

**"AYE READY!"**



**The History of Edinburgh Fire Brigade  
The Oldest Municipal Brigade in Britain**

**BY ALEXANDER REID**



## Foreword by the Firemaster

This booklet is published to commemorate the 150th Anniversary of the establishment of the Edinburgh Fire Brigade, thought to be the oldest Municipal Fire Brigade in the world.

In those far-off days of 1824, fire was a frequent visitor in the highly congested areas of the old part of the City. In the early part of the nineteenth century many of Edinburgh's citizens lived in the high multi-storeyed "*lands*" and outbreaks of fire spread with alarming rapidity exacting a heavy toll in life and property. The existing—and very primitive—fire-fighting arrangements were often found to be quite inadequate and, following a series of disastrous fires, the City Fathers decided that the responsibility of ensuring the safety of their citizens should rest with the Council. Thus was formed the City Fire Brigade under the command and guidance of James Braidwood, a young man of courage and vision who laid foundations and principles which are respected and admired to the present day.

This booklet compares the fire-fighting services which have existed throughout Britain since Roman times and in tracing the history of the Edinburgh Fire Brigade it highlights the technical advances which have been so necessary to keep abreast of developments in building, commerce and industry. The history of the Brigade is also of course the history of Edinburgh and there were many incidents which are now part of our City's tradition; the bravery of young John Geddes in the "*Heave Awa*" Close; the sordid activities of Burke and Hare; the muck creels carried by the early Council Firemen and the fights which often broke out between the rival Insurance

Brigades. These and many more make up the history of our Brigade and our City.

Uncontrolled fire is today—as it was in 1824—still one of man's greatest enemies; one which takes its annual toll of life and causes very high economic loss to the community. Now as then it is important that every member of our community plays his or her part in reducing this very serious hazard. The high ideals and spirit of inventiveness established by James Braidwood have been continued and expanded over the years and today the South-Eastern Fire Brigade, successor to the Edinburgh Fire Brigade, is justly proud of the position it holds.

Whilst technical advances in appliances and equipment are a necessary part of any Fire Brigade, it is the men who man the appliances and use this equipment who are most important. It is to these officers and men of the Edinburgh Fire Brigade, who throughout the years have contributed so much to the safety of the community, that we pay tribute in this booklet for their dedication, loyalty and devoted service.

The proceeds from the sale of this booklet will be donated to the fire Services National Benevolent Fund—a Fund set up to alleviate suffering and hardship of those firemen, and their families, who became casualties in the service of the community. The Fund was founded during the Second World War period and the then Commandant of the Auxiliary Fire Service in Edinburgh, Sir Andrew Murray, was appointed its President. I would therefore thank all purchasers of the booklet for their donation to a most worthy cause.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Anderson', written over a horizontal line.

James Anderson, F.I.FIRE.E., (FIREMASTER)

The South Eastern Fire Brigade wish to thank the following major suppliers of fire service appliances and equipment for their generosity in assisting by sponsoring the production of this booklet.

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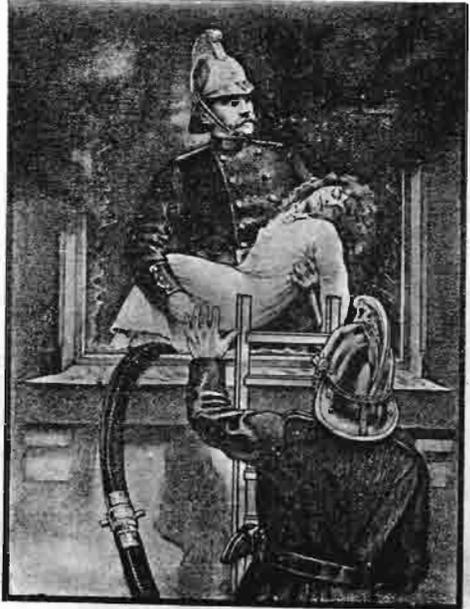
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Brigade Promenade Concert Poster, November 1913.  
Fireman is Bert Corey.

# The Historical Background

According to Greek legend, the founder of civilisation was Prometheus, whose name signifies 'fore-thought'. Prometheus, who deprived men of knowledge of the future and gave them hope instead, taught men architecture, astronomy, mathematics, writing, the care of domestic animals, navigation, the art of prophecy, working in metal, and most precious gift of all, the use of fire—which he stole from heaven against the will of Zeus.

Though fire was too precious to be refused, in accepting it man took an enemy within his household. Perhaps because of its heavenly origins, fire remains unreconciled to slavery. Again and again throughout history the fire that boiled the domestic pot has been the origin of a conflagration which laid a city in ashes.

Even today, the forest fire, with men and animals fleeing before the flames, remains one of the archetypal images of terror, and it is significant of man's fear of fire that the medieval hell was pictured as a place of flames.

While men lived in isolated homesteads and small communities firefighting could be left to those immediately threatened and such of their neighbours as came to their assistance out of friendship or self-interest. But as soon as human beings began to live in large settled communities, some sort of communal provision for preventing fires and dealing with outbreaks when they occurred became necessary. There was probably some sort of Fire Brigade in all the great cities of antiquity and Rome quite surely had professional firemen who also functioned as policemen. They were called *Vigiles* and were organised in seven regiments, each of seven companies. The regiments each numbered a thousand men, excluding officers. Each regiment was responsible for two of the fourteen wards into which the city was divided and had its own headquarters and barracks, both luxuriously appointed with shrines, statuary, mosaic paving, heating apparatus and marble baths.

The headquarters of the Fire and Police Departments of modern Rome today occupy the same site as those of the ancient city and excavations have revealed large halls ornamented with statuary, mosaic pavements, marble columns and wainscoting and with marble seating around the walls.

The *Vigiles* were equipped with ladders, ropes, picks, saws, axes and buckets. They had also 'squirts' (like large syringes) which could throw water for a short distance; made use of wet blankets, which they spread on walls to prevent the fires spreading, and wicker-work mats which were probably used for rescue operations. In fighting fires, however, their main reliance was on the human bucket-chain, that old device by which buckets of water were passed on from hand to hand from the source of supply until they could be poured directly on the flames by men on ladders.

The people of Rome called the *Vigiles* '*Sparteoli*' (literally 'tarred bucket men') and disliked them

because of their second role as policemen.

As an inscription dedicated to *Severus* and *Caracalla* discovered in their premises shows they were empowered both to judge and execute punishment on certain types of offenders.

The translation runs as follows:

*'Severus and Caracalla, Emperors, to Junius Rufianus, Brigadier General of the Vigiles: Greeting! You are hereby authorised to punish with the rod or cat-of-nine-tails, the janitor, or any of the inhabitants of a house, in which fire has broken out through negligence. In case the fire should have been occasioned not by negligence but by crime, you must hand the incendiaries to our friend, Fabius Septimianus Cilo, Prefect of the City. Remember also that one of your duties is to recover runaway slaves and return them to their masters.'*

Beside the *Vigiles*, the Romans, for a period, had volunteer Fire Companies; and it is recorded of the Commander of one such Company, a certain *Marcus Crassus*, that on arriving at a fire he would make a bargain with the owner to purchase the premises at a knock-down price before instructing his men to start operations!

In Rome the Volunteer Companies, perhaps because of such practices, were after a time abolished and in the provincial towns of the Empire, could only be organised by special charter. Such organisations were considered to be '*nurseries of disorder*' and possibly also of sedition. There was a Fire Brigade in London during the Roman era but it is probable that this was attached to the Roman Army.



Roman Matriculoei.

After the Roman withdrawal there is nothing in the British records about fire precautions or firefighting until the reign of the English King Alfred, who passed a law which required every householder to '*cover his fires*' at nightfall, to reduce the chances of accidental conflagrations.

When he came to power, William the Conqueror maintained this law and reinforced it with heavy penalties, and the introduction of the curfew bell.

Though the word has now taken on a different and more sinister meaning, '*curfew*' is of course simply a corruption of the Norman French *couvre feu* meaning '*cover the fire*'. The purpose of the bell was to prevent anyone pleading ignorance of the time as an excuse for failing to observe the law.

At a time when it was difficult to relight a fire once it had gone out this early fire prevention law was naturally very unpopular and was abolished by Henry I. Throughout the Middle Ages in England

## Fire-fighting in Old Edinburgh

however there was a requirement that every householder should keep a bucket of water ready, and if a fire occurred, proceed with his bucket to the point of danger. 'Bucket Brigades' also existed in some communities. In the larger towns during the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries watchtowers were set up and if a fire started, the citizens (rather pleasantly) were alerted by the watchman playing on a flageolet, a small instrument like a flute.

Most of the early English measures were aimed at fire prevention, for at that time once a fire gained hold, there was then little that could be done except hope (or pray) for a change or cessation of the wind.

Even in the largest towns the technical equipment for dealing with fires was, for a long time, woefully inadequate. During the Great Fire of London for example, the most sophisticated items of equipment available were 'squirts', similar to those which had been in use in the time of the Romans, and operated by three men: two to hold and direct the 'squirt'; the third to work the plunger.

Slow to refill and capable at best of throwing a few quarts of water a short distance, these 'fire engines'—for so they were called—were of course useless against such a conflagration and in the end the Great Fire was only contained when, in terms of a London fire-control measure of 1583, the military intervened and created a fire belt by demolishing a broad swath of buildings.

Edinburgh Firemen re-enacting the use of the Insurance Company Squirt (similar to those used by the Romans) as used in the city. circa 1700.

If any of the early English fire precautions and fire-fighting provisions were practised in Scotland they have not been recorded. There is no mention in the Scottish records of fire precautions until as late as the reign of James I of Scotland, when, in 1426, the town officers of Edinburgh were instructed to have *'seven or aught twenty fute ledders as well as three or foure sayes (saws) to the common use, and sex or ma cleikes of iron (long poles tipped with iron hooks) to draw down timbers and ruiffes that are fired'*.

This belated concern in Scotland about fire control measures is surprising for the lowland and border burghs of the northern kingdom were even more vulnerable to fires than most English communities. Besides the fires which began by accident, the Scots had also to cope with the incendiarism which was an accompaniment of every English invasion.

The French historian Froissart, who visited Scotland during the reign of David II (1329–1371) may have been correct when he wrote that the Scots country people *'did not mind much when the English burned their houses, as they could build them again in a few days with five or six poles with branches to stretch across them'*. But it is unlikely that either the citizens of Edinburgh (then a sizeable place for its time of about 400 houses), watched the destruction of their city by the English army sent north by Richard II, very cheerfully, or that the monks of Melrose and Dryburgh took pleasure in seeing their abbeys burning.



