



Metropolitan Fire Brigade Station 46 Akuna Street Altona


Anniversary

The Metropolitan Fire Brigade has been associated with Altona for more than 50 years these notes have been prepared from information available in the records of the Altona Laverton Historical Society, and from information supplied by the Metropolitan Fire Brigade and public sources



The Metropolitan Fire Brigade Station Number 46- 7 Akuna Street Altona.

This Akuna Street site currently housing the MFB Fire Brigade Unit is about to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of its construction and establishment on this site, which is located in a primarily residential setting in Altona within easy reach of the local homes, commercial shops, factories and larger industrial premises within the general vicinity and neighbouring suburbs served by this Brigade unit.

It has been advised that shortly construction will begin on a new building at the site, and this in itself is worthy of recording for future historical reference.



The current building is to be extended and redeveloped.

Plans are in place for a section of the current premises to be demolished, and the site will then be extended to allow for additional space for the continuing operations of the Station, its personnel and equipment

As well as attending to Fires and similar emergencies, Fire Brigade members, trained as Emergency Medical Responders, now also respond to medical emergencies, so it is possible if you dial Triple Zero in an emergency, it may not be an Ambulance which arrives, but a Fire Tender with crew.

In the Beginning

An article to the Editor of "The Argus" Thursday 23rd June 1932 reproduced below said:

Fire Risks at Altona

Sir - For years the Altona Riding of the Werribee Shire has had to pay 75 pounds per year to the Metropolitan Fire Brigade Board, and in every fire

which has occurred locally the premises have been gutted before the arrival of assistance which has to come from Newport and Williamstown. The Altona Progress Association, has several times, the last only a few weeks ago, appealed to the Metropolitan Fire Brigades Board to establish a local branch of volunteer fire fighters.



A block of land was offered to hold a temporary hose reel free of rental. Officers have been sent to report and that they have always replied to us in Altona that the matter would be given favourable consideration. At a public meeting which was attended by an officer from Newport fire station, we enrolled sufficient names to form a volunteer brigade. Our last appeal elicited a reply that no funds were available to carry out the project at present, and that the Board would deal with the matter later. Eighty percent of the buildings in Altona are constructed of wood and iron and in the absence of fire fighting facilities, insurance rates are very high. A line of hose would have been of great service at the last catastrophe.

It is time those in authority gave us a great deal more consideration.

Yours

G.Everingham

President Altona Progress Association
Altona June 20th.

Some information regarding the early Firefighters of Altona

The MFB Journal "Word Back" Vol. 1 No.5 p3 1982 featured notes from a discussion with "Beau" McGowan, one of the early members who could remember men who were part time firefighters, or partially paid, usually referred to as PP's.

He remembered Stations 44A St Albans, 44D Deer park and 46 Altona as being operated by PP's.

Early information available indicates 1933 as the commencement date in David Street Altona:

Notes on file at the Altona Laverton Historical Society indicate that on the 13th February 1933 the MFB Officially opened Station 46 in a small weatherboard building in David Street Altona.

Equipment then consisted of one hand drawn hose reel, 1200 feet of hose and two branches, Y couples, Stand Pipe, two hand extinguishers and some beaters.

There were 6 Volunteers and the Station was opened by District Officer Whittaker Wright from Newport Fire Station.

The volunteers were paid seven shillings and sixpence, and ten shillings if they had to use their own cars.

The PP fire men lived in the area and were alerted to an alarm of fire by a siren at the station and alarm bells in their homes.

During the day only two men were available as the remaining four worked outside the area.

The PP members also did theatre duty at movie theatres in Footscray , Newport and Yarraville.

The Fire Station then moved to McBain Street in 1938

A house in McBain Street was bought by the MFB and Improved for use as the Brigade Station.

The Hose Reel was replaced by a Bedford Hose Carriage, with a water tank fitted, this was possibly one of the first water carrying hose carriages in the Brigade according to a former member.

This is a photo of the Mc Bain Street building taken probably during the 1970s it has since been demolished and a private home is now located on the site.



The part paid fire men operated in Altona until December 1961 when the station became fully staffed and moved into the current Akuna Street building and the McBain Street station was closed.

Early Fire Fighting Activities

One of the early major fires attended by the Altona PP's was the Grandstand at the Williamstown Racecourse.

Just after World War 2 the stand was being renovated after being occupied by the armed forces when it "went up", never to be replaced, it is understood no cause of the fire was ascertained.



Shown above is a photograph held in the Altona Laverton Historical Society files.

An unusual event

There is also comment in the records that the Brigade were called out to a bomb which had landed in the locality after falling from an aircraft located at the nearby RAAF base in Point Cook, the Bomb Disposal Squad were eventually called to remove this item.

Other events attended are understood to have included bush fires, and the destruction of the Altona Picture Theatre.

Some Other Incidents

Altona as a Shire and a City has developed in different stages from a small beach front holiday style venue with beach front vistas then as developers moved in it became marketed as a sea side residential area, then Industry began to develop on the large blocks of vacant land in the area with companies such as Mobil, Carbon Black, Hoechst, Qenos and the like entering the area later, and more recently followed by Toyota, Nippondenso, various Freight forwarders, Logistic Groups and the like, and now as some of these earlier industrial tenants have begun to depart the area is beginning to attract more residential premises as the western side of Melbourne continues to grow and expand.

