

Pymont Fire Brigade Station No. 38



A Brief History 1881 – 2016



Pymont Fire Station, 1906.¹

**This Booklet has been produced to commemorate the re-opening of
Pymont Fire Station, at a ceremony held on
Saturday 13th February 2016**

This historical account was researched
and prepared by the Heritage Team at the



This intensive research project has brought together information using primary sources contained within Fire & Rescue NSW records, the Museum's own Digital Photographic and Research Collection, and the generous contribution of outside sources such as local libraries, historical societies and, past and present members of FRNSW.

FRNSW and the Museum of Fire comply with Government Heritage Guidelines which state that historical objects are more significant when retained in their area of use or region. Removal of these items should only be considered if their security and conservation cannot be assured.

The Museum of Fire seeks to preserve and present the history of FRNSW. Should you have any historic photographs or documents relating to the history of FRNSW, we ask that you consider making them available to be digitized by the Museum of Fire, who will then ensure they are returned to you.

The First Inhabitants

The original inhabitants of the Sydney city area were the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation. The territory of the Gadigal people stretched from the Southern Side of Sydney Harbour to the area that is now known as Petersham.² The Gadigal people were a coastal group that were dependent upon the harbour which provided most of their food.

The Gadigal had a deep understanding of every aspect of their environment and developed a rich and unique culture which they passed down through the generations. They had a unique understanding of their environment, and developed ways to live off and be sustained by the land, using special skills to farm and hunt resources without causing damage and living in harmony with the land that provided for them. Their country was nurtured and cared for, not only through physical manipulation, such as regular fires, but also through spiritual and social responsibilities.

The Pyrmont Volunteer Fire Brigade (1881-1886)

On Saturday 26 November 1881 some 2,000 people congregated on the green facing Union and Pyrmont Streets to christen the appliance of newly formed Pyrmont Brigade. Ten Brigades met at Number 1 Station, Haymarket and paraded from there to the new Station. Bands played as the procession passed through the city and the new appliance was decorated in a lovely assortment of flowers. The new manual appliance could be serviced by 14 men and was made within the NSW colony. During the Christening ceremony there was a commotion when the temporarily-erected stage the dignitaries were standing upon collapsed. Two children were injured when scaffolding became air-born however no one was seriously hurt.³

Pyrmont Fire Brigade Attend Firefighters Demonstrations:

One of the first events attended by the newly formed Pyrmont Brigade was the first ever Inter-colonial Fire Brigades Demonstration held in NSW. The demonstration occurred in November 1881 in Prince Alfred Park under the auspices of the United Volunteer Fire Brigades. On 8 November the torch-parade was met with cheers from the crowd, setting the tone for what would be a successful Demonstration. Another procession took place on the morning of 9 November which was the day of the Demonstration events and this drew attention to the day's proceedings and aided drawing in a crowd. The newly formed Pyrmont Brigade was amongst those Brigades that took part in the morning's procession.⁴

i. While this Brigade was known as a "Volunteer Brigade", in truth the attached firefighters were paid for their attendance at fire events. Therefore in October 1994, NSWFB made an organisation-wide decision to change the designation of "volunteer" firefighters to "retained" in order to more accurately represent their role within the Brigade as fully-trained, paid firefighters.

In all, about 6,000 people attended the day's proceedings, however long intervals between events meant that the crowd became restless and began to walk across the Demonstration ground which was off-limits to the public. A number of Firefighters attempted to stop the public entering the field, however their efforts were in vain so a new technique was tried, directing the water from the hose at the crowd to keep them back. This did not bode well though as in a portion of the crowd hit by the water were a number of ladies who were relatives of one of the promoters.⁵

A similar Demonstration was also held annually in Victoria. In May 1882 Pymont was among a number of NSW Volunteer Brigades that travelled south to attend the event in Melbourne. Over 3,000 volunteer firefighters took part in the Demonstration with Pymont Brigade leading the NSW contingent in the procession.⁶

Later in the year the second annual NSW Demonstration took place between the two states again in November. The proceedings were again begun with a procession, within which Pymont Brigade took part. The procession was accompanied by a number of bands and attracted such a crowd that it blocked traffic as it made its way through the city. Improvements had been made from the previous year with new 'side-show' stalls, a new Grandstand that seated between 600 and 700, and an improved railing that separated the competitors from the public. The organisers also succeeded in creating a faster-paced program, though they did fail to complete three of the events on the day with these having to be competed the following morning.⁷

The last Inter-colonial Demonstration attended by the Pymont Brigade was the Third Annual NSW gathering that took place in November 1883. At this event the Pymont Brigade is noted as being called the Pymont and Ultimo Brigade. It appears that, like at previous Demonstrations the Brigade did not win any team competitions.⁸

Pymont Volunteer Brigade Disbanded:

Though the first volunteer Brigade of Pymont operated from a Station in Union Street it was never registered with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade.⁹ The Brigade was disbanded in 1886 after William Bear, Superintendent of the MFB, wrote the following in the 1885 Annual Report;

*"I may here inform your Board that the Pymont and Ultimo Volunteer Fire Company may well be considered disbanded, as they have paid very little attention during the past year even to their own district, and are now trying to sell their plant."*¹⁰

Big Fire at Pymont but no Local Brigade to Respond Quickly, 12 April 1902.¹¹

At approximately 5:30pm on 12 April 1902 Pymont was gripped by a large fire. In less than half an hour, five or six large buildings covering almost a city block had been swept out of existence. During this half-hour period almost all of the city's fire fighting force descended on the scene; however witnesses stated that to fully fight the fire three times the manpower and equipment would be needed. Within the fire zone were a number of stables and sheds of great height that stood little chance against the billowing blaze. As the blaze grew volunteers rushed to free the horses and remove any items of furniture or vehicles that they could. The energies of the Brigade were directed, not to saving those buildings alight, for they were already too far damaged, but to stopping the spread of fire to other buildings. A strong breeze did not assist the attempts of the firefighters as it blew the fire from building to building. In all over 100 firefighters attended the blaze and though they stopped it spreading beyond the initial houses set alight, these buildings were completely destroyed.