In the Scottish Act of 1426, the emphasis, as in the early English Acts, is on fire prevention. It is ordered, for example, that *'no hemp, lint, straw, hay or heather or broom be stored near a fire'*. Edinburgh merchants selling such wares are permitted to use lanterns but not candles and citizens in general are forbidden to carry naked flames from house to house. *'Na fire may be fetched fra ane house til ane uther within the town bot within covered weshel or lanterne, under pain of ane unlaw.'*

That brothels and the homes of *'ladies of the town'* in general were considered a special fire risk is also shown by a clause in the Act which commands that *'common women'* should be housed at the outermost end of the town where *'the least peril of fire is'*. (Whether this was to prevent the risk of fire or to protect the ladies, is not recorded.)

Fire precautions also figure largely in the Edinburgh Improvement Act of August 1621 in which it was ordered that, to prevent fire, the houses of Edinburgh shall be roofed with slate, lead, tile or thatched stone instead of *'straw, deals or boards'*. Tradesmen (i.e. bakers, brewers and others) who kept *'heather, broom, whins and other fuel in the vennels and closes of the town'* were required by this Act to remove these materials to remote parts of the burgh.

In 1621, another important Act was passed concerning *'the supplying of water to the city from a distance'*. It was not however until 1681 that the first water main was laid. This was a three-inch pipe, which was installed by a German plumber at a cost of £2,950. It ran from a catchment in the Comiston area to a reservoir on the Castle Hill which, in its turn, fed ten of the city's public wells. Incidentally (though this is only mentioned later), as there were *'fire points'* on the pipes running from the Castle Hill to the wells, Edinburgh in this respect was in advance of other cities.

While Edinburgh remained within its ancient walls, the increasing height of the buildings as more and more people sought living space on the limited ground, introduced a new fire danger.

Some of these early *'high rise'* buildings, especially in the High Street, were, it is recorded, *'as high as the church steeples'* and in fact, they often reached 14 storeys.

In 1698 the Scottish Parliament, rather belatedly, introduced a regulation restricting new buildings to a height of five storeys but since the regulation did not affect buildings already in existence, this peculiarly Edinburgh fire hazard continued.

As the reader of this history will have observed, most of the early Edinburgh fire legislation was also aimed at reducing the chance of fires starting and measures to deal with fires, once they occurred, were as elsewhere minimal.

There were four reasons for this situation, three material, the fourth psychological. The first material reason was the continued lack of technical equipment and the second was the still limited supply of water.

Though the main from the catchment at Comiston had improved the water situation, the total supply of the city was still small and supplies moreover had often to be conveyed by bucket for considerable distances. The third material reason was the lack of a force of men trained and experienced in fire-

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fighting and ready to attend quickly to any outbreak. There remains the psychological reason which, at least in part, was responsible for the other deficiencies. This was a still widely held belief that fires, like war, famine and plague, were a retribution for sin.

Even as late as the disastrous fires of 1824, preachers in Edinburgh were still drawing a *'logical'* connection between fire outbreaks and the failure of citizens to *'observe the Sabbath and keep it holy'*.

What first shocked the Edinburgh City Fathers into taking thought about improving the existing situation was a particularly disastrous fire which broke out on February 3rd, 1700. According to a report written some time later, *'The flames broke out about 11 o'clock at night, in the north-east corner of the Meal Market, a small court of buildings then chiefly occupied by lawyers, situated upon the north side of the Cowgate, immediately behind the Parliament Close. From this spot the fire spread up the hill to the Parliament Close, destroying all the buildings called Kirk-heuch, which was then a sort of shoe-market, and at length reached the High Street where houses continuous to the cross were involved in the general ruin.'*

The Royal Exchange, the Bank of Scotland Building and part of the Advocates' Library, were among the public buildings damaged or destroyed by this fire in which close on 200 families were driven from their homes.

It was the worst fire that had occurred in Edinburgh since 1544 when an English army commanded by the Earl of Hertford, after overcoming the resistance of a small force of militant citizens, fired both the city and the Palace of Holyrood.

The phrase above *'shocked the City Fathers into thought'* was used by intent for action did not come until April 21st, 1703, when an important Edinburgh Act was passed for the formation of a *'Company for Quenching of Fire and Rules to be observed by the inhabitants thereanent'*.

A reproduction of this original bill with the provisions of this Act, is included among the illustrations but as both the print and the old Scots wordings may present difficulties, the following translation may be helpful.

*The Act (of the Provost, Bailies, Council and Deacons of Craft, 'ordiner and byordiner') states and ordains that:*

*'Owing to the sad desolations made in this city within these years by the terrible and dreadful fires which broke out in the Meal Market and Land Market, and made so sudden and great progress that a great part of the city was in danger of being consumed, if God in his great mercy had not put a stop thereto, the Council, judging it their duty to lay down methods and means, that through the blessing of God may prove effectual in the like or great conflagrations, have concluded the following rules to be observed in time coming:*

*That the Council do name out of the Burgesses and Freemen of this city, twelve men, to be called by the name of firemasters, and each firemaster be empowered to name six assistants to himself to be ready at all times upon the occasion of fire. The firemasters to receive their orders from the magistrates and the assistants from their respective firemasters, who are*



# A C T

## Appointing a Company for quenching of Fire, and Rules to be observed by the Inhabitants thereanent.

Edinburgh, 21 April 1703.

THE which day the Lord Provost, Bailties, Council, Deacons of Crafts, Ordinar and Extraordinary, being convened in Council, considering the sad Desolations made in this City within these few years, by the Terrible and Dreadful Fires which broke out in the Meal-mercat and Land-mercat, and made so sudden and great a Progress, that a great part of the City was in Danger of being consumed (if God in his great Mercy had not put a stop thereto) and the Council judging it their Duty, to lay down Methods, and provide Means, that through the blessing of God may prove effectual for preventing the like, or greater Conflagration; Have therefore concluded the following Rules to be observed in time coming, viz.

*Impr.* That the Council do name out of the Burgesses and Freemen of this City Twelve Men, to be called by the name of Fire-Masters, and each Fire-master be impowred to name six Assistants to himself, to be ready at all times upon the occasion of Fire, the Fire-masters to receive their Orders from the Magistrats, and the Assistants from their respective Fire-masters, who are all to present themselves to the Magistrats each first Munday of February and August yearly in the New-grassfriars.

*Item.* That each Fire-master have in his Hand an Baton, and each Assistant an Leather Cap on his Head, with an Cross-Iron-Bar on it, and an Badge of Pewther on the Front of the Cap, bearing the Number from 1 to 72, to be made by such Persons as the Council shall appoint, and by none other.

*Item.* That each Fire-master and his Assistant have an large Hand-Aw, made with Luggs nailed to the Shaft, and an Sledge-Hammer, with an Hand-Saw, all marked with the Towns Mark, and twelve Links alwise lodged in each of the Fire-masters Houses.

*Item.* That each Fire-master have his Name above the Door of his House or Clois-head where he Dwells, bearing them to be such, and a List of the whole lodged in the Town-guard.

*Item.* The Council appoints to be made twenty four Says and thirty six Stings with Knogs, whereof six standing full of Water with the Stings hanging by them, and some Buckets, with six Shovels, and six Matrocks with the Good Towns Mark upon them, to be lodged on the North side of the Weigh-house under a Shade made for that end, and the like at the East end of the Court of Guard, and the like at the Back-clois of the laigh Council-house, and the like at the New Well at the foot of the Horse Wynd in the Cowgate, and that each of the said Fire-masters have an Key to open the several Shades above mentioned, and another Key to be lodged in the Town-guard.

*Item.* The Council appoints 300 Leather Buckets or more to be made, and that there be lodged thereof in the Town-guard as many as can with conveniency, and the rest to be hung up in the old Kirk; As also twelve Leathers, whereof three of them 46 Foot, three of them 30 Foot, 3 of them 20 Foot, and 3 of them 15 Foot long, all to be hung up in the Old Kirk.

*Item.* The Council appoints the whole Muck-men to have each of them an Creel, and to repair to the Fire with their Creels full of Horse-dung or Muck, upon the first Alarm.

*Item.* The Council appoints the Wells to be put in good Condition, and the Fire-cocks in good order, that the whole Fire-masters may know how to put on the Water to the Fire-cock, and make the Water run to any side of the Street by the help of a Timber Spout, which the Council appoints to be made for that effect, and one to ly in each of the said places with the Says and Stings.

*Item.* The Council appoints one Key to open the Wells the Shades and the old Kirk.

*Item.* The Council appoints the Captain of the Guard upon the first Alarm of Fire, to send to the Magistrats and haill Fire-masters, and the Keeper of the Good-Towns Stores, and advertise them thereof; and to call the haill Tron-men and Water-carriers, and injoin them to carry Water to the several places, where the Fire-masters shall judge most convenient.

*Item.* The Council appoints the Captain of the Guard for the time, to cause two men of the best qualified of their Squad to walk Nightly through the Streets, with a large Baton in their Hand, five or six Foot long, who are hereby appointed to give notice immediatly to the Fire-masters and the Guard in case of Fire, and the said Captain is to take an account of their Diligence each Morning.

*Item.* The Council Ordains each House in a Tenement within this City, to keep two or three Ropes in their Houses that may reach from their Houses to the Ground, and four Fathome more, with a sufficient quantity of Water in their Houses or Cellars ready on all occasions, under Certification.

*Item.* The Council recommends to the present and succeeding Town Captains, the present and succeeding Deacons of Crafts, the present and succeeding Constables, to attend the Magistrats on all occasions of Fire.

*Item.* The Council recomends to, and appoints the present Dean of Gild, and his Successors in office, to see the Wells and Fire-cocks put and kept in good Order and Condition in all time coming, and recomends to, and appoints the present Thesaurer and his Successors in office, to cause make all the foresaid Materials; And being made, to see them lodged in manner above-prescribed, and to supplie them from time to time as occasion shall require.

And lastly, the Council discharges the Selling, Pledging, or Retetting, or any ways Imbazling of the said Materials; Certifying the Transgressors, they shall be Fined and Imprisoned, and otherways punished at the will of the Magistrats.

Enacted by George Home.

EDINBURGH, Printed by the Heirs and Successors of Andrew Anderson, Printer to the Queens most Excellent Majesty, City and Colledge, Anno Dom. 1703.

all to present themselves to the magistrates each first Monday of February and August yearly in the New Greyfriars.