The residents and fire fighters have had to combat a number of problems in the past and some of these photos from the Altona Laverton Historical Society records, together with press clippings give some idea of the incidents that have occurred in the past.

Flood

The Altona Area has flooded a number of times in the past and it is assumed that this would have caused problems for all emergency services at the time.

Development of Cherry Lake as a flood retarding basin and similar work in the area has now greatly reduced the chance of similar local flooding events.



Left - Flooding of Civic Parade near Millers Road probably circa 1960

Above right an early photo of the Mobil Plant

Some Fire and Other Emergencies in the area

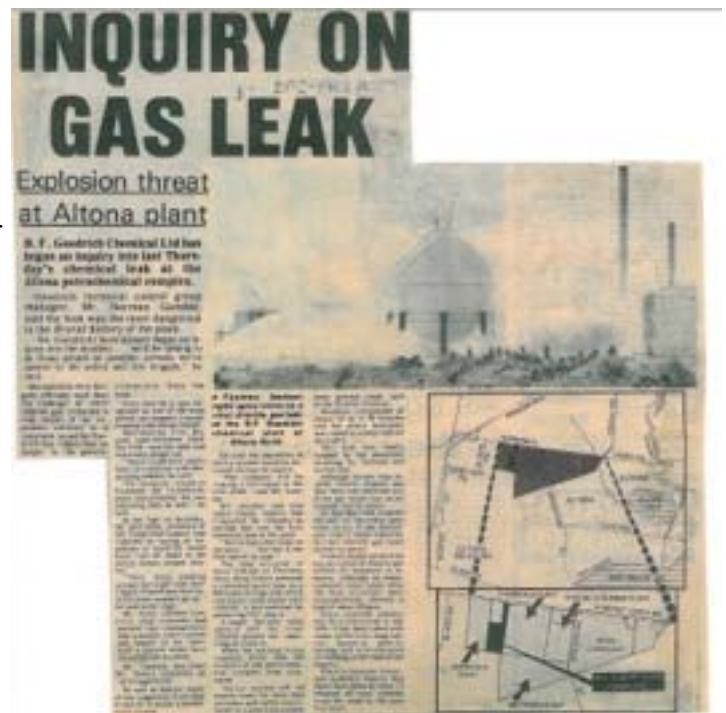


The Carpet Bazaar Gift Shop gutted by fire 1980



Explosion Threat and Gas Leaks

Goodrich Chemical 1982
&
Altona North Technical School evacuated because of a Gas Leak



A train wreck in the general area date unknown, probably during the 1940's.

Fire Services-A brief History from the Past

The development of Metropolitan Fire Brigade Service's in Australia has followed in the main the procedures that were originally adopted in the United Kingdom.

The early Fire Brigades began to develop from private brigades employed by the Insurance Companies that were established in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries in the United Kingdom.

Before the establishment of public brigades the insurers established their own, in the interest of self preservation of their insured assets.

For example the Royal Exchange Assurance Company established by Royal Charter in 1720 had by 1721 several (hand propelled) engines and 56 fire men, with 21 porters to remove goods.

Parishes were under a legal obligation to provide brigades but this fell away as insurance brigades were established.

The book "Royal Exchange Assurance 1720-1970" states that, "The attraction to serve in the brigades was considerable, and included not merely generous pay (normally in the eighteenth century, a shilling for the first and sixpence for each succeeding hour) and the attractive uniform, but also the immunity from the naval press-gang. There were long waiting lists for vacancies.



A Royal Exchange Fire Man



A Royal Exchange Fire Engine circa 1800



A depiction of one of the Great Fires of London which was a major reason for the need of an efficient means of fire fighting

An Image of a Royal Exchange Fire Man's Badge issued circa 1720

The building depicted is "The (second) Royal Exchange" 1669-1838 which was destroyed by fire in 1838.

The third Royal Exchange Building opened in 1844 and still stands in the City of London



Fire Marks



Metal plaques bearing the symbols of fire insurance offices in the United Kingdom and known as “Fire Marks” were introduced in the 17th. Century when the first United Kingdom Fire Insurance offices started business.

Their use continued in the United Kingdom up to the middle of the 19th. Century when their original purpose of identifying the insured property gradually disappeared.

It was originally the custom of the insurers to issue with each policy a “mark” which was nailed to a prominent part of the building.

It also became customary for the fire offices to pay rewards to bystanders who gave a prompt warning of fire in an insured building or who assisted the offices fire men in manning the fire pumps, and it was usual for the offices to pay for beer supplied to the firemen and their “assistants” during the thirsty work of fighting a fire, a prominently displayed Mark indicated that the building was insured and rewards for assistance were likely.

The earliest known mark issued was that of Nicholas Barbon’s Fire Office of 1680, sometimes called the Phoenix because of the figure of a phoenix on the mark, the company went out of business in 1711 and no known marks survive.

A publication by Guardian Royal Exchange Assurance (UK) states, “It has been said that fire men would refuse to assist in extinguishing a fire if the burning building did not bear the Mark of the fire office which employed them, but this is untrue.”

“An element of co-operation developed both among the fire men and the fire offices who employed them.”

Fire Marks are now an antique and collectors items of interest to those in the Insurance profession.

Fire Marks in Australia seem to have been used only to a limited extent and mainly as a form of local advertising rather than of any particular relationship to the Fire Brigade response offered.

The first known Volunteer Fire Brigade in Melbourne was in 1845.



An Australian Fire Mark