and its history much of what we see today would not have been possible.

Superintendent Harley was an avid collector of Fire Brigade memorabilia in the early part of his distinguished 35-year career with the WA Fire Brigades. This passion continued after his retirement and most of his personal memorabilia collection and knowledge has been passed on for others to share into the future.

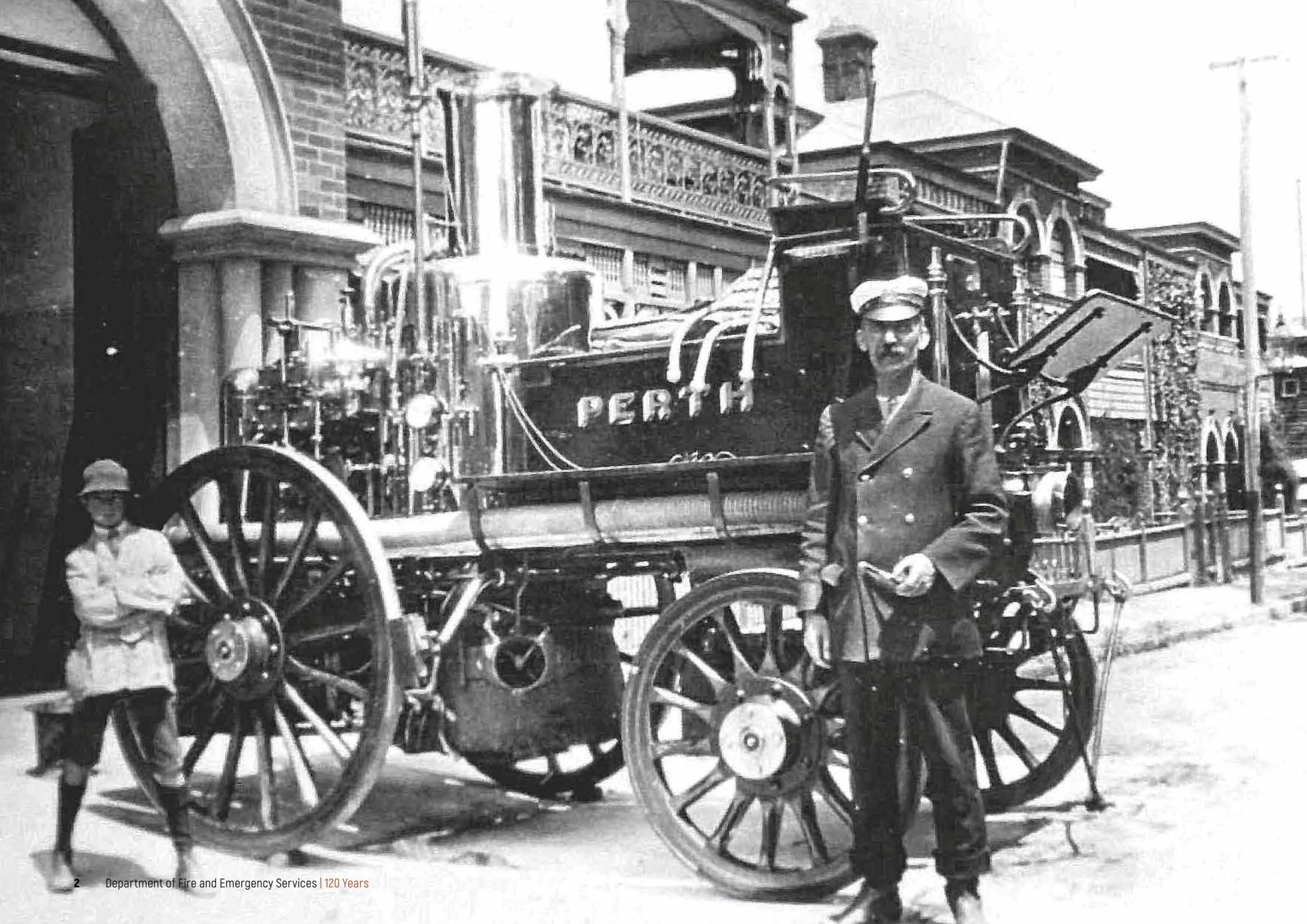


Darren Klemm AFSM
Commissioner
Department of Fire and Emergency Services

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Photo of St Georges Terrace, looking East
circa 1905, Photo from WA State Library.

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SECTION

01



Photo DFES Collection.

Introduction

This booklet tells the story of the Perth Fire Station that has housed hundreds of Perth firemen and general administration staff from January 1901 until June 1979 and beyond. To reflect on the long and full history of the building, this booklet will look at the construction, materials used, modifications and changes that occurred over the 120 years as a working fire station, and today as the Education and Heritage Centre. In discussing the building, it is also necessary to include and describe the technological and social changes that drove the structural modifications that occurred over that time period.

02

An 1890s view of the rear of the original Perth Fire Station to the left of the Perth Town Hall, which had been originally built to accommodate the Pensioner Guards. The area was demolished in the 1950s. Photo DFES Collection.



Early years of the Perth Fire Brigade

The City of Perth Fire Brigade was founded in 1885 and located in the former Pensioner Guard Room building on the south side of the Perth Town Hall facing onto Barrack Street.

The Fire Brigade structure then included just three permanent paid staff, a Superintendent, Foreman and Engineer. These roles were supported by volunteer and auxiliary personnel when required. In the event of a fire, the horses required to pull the fire appliance were sourced from the horse drawn taxis parked outside the building.

With the discovery of gold in WA during the 1890s, and the dramatic increase in the Perth population from 8,447 residents in 1891 to 27,553 in 1901, the demand for Fire Brigade services increased.¹

Perth was transforming from a settlement into a large, bustling town with a flurry of buildings and large infrastructure projects built in the central business district.

The need to protect this expanding community from fire became an important issue for the State Government, which led to the proclamation of the *Fire Brigades Act 1898*, upgrading the Perth City Council Brigade to the Metropolitan Fire Brigade.

The initial *Fire Brigades Act 1898* designated the establishment of the Western Australian Fire Brigades Board (WAFB Board) to oversee the management of the new Fire Brigade as well as the financial contributions needed to maintain the brigade. The payments were made by a collective of insurance companies (45%) and local governments (45%) with the Colonial Treasurer (government) contributing 10% to the total Fire Brigade budget.

This funding with some minor changes to the ratio remained the model for Fire Brigade funding until the introduction of the Emergency Services Levy (ESL)² in 2003.

It's important to understand at this stage that the focus of the new *Fire Brigades Act 1898* was on Perth, but with some encouragement for other brigades to come under the umbrella of the WAFB Board. Although a number of regional, industry based and metropolitan brigades were affiliated, the only other brigade to come under the direct auspices of the original WAFB Board was Fremantle in 1905.

It wasn't until 1909 with a new and revised *Fire Brigades Act 1909*, that it became compulsory for all brigades, private or municipal to register with the WAFB Board.

With the expansion of the Fire Brigade at this time came the need for more personnel and the number of permanent paid staff was increased to 14 with seven auxiliary firemen.



Photo of the Perth City Council Brigade circa 1898. Photo DFES Collection.

¹ The Economic History of WA Since Colonial Settlement, December 2004. Dept of Training & Finance, St Georges Terrace Perth www.dtf.wa.gov.au

² ESL current funding method for emergency services in Western Australia.

Need for a new fire station

Given the rapid increase in personnel and limited space, the State Government decided to source land for a new fire station away from the Perth Town Hall, as this was no longer seen as a suitable location for a working fire station.

To resolve this issue the WAFB Board embarked on a mission to locate a suitable site for a working fire station. While the criteria for the site is not known, it was clear by 1900 that the area off Barrack Street and Saint Georges Terrace was becoming the hub of activity with infrastructure.

This is arguably why the Murray Street location was selected as it wasn't too far for horses to attend in an emergency.³

The site itself and the general area had a lot of history prior to European settlement. Perth or Mooro / Goonap as it was called by the traditional owners of the land was a significant location and held strong social ties for its first inhabitants, the Whadjuk Noongars. The area surrounding the suggested fire station location was particularly important to the Whadjuk Noongars as it was here the Yandellup Reed, noted for its edible roots, was cultivated and harvested.

03

Also located approximately 150 metres further east, in what is now called Victoria Square, was the original site of an Aboriginal burial ground. It is very evident prior to European settlement that the general location of what was to become Irwin and Murray Streets and surrounds were considered an important part in Whadjuk Noongar culture.⁴

With the arrival of Governor Stirling in 1829 and subsequent settlers, the land possession was transformed. Large tracts of land in Perth and surrounding areas were allocated to the early colonists. The Roman Catholic Church purchased a large area of land between Irwin Street and Goderich Street, opening the first Catholic school in WA in Irwin Street in 1878.⁵

³ History of Perth. Wikipedia.

⁴ http://www.boodjar.sis.uwa.edu.au/_literature_130673/Whadjuk_Trail_Map

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Patrick%27s_Boys%27_School,_Perth

The WAFB Board purchased a block from the Roman Catholic Church, on the northern side of the school, located on the corner of Irwin and Murray Street. It is believed Dom Salvado of New Norcia owned the block originally.⁶

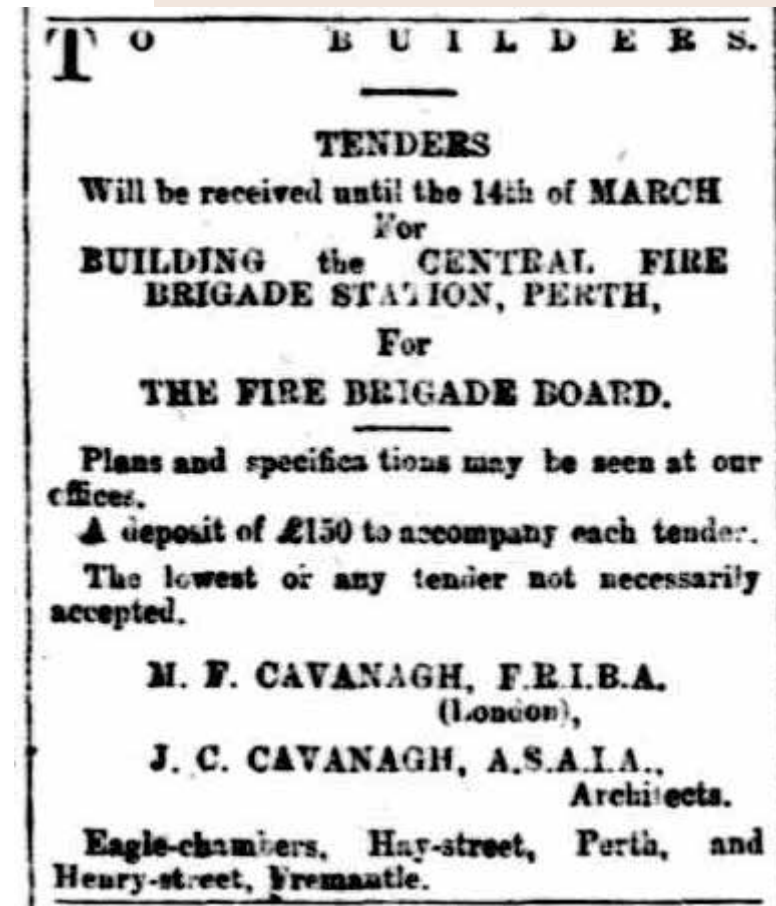
With the Irwin and Murray Street site purchased, it was reported in the WAFB Board Annual Report for 1899, (and then forwarded to the Colonial Secretary, the Honourable G Randall), a site had been purchased at the corner of Murray and Irwin Streets, having a frontage of 125 feet (38.10 m) to Murray Street, by a depth of 100 feet (30.5m) to Irwin Street for the sum of £3,125 (equal to approximately \$231,000 in 2019) was purchased from the Perth Roman Catholic Church, through Bishop Gibney⁷.

Following this announcement, a list of architects was submitted to the WAFB Board for scrutiny, and on 26 October 1899 the successful architect was announced as Mr. Michael Cavanagh.