That each Firemaster have in his hand a batton and each assistant a leather cap on his head with an iron cross-bar on it, and a badge of pewter on the front of the cap bearing the number from 1 to 72, to be made by such persons as the Council shall appoint and by none other.

That each Firemaster and his assistant have a large hand axe, made with luffs nailed to the shaft, and a sledge hammer, with a hand saw, all marked with the Town's mark and twelve links alwise lodged in the Firemaster's houses.

That each Firemaster have his name above the door of his house or close-head where he dwells, bearing them to be such, and a list of the whole lodged in the town guard.

The Council appoints to be made 24 says and thirty-six stings with knogs, whereof six standing full of water with stings hanging by them and some buckets, with six shovels and six mattocks with the good Town's mark upon them, to be lodged on the north side of the weighhouse, under a shade made for that end (several other stations are mentioned), that each Firemaster shall have a key to open the several shades.

The Council appoints 300 leather buckets or more to be made, and that there be lodged thereof in the Town Guard as many as can with conveniency and the rest be hung up in the Old Kirk, as also 12 leathers, whereof 3 of them of 46 foot, 3 of them 30 foot, 3 of them 20 foot and 3 of them 15 foot long, all to be hung up in the Old Kirk.

The Council appoints the whole muck-men to have each of them a creel, and to repair to the fire with their creels full of horse-dung or muck upon the first alarm.

The Council appoints the wells to be put in good condition and the fire-cocks in good order, that the whole Firemasters may know how to put the water on to the firecock, and to make the water run to any side of the street by the help of a timber spout, which the Council appoints to be made to that effect.

The Council appoints the captain of the guard upon the first alarm of fire to send to the magistrates and hail Firemasters and the keeper of the good town's stores and advertise them thereof, and to call the hail tronmen and water carriers and inform them to carry water to several places, where the firemasters shall judge most convenient.

The Council appoints the captain of the guard for the time to cause two men of the best qualified of their squad to walk nightly through the streets, with a large batton in their hand, five or six foot long, who are hereby appointed to give notice immediately to the firemasters and the guard in case of fyre, and the said captain is to take notice of the vigilance each morning.

And lastly, the Council discharges the selling, pledging, or re-setting or any warp, imbasling of the said materials, certifying the transgressors they shall be fined and imprisoned and otherways punished at the will of the magistrates."

In addition to the provisions above, citizens were required to keep a supply of water in their houses in

case of fire and occupants of tenements to provide themselves with ropes of the height of the building plus an additional 'four fathoms'. This last provision (like that alerting the city muck-men), has aroused smiles at the idea of elderly grannies swarming their way down from the upper windows of the high Edinburgh 'lands'. But the length of rope additional to the height of the buildings, was clearly intended to allow for a loop in which those who were unable to help themselves could be lowered to safety. As for the item concerning the city muck-men, there was much more sense to this than at first appears. The creels of (wet) muck (mostly horse-dung) must have been useful addition to the limited supplies of water available; the dung when heated gave off fumes of ammonia which acted as a natural chemical fire extinguisher.

The firemen attached to the new organisation were of course what we would now call auxiliaries. They only turned up at an alarm, otherwise they followed their customary occupations. There is no record of their receiving any instruction in fire-fighting and probably they had to learn the hard way, by experience. For their services they were paid £8 Scots (i.e. 16s. 8d. in the English currency of this time), per annum. Despite this meagre reward there does not seem to have been any shortage of volunteers.

One puzzling thing about the Edinburgh Act of 1703 is that it makes no mention of any fire engine though it is known that a James Colquhoun of Edinburgh built machines, described as such, for Edinburgh and Glasgow as early as 1650. A possible explanation is that these engines were simply 'squirts' of the kind used in London during the Great Fire and that Colquhoun's 'engine' was either found of little use or had been destroyed in the interval.

## The Fire Insurance Companies' Brigade

Though an improvement on anything that existed previously, the Fire Service set up by the Edinburgh Act of 1703 had obvious deficiencies.

Since the firemen were auxiliaries, there was no guarantee that they would always be available when required, and uncertainty about who was in command when a fire occurred was another complication. That this civic force was not put to any serious test until 1771 (when there was a large fire in the Lawnmarket) was therefore fortunate and it was also fortunate that by that date the city's fire-fighting services had been augmented by the rise of the 'private enterprise' brigades of a number of Fire Insurance Companies.

Fire Insurance Companies originated in London after the great fire of 1666 when a group of London merchants formed a 'friendly society', the aim of which was to spread risk and provide compensation for any member who suffered loss from fire damage.

The scheme was so successful that it was decided to extend its benefits to the general public when the



Fireman 1832 Royal Exchange Assurance (incorporated 1720).

response was so great that by the turn of the century, several fire insurance companies were in operation in the English capital. Among the earliest were The Phoenix, the Hand in Hand, the Royal Exchange and The Sun. Similar organisations also sprung up in the larger English provincial cities as well as in Scotland—the most famous of the Scottish companies being the Caledonian.

The Fire Insurance Companies issued their policy holders with metal plates called Firemarks usually of copper or lead. These were embossed with the Company's sign or motif and the number of the relevant policy. Plates were fixed to the front of the buildings and brightly coloured so that they could be readily identified. At first, to limit their losses, the Insurance Companies organised salvage squads but soon these squads developed into fire brigades, equipped with the most modern fire-fighting equipment then available. The men who manned them were of course auxiliaries, like the firemen attached to the Edinburgh City fire establishment.

Despite their excellent equipment, the Insurance Brigades had obvious deficiencies. Like the fire-fighters of the city Fire Establishment, their men were untrained and, worse still, there was no statutory requirement that they should attend or deal with any fire in which their company had not a financial interest.

If Fire Insurance Company fire-fighters arrived at a fire and found that neither the burning building nor any nearby structure was a concern of their company, they would either return to their stations leaving the building to burn, or simply stand around watching the flames and if several fire brigades had an interest in the same fire the situation could be even more catastrophic. While the flames mounted, battles frequently broke out between members of rival





Fire Insurance Marks.

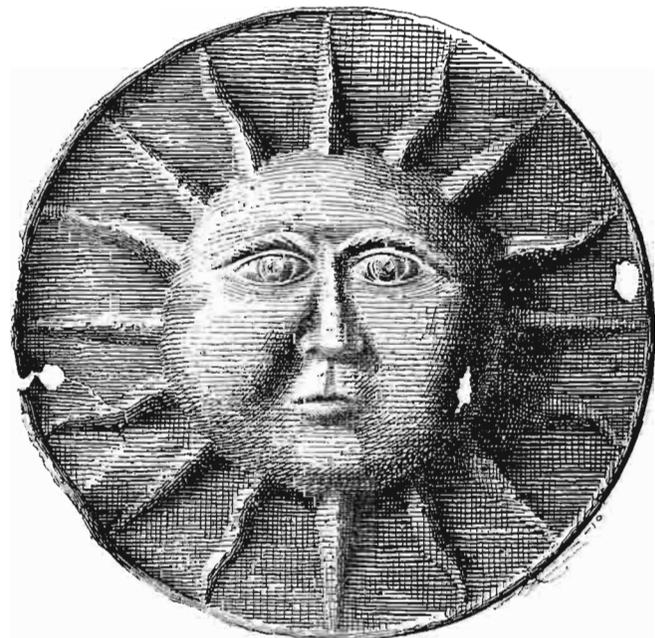
Opposite page: Top Right; Scottish Union 1824:

Middle: Friendly Society of Edinburgh founded in 1720 and is one of the earliest Insurance Companies. Business confined to the city until 1764 and bought over by the Sun Insurance Office in 1847.

Bottom: Caledonian 1805.

This page: Above; North British 1809.

Below; Sun Insurance 1710.



brigades for the use of firecocks, and deliberate sabotage was also alleged. But the confusions that frequently resulted from this situation in Edinburgh is eloquently described in a letter by a Sir Patrick Walker which was published in the Scots Magazine No. 9, of 1814. This incidentally has another importance, for it may well have been this letter which inspired at least some of the ideas which Edinburgh's first professional Firemaster, James Braidwood, put into effect when he organised the famous Edinburgh Municipal Fire Brigade in 1824.

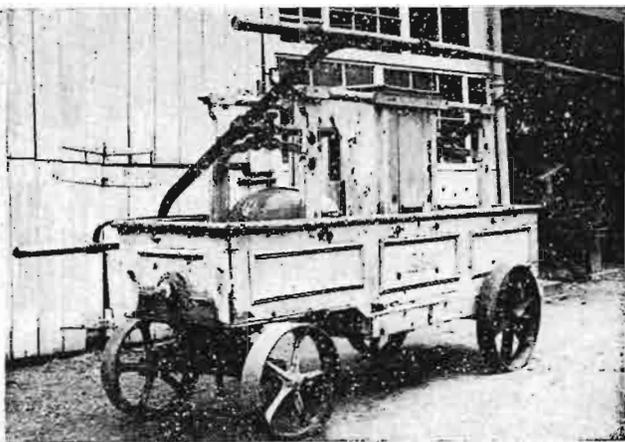
An abbreviation of the letter (which Braidwood printed as an appendix to influential and pioneer work, on the construction of Fire-Engines and Apparatus, the Training of Firemen, and the Method of Proceeding in Cases of Fire, published in Edinburgh in 1830) runs as follows:

*'I happened to be one of those who took an active part in endeavouring to arrest the progress of the late destructive fire at Bishop's Land, High Street—a circumstance I mention merely as it enabled me to remark the misfortune attending a total absence of combined and connected aid, which must often render abortive all exertions, or at least expend unnecessarily the labour of many individuals, whose anxious and philanthropic zeal leads them on such occasions to exert themselves freely, and not without danger.*

*Under this impression, allow me to state a general view of the chief defects to which I have been a witness, in the means of assistance used in cases of fire, with a few hints at their improvement, for the consideration of those better qualified to judge than I can pretend to be.*

*The first and chief one originates in having Company Engines, which creates a degree of jealousy among the men who work them, that, I lament to say seems to increase with the fury of the flames and, at a moment when all success depends on a union of their efforts, then are they most discordant. The other night exemplified the truth of this in a most marked degree. A premium, no doubt, adds to the inducement to hasten forward the engine; but that is a small part of the business, for you have soon many more engines than you require or have water for; and in place of two or three well supplied, according to the circumstances of the case, you have a whole dozen of them running counter to, and depriving each other of the requisite supply of water, much of which is not only consequently wasted, but perhaps also no engine has a sufficient supply to enable it to work with effect; of course the exertion of all is diminished, and the character of a good engine too often lost.*

*The most effectual remedy is to abolish all names, or marks, that distinguish company engines, and form the whole into one body upon military principles—a regiment, as it were, would be formed of firemen, and the men, as in companies, would be attached to the different engines, which would be, like them, numbered. The men of each company, or engine, classed according to their individual qualifications under intelligent men as non-commissioned officers, so as to form a regular gradation and chain of responsibility, from the highest to the lowest, would enable you to work an engine with all the regularity of a piece of artillery, and men could easily be*



Top left; Manual Fire Engine purchased by Duns 1806:

Above; Edinburgh Firemen re-enacting the use of Insurance Company Pumps as used in the city. Circa 1700.