An artists rendition of firefighters battling the blaze that appeared in a newspaper at the time.

The Establishment of a Station

On 25 August 1904, the site of the current Pymont Fire Station was resumed from a Mr. Mathew Harris at a cost of £1,425 (approximately \$209,000 today). It wasn't until March 1905, however, that the Board accepted the tender of Mr J.C. O'Brien to erect a fire station on the site.¹² Prior to this there was much discussion about the erection of a fire station in Pymont as in March 1904, Superintendent Alfred Webb had already secured an appliance for use by the Brigade. He stated that if a temporary building could be erected he would make the appliance available for use as at the present time it was being used as a spare appliance at Headquarters.¹³

In August 1906, prior to the opening of the new Pymont Station, Superintendent Alfred Webb had recommended to the Board of Fire Commissioners that the strength of the Brigade at Pymont be increased to ten men to facilitate the manning of the Station. This increase was approved, raising the number of permanent firefighters within the Metropolitan Fire Brigade to 176.¹⁴

Designed by Government Architect, Walter Vernon, the new Station was erected at a cost of £6239 (approximately \$877,000 today). The Station was occupied on 18th December 1906 and the first firefighters reported for duty at 4pm that day.¹⁵ Though there was no official opening held for the Station, on 20 December 1906 a number of Board Members inspected the new Station.¹⁶

**The Original
Members of the
Pymont Fire
Brigade in 1906
were:¹⁷**

SO Samuel HOLMAN
Samuel FLETCHER
Francis
WHITEHOUSE
Angus SMITH
Walter WYLIE
Cameron MURRAY
John BARNABY
S. B. PARKINSON
Patrick McCAULEY
William TANNER



Pymont Fire Station, c. 1906.¹⁸

Memorable Incidents 1906-1945

Brigade Gets Blaze Under Control in Twelve Minutes, 20 August 1909.¹⁹

Shortly after 11pm on Friday 20 August 1909 a man rushed to Pymont Fire Station and announced that a fire was in progress in Harris Street. Fearful of the size of the fire, a large contingent was sent to battle the blaze with men drawn from Brigades across the city, however when the crews reached the site of the fire in Harris Street, they found that the building alight was that of the Federal Manufacturing Company and the blaze was gotten under control in 12 minutes. Only the ground floor suffered any damage, most of which was water damage. The fire is thought to have been caused by a candle.

Fire Causes £20,000 (\$2.3 million today) Damage in Pymont, 11 October 1912.²⁰

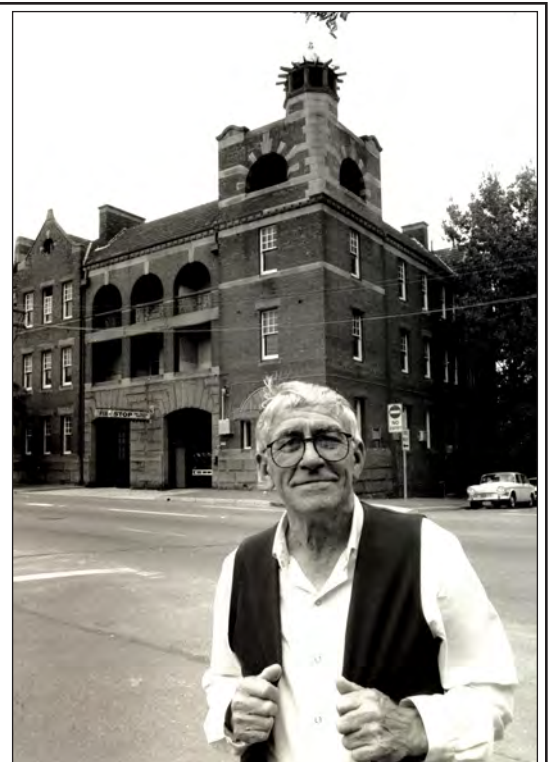
When firefighters arrived at D. Hardy's Wheelwrights and Coachbuilders premises in Pymont on Friday 11 October 1912 they found it to be well alight. Fire was coming through the windows and bursting through the roof with large amounts of timber in the building providing fuel for the fire. Expensive machinery was also attacked by the fire which caused sparks to fly in many directions. While the sparks did not cause any further buildings to catch alight, the intense heat of the fire did cause a number of fences across the street to catch fire. The premises sat next to a number of timber yards so the Brigade did a good job in stopping the fire from spreading to these premises. While the building of Mr. Hardy did receive damage of up to £20,000 (approximately \$2.3 million today) the Brigade did manage to save part of the premises which housed the finished wheels totally £25,000 (approximately \$2.85 million today).