The WAFB Board were now able to make the announcement that plans of the fire station were in the course of preparation and it is hoped the building will be completed by 1 July 1900.

Mr. Cavanagh, who was the WA Institute of Architects vice-president in 1896, had a considerable influence on Perth architecture and designed many of the iconic Perth and Fremantle buildings. Some are still in use today, including St Patrick's Basilica, Fremantle (1898), Fremantle Fire Station (1908) and a number of Catholic churches around the State, as well as numerous hotels in both Perth and Fremantle.⁸

The Tenders for the construction of the new fire station were called for by the WAFB Board with two applications received. One from a Mr. W.C. Rose for £4,185 and the other from a Mr. F.W.G. Liebe for £4,593.



Tender for the Builder. Image from Trove Collection.

Mr. Rose was awarded the contract but withdrew leaving Mr. Liebe as the successful builder. Mr. Liebe was an established builder and some of his works still exist today including the iconic His Majesty's Theatre located in Hay Street, Perth.

6 Perth Roman Catholic Diocese (Archives).

7 Perth Roman Catholic Diocese of Perth.

8 <https://repository.architecture.com.au/download/chapters/wa-chapter/wa-biographies/cavanagh-michael-francis.pdf>

The site, design and construction of the new Perth Fire Station

4.1 The Site

The site selected for the new Perth Fire Station was one of the more elevated areas of land in central Perth with the additional benefit of it being a relatively quiet location.

The early WAFB Board Minutes at this time do not indicate how many sites around Perth were considered for the station location. The area around Murray and Irwin Streets seems to have been the most desired, possibly because of the Perth Public Hospital, Government Stores, Roman Catholic Church complex, and other similar buildings that were within close proximity.

In general terms the streets within the vicinity of the new station were wide and had limited heavy traffic, so they were an ideal location for the daily training / exercising regimen undertaken by both firemen and horses.

At the time, it was considered risky for fire appliances and crews to be off station, due to the inability to contact them as communications was limited and the incoming fire alarm notification system required immediate turnout.

04

It was very important that the horses were exercised and the firemen maintained their training standards. The open ground directly opposite the fire station entrance on Murray Street (owned by Perth Hospital), made for an ideal training location.

Horses were an important part of the well-oiled turn out procedure and were regularly rotated between exercising in the open ground area and the station to maintain their fitness. Later, due to the expansion of Perth Hospital opposite the fire station, the horse exercise yards were moved to Moore Street, East Perth.

1859

The Deanery

1879

Old St George's Cathedral

1867

Perth Town Hall

Fire Station Block



Irwin Street

Murray Street

Photo looking south west to the corner of Irwin & Murray Streets (circa early 1870s) with Kings Park in the far background. This vacant land was the eventual site of the Perth Fire Station in 1899. Photo from the Royal WA Historical Society.

04 The site, design and construction of the new Perth Fire Station



Perth Town Hall

CBC School site purchased in 1906 for workshop expansion and top level used as a gymnasium

1899

Original fire station site purchased

Heritage listed Catholic Centre Care building

This view of the original fire station site and Christian Brothers College school/church purchased in 1906 for the Workshop extension was taken from the roof of St Mary's Catholic Cathedral circa 1890 looking in a south west direction towards Kings Park with Perth Town Hall spiral in the background. Photo courtesy of State Library WA.

4.2 Design and Construction

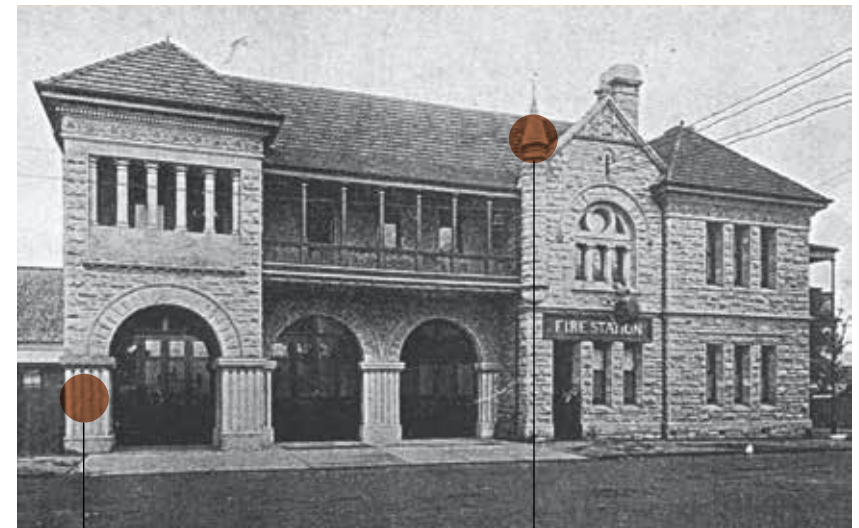
The two-storey fire station building was constructed with rusticated Cottesloe limestone walls along with local bricks used on the eastern end of the building as well as a Marseilles tiled roof, with a front façade consisting of turrets and recessed colonnades.⁹ The limestone was sourced from a quarry in Cottesloe, in an area bounded by Napier and Eric Streets. The limestone was also used in buildings around Perth including Government House, the Weld Club and Saint Marys Cathedral until the quarry eventually closed in 1908 due to the exhaustion of the limestone.¹⁰

The rustication of limestone, in architectural terms, is a type of decorative masonry achieved by cutting back the edges of the stones to a flat planed surface while leaving the central portion of the limestone face either rough or projecting markedly.¹¹

The Marseilles tiled roof, which was innovative for its time, was constructed with imported fired clay tiles that interlocked. They are commonplace today but in 1900 were considered modern and superior to the traditional corrugated iron used in roofing at that time. The benefits were that the tiles didn't rust, had little wear and tear and were more colourful than the traditional corrugated iron.¹²

The actual exterior design of the new fire station was best described as a "Federation Romanesque Revivalist" design. This particular design was popular and prevalent in a number of government constructions around Australia from the late 1890s to around 1915, and was known for its Roman pillars and archways that seemingly conveyed authority and power to the observer.¹³

Original photo of Perth Fire Station circa 1905.
Photo DFES Collection.

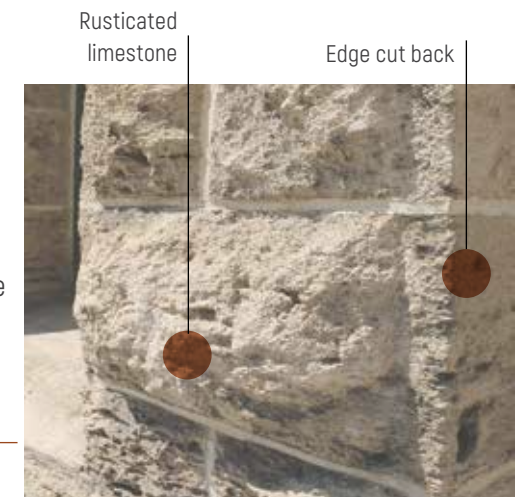


Roman Pillars

Turret

In the original 1901 fire station, this amounted to one turret and six Roman pillars in the first-floor design and imitation Roman pillars around the engine room doorways.

The major construction of the building took approximately nine months to complete with the finishing touches ongoing after this period. This was quite a remarkable achievement given the building materials and construction technologies available in the late 1890s.



Limestone located at the front of the Perth Fire Station. Photo DFES Collection.

9 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Perth_Fire_Station

10 <http://inherit.stateheritage.wa.gov.au/Public/Inventory/PrintSingleRecord/a6b8cac1-0a04-4c9b-ad6c-ae4c1e789e50>

11 Rustification-[https://en.wikipedia.org/Rustification_\(architecture\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/Rustification_(architecture))

12 <https://www.architectureanddesign.com.au/getattachment/2830d8c9-5dc4-4517-97f1-7e73b18226a4/attachment.aspx>

13 https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Federation_Architecture_of_Australia

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Technologies of the time



Shand, Mason & Company fire pumps of the day were horse drawn and steam powered. Photo DFES Collection.

With the construction of the new fire station, it provided the builder and the WAFB Board an opportunity to encompass the exciting new technologies available in the late 1800s and include them within the building. This included the following:

5.1 Electricity

A significant innovation was the installation and use of electricity for power. While the availability and use of electricity is commonplace today, this wasn't the case at the turn of the century with the first electric streetlight coming to Perth in 1892.

5.2 Gas

Gas was already well established in Perth by the late 1890s and used domestically and throughout the city area for street lighting. The new fire station was designed to have gas outlets installed in the engine room floor to connect with the steam pump. This maintained the

water temperature to just below boiling point, ready to be brought up to an operating pressure to drive the water pump through making steam when needed.

This was a significant change in operational procedures and very innovative. Previously, when a fire alarm was received a small fire had to be lit in the pumps furnace to raise the water temperature to steam, to action the pump which took up valuable time.

5.3 Fire Appliances

The fire appliances at the turn of the century were all horse drawn. The water pressure used for pumping purposes was powered by steam boilers located on the appliances. Steam powered fire pumps were common at the time and a number of these were purchased by the brigade from Shand, Mason & Company, fire pump manufacturers located in the United Kingdom (UK).¹⁴

As WA still had very strong cultural links with the UK, most of the small fire equipment and firefighting uniforms

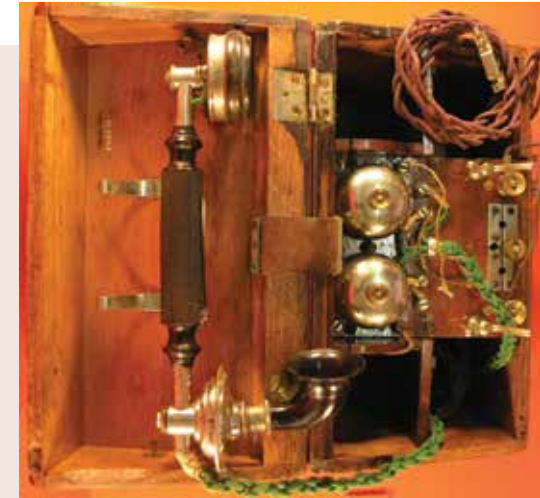
in service were manufactured and procured from the UK. General firefighting operational procedures were also based upon those of the British Fire Service experience.

5.4 Telephones

Telephones were available at the time but were very limited. It was only 20 years prior when the first telephone was connected between Government House and the Colonial Secretary's Office in 1878. Telephones were not available in every house or business, however, they were installed in the new fire station.

WA's first telephone exchange opened in Perth on 1 December 1887. It was a local battery/magneto manual system operated by telephonists. Automatic dial in telephones hadn't been invented at that time and did not arrive in WA until 1914. The majority of subscriber telephone lines were still single wire earth return and all used the local battery/magneto system.¹⁵

Even though telephones were limited, fires were increasingly reported through



Mobile phone carried by firemen and used to plug into a street alarm box to communicate with fire station. Photo DFES Collection.



Private building fire alarm box with direct line to fire station watch room. Photo DFES Collection.

the telephone system connected to alarms around the city.

The Fire Brigade had direct telephone lines to Police, Tram and Light Company, Gas Company and the Water Board.