## The Great Fire of Edinburgh

What came to be known later as *'The Great Fire of Edinburgh'* began in a printer's shop in the High Street. The call for assistance first reached the Brigade at about 10 p.m. and within a short time several companies with their engines were on the scene. Unfortunately, they had difficulty in finding water and by 11 o'clock, when a supply was at last located, not only were the original premises burning furiously but the fire had begun to spread. By midnight four high tenement blocks were alight on all floors and the fire was advancing down the Fish-market.

As the night wore on more and more buildings caught fire despite the efforts of the firemen, while the volunteers who came forward to man the pumps found their work made difficult not only by dense smoke but by showers of burning debris.

Towards midday on November 16th, the tall steeple of the Tron Kirk caught fire, and the Kirk's famous bell, which had originally hung in Holyrood Chapel (and whose nagging tongue had inspired one of the poems of Robert Fergusson) came crashing down in a half melted state; and though firemen succeeded in reaching the roof, the fire was so fierce that they had soon to retreat and leave the Kirk to its fate.

The City firemen were now joined by a military force from the Castle, and with this help seemed to be gaining ground. However, as darkness fell, a secondary fire broke out in Parliament Square.

It started on the top floor of an eleven-storey building on the side of the Square which overlooked Cowgate, and, as a representative of the Edinburgh newspaper of the day, the *'Evening Courant'*, reported in the issue of November 1824:

*'Fire spread resistlessly. . . . By about 5 o'clock in the morning all the eastern side of the Square, not consumed by the recent fire, presented one huge burning tower.'*

detached on particular services, such as to strengthen the operations of a particular engine, etc, as occasion might require; thus a great and combined effort would be given to the whole, in a way that must ensure success, and prevent accidents.

The second evil is the waste of water occasioned by hand-carrying, which of itself creates a great confusion. If the remedy suggested above is adopted, this will, as a subordinate part of it, be at the same time remedied; for the combined interest of the whole will lead the firemen to joint their united pipes to the firecock, which is often beyond the reach of those of any individual engine, and, of consequence, a more regular supply of water will, without waste or confusion, be brought to the point of action, and be distributed, under the direction of the superintending officer, to such engines as he may judge most serviceable, either from superiority in their equipment or their position.'

Though the good sense of these proposals is evident, as usual when many interests are involved, nothing was done until 1824 when the Civic Authorities, forced into action by a series of dangerous fires in the old city, in February in Niddry Street: in March in the North Bridge: in June near St Giles when a large tenement, opposite the Royal Exchange went up in flames, took the momentous step of instructing the Police Commissioners to set up an entirely new organisation: an Edinburgh Municipal Fire Brigade, which would remove from the Insurance Company Brigades all responsibility for dealing with fires in the city.

To this end in August 1824, a committee consisting of members of the Police Commission and representatives of the various Insurance Companies affected was set up and on the 10th of October of that year, agreement had already been reached for the formation of the new Brigade. It was to be the first Municipal Fire Brigade in the history of the United Kingdom and one of the first in Europe and its first Firemaster was James Braidwood, a young man of genius, heading a force of 80 firemen.

Though the Edinburgh Fire Brigade came officially in being in October many details of its organisation and financing remained to be settled and meetings of the committee were actually in progress when on November 15th, 1824, the new Brigade, its forces untrained and its existent equipment depleted as a result of the earlier outbreaks received its baptism of fire in one of the worst fires in the history of Edinburgh.

Next, one of the old Edinburgh 'lands', a great block of flats, was ignited and was soon pouring out flames from every window. But let the *Courant* reporter continue:

*'The scene was now awfully grand; and could we have divested ourselves of the thoughts of the losses, and hardships and ruin which attended the progress of the conflagration, we could not have been placed in a situation where we could have derived such a portion of sublime enjoyment. The whole horizon was completely enveloped in lurid flame. The consternation, the daring, the suspense, the fear that sat upon different faces, seemed each appropriately lighted up to express their several emotions the more vividly the dusky faces of the firemen gleamed from under their caps and the very element by which they endeavoured to extinguish the conflagration seemed itself a stream of liquid fire. The clattering of the horses' hooves and the light reflected from their riders' swords, added a kind of martial terror to the whole scene; and when we beheld the whole surrounded with burning piles or with edifices that reflected a light more fearful than that which was thrown upon them, we felt a thrill of mingled awe and admiration. The County Hall at one time appeared like a palace of light; and the venerable steeple of St Giles reared itself amid the bright flames like a spectre awakened to behold the fall and ruin of the devoted City.'*

The fire was now almost wholly out of control with the High Street buildings burning so fiercely that it began to look as if the whole of the old city might be destroyed. Then, on the morning of November 19th, there was a dramatic change in the situation. A great downpour of rain began and thanks to this all the

fires were at last contained and extinguished.

The losses—both in life and in property—were, of course, enormous.

Two firemen and eleven other people were dead and a much larger number had suffered injuries of various degrees of seriousness. Four hundred families had lost their homes and a huge area of the city, extending from the High Street down to the Cowgate, had been almost completely destroyed.

The extent of this disaster, coming so soon after the formation of the Municipal Service, inevitably led to criticism, both of the new Brigade and its young Firemaster. At the enquiry which followed, however, both Braidwood and his 'Pioneers' (as the first firemen were called) were wholly exonerated from blame. Indeed, the inquiry proved helpful in that it forced attention to certain real deficiencies in the new organisation and led to rather speedier action than is usual being taken to remedy these.

The first deficiency revealed by the fire was the absence of a clear directive about who, precisely, was in command during fire-fighting operations. At the great fire of November, in accordance with earlier Regulations, a great host of public officials, Bailies, Law Officers and 'Gentlemen of Importance' had been in attendance—each of whom considered himself competent and authorised to issue orders—often contradictory—to the harassed firemen.

This weakness was remedied by the passage of a law by which the City Firemaster or, in his absence, his Deputy, was given complete command of all fire-fighting operations—and regulations to this effect are today general throughout the United Kingdom Fire Services.

The second deficiency upon which the November

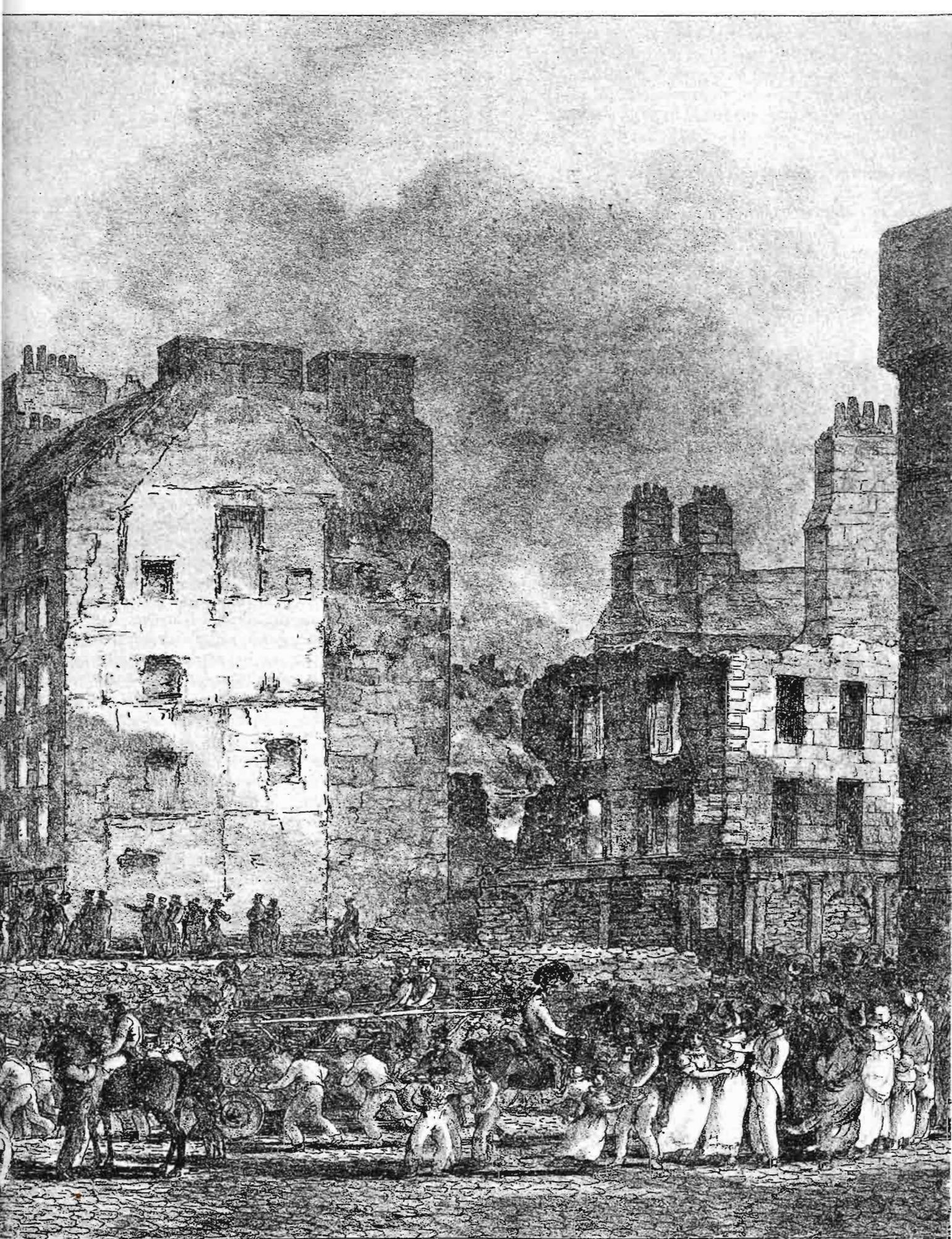


VIEW of the GREAT FIRE in the PARLIAMENT SQUARE, EDINBURGH



*Printed & Published at Robertson & Ballantine's Lithographic Press, 20 Greenside, Place Edinburgh N<sup>o</sup> 1107. 1824.*

*VIEW of the GREAT FIRE of EDINBURGH*



*W. Turner de Lond. del. et fecit*

*taken on the 16<sup>th</sup> day of November 1824.*

experience had thrown a lurid light, was the lack in the city of a sufficient number of firecocks. Though this deficiency could not be remedied so quickly, action again was taken with commendable speed. The first statement of accounts issued by the Convenor of the Edinburgh Police Fire Engine Establishment on December 22nd, 1825, showed already a great improvement over the position in November of the previous year.