The Families that Called Pymont Fire Station Home

With such intensive working hours many Fire Stations also provided living quarters for the Firefighters and their families.

Firefighter Lewis Phillips and his two brothers were born in the rooms above Pymont Fire Station where their father was stationed until 1922. Lew recalls being told by his Father that, as they lived directly above the watchroom, when his Mother went into labour and his Father was on duty she would bang on the floor alerting his Father to call the midwife.

Lew's Father eventually took up a position as Station Officer in Wagga Wagga and when he was 17, Lew joined his brothers as Volunteer Firefighters. After World War Two Lew joined the Brigade as a Permanent member and remained in the Brigade until 1972.²¹



Lew Phillips outside Pymont Fire Station

Dan the Fire Dog, Pymont Fire Brigade's Mascot.²²

After the new Station was built at Pymont a four legged friend made himself at home, Dan the fox-terror! Dan's Mother lived in Redfern Fire Station where he was born before transferring to Pymont Fire Station as a pup. Dan was trained to follow commands and would grab his fire hat (pictured wearing it here) before jumping into his spot at the front of the appliance with the rest of the Brigade. Dan was so well loved that in July 1914 the Sydney Sunday Times did an article on what a special little dog he was!



Thieves Suspected in Pymont Fire, 17 February 1924.²³

At about 3am on Sunday 17 February 1924 a Mrs. Addison was making her way home in her motor car when she saw fire gaining hold of a factory in Pymont so she promptly drove to the Fire Station to alert the Brigade. It was found that the fire was taking hold of a bedstead and wire-mattress factory on Abattoir Road, with a number of beds and mattresses found to have already been destroyed. Once the Brigade extinguished the fire, they found that the safe at the front of the building had been tampered with and kerosene was found near the safe and in other areas of the building. The owner of the premises stated that two previous attempts had been made to break into the safe with an explosive device used on the first occasion and on the most recent occasion the bottom of the safe was cut away with safe breaking tools.

Five Men Injured in Pymont Sugar Works Explosion, 23 January 1926.²⁴

A mysterious explosion occurred in the packing room of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company's Works on the morning of Saturday 23 January 1926. The foreman suffered severe burns to his face, neck and limbs as did a packer and labourer. A manufacturer received serious burns to his face and body, while another labourer received scalp wounds, a possible fracture and concussion. The men were working in the packing room when at about 9:40am there was a tremendous roar and the men felt themselves being thrown backwards and attacked by flames. The room was filled with smoke making it impossible for the men to see. The noise of the explosion attracted other workmen who rushed into the room to try to locate the injured men who were losing consciousness. The force of the explosion had also collapsed part of a wall which hampered the rescue effort. With the outbreak of the fire a message was despatched to the Fire Brigade through the automatic sprinklers and so Pymont Brigade were quickly on the scene working to stop the spread of the fire. The cause of the explosion and subsequent fire was unknown as only sugar was kept in the room, with authorities suggesting that spontaneous combustion may have taken place.

Pymont Wool Fire, 25 September 1935.²⁵

The fire at the Goldbrough, Mort and Company Wool Store was described by Senior Officers on the day as the largest yet seen in Sydney! The building was a wool store holding 40,000 bales of wool. The alarm was received at 7:15am on 25 September 1935 with Pymont Brigade the first on the scene. Upon arrival back-up was requested as the eight-storey building was completely engulfed in flames. By 8am the wool store was surrounded by fifteen pumpers with twenty-seven jets of water directed onto the blaze from different angles to attempt to stop the fire from spreading to surrounding buildings. The intense heat forced firefighters back, with many only just escaping out of the way as the main wall of the building collapsed. By 10am the main blaze had been brought under control, however it wasn't until nine days later that the fire was declared completely out. Some 49,140 kilolitres of water was used to fight the blaze with 27 officers and 172 firefighters present to battle the initial fire. The cause of the fire remained unknown with spontaneous combustion initially suspected, however, authorities were critical of this as they believed the speed at which the fire spread led support to an arson or cigarette butt theory, however no evidence was found to support either theory.



Firefighters battle the blaze at the Goldbrough, Mort and Company Wool Store, 25 September 1935.²⁶

Brigade Members Injured in Soapworks Fire, 31 July 1937.²⁷

More than twenty firefighters were injured in a fire that destroyed most of the Australian Soaps Ltd works in Alexandria on 31 July 1937. The fire which was considered to be the most serious in Sydney since the Wool Store fire a few years previously, saw more than 100 firefighters attend the blaze. The Brigade had to face intense heat to battle the fire which blistered the skin on the hands and faces of many of the men. They also suffered oil and fat showers as the contents of the building were affected by the fire. Due to the vast nature of the fire many people came out to watch the firefighters work and were especially impressed with their newest weapon, foam, which tackled the fire in a manner that water could not. This is one of the reasons that their firefighting efforts were considered so successful. The fire began at approximately 9pm and was only gained under control in the early hours of the following morning. It was only after the fire was under control that many of the men sought help for the injuries and burns they had received. The damage bill was estimated at £85,000 (approximately \$7.4million today).