¹⁴ Shand, Mason & Company - [gracesguide.co.uk/Shand, Mason_and_Co](http://gracesguide.co.uk/Shand,Mason_and_Co)

¹⁵ <https://oldaustraliantelephones.weebly.com/western-australian-colonial-telecommunications.html>

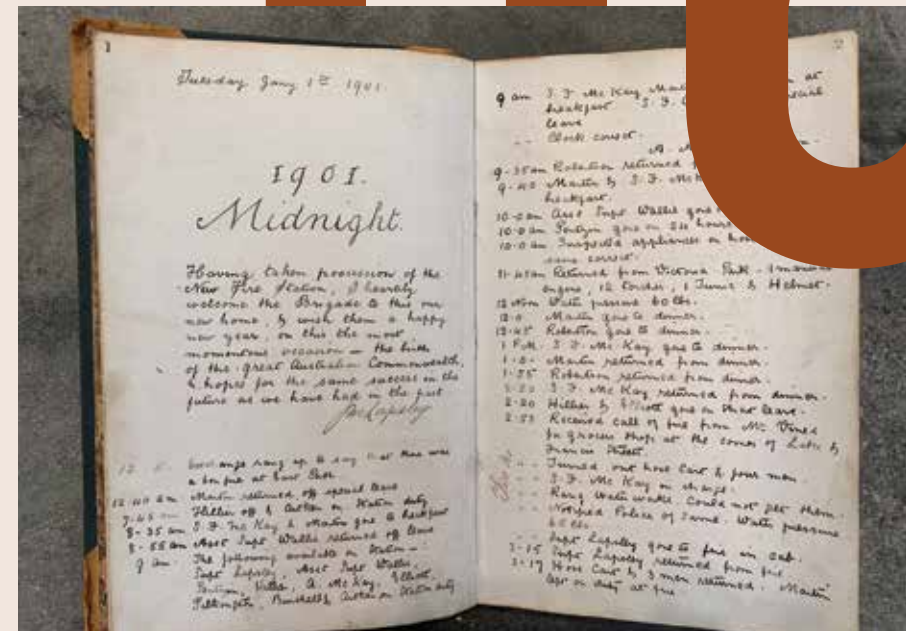
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Superintendent James McFarlane Lapsley's signature on an early crest of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade.

Western Australian Fire Brigades – Perth Fire Station – Occurrence Book. Photo DEFS Collection.

Opening of the new station



The page above is an extract from the Perth Fire Station Occurrence Book dated Tuesday, January 1, 1901 and was written by the then Fire Brigade Superintendent James McFarlane Lapsley, who later became the first Chief Fire Officer for WA in 1910.

As Superintendent Lapsley's comment shows below, there was great optimism in Perth with independence proclaimed for the state in 1890, the beginning of a new Australian Federation and a new state-of-the art fire station for the City.

It reads:

"Having taken possession of the New Fire Station, I hereby welcome the Brigade to this our new home. I wish them a happy new year, on this most momentous occasion – the birth of the Great Australian Commonwealth, and hopes for the same success in the future as we have had in the past"

JM Lapsley (WA Fire Brigade Superintendent)

Despite taking possession of the new fire station at the beginning of 1901, it wasn't until 29 July 1903 the Perth Fire Station was "officially" opened in a very low-key affair.

James McFarlane Lapsley (1856-1931) became the WAFB Board's first Superintendent and in 1910 the first Chief Officer. Lapsley was a key factor in the early success of the Perth Fire Station.

His knowledge of plumbing engineering along with business acumen made him very capable and he was able to apply these skills into the new and future building designs of the fire station.

Lapsley was also very proficient with administration issues and the day to day running of the brigade, from all accounts he "ran a very tight ship". He was forward thinking and developed future strategies in keeping the WA community safe including an involvement in promoting first aid.

Lapsley was heavily involved with the St John's movement and this contribution was rewarded with the significant title of the Order of St John of Jerusalem in 1905. He was also awarded the Kings Police Medal in 1910 for his work in organising and coordinating all the Fire Brigades

located in WA under one umbrella following the *Fire Brigades Act 1909*.

Lapsley was proud of his firemen and their first aid skills and those qualified in first aid wore a St Johns Ambulance badge on their left sleeve.

Lapsley also had a strong voice in the general community and was actively involved in the 8 Hour Day movement in WA. Lapsley was also involved in Freemasonry helping set up the Scottish Freemasonry Lodge in 1897. Other involvements included being one of the founders of the Caledonian Society and an office bearer of many sporting associations. Lapsley retired from the WAFB Board in 1922.¹⁶



Chief Officer James McFarlane Lapsley, KPM.
Photo DFES Collection.

The City of Perth crest and the Perth Metropolitan Fire Brigade motto is "Semper Paratus" which means "Always Ready". This motto is still valid today.

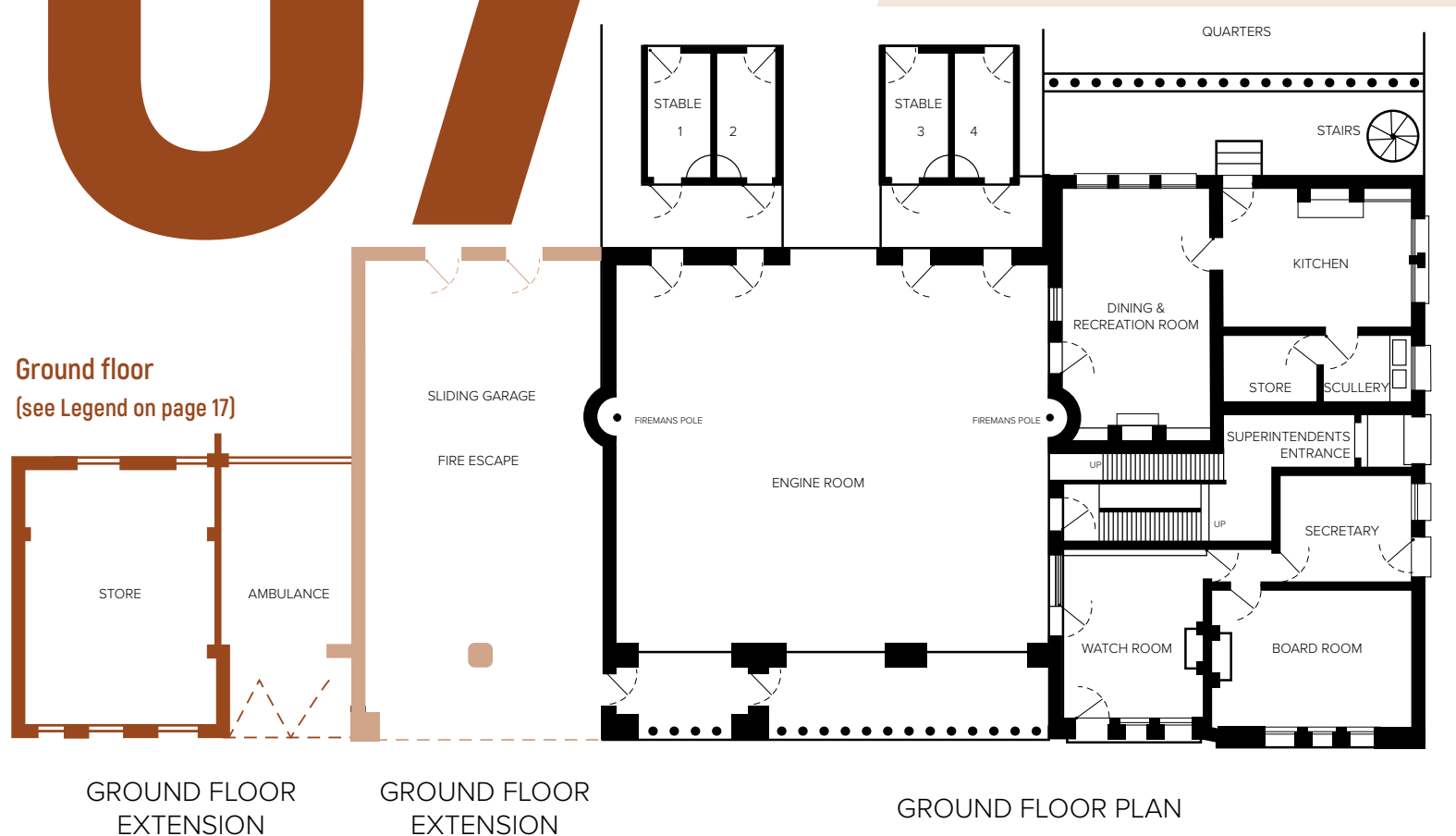
¹⁶ Sally Anne Hasluck, 'Lapsley, James McFarlane (1856-1931)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/lapsley-james-mcfarlane-7034/text12237>, published first in hardcopy 1983.

SECTION

07

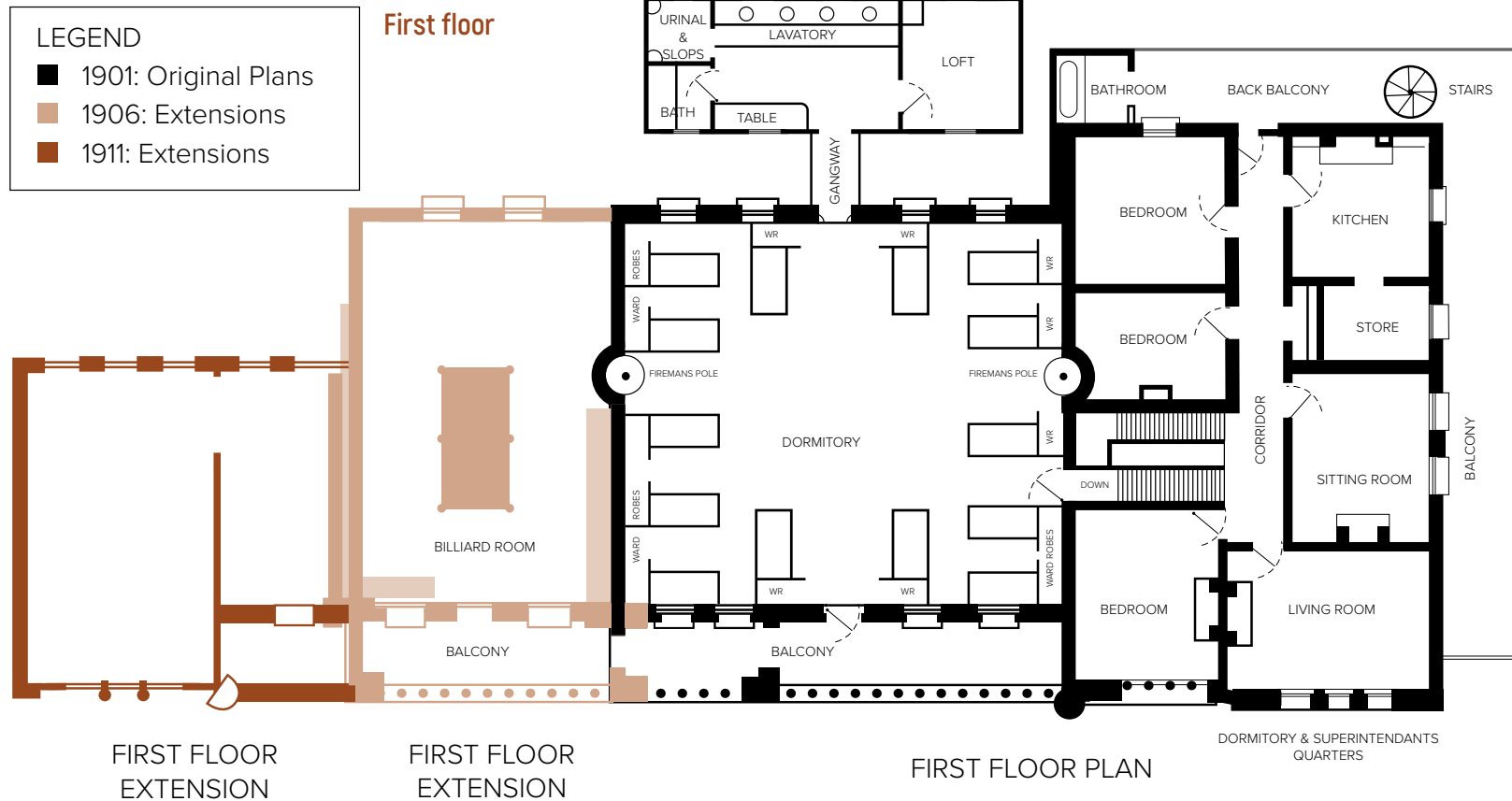
Below is the original design of the Perth Fire Station in 1901 which consisted of a ground and upper floor with other structural extensions added later.

