



Life on Station

Horses to be fed... Hoses to be mended...

In 1901 the Perth Fire Brigade moved into the spacious new Perth Fire Station. Happy to leave the cramped Town Hall undercroft, the new facilities included three engine bays, a dormitory, kitchen and workshops.

With limited permanent staff, unmarried men were required to live on station in the upstairs dormitory and married men could live close by. Their houses, fitted with a special alarm, could be no more than a two-minute bicycle ride away.

The Chief Officer and his family also lived on station. There was even a fire pole leading from the bedroom to the watchroom. After five years they moved to a house close by. The Deputy used the quarters until the mid 1920's. After that, senior officers used the rooms until the station closed in 1979.

Under the direction of Superintendent and engineer James Lapsely, The WA Fire Service and Perth Brigade were recognised as being professional and resourceful. Funding was always an issue however, as costs were spread across an expanding fire service in the city and country areas.

After decades of living without an effective fire service, the brass helmet and woollen tunic became a familiar and comforting sight in the community. Firemen quickly earned the reputation of providing a reliable emergency service.

As well as fighting fires, brigade members carried out the ambulance and rescue role even designing their own horse drawn, and later, motorised ambulance, known as the Lapsely Van.

Requiring a trade to join the brigade, firemen made almost everything they needed – their uniforms, boots and personal equipment as well as fire hoses and pumps. The electricians installed the first automated alarm system and back-up power supply which remained in working order until the station closed nearly eighty years later.

In the early days firemen worked over one hundred hours a week. The days were long and the work was hard. There was a high turnover of staff until weekly and annual leave was granted. The basic wage and leave package started at £4 a week and six days annual leave.

For the first ten years, Perth Station relied on horses for transport. Up to eight horses were kept by the brigade, which were trained and cared for by the firemen. Four horses were on duty at a time, the others were rested in paddocks close by.

Living on station enabled strong relationships to form amongst the firemen. They lived, worked, and socialised together. It was a busy lifestyle as the station was also the WA Fire Brigades' Board Headquarters and equipment depot for the whole of WA.



Sports and other activities grew hand-in-hand with the fire service. Activities such as gymnastics, brigade bands, and various sports were played. Inter-brigade “demonstrations” became a huge community event. Time was also found for charity and community work, which continues today.

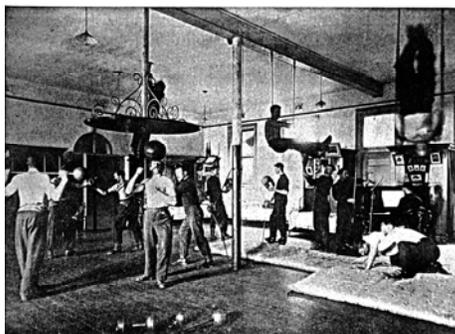
Fitness and personal training was also encouraged. The dormitory was converted into a gymnasium during the day where the men would train for an hour every day. Social events were also organised such as Christmas dinner and pantomimes. A recreation club existed which was coordinated by the firemen and subsidised by the WA Fire Brigades’ Board.

Over the years there were many additions and changes to the station precinct. The main building had undergone two major extensions by 1911 adding more engine bays and dormitory space. Buildings were purchased along Irwin Street providing living quarters, a boardroom and offices. Further additions occurred up until 1940.

Perth Central Fire Station became known as No.1 City Fire Station in the early 1970’s. The WA Fire Brigades’ Board introduced a numbering system to metropolitan stations as part of an electronic tracking map located in the operations room. In 1979 the Station closed and the Perth Brigade and WA Fire brigades’ Board moved to new premises next door. The call centre and operations room remained at the old station for several months afterwards.



Fire fireman in tunic and helmet c1910



Daily fitness training in dormitory c1905



Fitness training rear of Perth Fire Station c1905



Hose darning c1925



Workshops Perth Fire Station c1908



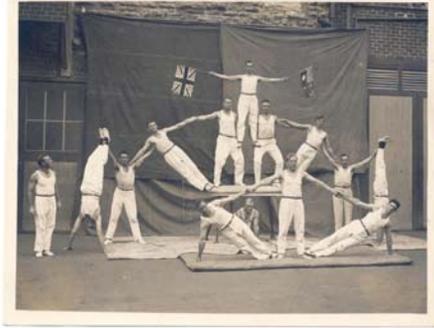
Making firemen's boots c1915



Off duty firemen Perth Fire Station c1940



Perth fire brigade horses c1915



Gymnastics training Perth Brigade c1925



Drills on station c1930



Christmas dinner at Perth Fire Station c1960



Perth Fire brigade 1925 the year when the second platoon was introduced



Last shift - fire fighters leave Perth No.1 Station for the last time.