As this document is both historically interesting and lists the equipment which was at the disposal of the Brigade in the first year of its existence it is worth quoting in full. It runs as follows:

*David Murray,*  
*Convenor of Edinburgh Police*  
*Fire Engine Establishment*  
*Receipt and Expenditure*  
*22 December 1825*

The very defective state of the means of extinguishing fires in Edinburgh had for some time attracted notice; but the public attention was particularly called to it, in consequence of the fire which occurred in Niddry Street in February 1824, a subsequent fire in the New Buildings, North Bridge Street, in March following, and a fire opposite the Royal Exchange in June that year. On all of which the want of efficient assistance was most conspicuous. This induced the Commissioner of Police to take up the business, who, in the month of August 1824, appointed a Committee of their number to enquire and report.

The Committee held various meetings with several of the magistrates and the managers of the Fire (Insurance) Companies, with a view to organising an efficient system, and a subscription was made by these bodies for the purpose of defraying so far, the annual expense; it being agreed that the deficiency should be paid out of the Police Funds. But before it was possible to procure and train a body of firemen or to form other arrangements, the alarming fire in November 1824 took place. On this occasion almost all the engines which were of the smallest use were completely worked out.

This induced new meetings with the magistrates and the managers of the Fire Companies, and the Police Committee feel much satisfaction in testifying that the utmost liberality was displayed on that trying occasion.

The Magistrates agreed to pay £200 out of the funds of the Community, for the purpose of assisting in procuring a new set of engines, with a free complement of all other necessary apparatus and the following Scotch Fire Companies contributed each the sum of £200, viz:

The Friendly, Caledonian, Hercules, North British Insurance Company of Scotland and Scottish Union, making in all £1400 for the above purpose, while the Commissioners agreed to make up the deficit.

In consequence of this arrangement, the Police Committee continued their exertions, and in the first place, procured and trained by regular exercise, a body of 80 Firemen under the command of a Superintendent (Mr Braidwood) and other officers.

They have also either already provided the Establishment with the following articles, or have ordered them as necessary, for rendering it complete, viz:

14	<p>Three large new Engines (London made) £530 17 4d          Freight of new Engines . . . . . 10 3 5          Sundries for Engines in Edinburgh . . . . . 19 - -          4 Smaller Engines . . . . . 210 - -          6 Portable Engines . . . . . 22 10 -          2 Large Water Carts with Butts . . . . . 42 - -          8 Smaller Water Carts with Butts . . . . . 96 - -          Carriage for spare pipe . . . . . 12 - -          Clothing and helmets for 80 Firemen . . . . . 181 19 1          Additional Fire Buckets . . . . . 39 17 5          Hatchets etc . . . . . 18 8 10          Triangles . . . . . 35 - -          Suction Tubs and Carriages . . . . . 33 - -          Suction Pipe . . . . . 9 - -          500 feet additional pipe amounting to about . . . . . 95 - -          A variety of small furnishings, consisting of ropes, ladders and such like, furnished and to be furnished, about . . . . . 100 - -          £1460 16 1d          Repairs and alterations to Engine House, High Street, about . . . . . £50 - -          Price of Engine House, Portsburgh . . . . . 420 - -          £1930 16 1d</p>
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**NOTE:**

The Commissioners rent an Engine House for the Newtown district; but have been for some time at much loss for one of the Southern Districts.

They are at present ill-accommodated and must expend a considerable sum for a new one as soon as they can find a proper place.

But the grand article of expense consists of what is necessary for a proper number of Fire Cocks. There were only 45 in the whole town when this committee was established and since that time 52 new ones have been erected at an expense (after making an allowance of £2.2|-d for each which the Water Company engaged to pay of £365.11|-d).

It is proposed to erect another 88 which are calculated (after deduction of the Water Company's allowance) to cost £661.17|-d, in all £2,958.4.1d.

Thus upon the necessary stock of articles for the establishment and erecting of additional Fire Cocks, the Commissioners of the Police must expend a very large sum in addition to the contributions by the city and the Scottish Companies.

Upon this article again of annual support for the Establishment, the cost is very great. The annual contribution by the City of Edinburgh and the Fire Offices, including several English agencies, amount to about £335, but the pay of 80 Firemen and their officers, the expense of turning out in case of alarm, and a day of exercise, the constant repairs to the Engines and the tear and wear of all apparatus, will be, from experience hitherto, more than double that money. There is thus a very heavy charge on the Police funds on both branches of the Establishment, while nothing is levied from the inhabitants on account of it.

But besides all this, there is a very important fund altogether awaiting, namely for the relief of such Firemen or others as may receive bodily injury in the Service, and for providing for the families of such as may be killed. It is well known that such accidents often happen, and on all occasions there is a great danger in the business of a fireman, so that if they

are not to be relieved when injured and their families provided for in the event of their death, it is manifest that they will not encounter the risks which they otherwise would do. Unless a direct tax were to be laid on the inhabitants, in order to provide for such casualties, the Committee know of no source from which it can procure, except the surplus of the late subscription, because it would be unreasonable to expect anything more from the Town of Edinburgh or the Fire Companies.

It therefore becomes a matter of deep and serious consideration for the subscribers, and for the inhabitants at large, whether the present opportunity of providing such a fund should be suffered to escape.

(Sgd) DAVID MURRAY, Convenor

Police Office  
Edinburgh  
22 December 1825

One reference in the above document—to the Water Company—requires to be enlarged on.

Reference has already been made to Edinburgh's first water main—a three-inch lead pipe laid by a German plumber between Comiston and the reservoir on the Castle Hill. Useful though this was, it soon proved inadequate to meet the needs of the city and in 1722 a pipe of  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches diameter, also of lead, and fed from additional springs was laid down. This again soon proved inadequate and in 1787 a third pipe, this time of cast-iron and five inches in diameter, was laid and followed in 1790 by a seven-inch iron pipe bringing water into the city from the lower slopes of the Pentlands at Swanston. Even this, however, had fallen short of the demand by the end of the first decade of the nineteenth century, when it became clear that supplies would have to be brought in from farther afield, and to arrange this a private company, the 'Edinburgh Joint Stock Water Company' was formed in 1819. This was the Company referred to in the document of 1825 and though there is no record of the amount of water which was available in 1824, it is known that by 1842 the supply from all sources still only amounted to about 500 gallons per minute—roughly equivalent to the output of only one of the modern South Eastern Fire Brigade's pumps.

These then were the resources in manpower, equipment and water supplies which James Braidwood, the first 'Master of the Fire Engines' of the Edinburgh Municipal Fire Brigade (the older title of Firemaster was not revived until later) had at his disposal in his first year of office. Out of this, in a short time, he created what was in the period, one of the most efficient fire-fighting organisations in the world and a model for almost all of the other municipal brigades which came into being in Britain later in the century. He did so in spite of exceptional difficulties.

As a result of Improvement Acts, the thatched roofs of the Old Town, which had constituted a special fire hazard, had now all been replaced by slates, tiles and other incombustible materials. The Old Town of Edinburgh, however, remained one of the most congested urban areas of Europe.

So far from its abandonment by many of the wealthy for new homes in the Neo-Classical 'New Town' across the valley (now Princes Street Gardens)

having improved the housing situation in the city, it had made it worse. As quickly as 'The Quality' moved out, the houses vacated were divided and sub-divided to form a vastly larger number of separate dwellings, each with its own fire.

The exceptional height of the old tenements also continued to give rise to special fire risks; for the law restricting the height of new buildings did not apply to those which were already in existence, many of which were also in an extremely dilapidated condition.

## James Braidwood and the First Municipal Brigade

When James Braidwood took command of his newly recruited force he was still less than 24 years of age, but the speed and the precision with which he set about the organisation of the new service makes it clear that he must, long before his appointment, have given a great deal of thought to the fire-fighting requirements of the City.

For this he had a useful background. The son of a prosperous Edinburgh cabinetmaker, when his formal education at the Edinburgh High School was completed, he was trained as a surveyor and had an exceptional knowledge of Edinburgh housing conditions as well as the topography of his native city.

What led him to join the police is unknown but it could well be that long before the great fires of 1824, he had already foreseen the necessity for the Municipal Brigade. Indeed, his appointment to the post of Firemaster at so early an age argues strongly that his ideas had already impressed the Committee responsible for the appointment.

Apart from tributes to his 'courage, self-possession and good judgement', very little is known about Braidwood's private personality, but much can be inferred from the kind of organisation he created, from his beautifully kept log books, and from his classical book on the 'Construction of Fire-Engines and Apparatus, the Training of Firemen and Method of Proceeding in Cases of Fire'.

This was the first work of its kind in English and one which, except in so far as its recommendations have been rendered redundant by technical invention, remains valid today. The picture which emerges from these sources is of a man who was a practical and organisational genius of a high order; a man whose concern with fire-fighting was primarily humane; who was possibly somewhat withdrawn in his private life and perhaps also (a not uncommon weakness in men with a mission) a little lacking in humour. Certainly, if it was not intended ironically, his remark relative to the dangers of not arriving feet first into a safety sheet is a masterpiece of understatement; 'If (those in peril) hesitate,' he wrote, 'and fall from the window instead of leaping; the chance is that they may alight on their head; and in that there is a danger of injuring the neck.'

advanced in life. You will frequently find men who though they excel in the mechanical parts of their professions, are so devoid of judgement and resources, that when anything occurs which they have not been taught, or have not been able to foresee, they are completely at a loss.' He also preferred expert tradesmen to unskilled men because, 'there is generally a degree of respect shown to first-rate tradesmen by their fellows, which inferior hands can seldom obtain; and this respect tends greatly to keep up the character of the corps to which they belong, which ought never to be lost sight of.'