Fire station layout

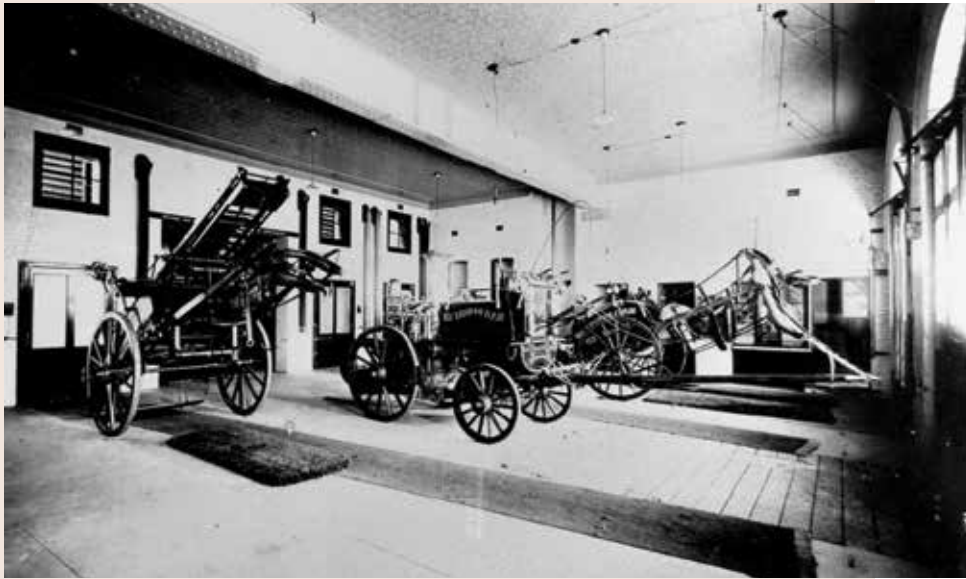


PERTH FIRE STATION BUILDING PLANS*

*These designs have been reworked in 2020 based on archival material and working knowledge of the station.



07 Fire station layout



Engine Room with a currie ladder in the forefront and steam pumper and hose layer. Photo DFES Collection.



Front Door locator and Fire Bell button of Perth Fire Station. Photo DFES Collection.



7.1 Ground Floor

The ground floor of the original station consisted of the engine room, watch room, dining and recreation area, kitchen and boardroom.

Located in the engine room were three horse drawn appliance bays. Two were of the same length and one was two metres longer, possibly with foresight for housing larger appliances in the future such as the aerial turntable ladders that were being developed overseas.

The internal walls were constructed of masonry bricks that had a ceramic tile finish that was pre-baked onto the brick. On the engine room walls, firefighting uniforms hung from hooks for quick access and immediately behind the engine room were four stables with a thoroughfare to the rear yard.

At the rear right hand side of the engine room was the fireman's dining and recreation room, kitchen, scullery and storeroom.

To the side of the ground floor building was the Superintendent's office, with a door leading into Irwin Street adjacent to that was the boardroom. Leading from the engine room was the watch room where all communications were received and dispatched.

The main entrance to the fire station came directly into the watch room. On the outside limestone wall of the entry, mounted on a brass plate with large raised letters were the words "FIRE BELL 1899". In the centre of this brass plaque was a pull handle, depicting the "God of Fire" and when pulled it alerted the Duty Watchman to a caller, possibly reporting a fire. This was later replaced with an electrical energised push button.

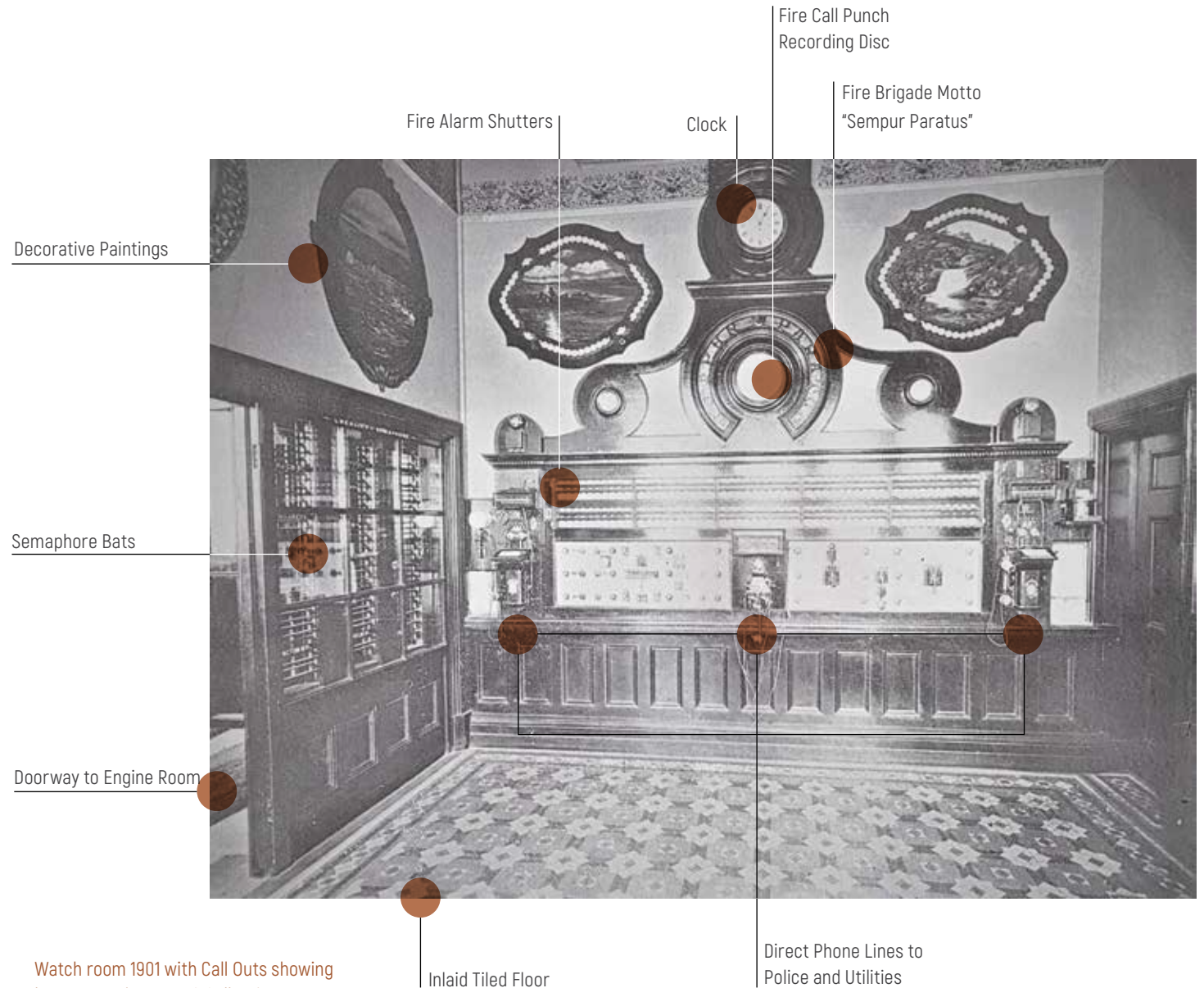
7.2 Watch Room

A fire station watch room is the nerve centre and the new fire station's watch room was no exception. It was the hub of all communications managed by the fireman rostered as the Duty Watchman.

The Duty Watchmans duties included monitoring and receiving all emergency calls for assistance via the installed alarms system, telephone, passers-by, or with normal business calls. Once a fire emergency was reported the Duty Watchman was responsible for the efficient dispatch of the station appliances.

Besides answering fire and telephone calls the Duty Watchman had to maintain the station occurrence book (also known as the Log Book) in which all pertinent details of the station activities and incident information were recorded for that shift.

The switchboard had instant direct lines to the Police, Tram and Electricity Company, Gas Company and Water Board, in case of emergencies relating to fires. At night, the Duty Watchman had to sleep in the watch room on a folded bed which was still the practice until 1962. The watch room was relocated allowing the Duty Watchman an improved wall mounted folding bed.



Watch room 1901 with Call Outs showing key areas. Photo DFES Collection.

07 Fire station layout

The fire alarm panel was fitted with a bell that rang loudly when an incoming alarm or phone call went unanswered for more than 15 seconds. Within that time the Duty Watchman had to switch the lights on and either place a jack (plug) into the alarm or answer the telephone. If he was slow in his response, the bell would sound all over the station thus alerting the duty officer and also the entire station.

Two large glass encased panels contained numbered leather pouches on hooks containing keys to all those buildings connected to the fire station alarm system. These keys provided the firemen attending the fire alarm easy access to a particular building without having to break down doors. This system remained in place until the mid-1960s.

Paintings decorated the upper section of the watch room walls. Above the alarm panels and key cases. One depicted the "Great Fire of London" and others related to famous fire scenes.

They were lost forever when the walls were accidentally replastered during the refurbishing of the station in 1984. Fortunately, the photographs of them still remain today.

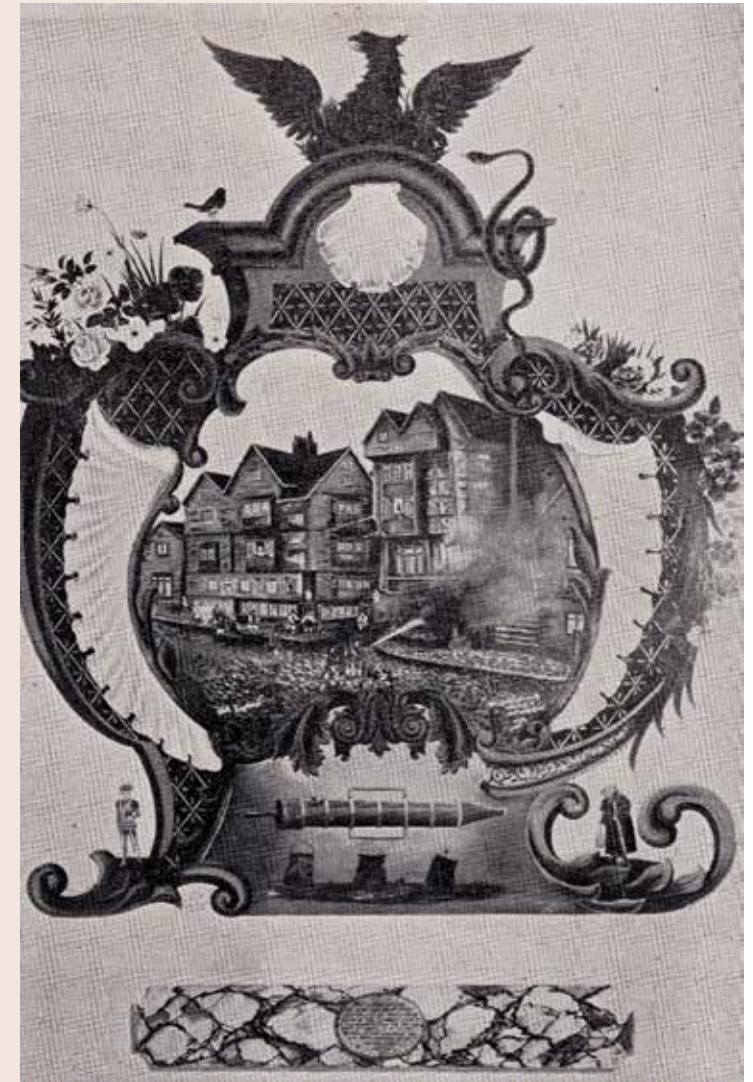
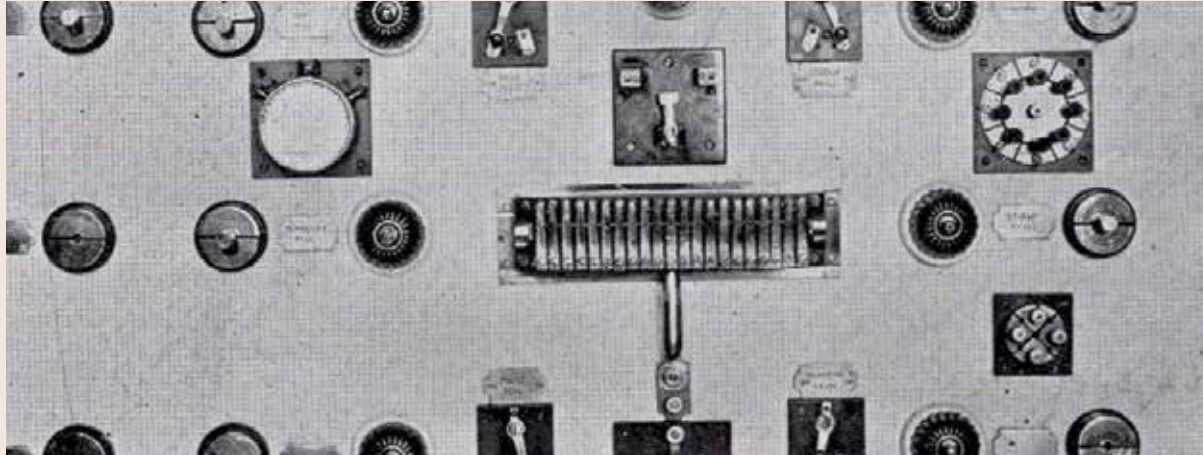
The inlaid ceramic or encaustic tiled floor in the watch room is still in very good condition after more than 120 years of wear and tear.¹⁷ Every Saturday morning it was the duty of the rostered domestic fireman to clean and mop this floor using only warm water and liquid soap. For hard stains a long-handled hose scrubbing brush was utilised.