Pyrmont Fire Brigade with their Dennis 500/700 pumper, outside Pyrmont Fire Station, c. 1928.²⁸

The Ghost of Pymont Fire Station

Over the years many have reported the presence of a ghost in Pymont Fire Station. The most common and popular reason behind this is the belief that it is the ghost of Station Officer Fred Bathie. SO Bathie was stationed and lived at Pymont Station during the 1920s-30s when the 'pushers' terrorised the area. By all accounts SO Bathie wouldn't be bullied by the gangs and so made many an enemy of them. Despite his determined attitude to not bow to the pressures of the gangs, he suffered considerable anxiety due to the threats they made against him.

Legend suggests that it is thus his ghost that haunts Pymont Fire Station however SO Bathie retired from the Brigade on 25 September 1936 and did not die in Pymont Station but rather died over three years later elsewhere. While many believe the ghost of Pymont Station to be SO Bathie it seems unlikely given he did not die at the Station.

Over the years the famous Pymont Ghost has come to be known as 'Harry', however the possibility of a ghost seems somewhat unlikely with no other reported deaths at the Station since its inception.²⁹



Pymont Fire Brigade pictured outside Pymont Fire Station, c. 1928

SO Fred Bathie is pictured middle, seated.

Pictured seated on the left is Wally Plumbe who rose to the rank of Sub-Station Officer before he was tragically killed responding to a fire in 1940.

Pymont Fire Station Closed (1945-1959)

During World War Two (WWII) Pymont Fire Station was reconditioned to assist with the War Effort, with auxiliary workshop premises established to disperse the amount of work from headquarters.³⁰ Following WWII, Pymont Fire Station was closed as the NSW Fire Brigades underwent a re-structure. It was believed that more modern vehicles were now available and hence fewer Fire Stations would be needed with the appliances able to travel faster and further.³¹

On 9 September 1946 the possibility of re-opening Pymont Fire Station was discussed, when the Town Clerk implored the Board of Fire Commissioners to consider providing more coverage and security to the area. The Board responded by stating that;

“So far as Pymont is concerned the Board desires to point out that this portion of the City of Sydney was always successfully covered by Headquarters and by the facilities provided by the Brigades at George St West, Glebe, etc., and since the re-organisation with the concentration of the staff at more convenient and strategic points, the Board’s experience has entirely vindicated its decision to re-organise the fire protection services in the Metropolitan Area... The Board, in the light of its experience, can see no reason to justify a replacement of the service at Pymont that makes six firemen available for a turn-out to fires.”³²

Initially, after the Station was closed it was used as a relay station, which meant that it was used for the receiving and transferring of alarms and the supervision of telephone and automatic alarms and sprinkler systems.³³ Fire engines were also housed in the Station building and maintained as standby appliances, available for use when required while the quarters within the Station were still occupied by members of the Brigade attached to other Stations.

In 1951, a motor vehicle maintenance section was established in the Station as part of a program to permanently decentralise workshop activities from headquarters.³⁴

On 23 December 1951 all uniformed staff were withdrawn from Pymont Fire Station.³⁵

Pymont Fire Station Re-Opened (1960-1992)

After a review of the fire protection afforded by the Stations located in Sydney, the NSW Board of Fire Commissioners decided to re-open Pymont Fire Station as well as those at Ryde and Mascot.³⁶ On 16 December 1960 Pymont Fire Station was re-opened at 7am when District Officer Cruise and Station Officer Flynn called the role. At 8:26am Deputy Chief Officer Welch arrived to inspect the Station and at 8:40am he left with District Officer Cruise, leaving Station Officer Flynn in command of the Station.³⁷

Whilst it was closed as an active Fire Station, Pymont had housed the Transport Section of the NSW Fire Brigade for a number of years. With work being undertaken to enhance the aging building, prior to the Brigade returning to service there, it was also requested that upgrades be made to better house the Transport workshops.³⁸ A new roof, new concrete floor and new doors were required to better house the workshop staff and appliances currently being worked upon. The estimated cost of the work was £5,400 (approximately \$150,000 today).³⁹ The work was completed in July 1962 however the initial costing estimate was surpassed with the work totally £6093 (approximately \$166,000 today). One of the reasons put forward for this increase was the extensive electrical work that was completed in the garage to enhance the working space of the workshop staff.⁴⁰



Pymont Fire Station, 1979.⁴¹

Memorable Incidents 1960-1992

Spectacular Broadway Fire, 23 September 1961.⁴³

At 8:15pm on Saturday 23 September 1961 several calls were received by the Sydney watchroom that the building occupied by Malley's Ltd in Mountain Street, Broadway was alight. The first Brigade's on the scene were Pyrmont and Glebe who were confronted with a two-sectioned building; one portion being four-storey and the other two-storey, completely engulfed in flames. As the crews arrived the roof of the two-storey portion collapsed, sending sparks and embers into the air. A strong south-easterly wind subsequently blew the embers into surrounding factories. Brigade's worked swiftly to contain the fire to the one building and were successful in this endeavour. Back-up was required with over 60 fire-fighters from ten Station's needed to battle the blaze. The fire was eventually extinguished at 10:49pm leaving the Malley's building with damages estimated to be £200,000 (approximately \$5.4 million today).