The uniform of Braidwood's firemen consisted of blue jackets with brass buttons, hardened leather helmets, white canvas trousers and leather belts with brass buckles to which were attached axes, hose coupling, spanners and a length of cord. The total force was divided into four companies each under the command of a captain and sergeant. The companies were distinguished by separate colours—red, blue, yellow and grey—and the engines and accoutrements of each company painted in the appropriate colour for ready identification.

The companies with their engines and other equipment were centred at fire stations located in the High Street, Rose Street, at Portsburgh (near the West Port) and in the southern outskirts.

Whether Braidwood was wholly responsible for choosing these locations is uncertain but the situations are in line with his theory, doubly important at a time when engines had to be man-hauled to the scene of a fire, that fire stations should be situated at high points—on the sound principle that it is easier and speedier to pull an engine downhill than up.

The headquarters of the Brigade were in the High Street, next to the Police Station. This too was in accord with Braidwood's theories, for it was the City Watchman (there were at the time no police in the modern sense) who were, in the main, responsible for communications.

When a fire was reported, the watchman concerned was instructed to 'run as fast as he could' towards the nearest Fire Station and 'when breathless', to send forward 'any other watchman he met', following at a walk to confirm his information.

The Master of Engines, on receiving notice of any fire was 'to equip himself in his uniform and repair at once to the scene', and as one of his first measures to station sweepers on the roofs of adjoining houses to keep them clear of flying embers. Firemen were expected to turn out as quickly as possible and the man who arrived first at the engine-house, properly equipped, received three shillings in addition to his turnout pay. Each fireman on reporting for duty was given a ticket, marked with his number and the number of his engine, which he had to hand to a police officer within half an hour of the arrival of his engine at the fire. Otherwise his allowance for turning out and his first hour's pay were both forfeited.

Like the firemen of the Insurance Brigades, Braidwood's firemen were 'retained'. They followed other vocations when not on fire service. Indeed Braidwood's own post seems, at the beginning, to have been considered only a part-time occupation. His salary as Superintendent of Engines was £50 in



James Braidwood Firemaster 1824–1832.

In selecting recruits for his Brigade, Braidwood gave preference to slaters, house carpenters, masons, plumbers and smiths and to young men 'from seventeen or eighteen to twenty-five years of age'.

'Slaters make good firemen, not so much for their superiority in climbing, going along roofs etc., although these are great advantages, but from their being in general possessed of a handiness and readiness which I have not been able to discover in the same degree amongst other classes of workmen. It is perhaps not necessary to account for this, but it appears to me to arise from their being more dependent on their wits and more frequently put to their shifts in the execution of their ordinary avocations. House-carpenters and masons being well acquainted with the construction of buildings, and understanding readily from whence danger is to be apprehended, can judge with tolerable accuracy, from the appearance of a house, where the stair is situated and how the house is divided inside. Plumbers are also well accustomed to climbing and going along the roofs of houses; they are useful in working fire-cocks, covering the eyes of drains with lead and generally in the management of water. Smiths are serviceable in any little matters of repair which may be necessary about the engine or apparatus.'

Braidwood's preference for youthful firemen is explained, not only as might be thought, because young men are more agile than those of a more mature age, but by his recognition that young men 'enter more readily into the spirit of the business, and are much more easily trained than when further

his first year of office, although this was raised to £100 in the second.

There was however, one very important difference between the Insurance Company firemen and the men of the Municipal Brigade. The Municipal Force were regularly trained; exercises being conducted at 4 o'clock in the morning, an hour chosen because it interfered least with the men's other occupations and because at that time the streets were uncongested.

Braidwood notes in his book that this early hour gave his men experience of working during the hours of darkness, when fires were most frequent.

Training was, at first, given once a week; later, once a month, and it is typical of Braidwood's attention to detail that the exercises aimed at general physical fitness—on the grounds that while each trade exercised some muscles, few exercised all.

In fire-fighting, Braidwood believed in tackling fires at close quarters, but his care for the safety of his men is shown in his insistence that no fireman should go into a dangerous situation unaccompanied.

He himself seems to have taken an active part in fire-fighting operations and one of his recorded exploits in Edinburgh was his removal of a large quantity of gunpowder from a burning ironmonger's shop. It is typical of the man that when he died, it was on active service—directing (as Master of the London Fire Engine Establishment) operations at the great fire of Tooley Street, near London Bridge.

Braidwood's many original ideas included the use of a steel cross-bow to carry a line over the roofs of houses which were too high for the available ladders and could not be reached by other means. When the line was secured at the farther side of the building it was used to draw over a strong cord and that, in its turn, a single chain by which a chain ladder was drawn up to the roof.

His other inventions included a simple fire escape which in essence consisted of a single chain attached to a stout canvas bag. Those unable to help themselves were put in the bag by the firemen who then lowered

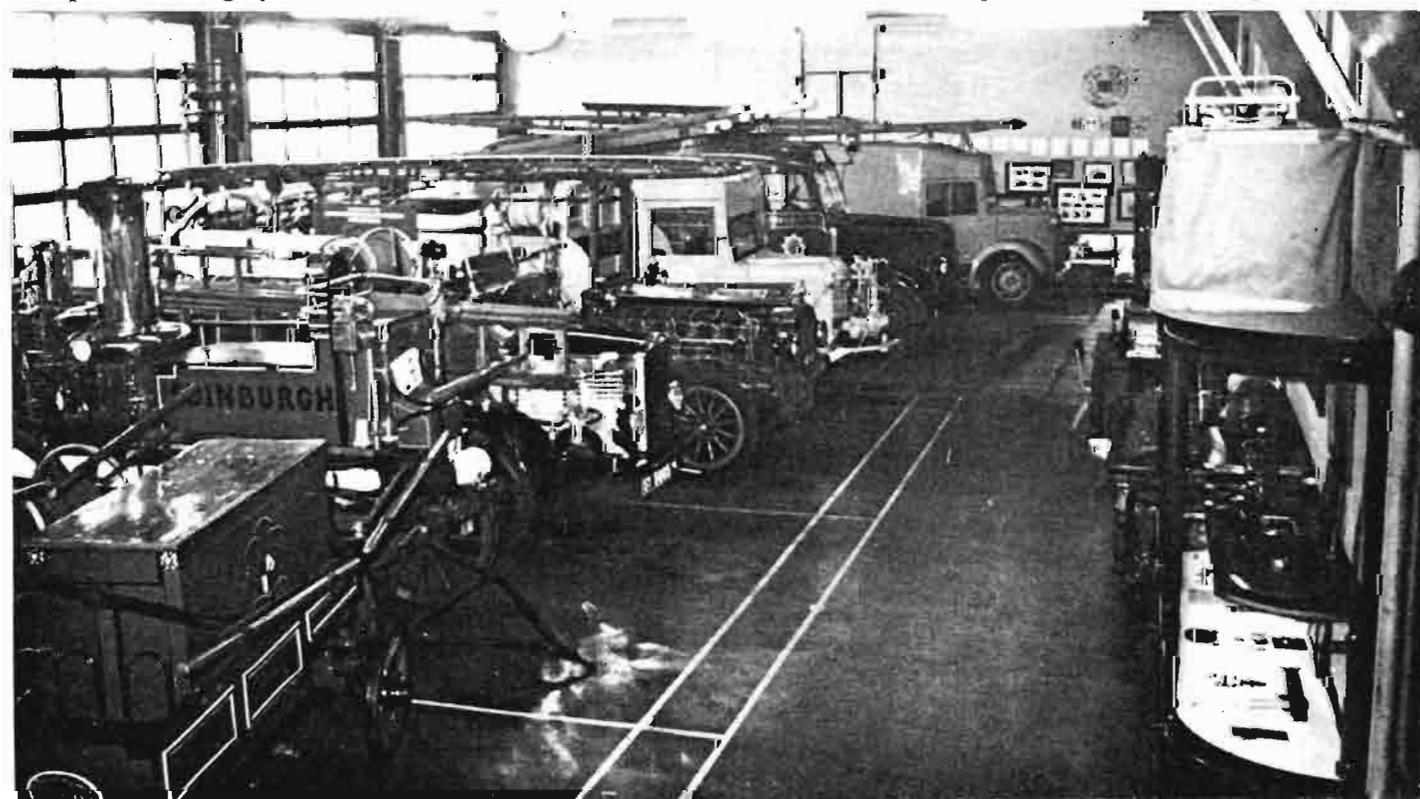
them to safety. In his book Braidwood writes that the men of the Edinburgh Brigade *'were frequently practiced in ascending and descending by single chains'* and that in the use of the rescue device *'bagging each other (seemed) to amuse them exceedingly'*. When practising their climbing and life-saving exercises, the Edinburgh firemen made use of the North Bridge where the height from the parapet to the ground is 75 feet.

One of the fire-engines of the Braidwood era, which belonged to the Red Company, is still preserved in the *'Braidwood and Rushbrook Museum'* at the McDonald Road Fire Station, Edinburgh, where many other items of equipment dating from this era, can also be seen—among them, several of the original leather helmets. A puzzling thing about these helmets is that those which have survived are all far too small to fit the head of the average adult of today, and a possible explanation of this oddity is the acrobatics which the firemen of Braidwood's time were then called on to perform.

Though this is not obvious from the auditorium of a theatre, most professional acrobats are slightly built and below the average height of the ethnic group they belong to.

Though the large increase in the number of fire-cocks in Edinburgh during the period when Braidwood was in charge of the Brigade improved the water supply situation in the City, these were still insufficient, and Braidwood had original ideas for dealing with this difficulty. If the available hose was insufficient to reach the nearest fire-cock, the water he pointed out could be channeled by dams and carried by the force of gravity to within range of the engines. In

Braidwood and Rushbrook Museum. View through brigade museum showing some of the exhibits. Left to right; 1830 Ridgeway Manual; 1890 Shand Mason Steam Pump; 1936 Dennis Ace; 1910 Halley Pump; 1942 Austin Pump Escape; 1939 Dennis Limousine Pump; 1942 Austin Towing Vehicle.



emergencies, he suggested, the City drains could also be called on.

The hose pipes of the time were of leather, heavily greased to keep them supple, and messy and difficult to handle. The engines were both hand-pumped and hand-hauled and though the steep braes of Edinburgh lightened the labour of the haulers they were also a hazard. Edinburgh firemen were often injured when an engine out of control ran them down. Braidwood, with his usual attention to detail, had also advice to give on how this danger, at least, could be reduced. An engine, he pointed out, could always be brought to an immediate halt by swinging it smartly round at right angles to its direction of travel.