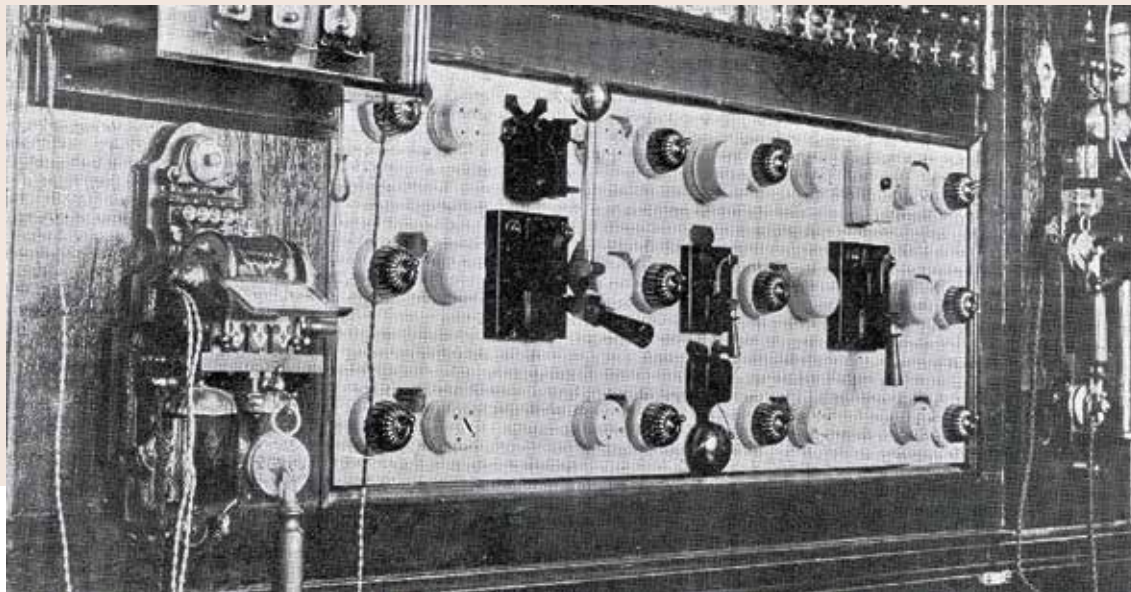
Watch room ceramic floor 120 years on.
Photo DFES Collection.

¹⁷ **Encaustic tiles** are [ceramic tiles](#) in which the pattern or figure on the surface is not a product of the [glaze](#) but of different colors of [clay](#). They are usually of two colours but a tile may be composed of as many as six. The pattern appears inlaid into the body of the tile, so that the design remains as the tile is worn down.^[1] Encaustic tiles may be glazed or unglazed and the inlay may be as shallow as $\frac{1}{8}$ inch (3 mm), as is often the case with "printed" encaustic tile from the later [medieval period](#), or as deep as a quarter inch.

Watch room electrical switch board.
Photo DFES Collection.



Watch room mural depicting scenes from another fire in the painting. Photo DFES Collection.



Watch room telephone switch board. Photo DFES Collection.

07 Fire station layout

7.3 Basement

Below the firemen's dining room was a basement with access stairs down from the yard. It contained a small "Delco Remy" electricity generator for emergency power. The machine was still in running order when the fire station closed in 1979, and still remains in position today. In later years the basement was used as a workshop by the Brigade Electrician. The basement was also used as a general storeroom. In 1962, stairs were constructed from inside the station adjacent to the newly relocated watch room. This provided better access to the wiring for the alarm and telephone panels.

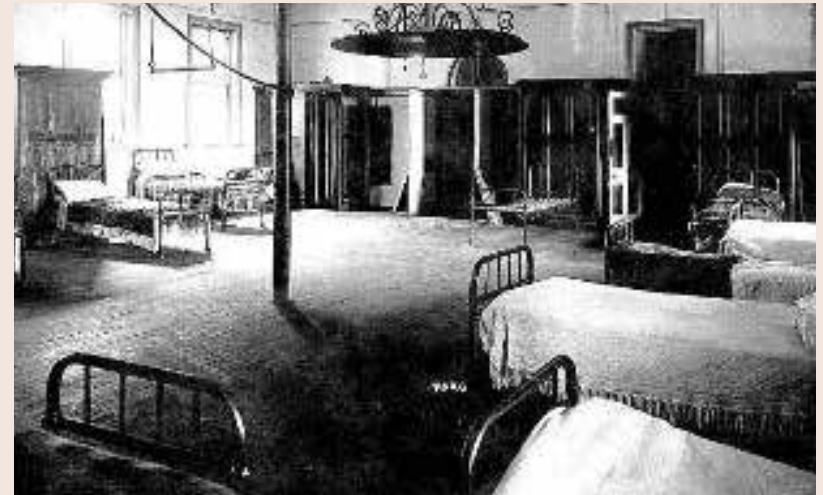
7.4 Upper Floor

The single firemen lived in the main dormitory with the married men residing in housing east of the fire station, where the City of Perth, Fire Station Car Park is now situated. They were later re-housed in accommodation in Moore Street, East Perth.

The upper floor housed the 14 firemen who lived in the dormitory and the Superintendent lived in a separate private area with his family.

Firemen were on duty for 168 hours per week, a long time compared to the hours worked today.

To maintain privacy, the living quarters were accessed by separate entrances. The firemen's staircase was accessed via the engine room to the first floor, whilst the Superintendent and his family entered from a private entrance on Irwin Street. In 1926 these stairs were removed and relocated to the rear of the Chief Officers quarters, and firemen's stairs relocated to the rear of their dormitory area following the dismantling of the stables.



Upper floor set up for a night shift. Photo DFES Collection.



Fireman sliding down pole from the upper level of the fire station. Photo DFES Collection.



Batch of batteries that required regular servicing. Photo DFES Collection.

7.5 Electricians Workshop

The original Brigade Electricians workshop was located in the fire station roof space which also contained the batteries that were critical in powering the fire alarm system located below in the watch room. As the batteries were so crucial in the alarm operating process, they had to be regularly checked by electricians to ensure that all were operating correctly. Access to the roof space was from the firemen's dormitory by means of a vertical ladder which is still fixed to the wall.

7.6 General Workshops

While not considered in the original construction of the fire station, by 1902 it was recognised that a workshop was required to ensure the fire station was efficient and effective. The brigade workshop was built in the rear yard as a lean-to against the northern wall of Saint Patrick's Boys School.

The trades listed below were undertaken in the new workshop:

- Blacksmith / Farriers
- Carpenters
- Electricians
- Painters
- Hose handlers, and
- Mechanics.

The noise that came from the busy workshop area soon annoyed Bishop Gibney, (who oversaw Saint Patrick's Boys School) that he complained continually to the WAFB Board. Eventually, this resulted in the Board purchasing the church/school site in 1906 for £2,100 (\$315,000 today).

This purchase worked out well for WAFB as the workshop area had become too small and expansion was desperately needed. Particularly after 1909, when the central workshop supported the burgeoning Fire Brigades around the State.



Fireman repairing firefighting hose in the workshops. Photo DFES Collection.

07 Fire station layout

The workshops were very industrious and serviced all metropolitan brigade appliances, with the construction of motor bodies for fire appliances also carried out on the premises.

A few years later the workshops were increased by extending an "L" shaped building onto the side of an adjacent building. The original lean-to workshops and stables were demolished providing additional yard space.

Eventually it was determined the conversion of the old school building would consist of a mezzanine floor which would contain a gymnasium/lecture room on the upper level and a workshop space at the ground level.

The WAFB Board recommended the firemen, given their trade backgrounds and experience, undertake most of the construction of the workshop area. In recognition for this effort from the firemen the WAFB Board agreed to have the ceiling of the gymnasium finished with Wunderlich stamp metal.



Bootmaker/fireman repairing firemen's boots in workshop area. Photo DFES Collection.



Firemen using their skills to repair hoses and ladders. Photo DFES Collection.

The WAFB Board recommended the firemen, given their trade backgrounds and experience, undertake most of the construction of the workshop area.



Firemen making a new extension ladder.
Photo DFES Collection.

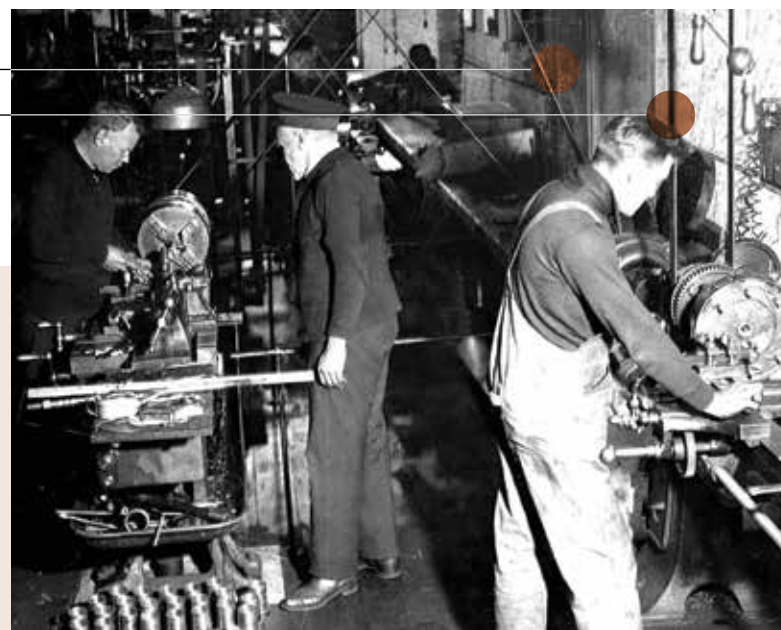
Ornamental stamped metal was very popular in Australia between 1890 and the 1930s as it was easily installed, durable, fire and dust proof and very aesthetically pleasing.

At this time an architect, Mr. James Ochiltree was appointed as the overseer of the new additions.

Additions to other parts of the Irwin Street side of the fire station included a new boardroom, offices, apparatus room, ambulance shed, store and Chief Officers quarters all built by the contractor C.W. Arnott and completed by 1914.

These ongoing building adjustments continued as the brigade struggled to keep up with a rapidly growing city's Fire Brigade needs.

Drive belts



Engineers and firemen working in the metal shop with a metal lathe at Perth Fire Station. The drive belts are connected to drive shafts on the ceiling. Photo DFES Collection.