Lyceum Fire, 25 February 1964.⁴⁴

At 5:50am on 25 February 1964 the alarm was raised of a fire in one of Sydney's oldest and most famous theatres, the Lyceum. Pyrmont and Darlinghurst Brigades were the first to respond and found that much of the theatre was already engulfed in flames. Initial fire fighting efforts were directed at the dress circle, however as the fire had already reached the roof it wasn't long before the roof collapsed. This occurred at 6:12am with the roof falling onto the stall section of the seating, sending the fire closer to the stage portion of the theatre. At this time more Stations joined the battle against the blaze, with efforts concentrated through the Wesley Chapel on Castlereagh Street. The Chapel offices received water damage but were largely unaffected. Though the fire was contained by 7:15am, crews remained at the site of the fire for two more days. The estimated damage to the historic building is £200,000 (approximately \$5.25 million today).



Fairfax Warehouse Fire, 9 February 1971.⁴⁵

At 2:07pm on 9 February 1971 reports were received of a fire in Jones Street, Pyrmont. When the Brigade from Pyrmont arrived they found that the building alight was in fact a large warehouse, the main bulk newsprint storage for Fairfax newspapers. The fire began at the top of a stack of newspaper and it is believed that the speed of the fire was propelled by a fine layer of coal dust deposited on roof trusses; however the actual cause was never determined. Within twelve minutes of Pyrmont and Glebe Station's arriving at the scene another eight Station's responded to assist the battle against the growing blaze. The fire spread with incredible veracity, engulfing the entire building in fifteen minutes. It became clear that the building couldn't be saved and so all efforts were turned to protecting surrounding buildings. Due to the size of the building the water from the hoses couldn't reach the centre of the building from where most of the heat was being produced and further fuelling the fire. Eventually there were 24 appliances, including two fire boats involved in fighting the fire which took nine hours to extinguish. It wasn't however, until 23 February that fire crews finally left the site when the authorities were satisfied that the fire was completely out.



Elizabeth House Fire, 30 November 1974.⁴⁶

Surrey Hills was rocked by a blast on Saturday night, 30 November 1974. When crews arrived at the mixed-occupancy building named 'Elizabeth House' they found it to be alight from the sixth floor. A huge explosion from this floor had hurled large items across busy Elizabeth Street and the noise was so loud that it had been heard at headquarters. Crews began battling the sixth floor blaze by directing water onto it from their position in the street. No further blasts were experienced while crews from Pymont, The Rocks, Glebe, Redfern and Waterloo worked to save the building and to limit the amount of water damage to the lower floors. The Brigade was successful in this endeavour.



Sydney City Centre Burns, 14 January 1975.⁴⁷

On 14 January 1975 Sydney firefighters faced what many described as the most difficult and hazardous commercial property fire in Sydney for many years. At 11:27am the alarm was raised that smoke was coming from the basement of a historic building in Sydney's CBD. The building had originally housed Angus and Robertson book publishers, however they had vacated the building in 1972 after which time it was occupied by a variety of commercial enterprises.

Firefighters wearing breathing apparatus had attempted to enter the part of the building affected to extinguish the fire, however, their efforts were hampered by the intense heat, smoke and lack of access to the basement area. While the Rocks Brigade fought the initial blaze, Pymont and Glebe began the difficult task of evacuating the neighbouring Centrepont complex and David Jones. As crews attempted to battle the blaze they discovered a maze of corridors that also hindered their efforts. Despite the efforts of firefighters at 2pm the fire jumped above the basement level and within minutes had engulfed the entire building. It wasn't until 8:30pm that the blaze was finally brought to an end, however the historic building was destroyed.



Sydney City Centre Burns Again, 26 May 1976.⁴⁸

On Wednesday 26 May 1976 at 3:23am inner-Sydney Brigades were called to the historic Strand Arcade where fire had gripped the basement, ground floor and upper floors of the building. Crews battled the blaze from the ground as well as from above with snorkel appliances. Procedure dictated that when the inner-city Brigades were engaged in such a big firefighting effort, crews from the outer-city area moved to a standby position at key Stations across the city in case of further emergencies. In this case this proved crucial as firefighters battling the Strand Arcade blaze noticed smoke coming from a building further down George Street. When they raised the alarm at 3:39am, Pymont raced from their place at the Strand Arcade to this second fire at Harpoon Harry's, a first-floor tavern and nightspot. Stanmore Brigade had been enroute to standby at headquarters but were diverted to assist Pymont battle this second blaze. While crews battled this new blaze, the initial fire at the Strand Arcade grew in ferocity with the high glass roof at the George Street end exploding from the heat within the building, forcing crews back.

Crews battling the tavern blaze had greater success with firefighters wearing breathing apparatus able to enter the building and directly fight the fire. By 5:22am the fire was out at the tavern and shortly after this at 5:36am the fire in the Strand Arcade was extinguished. Both fires left considerable damage, especially to the Strand Arcade which had been gutted in parts, however its historic structure remained and so was able to be restored to its original appearance.