Signalling was effected in the Braidwood era by means of a Bo'sun's whistle and Braidwood's personal whistle is among the relics of his time on display at the McDonald Road Museum. His beautifully kept log books are also preserved. Written in a clear firm hand and in a prose that follows close to the bones of the facts, the log book reports show that he studied every fire with a view to increasing his knowledge and improving the service. Though it is curious that so humane a man does not mention the names of the firemen who died on duty during his term of office, his concern for the welfare of his personnel is very evident.

He noted among other things, that—*'The danger to which firemen are most exposed is catching cold, from their being so frequently drenched with water and from their exposure to the sudden alterations of heat and cold.'*

Such drenchings must indeed have been dangerous in the cutting winds and bitter cold of winter nights in Edinburgh, when firemen (apart from having often already worked a long and exhausting day) were frequently on duty for lengthy periods with no opportunity to change their clothes, and Braidwood's precautions against the ill effects of drenchings included the issue of *'a dram of spirits'*, either, when the fire was extinguished, or two or three hours after its commencement. This spirit ration was continued in Edinburgh for half a century afterwards.

But though he recognised the beneficial effects of *'a dram of spirits'*, Braidwood was also aware of the frequent association of heavy drinking and fires and earnestly urged that when any person of the household was expected to return home intoxicated, a more sober member should remain up to see them safely to bed without hurt to themselves or others. He also notes that fires in Edinburgh frequently began as a result of people searching with candles, under beds—a common storage place in the overcrowded houses of the Edinburgh poor.

As it was a public service, the Municipal Brigade was frequently called on for what would now be called *'Special Services'*. These included rescuing people trapped in collapsed buildings, the inspection of buildings suspected of being in a dangerous state and sometimes, on the orders of the Dean of Guild, the demolition of such buildings.

As today (though they are now diminishing), chimney fires formed a high proportion of the workload and a charge of four shillings for the service of one man and seven shillings and sixpence if two were required, was at first made for this service. Later this

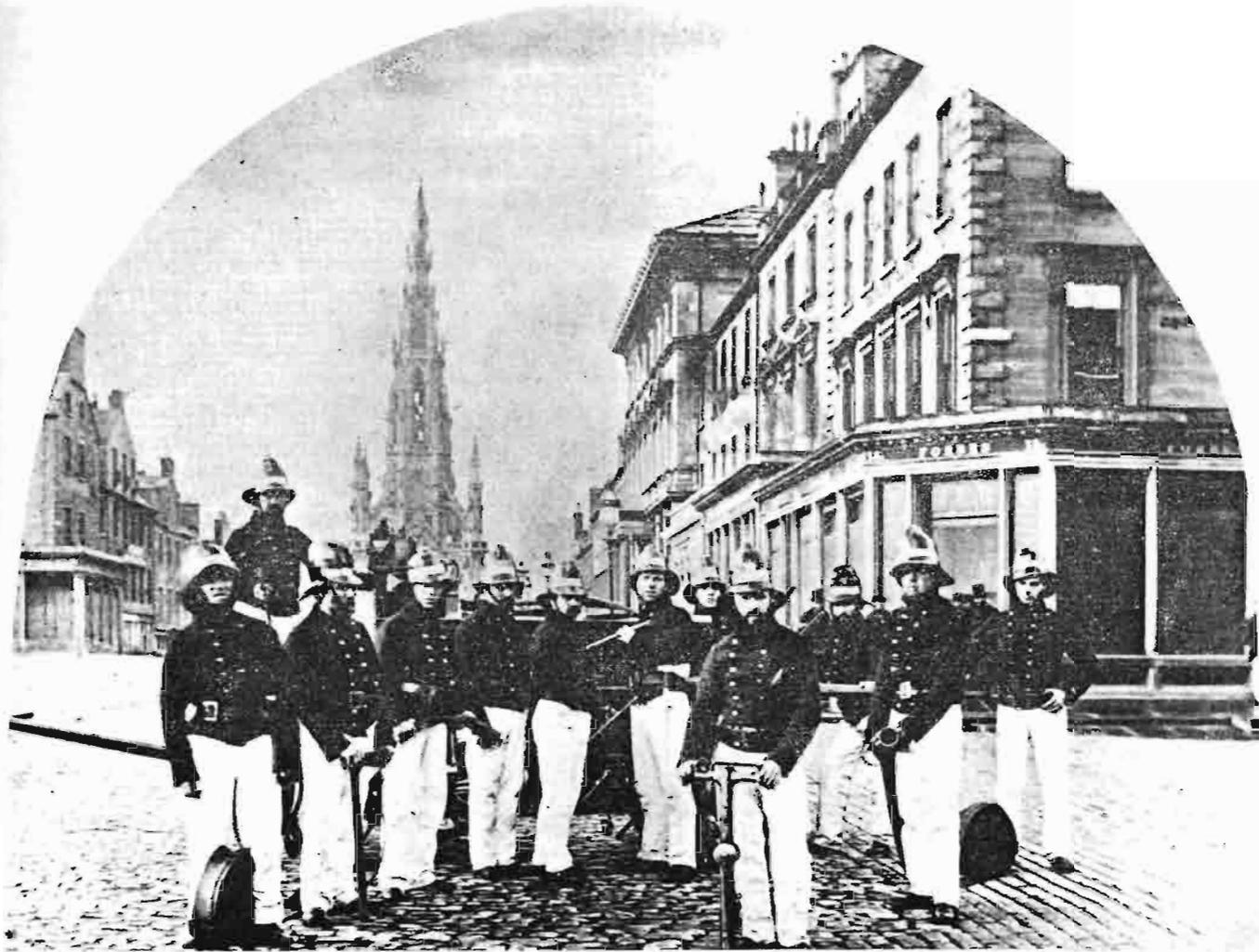


James Braidwood Memorial plaque, Southwark, London.

was reduced to two and sixpence a man, probably to encourage citizens to make use of the service instead of risking a larger conflagration by leaving the fire to burn out.

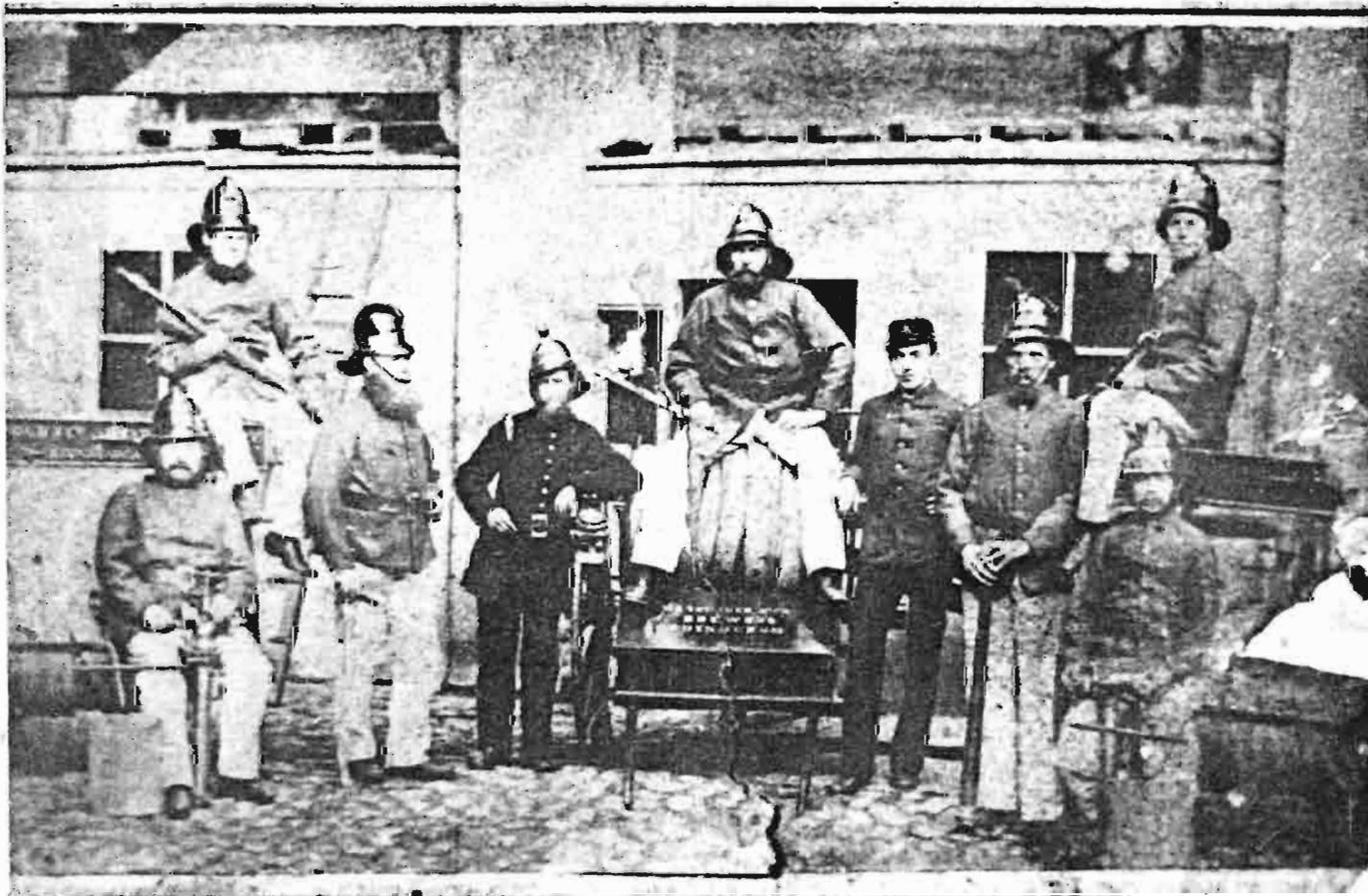
Hogmanay in nineteenth-century Edinburgh was considered to present a special fire risk, and entries in Braidwood's logs show that ten men were always retained on standby duty on such occasions. It is also interesting to read, in the log book entry for December 24th, 1828, that *'This being the night of the trial of Burke and MacDougal for murder, it was thought advisable by the Superintendent of Police and Master of Fire Engines, that seven men should remain in the main office Engine-house, and three in Park Place, all night, in case the mob should set fire to Dr Knox's classrooms in Surgeons Square or his dwelling place at Newington. As almost the whole of the watchmen were off, it would be impossible to collect the firemen in case of an alarm.'*

The Burke mentioned was, of course, the Burke of the notorious Edinburgh (body-snatchers) murder trial in which Burke's partner, Hare, escaped hanging by turning King's evidence. Helen MacDougal was the woman who lived as Burke's wife and Dr Knox, the Edinburgh anatomist and medical teacher who was widely believed in Edinburgh to have accepted bodies in the full knowledge that they had been turned into *'marketable articles'* by other than



Wet Drill at St. Andrew Square by the Rose Street Company in 1880.