The original Saint Patrick's church/school site had two large gothic leadlight windows on the southern side of the building which were covered over by lining boards for protection and were thus hidden for 65 years. When the building was being demolished the windows were salvaged and relocated into a building at the Roman Catholic College at Bindoon where they can be seen by visitors today.

The stairs to the left lead into the rear yard of the fire station. It can be seen that there was approximately two metres difference in levels between the fire station and the old school floor.



The fireman at the left of the photo is sewing part of a collapsible stretcher that was invented by Superintendent Lapsley. Another fireman is shaping timber whilst the fireman to the right rear is making hose repairs.
Photo DFES Collection.

In February 1911, the WAFB Board approved the purchase of a large motor and line shaft for power transmission to be installed to drive a large lathe, other machines and a smaller lathe.

These additional pieces of machinery provided the workshops with the ability to carry out manufacturing of fire appliances and small items of necessary equipment.

To the eastern side of the fire station there was another workshop that had been constructed to relocate some of the noisier activities and thus lessen the impact on neighbours. The noise factor remained a constant problem and this new workshop only diminished the problem slightly.

These workshops were also pitched against a building that did not belong to the Fire Brigade as at this time the by-laws did not prevent building against adjoining structures, even if owned by other people.

In 1961/2, the Perth Fire Station workshops and store were moved to the Belmont Complex on Great Eastern Highway between Hardy Road and Kimberley Street.

The relocation of the workshops to its new home at Belmont made it possible to extend the fire station and provide more room around the station for training.

7.7 Horse Stables

Horses played an integral role in early firefighting in Perth as they were the key to mobilising pumps and transporting firemen to a fire. When the Perth brigade moved into the new premises, it owned most of its 18 horses, with some still on a lease arrangement.

Training horses was an important facet of daily life at the fire station and this was regularly undertaken by firemen skilled in horse care and grooming in the paddocks adjacent to the fire station, owned by the Perth Hospital.

All the horses were issued with names including, Ronald, Lorrie, Jack, Kitty, Lottie, Joe, Hamish and General. Hamish and General were quite famous as they were both trained to pull the steam fire engine in tandem. The duo looked very impressive as they galloped down the street and were featured in many old photographs including the fire station opening souvenir booklet in the DFES Collection.

A two-horse harness pulls the Shand, Mason & Company steam pumper. Horses are Hamish and General. Photo DFES Collection.



07 Fire station layout

The speed of the firemen's turnout from the fire station was quite remarkable given that the horses had to be harnessed up and the crew had to get dressed in full firefighting clothing. The record was 16 seconds for a complete turnout, although the Chief Officer Lapsley was happy with around 60 seconds which is still very fast.

Once the station bells sounded, the horses would get very excited and were very keen to gallop to the fire as quickly as possible. It was reported that a retired fire station horse, which was pulling a milk cart heard the pounding of the hooves coming down the street and the strident ringing of the fire bell and raced along the street with its former workmates!

Due to the long hours the firemen worked in the 1920s, distractions were welcomed. On one occasion a little puppy later named Jip was found one wintry night abandoned at the fire station door looking dishevelled and under fed. He soon found his calling and become a fire station mascot.

When a fire call was announced he would run along and jump into the pump (generally the driver's seat) ready for action and proceed to the alarm. He became a big part of the Perth Fire Station team for years after and was considered just below the Chief Officer in rank.¹⁸

The firemen also loved their horses, they were well looked after and very much part of the firefighting team. An example of this was in Boulder in 1925 when "Piggy" a much-loved horse at the Boulder Fire Station was retired. The firemen raised enough money to ensure he would have a safe and relaxing retirement with agistment at the Boulder Council stables for the rest of his life. Chief Officer Lapsley was quoted as saying "the boys didn't like to lose the horses as they come to know each other so well and to lose one of the horses was like losing a friend."



A typical two horse drawn turn out in the early 1900s. Photo DFES Collection.

¹⁸ Daily News Saturday 1st October 1921 page 19.

In the photo below, taken circa 1904, the horse stables can be seen to the left. The extended workshops are in the background.

The firemen's ablution facilities were located at the rear of the dormitory, directly over the horses' stables, as was the loft where the horses' fodder was stored. To feed the horses, the fodder was dropped down a chute into each stable.

The outline of these stables has been preserved to this day by the tiles laid in the rear yard directly behind the fire station and contains the names of the most prominent horses.

With the purchase of motorised fire appliances in early 1908, the use of horses at the Fire Brigade was gradually being phased out with the last horse retired in 1920.



The fireman second from the left in the apron is the brigade farrier, note other firemen wearing caps similar to the Royal Navy. Photo DFES Collection.

Superintendent Lapsley adopted many naval practices and procedures including wearing caps (see photo opposite) which were very similar to the cap worn in the Royal Navy, as well as the traditional ringing of station bells every hour.



Motorised Dennis Gwynne Pump, first motorised appliance purchased by the WAFB Board. Photo DFES Collection.

n8

Turnout system and alarm recording



Retired WAFB Superintendent, Ron Harley AFSM with an original Punchboard Fire Incident Recording Disc. Photo DFES Collection.

The most spectacular feature of the new station was the previously unknown method of receiving and recording a fire call and the subsequent turnout procedure.

This procedure became famous throughout Australia and internationally for its effectiveness and efficiency. Many notable and distinguished persons visited the fire station to observe how the alarm and turnout system operated. Among them was HRH The Duke of York during his visit to Western Australia in 1901; the Japanese Navy Fleet Admiral with an entourage of 50 officers in 1904; Australian opera singer Dame Nellie Melba; and many federal politicians over time.

The system was designed and built by the firemen, under the guidance of Fireman Hill, a qualified electrician who was recruited for his skills in this area. The Fire Brigade Engineer Pilkington also played a key role in supervising the systems construction.

The completed system was unique and so efficient for its time.

The original alarm and turnout system were constructed to perform nine sequential movements upon receipt of an alarm at the panel, these were;

1. Punch a time recording hole (time stamp) in a paper disc mounted over a rotating face (see disc opposite).
2. Turn on watch room and station lights.
3. Ring station and house bells.
4. Drop the particular alarm enunciator on the alarm panel.
5. Bring up the correct wooden name plate in the address semaphore of the watch room by the use of minute chains and pulleys.
6. Open the horse stable doors by electromagnetic counterweights and springs.
7. Lower the horses' harnesses over the appliances.

8. Open engine room doors to Murray Street.
9. Activate an external warning light for pedestrians to be aware of turning out fire appliances.

Each Wednesday, the community was invited to the fire station to see the firemen demonstrate how this alarm system worked.

With the introduction of motorised appliances some of the procedures in the turnout system, mostly related to horses and horse driven steam pumps, were not required.

8.1 Recording System

The new Perth Fire Station had a unique fire alarm recording system that became a model throughout Australia and also in many overseas countries.

The duty fireman would insert a round blank paper disc with a date into the recorder on the completion of a previous alarm call. The recorder would spin as a clock in line with the current time.



Punchboard Fire Incident Recording Disc.
Photo DFES Collection.

08 Turnout system and alarm recording

When a fire alarm was received, a punch would automatically penetrate the round disc and record the time of call. The Duty Watchman could also initiate a call manually if a fire call was received over the telephone or by a passer-by.

On completion of the alarm call the duty fireman would remove the round disc and enter relevant details of the incident before the responding officer would sign it off.

Information on the disc included:

- The address
- Type of call
- Insurance of property
- Insurance of contents
- Appliances used
- Remarks
- How call was received
- Time occupied
- Damage

8.2 Street Alarms

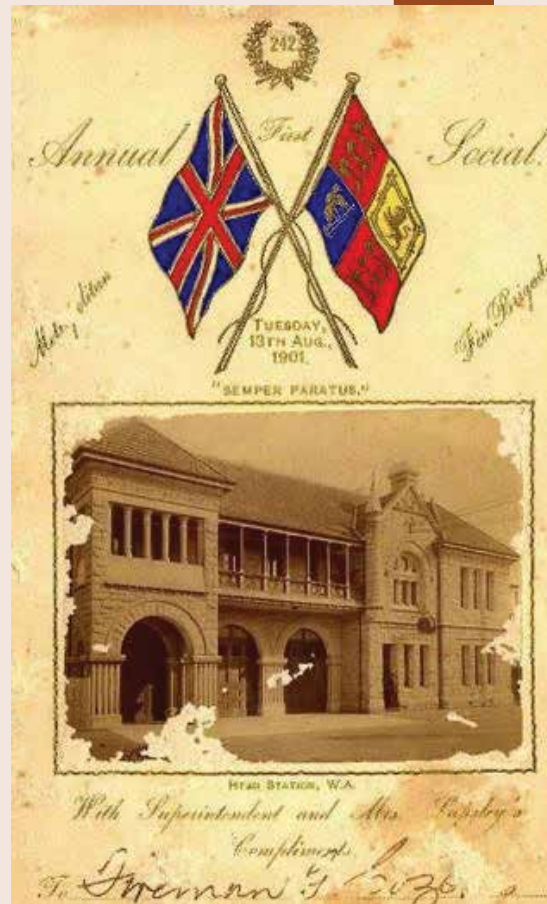
Street alarms were another unique part of the total fire alarm information technology designed for the new fire station. Connected by a telephone line to the Perth Fire Station, street alarms were activated by a person smashing the breakglass panel before pressing the large button inside.



Fire alarm being activated above.
Photo DFES Collection.

09

Working conditions for firemen in 1901



Invitation to the first Social Night in 1901. Image DFES Collection.

09 Working conditions

Given the long hours firemen worked, cooks were employed by the social club with a subsidy from the WAFB Board to provide meals for onsite firemen.

To get some respite from work, firemen had to apply for leave to go downtown or to have a break. The leave granted was generally for half a day. In the dormitory, each fireman was provided with a large upright locker that contained his personal clothing and effects. The locker was also used to hang his folding bed, which was packed away during the daytime. The dormitory also served as a multi-purpose area including a training venue, gymnasium or, on special occasions, for social gatherings, dances etc.

These festivities were also attended by the families of the married firemen who lived off the station in nearby rental accommodation in Murray Street. In later years, the majority of officers and firemen lived in housing in nearby Moore Street and rode bicycles to answer the fire alarm bells.

Firemen and families at Perth Fire Station social function in mens dormitory in 1905. Photo DFES Collection.



They received one shilling sixpence (15 cents) per week bicycle allowance.

The firemen's working conditions were harsh in the early 1900s with long hours, basic appliances, limited water supplies and a lack of operational back up coming to fires. Married firemen worked from 8am until 4pm and were permitted to return home to their family to share the evening meal but returned to the station from 6pm until 8pm before returning home again.

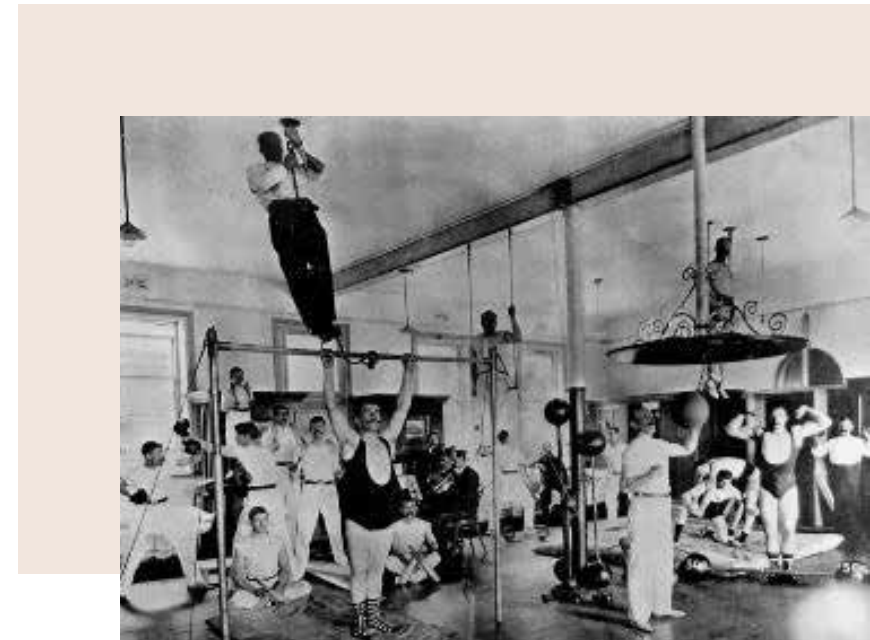
Even at home married firemen were still on duty with electric alarm bells fitted to the house that would ring loudly when a fire alarm call was received at the fire station. They had to respond to the bells and be at the station within a prescribed time, failing this they would face disciplinary action.