Large Fire in Ultimo, 19 March 1978.⁴⁹

Pymont Brigade was turned out to reports of a fire at a former wool store at the corner of William Henry Street and Bulwarra Road at 3:15am on 19 March 1978. Upon arrival Pymont sent a message for more appliances as they discovered the breadth of the fire. The building was absorbed in flames which was threatening nearby tenement housing. The building was originally used as a wool store, however, now three separate businesses occupied the premises; a plastic flower and paper decorations store, a plastic furniture manufacturer and the final section was used to house TAB betting tickets. A severe wind was also blowing, fanning the flames of the fire so it became essential that the Brigade stop the fire from spreading across the street to other premises. Pymont were tasked specifically with protecting the residential tenements that backed onto the building. Only 13 minutes after the initial call, the southern wall of the building collapsed into the back yards of the tenements causing extensive damage to outside laundries and toilets. Brigade access was also hindered to the fire ground, as other parts of the building collapsed falling into the road blocking the path of firefighters. The wind also picked up which meant that burning embers were sent flying several hundreds of meters in all directions. Additional appliances were detailed with putting out these spot fires as they occurred in the surrounding area. Pymont and their appliance had to be withdrawn from their position as the fire threatened their safety; they then directed their efforts on protecting a nearby church. By 3:44am the wind had increased to gale force and despite the best efforts of crews, the fire spread across the road to a weatherboard building which soon became totally engulfed by fire. This new source of fuel saw the fire become intense and it even spread to the roof of an adjoining property, however crews contained the fire just to this portion of the roof. At 4:20am the remaining two walls of the initial building collapsed allowing crews to move in and contain the fire. Collapsed power lines made the task of firefighters more dangerous, and despite initial attempts to work around the fallen lines, a decision was eventually made to blackout the whole area of Ultimo to make it safer for crews. At 5:13am the STOP message was able to be sent.



Ghost Train Fire at Luna Park, 9 June 1979.⁵⁰

At 10:14pm on Saturday, 9 June 1979 a fire was reported in the Ghost Train at Sydney's Luna Park. Large crowds were at the popular Sydney attraction and this made it difficult for crews to initially reach the ride. Attendants rushed to evacuate the Park while crews made their way to the Ghost Train. Park Staff were unsure if anyone was left inside the building and the great heat and vast nature of the flames meant that crews could not enter the building in order to conduct a search. As additional crews were called in to assist, water was drafted from the harbour and a breathing apparatus van was requested. Pyrmont's "B Platoon" joined crews from Crows Nest, Neutral Bay, The Rocks, Lane Cove, Mosman and Willoughby to fight the blaze. As the fire grew, flames spread to the big dipper rollercoaster overhead, which crews quickly turned their attention to speedily extinguish. The ghost train building eventually collapsed, and by 11:17pm the emergency had ended, and the grim task of searching for victims took place over the next six hours. Seven bodies were found; four school boys as well as a father and his two sons.



The Strand Arcade Threatened by Fire Again, 13 March 1980.⁵¹

On Thursday evening, 13 March 1980 numerous triple zero calls were received stating there was a fire in 'Shopping World' in Pitt Street. The area was crowded with many shoppers, however the building from which the fire was issuing was unoccupied as it was under demolition. A building on one side of the fire-ridden building was also under demolition, but the building on the other side was the Strand Arcade that had only been recently restored after the 1976 fire. Firefighters inside the Strand Arcade could see flames through the Strands glass roof, however, despite parts of the glass shattering crews were able to keep the fire away from the building. Spot fires broke out on the roof of the other un-occupied building but crews worked swiftly to extinguish these. Pyrmont Brigade were amongst 104 firefighters to take part in battling the blaze. By 11pm the blaze was contained to the 'Shopping World' building and crews turned their attention to fully extinguishing the fire in the guttered building.

Historic Sydney Building Fire, 12 December 1984.⁵²

The historic building at 23 Bridge Street (the Lands Department Building) in the city was built in two sections; firstly in the 1870s and then in the 1890s. At 11:02am on 12 December 1984 reports were received that smoke was seen coming from the roof and base of the clock tower. Within minutes crews from Headquarters and the Rocks responded to find the clock tower alight with a substantial fire above the fourth floor. The location of the blaze made it difficult for crews to reach and the fire only increased in volume as it broke through the ceiling. More manpower was requested, and so Pymont Brigade attended the scene as did crews from Darlinghurst, Drummoyne, Redfern, Waterloo, Woollahra and Alexandria. At the height of the fire over 61 firefighters were present to battle the blaze. Conditions faced by firefighters were difficult, with a number needing to be escorted back to ground level after suffering excess smoke inhalation and heat exhaustion as they battled the blaze in the roof void, which was experiencing a lack of ventilation. At 12:22pm the STOP message was sent. Though the historic building had been severely damaged the clock tower was preserved. Firefighters had also been successful in preserving a number of historic records that were stored in the building.



Pymont Blaze, 20 April 1990.⁵³

Pymont Brigade were the first on the scene when fire was reported at an importers and accountancy business on Experiment Street in Pymont on 20 April 1990. The alarm was raised at 11:09pm and Pymont Brigade arrived minutes later to find the building well alight. The Bronto was set up on the western side of the building while the No 18 Hydraulic Platform did the same on the eastern side. Firefighters had to wear breathing apparatus as the cardboard and plastics stored in the building meant toxic fumes were being produced as they caught fire. Initially crews gained entrance to the building through the main front doors, however, without warning the roof caved in onto the second floor which sent large beams crashing down to the first floor. Those outside the building feared for those inside. Though the firefighters inside were unscathed, part of their hose was trapped under the rubble. Crews worked to find another entrance from which to fight the blaze and eventually cut another access point through a roller door. The STOP message was transmitted at 1:08am the following morning.