Given the long hours and somewhat difficult accommodation conditions for both married and single firemen, tempers sometimes flared and created problems amongst the otherwise tranquil fire station.

One particular issue was the arrival of a number of firemen from the eastern states who gained jobs and subsequent seniority over the local firemen. This came to a head in early 1901 when a large number of firemen resigned and demanded a meeting with the WAFB Board.¹⁹

The meeting eventuated, discussions were conducted with lawyers present and a satisfactory outcome was eventually reached for all parties. However, it did demonstrate that friction and animosity could be an issue and needed ongoing attention by senior officers.

Firemen were mostly recruited for their particular skills in various trades which included blacksmithing, carpentry, painting, building bodies for fire engine chassis, constructing and repairing ladders, motor mechanics, and boot making. This made the Brigade virtually self-sufficient in the area of ongoing maintenance.



These skills also were shared between firemen and this contributed to a very strong camaraderie on and off work.

In 1946/7 the WAFB Board employed an additional 50 ex-servicemen to commence the third platoon of firemen. This came about because of the improvement of working hours for firemen.

Firemen working out in the upper floor gym / dormitory. Photo DFES Collection.

¹⁹ West Australian Tuesday 12th February 1901 page 7.

09 Working conditions

Over the next 60 years this recruiting preference continued. Trade work, as it was known, was eventually halted in the late 1960s with some of the work being outsourced as well as specific tradespeople being employed to undertake mechanical and electrical work on a full-time basis.

The front of the building was built with a verandah, as was the Superintendent's quarters on the Irwin Street frontage.

The verandas provided fresh air to both the Superintendent's quarters and firemen's dormitory and was a place where firemen could relax. In later years, as the number of firemen increased at the station, beds were placed on the verandah.

The overall fire station working and living environment in this early time, while it appears very harsh was harmonised and could be likened to a large extended family. There were firemen sleeping and working in close proximity in the dormitory, four on-duty horses in their stables whinnying, plus the various

noises from the workshops. In addition, there was the Superintendent's children playing in the rear yard with the family washing on the clothes line. All very domesticated.

The photograph opposite shows the rear verandah of the Chief Officer's quarters top left and a section of the horse stables with loft above. One of the first fire appliances purchased, a Shand, Mason & Company steam pumper is in the shed at the rear of the photograph.

Chief Officers Quarters and verandah



Firemen in training at the rear of the Perth Fire Station.
Photo DFES Collection.



10

Fourth Engine Bay and Billiard Room Extension. Photo DFES Collection.



1906

4th Engine
room bay

Fire station extensions

10 Fire station extensions

In 1906, a fourth bay was added as part of a first extension to the fire station. This extension included a billiard room above, with the ground floor constructed of a limestone exterior and a tiled wall interior.

The upper rear section was constructed of timber so that it could be rebuilt in solid construction at a later date. The length of this extension was shorter at the southern or rear side than the existing station, as it was built to the size necessary for a large billiard table to be placed above the fourth engine room bay. The ground level was to house the 50-foot (15.2m) curricule ladder.

The second extension to the fourth bay was carried out later in 1910 to house the newly acquired turntable ladder. This involved the lengthening of the engine room bay to run in line east to west with the original building structure. A small dormitory was added to the upper level to cater for the increase in staffing.

The third and final major extension to Perth Central Station was carried out in 1915. This provided a fifth engine room bay to house the ambulance and the main store at the ground level. The billiard room was relocated directly above the Brigade Store and the space made available was converted into a small dormitory.

By 1915, the station was once more becoming overcrowded with additional fire equipment and firemen. The Chief Officer reporting to the WAFB Board stated, "Owing to the congested conditions of the men's dining room, kitchen and workshops, it will be necessary to have additions and alterations made to same. The extensions of the dining room and kitchen will cost approximately £400, (equal to \$41,000.00 today) and increase in plant and alterations to workshops, say about £150." (equal to \$16,000.00)



The 50-foot turn table ladder in training, not fully extended. Photo DFES Collection.

Boardroom
Upper Level

The changes to the kitchen and dining room involved the construction of a separate kitchen approximately two metres outside of the station rear, with the west wall fronting onto Irwin Street. This was the former backyard to the living quarters of the Chief Officer.

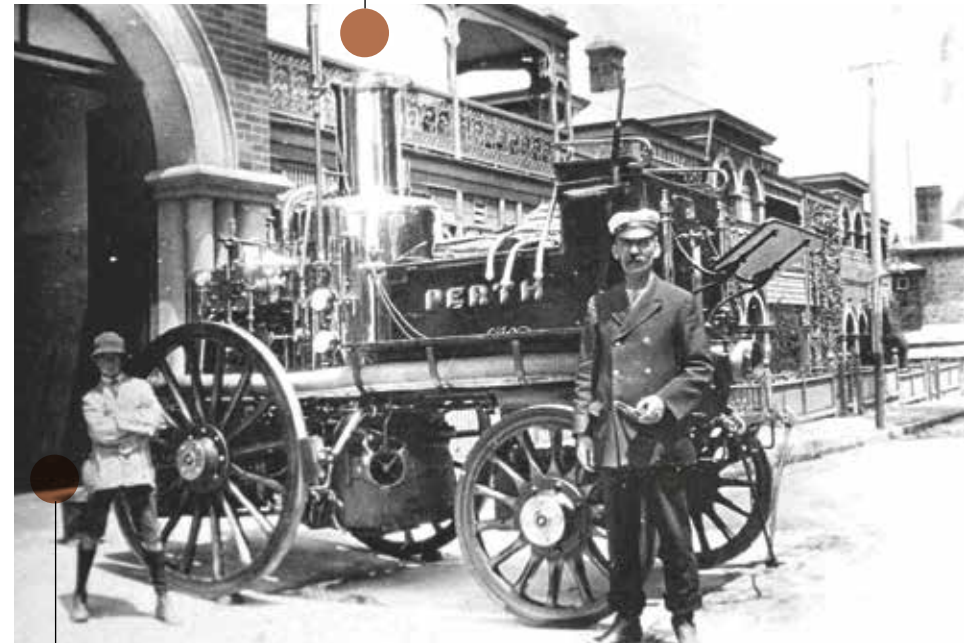
Further alterations took place following the transition from horse driven appliances to mechanical appliances. The small dormitory insitu above the rear of the fourth engine room bay was turned into an ablution area. The interior staircase from the firemen's dormitory was relocated to the rear of the main dormitory in 1926 where it was enclosed for protection from the weather. Numerous alterations and additions were carried out on the fire station engine room areas over the following years until the early 1970s but were all relatively minor.

10.1 Irwin Street Structural Changes

In July 1910, the WAFB Board Architect, Mr. Ochiltree submitted plans for additions at Headquarters, to be constructed in Irwin Street immediately in a location at the front of the workshops / gymnasium (Saint Patrick's boy's school) to the existing laneway adjacent to the two story residential houses attached to the fire station.

Of the original plans submitted in 1910, only part of the works were undertaken by 1915. These included a Lower Engine Room and Chief Officer Quarters, which also housed the WAFB Boardroom.

Other works contained within the 1910 submission were prioritised due to a number of external factors including World War 1. By late 1920s other properties in Irwin Street were gradually resumed with the plan to convert them into Officer Quarters. By 1934 these buildings were the living quarters for a number of Station Officers, the Deputy Chief Officer and other Senior Officers.



Lower Engine
Room

Photos looking South along Irwin Street showing the Lower Engine Room, Chief Officers Quarters (including Boardroom) extensions from 1910. Photo DFES Collection.

Chief Officer
Quarters both
Levels



10 Fire station extensions



WAFB buildings on right looking North along Irwin Street circa 1950s. Photo State Library of WA.



St John Ambulance Building.
Photo DFES Collection.

Chief Officers Quarters
and verandah

These and other buildings in the Murray and Hay Street precinct catered for the third shift roster which was introduced in 1947/8.

From 1915 until the mid-1970s, the Irwin Street buildings had a number of different occupancies supporting operations and administrative functions.

In the early 1960s the Fire Brigade Regulations changed, allowing Officers to reside in private residences. This allowed for the administrative functions to occupy space previously required to meet the WAFB live-on-site policy.

10.2 Ambulance Building

The WAFB had the ambulance role since its inception. Eventually this was taken over by the St John Ambulance Association who constructed a purpose built building opposite the Perth Hospital and next to the fire station in 1922.

Eventually, in 1940, the St John Ambulance Association decided to relocate away from Murray Street to a new site in Wellington Street on the corner of Pier Street.

This relocation gave the WAFB Board the opportunity to expand and purchase the St John Ambulance building in 1942.

Following modifications, the front upper level, which was a bedroom now became a dormitory for the Station Officers. The rear area was retained as the kitchen.

The ground floor engine room remained as such and was later used to house a bush fire appliance. Immediately behind was the carpenters workshop. A hose shop was established, later becoming the breathing apparatus section. Access was from a set of stairs from the yard or from a set of internal stairs at the front of the engine room.

The introduction of the fourth shift of officers in 1966 saw the need to house the extra staff as a priority. The original Chief Officers quarters became the Station Officers quarters and the old ambulance building became the Senior Officers quarters.

11

Ambulance Service - WAFB (1901 - 1922)

First ambulance in Western Australia named the Lapsley Wagon out of honor and respect for the first Fire Brigade Superintendent JM Lapsley.
Photo DFES Collection.



11 Ambulance Service – WAFB (1901 – 1922)

In the 1900s, the need for an ambulance service for the area of Perth had been identified and the brigade undertook the ambulance role. This was contrary to their roles and responsibilities described within the *Fire Brigades Act*. However, with continual strong support from Superintendent Lapsley the brigade continued to cover the first aid component of emergency response.

The first ambulance construction was initiated by Bowra and O'Dea, a local undertaker and coachbuilder of Perth. The project was financed through funds raised mainly from public donations.

The new ambulance design was based on ambulances used in the American Civil War which could transport up to six patients at a time.

It was eventually constructed and on 23 December 1904, out of respect for the person who had been very influential in promoting first aid, and very supportive of the ambulance concept, the ambulance was named The Lapsley, after the WAFB Superintendent James M. Lapsley.

To further offer emergency first aid support to the Perth community, Superintendent Lapsley also approved the use of street fire alarm pillars to call for an ambulance in an emergency. Additionally, all firemen were required to be proficient in first aid training, a legacy that still occurs to this day.

Perth firemen were quite active in providing the ambulance service and in 1911 attended 350 accidents, an increase of 80 on the previous year.²⁰

As the use of horses in incident response was gradually phased out, the original horse drawn ambulance was also phased out. Firemen then built a more sophisticated motorised vehicle called the Lapsley Van.

The modernised vehicle was eventually handed over to St Johns Ambulance as the organisation assumed responsibility for the city's ambulance service on 1 July 1922.



Lapsley's name
on the radiator

Motorised Fire Brigade Ambulance named after the Chief Officer JM Lapsley.
Photo DFES Collection.

²⁰ Trove.nla.gov.au/newspapers/rendition/nla.news-article26345606 The West Australian (Perth WA) Monday, 17 July 1911 page 9.

12

Watch room upgrades



Watch room with telephone switch board behind duty watchman. Photo DFES Collection.