Pre-School Fire, 12 April 1991.⁵⁴

Even before they left their Station, Pymont Fire Brigade could see smoke issuing from a building in the distance near Darling Harbour on 12 April 1991. Upon arrival Pymont Brigade could see nothing but flames coming from the pre-school and so got to work attempting to extinguish the fire. The quick-thinking staff of the pre-school had gotten the 21 children outside to an evacuation point at the first sign of smoke, however their attendance list was left inside the burning building so no one was 100% sure that everyone was out safely. With this at the forefront of their minds, firefighters from Pymont acted swiftly to enter the building to ensure that no one had been left behind. The speed at which the fire engulfed the building was incredible and hence the Brigade stated that, had the children been asleep at the time of the fire they would have struggled to get everyone out in time. The fire was eventually extinguished by 5:33pm.

New South Wales's Biggest Fire in Twenty-Five Years, 6 July 1992.⁵⁵

Described as one of the biggest fires in NSW within 25 years, the disused Australian Mercantile Land and Finance Store caught on fire at 12:15pm on the 6 July 1992. Over 25 stations and 119 personnel responded. When fire crews arrived on the scene a quick strategy was developed to surround and contain the fire, so as to maximise the available resources. The strategy required that firefighters and equipment be close enough to be effective, but be so placed that withdrawal and relocation could be made should the fires intensity or conditions deteriorate. Even with this strategy in place, the ground area in the immediate vicinity of the building became extremely dangerous due to falling window glass, bricks and debris – but fire crews maintained their positions. In total 12,960 thousand cubic meters of water was directed at the fire before it was extinguished. Three firefighters sustained minor injuries, but there were no civilian casualties.



Pyrmont Fire Station Renovations (1993-2006)

In 1993 Pyrmont Fire Station was closed and made ready for sale. The Brigade and appliances were re-located to the City of Sydney Headquarters in the interim.⁵⁶ Though it was still planned that the Station would be sold and new premises sought for the Brigade on the waterfront, the sale of the building was delayed and for the interim the Brigade moved back into the aging Station on 18 January 1997 to afford the Pyrmont area better fire protection. Prior to the Brigade re-occupying the building it underwent a number of renovations to better serve the purposes of the Brigade.⁵⁷

In the financial year 2002-03 the Department of Commerce provided funding for restoration work for Pyrmont Fire Station, through its State Heritage and Retained Properties Program to coincide with the upcoming Centenary of the Station in 2006. It was at this time that talk of selling the heritage listed Station ceased.⁵⁸



Pyrmont Fire Station During the period of closure, c. 1997.⁵⁹

All Season's Hotel Fire, 11 December 2000.⁶⁰

Guests at Sydney's All Season's Hotel in Darling Harbour were enjoying their breakfast, when smoke began seeping through the floorboards and a wall on the mezzanine level of the hotel at approximately 8:30am on Monday 11 December 2000. The automatic fire alarm was activated as the room began to fill with smoke and staff rushed to evacuate guests. Pyrmont and the City of Sydney Brigades were first on the scene making their way to the mezzanine level, where they found a pizza oven located on the level directly underneath. The Firefighters cut a hole in the floorboards to gain access to the fire which they quickly extinguished. Fire Investigators then discovered that the pizza oven was not the cause of the fire, but rather it was caused by a small transformer located on a timber support. The transformer's purpose was to drive a floor light that over time had heated up and absorbed all the moisture from the timber leaving it easily ignitable. Thanks to the fast work of the Brigade a major disaster was avoided and so the grateful management of the hotel supplied the firefighters with refreshments.

Celebrating a Centenary and Recent Renovations (2007-2016)

On 31 March 2007 celebrations were held at Pymont Fire Station to celebrate 100 years since the opening of the Station in December 1906. More than 200 people joined the celebrations which featured a parade of past Firefighters that had been stationed at Pymont.⁶¹

On 25 June 2014 FRNSW issued the tender for the redevelopment of Pymont Fire Station. Extensive consultations took place on how best to preserve the heritage listed building whilst still providing a modern environment for those firefighters stationed there. During the construction phase the Pymont Brigade and their appliance were re-located to the City of Sydney Fire Station.⁶²

Due to its long history Pymont Fire Station is listed on the State Heritage Register, therefore immense work was done during the refurbishment and renovation of the Station to preserve the history of the building. Some of the steps taken by FRNSW to achieve this are:

- Any new brickwork was completed to match that of the existing brickwork
- Only areas of damage or missing joins were given attention in regards to the mortar
 - All original timber floorboards were kept, with work done to enhance them where necessary or additional boards added above the existing ones where safety was a concern
- Original glass was retained where possible

Some examples of the Conservation work undertaken by FRNSW to preserve the heritage of building during renovations are:



The Original Fireplace has been preserved in what will now be the firefighters gym.



The Original stove has been maintained in its original position. The room is now used as an office space.

More Examples of Conservation Work Undertaken in Pymont Fire Station:



Right: Graffiti drawn on the walls by former residents have been preserved with glass-faced frames.



Left: The original tin roof and external portions of the building are preserved within the new building structure

Prior to the start of renovations archaeological excavations were undertaken and a number of items were recovered through this process and throughout the renovation process. While the most common items uncovered were glass products and porcelain tableware, some of the other items uncovered are shown here:

Right: A bell that was once used to alert firefighters to an incident in progress was found during the construction process within the wall space. This bell may date back to when the station was first opened as electricity was introduced to Sydney in 1905.



Bottom Left: Telegraph List. Many paper based items were found within the Station such as an old lottery ticket and this telegraph list. All electrical cables are noted on this list which traverses the globe from London and Belfast to Sydney and Bombay (now Mumbai).

Bottom Right: Found in the Backyard of the Station this is an Iron Horse Shoe that is now covered in corrosion. The shoe most probably dates back to the early 1900s when the Brigade used horses to mobilise their appliance.



Pyrmont Fire Brigade Appliance List

Year	Model, Make	Number	Type
1881	-	-	Manual
1906	Shand Mason	11	Steam Pumper
1906	Bain	10	Curricule Ladder
1913	Dennis 75 HP	73	Pumper
1924	Shand Mason	18	Steam Pumper
1928	Dennis 500/700	16	Pumper
1937	Aster-Gwynne	10	Trailer Pump
1938	Dennis Light 6	102	Pumper
1960	Dennis Big 6	132	Pumper
1960	Dennis-Magirus	3	Turntable Ladder
1967	Ford D750	331	Foam Pumper
1969	Mack Type 75	293	Pumper
1971	Dennis D600	431	Pumper
1975	ERF - Simon	489	Hyd Platform
1979	International 1710B	385	Pumper
1985	International 1810C	117	Pumper
1994	Austral Firepac 3500	240	Pumper
2004	Varley Commander T3	860	Pumper
2010	Isuzu FRR	380	CO2 Tender
2011	Scania P320	269	Pumper
2012	Isuzu FRR	201	CO2 Tender



Dennis F2 pumping water from a wharf in Pyrmont, c. 1969.⁶³

Pymont Fire Brigade

Appliances Today At The



In the 1890s the City of Sydney was expanding and so the Metropolitan Fire Brigade sought an appliance that could pump water as high as 10-storeys should the need arise. Therefore in 1891, Shand Mason & Co. of London produced, what was at the time, the largest capacity steamer built for land use.

The appliance featured an inclined water tube boiler with a steam pressure of 120 psi 9800kPa. The appliance was used at City of Sydney Headquarters and Circular Quay Fire Stations until it was retired out of the inner-city in 1913, when it was adapted from a horse-drawn appliance into one that could be towed by a truck. In 1924 it entered service at Pymont Fire Station as a stand-by appliance until 1937 when it was retired. Today the **No. 18 Shand Mason Steam Pumper** resides at the Museum of Fire on permanent display (pictured to the right here).



From the mid-1930s the Dennis Bros identified their various models of appliances based on the relative size of the engine. The '**Big 6**' was the largest in the range with a 6-cylinder petrol engine of 9.5 litre capacity, a 4-speed crash gearbox with 4-wheel servo assisted hydraulic brakes fitted. The bodywork of the Big 6 was produced in the Brigade workshop and was thus designed for the specific needs of the NSW Fire Brigade. Only one Big 6 was ever made; no. 132 and it entered service in April 1940 as the running motor at City of Sydney Headquarters. The appliance later saw service at The Rocks (1951-54) before being transferred to the Transport section of the Fire Brigade which was housed at the closed Pymont Fire Station. In 1960, when the Station re-opened the Big-6 was assigned to the Pymont Brigade. In 1967 the Big-6 left its home and was subsequently used at the Brigade's Training College and for major Sydney fires.

It was also used as a coffin carrier at official Brigade funerals. The Big-6 was officially withdrawn from service in August 1973 and after extensive restoration work by volunteers at the Museum of Fire in the early 2000s it was accepted onto the NSW State Heritage Register in 2004. (Big Six pictured here outside the Museum of Fire).



Pymont Today - The Suburb and it's Brigade

The wider area of Pymont was first inhabited in 1795 when Thomas Jones received a land grant of 55 acres. The current site of Pymont Fire Station was originally granted to John Harris, a surgeon with the NSW Corps; in December 1803 (a further grant extended his property in 1806). Dr Harris established Ultimo Farm where he keenly pursued his farming interests and kept the property as a retreat. He maintained a number of sheep, cattle, and guinea fowl and also established a deer park.⁶⁴

In the nineteenth Century a number of quarries were established in Pymont which provided the Sandstone for many of Sydney's buildings and the area became a working class district. After World War Two many of the factories in Pymont closed down causing many of the residents to re-locate to other suburbs. As a result the area become what many called a 'slum' and it wasn't until the 1990s that steps were taken to rejuvenate the area, re-fashioning the area as a residential stronghold close to the amenities of the inner-city.

Today 11,600 people live permanently in Pymont. The re-development of the suburb attracted a more multicultural group to the area and thus only 35% of Pymont residents have been born in Australia.⁶⁵

The fire statistics in the Fire & Rescue NSW latest Annual Report show that for the year, Pymont Fire Brigade had responded to 145 fires and 1905 other incidents.⁶⁶



Pymont Fire Brigade Platoons:



Members of A Platoon: SO Mark Macquaim-Quarrell, Samantha Paul, Ryan Oud, Thomas McMillan, Grant McDonald (Sean Radi and Geoffrey Ferguson on leave).



Members of B Platoon: SO Timothy Jones, Paul Hallahan, Trent Haseley, Aaron Howard, Scott Tappin, Joseph Ford (Kristy Buckpitt on leave).



Members of C Platoon: SO Robert Russell-Smith, David Carroll, Evan Knowles, Christopher Mizon, Dario Cargnelutti, Adrian Child (Allan Quinnell on leave).



Members of D Platoon: SO Belinda Hooker, Quentin Johnson, Mark Young, Cameron Green, Leslie Sutton, Christian Hobin and Brett Kemble



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