12 Watch room upgrades

In the 1950s, a disabled ex-serviceman was appointed to the position of a Watch Room attendant, working on a roster of one week of day duties at a time. This additional person created greater flexibility and effectively deployed an extra fireman per shift. In 1969, the watch room was re-designated as the WA Fire Brigade Operations Centre which coordinated all of the state's emergency fire calls.

Non-operational staff were employed to crew the operations centre with staffing consisting of two people per shift with no sleeping facility.

With the continual improvements in technology, the original watch room was updated in 1962 and relocated to an internal part of the station.

A disposition board in the form of a large map on the back wall with station numbers, was the start of the electronic era and was wired to indicate the location of the permanent fire stations. Lights would glow to indicate the status of any appliance.

This indicator board was not very effective because of numerous malfunctions and with the information on the map quickly becoming outdated.

The bottom photo to right shows the Brigade disposition board for metropolitan fire stations and their designated districts.

The WAFB Operations Centre remained at the Perth Fire Station for six months after the fire station was closed in 1979. This was to ensure the new Operations Centre located in Hay Street was fully operationally tested and commissioned.

Watch room with telephone switch board.
Photo DFES Collection.



Brigade disposition board

WA Fire Brigades Operations Room in 1969. Photo DFES Collection.

13

The Murray Street Fire Station and the new fire station at rear on Hay Street, Perth. Photo DFES Collection.



**Closing of the
fire station
in 1979**

13 Closing of the fire station

By the early 1970s, planning had started for a new fire station and administrative headquarters to accommodate increased numbers of firefighters, larger fire appliances and to house administration and communications functions.

In 1975, the administration of the WAFB Board relocated to Jaxon House at 180 Hay Street, East Perth so that demolition could commence for the new brigade headquarters in Hay Street.

In 1984, in conjunction with the State Government, the WAFB Board commenced refurbishment of the premises and established the Fire Brigade Education / Museum which was officially opened in 1985.

The Perth Fire Station and those who worked there, served the community of Western Australia for just over 79 years. During that time hundreds of firemen and officers worked at the location.

A number resigned during the World Wars to fight for "King and Country". Sadly, some never returned while others rejoined to go on and have long and distinguished careers.

Over the period the fire station was operational, Perth and the surrounding suburbs grew considerably with enhancements in appliance, equipment and communication technologies.

By June 1979, a new six floor, state-of-the-art fire station was opened at 480 Hay Street, Perth and the old fire station was fully decommissioned.

The original Perth Fire Station was decommissioned on 2 May 1979 with District Officer Ron Harley being tasked with convening the collection of Fire Brigade memorabilia for the recently founded Fire Brigade Historical Society.



Smiling firemen pack up and leave the fire station in Murray Street, ready to start work at the new Hay Street Fire Station in 1979. Photo Western Australian Newspaper.



The new fire station was officially opened in 1979.



End of an Era. Photo DFES Collection.

14

New life for the old station



WA Premier Mr Brian Burke MLA opens the Heritage Centre 1985. Photo DFES Collection.

14 New life for the old Station

By the time the old station was closed it had already been classified by the National Trust (WA) in December 1975 and was later entered into the Register of the National Estate by the Australian Heritage Commission in 1978. The building was left vacant following the relocation of Perth Fire Station to its new premises in Hay Street, Perth. The decommissioned station was handed over to the WAFB Board Historical Society on 2 May 1979.²¹

The building was also included on the City of Perth's Municipal inventory and was interim listed on the State Register of Heritage Places in March 1992. In December 2008 the building was registered permanently on the WA Heritage Register.²²

However, without any real commitment or guidance in relation to the future direction of the building along with a lack of financial support, there were some concerns about the future of the old fire station.

Fortunately, in 1984 a decision was made by Premier Brian Burke to fund and convert the old fire station into a Fire Safety Education Centre and Museum.

The restoration was extensive, with the building requiring re-roofing with terracotta tiles and the reconstruction of a limestone arch that had been replaced with a concrete lintel to suit much larger fire appliances than were around in 1901.

Columns, mouldings and original doors which had been removed were replaced and internal work undertaken to include new timber stairs, toilets and a theatrette. New ceiling cornices and ceiling roses were installed to match the period.



Wall plate formally announcing building change from fire station to Education Centre. Photo DFES Collection.



Children putting on junior firefighting sets and learning all about being a firefighter. Photo DFES Collection.

21 Fire Brigade No 1 Station (former 35 Murray St Perth (http://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/ahdb/search.pl?mode=place_id=16651) Australian Heritage Database. Department of the Environment.

22 http://register.heritage.wa.gov.au/comprehensivereport.html?place_seq=2051

The building was reopened in 1985 as a WAFB Board Fire Safety Education Centre and Museum. During 2005-08 the building undertook further refurbishments to the gallery, displays and to address disability access.

While the building's original purpose more than a 100 years ago was as a specifically designed and built operational fire station, times had changed. The old fire station building has been reinvented in a different way with approximately 20,000 people passing through its doors annually.

Visitors observe and read about the history of the WA Fire Brigades.

In addition to this, the upper level hosts a Hazards Gallery with interactive displays and games in various general emergency education strategies and safety awareness for children and parents. These hazards include floods, storms, tsunamis, cyclones and many more emergency situations.

What was once a dedicated operational fire station is now an important resource for school teachers and the general public, showing that in its new direction it still continues to support the WA community today.

The building has become a noted landmark and an integral part of the historic early 1900s streetscape of the Murray Street, East Precinct in the City of Perth.



Families looking at flooding safety practices upper floor Old Perth Fire Station.



Vintage Dennis Fire appliance restored by the Volunteer Vehicle Restoration team stands on display along with other appliances and fire memorabilia. Photo DFES Collection.

Timeline

1885

The City of Perth Municipal Fire Brigade was formed.



1901

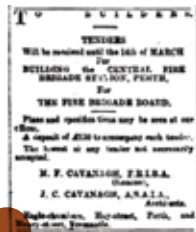
Fire station opens at midnight on the 1st of January staffed by permanent firemen.

1898

Fire Brigades Act gazetted by Parliament and land located at the corner of Irwin and Murray Streets purchased from the Catholic Church Perth Diocese as a suitable fire station site.

1900

Architect selected, Tenders obtained, Builder selected, and construction occurs.



1906

Catholic School/church next door to the fire station, with Irwin Street frontage, purchased from the Catholic Church, Perth Diocese. Workshop extended. 4th Engine room bay added to fire station. An extra appliance room with a small dormitory above was built with a small billiards room next to it on the second level. This engine room was extended to the rear in 1911 to house a turn table ladder.

1902

First Workshop built at the rear of the fire station against school building wall.

1909

Fire Brigades Act changed which included all Fire Brigades coming under the umbrella of the WAFB Board. Superintendent Lapsley made the first Chief Officer of WAFB.

1910

Rear extension of engine bay 4 expanded to house longer appliances.

1913

Additions at Headquarters, included Board Room and offices, apparatus room, ambulance shed, store and Chief officer's quarters adjacent to the lane, were well in hand and it is anticipated the alterations will be completed in March 1914.

1914

Last horse removed from Perth Fire Station as appliances became motorised.



1922

St Johns Ambulance building built at eastern end of Perth Fire Station block.

1920s

A number of properties along Irwin Street were converted into living quarters for Senior Officers and then later into offices for WAFB Board administration.

1915

Second Major Extension.



1940

St Johns Ambulance move out and created opportunity for WAFB to purchase property, which was settled in 1942.



1942

The fire station's Operations Room is prepared in case of Japanese air raids. An Auxiliary Fire Service is formed, which sees the upskilling of males and females from across the city to back up permanent firemen.



1962

Workshops move to Belmont Complex.



1970s

Planning begins for new fire station at 480 Hay Street, Perth.



1979

New fire station opens.

1975

WAFB Administration moves out of Irwin Street premises to Jaxon House, 180 Hay Street, Perth.



1979

Perth Fire Station, Murray Street closes.

1984

Government decision made to restore the Perth Fire Station building.



1985

Building reopened as Fire Safety Education Centre and Museum.

2000



2008

The building was registered permanently on the WA Heritage Register.

2005-2008

Fire Safety Education Centre and Museum closes. DFES Collection categorised and stored off site. Major refurbishments are undertaken including disability access. All Hazards Gallery developed before the Centre is reopened.

2020

Station celebrates 120 years of service and continues to serve the community of Western Australia.





The painting from 2006 "Kalla" which means "fire" in Whadjak, recognises that for thousands of years local Noongar people have used fire in cooking, hunting, farming and shaping the land in the Perth area.

The painting also reflects that while fire remains an important part of our communities, it can also put them in danger.

It supports the need for Fire Brigades to protect people, towns, cities and environment and acknowledges in colonial WA, Aboriginal people often joined Fire Brigades to help keep their people safe.

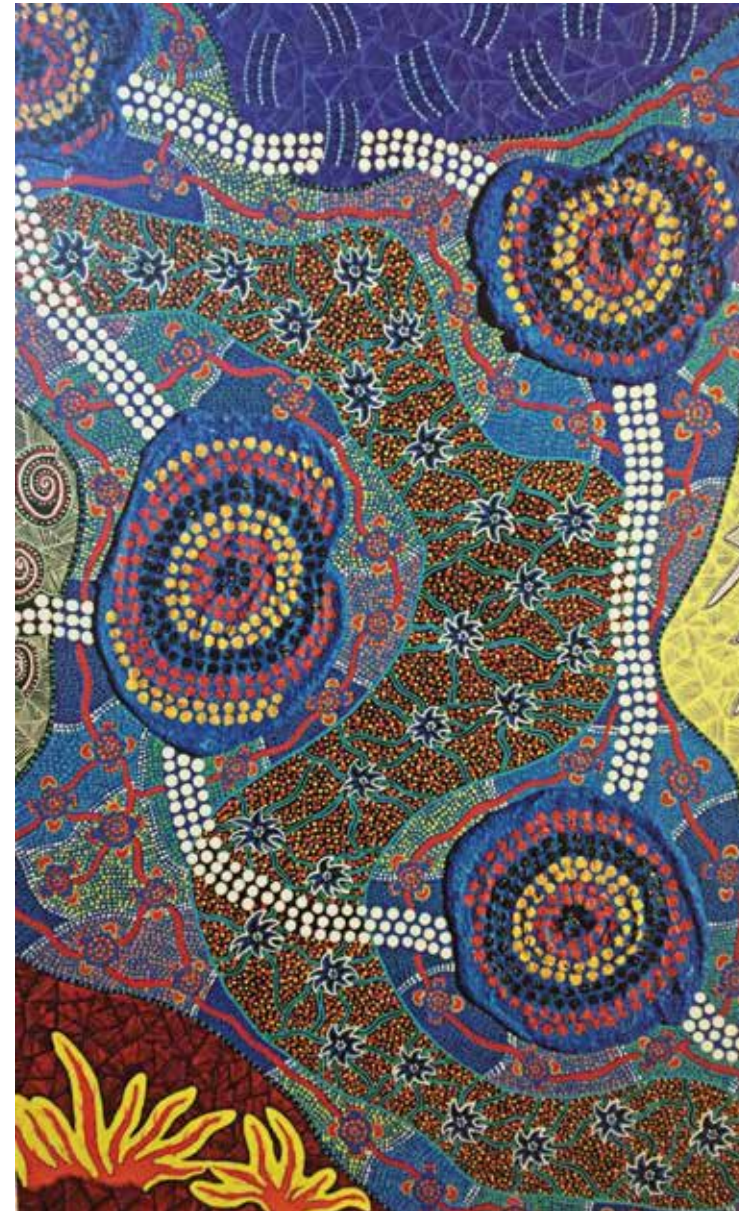


Image Deborah
Coertse -
Newenham 2006

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120 Years of WA Fire Service History ©2020

Department of Fire and Emergency Services, Western Australia

20 Stockton Bend, Cockburn Central, Western Australia 6164

Tel: (08) 9395 9300

Email: dfes@dfes.wa.gov.au

Web: www.dfes.wa.gov.au

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dfes.wa.gov.au