Younger's Brewery Fire Service 1880.



natural causes.

Possibly because of the disastrous fire of November 1824, the Edinburgh Municipal Brigade was at first viewed with a certain scepticism, and in its first year of existence only 62 calls for assistance were received. By 1829–1830 however, the number of calls had risen to 288 of which about 200 were to chimney fires.

As the efficiency of the Edinburgh Establishment began to be recognised, appeals were received from other Scottish communities for help in the organisation and training of their own Fire Services. Indeed after publication of Braidwood's book in 1830, such appeals sometimes came from much further afield.

The Scottish border burghs had of course good reason to be interested in fire control. Many of them had suffered even more severely than Edinburgh from the incendiaryism of invading English armies and Kelso, as a result of its situation so close to the frontier, had had a disastrous history in this respect. Its worst fire however, was not started by an English army but was accidental in origin.

It occurred in March 1684 and raged so furiously that by the time it was over the entire town was in ruins.

So great was the destruction that a royal proclamation was issued on the 17th of the following month, recommending a *'general collection throughout the Kingdom for the relief of the suffering inhabitants'*.

## Horses and Steamers

James Braidwood resigned from his post in Edinburgh to become Superintendent of the London Fire Engine Establishment on January 1st, 1833. He left the Edinburgh Brigade on such a crest of achievement that the four Firemasters who succeeded him (James Paterson 1832–39; Robert Hale 1839–46; John Wood 1846–49 and John Mitchell 1849–72) had little to do except keep the organisation he had created working efficiently.

Some of the fires which occurred in the period were, however, serious enough. On December 27th, 1836, a dozen of the very high tenements in the Greenside district as well as a large wood yard were completely burnt out. On January 19th, 1845, the Old Greyfriars Church was lost. May 24th, 1853, saw the Adelphi Theatre in Broughton Street burned out and in August 1857 over a hundred persons were made homeless by the total destruction of a huge nine-storey tenement. In addition, in the early months of 1865 two more Edinburgh theatres, the Royal and the Southminster, were destroyed. The Theatre Royal fire indeed was a major catastrophe, for seven lives were lost when a wall fell on George Mortimer—the then Dean of Guild—and six other volunteers who were trying to rescue others from the ruins.

In the performance of *'Special Services'* during this period the Brigade was also involved in incidents where the loss of life might possibly have been reduced if the firemen had had greater material resources. The worst of these was the collapse on

20

Sunday, November 24th, 1861, of one of the old Edinburgh *'lands'* many of which, despite the fortress-like fronts they presented to the streets, were *'all rotten within'*.

The disaster occurred shortly after one o'clock in the morning, when with no prior warning the whole of this huge seven-storey building, which housed thirty families, suddenly collapsed in a heap of stones and rubble, shattering timbers and the crushed and bleeding bodies of seventy men, women and children.

Even before the dust had settled, rescue workers from neighbouring houses were on the scene, clawing at the debris in a frantic search for survivors and as the building was in the High Street, between North Bridge and John Knox's house, firemen from the Central Station, only a short distance up the street, soon arrived to add their energies and skills to the rescue operations.

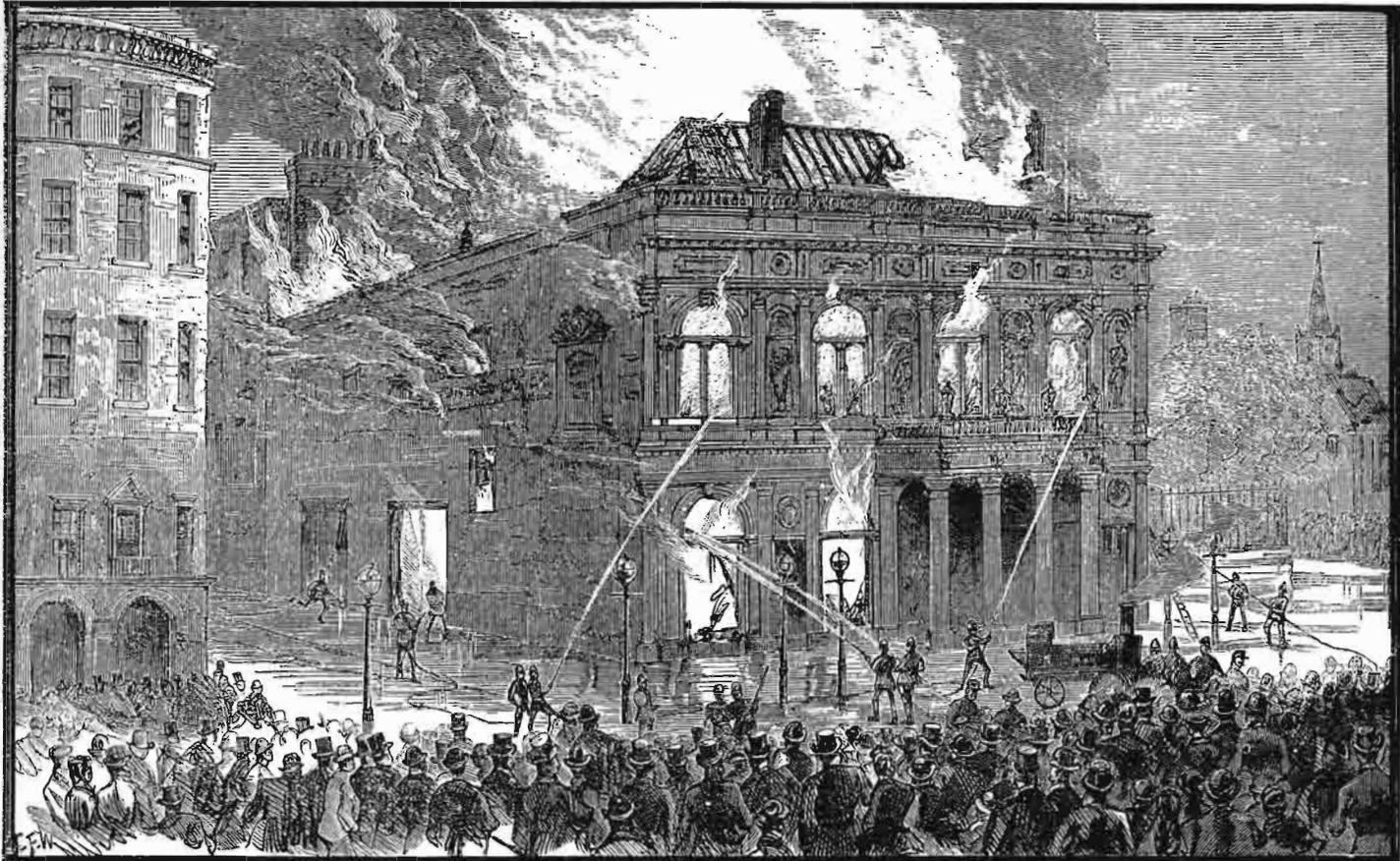
By what seems close to a miracle, only twenty-two of the occupants were actually killed or received fatal injuries in this disaster and in which the most famous incident had in fact a happy ending.

When, after long hours, further search for survivors was about to be abandoned, a human foot was noticed sticking up from the debris and when touched a faint but urgent cry was heard from the debris of *'Heave awa', chaps, I'm no' deid yet!*' It was the voice of the owner of the foot, a young lad called John Geddes. Unearthed, he turned out to be unscathed and immediately asked for a drink of water!

This incident is commemorated by a sculptured effigy of John Geddes's head and a scroll with the words *'Heave awa', chaps, I'm no deid yet'*, above the entrance to Paisley's Close, 101 High Street, and the fall of the Land, and the melancholy aspect of the ruins, is recorded among Robert Louis Stevenson's writings.



Drill in the High Street 1864.



Burning of the Theatre Royal. July 1884.

Incidents of this kind, plus the added danger of fires as a result of the still rapidly growing population, new fire hazards arising from gas lighting and the growth of industrial undertakings, put a heavy strain on the Fire Brigade which no longer held its leading position among the Brigades of Britain. Much of its equipment was now out of date. As late as 1873 for example, the Brigade was still wholly dependent on man-hauled, hand-pumped fire engines (manufactured by Merryweathers, Shand Mason and Colquhoun of Glasgow), very little different from the type which had been in use in Braidwood's time.

Though these manuals had given good service in the first half of the century, when the force of gravity could be counted on to ensure their speedy arrival at fires, this was not the case in the larger city of 1870. Moreover these machines were so exhausting to work that volunteers who came forward to man them had to be relieved at five-minute intervals as well as refreshed with plentiful supplies of beer.

The whole Edinburgh establishment, in short, needed revision and some moves towards this were made by the next Firemaster, a Captain Richard C. Williams, who in 1873 brought the first steam-pumped, horse-hauled fire engine to Edinburgh, and issued the Brigade with a new uniform.

The arrival of the first 'steamer' in Edinburgh naturally caused great excitement and the occasion had a farcical ending. When it arrived at the Central Station in the High Street, where it was to be housed, the smoke stack of the steamer turned out to be too tall to allow the vehicle to enter. In the event, it was decided that the steamer should be kept in the Kings Stables, a location which would of course have horrified Braidwood since the Kings Stables are in a low-lying area from which it was a slow and laborious business for the horses to pull this vehicle to the

heights of the city—even when horses were available, which was not always the case!

Nevertheless these changes looked spectacular enough and when the Brigade mustered in Parliament Square prior to the dash through the town to the Queen's Park in November 1873, its new look was rapturously hailed by a reporter of one of the city's newspapers:

*'The entire Brigade, to the number of forty-five, wore the new uniform which has recently been supplied to them, consisting of a brass helmet and long coat. Formerly the men were arrayed in short blue coats and cork helmets. Their appearance on Saturday showed a marked improvement on former days, every man presenting an exceedingly smart appearance. The rank of the four captains of the brigade is indicated by an epaulette on the right shoulder and the assistant-firemaster has one on each shoulder. The firemaster himself is distinguished by a bright electroplated helmet, by buttons on his tunic of the same material, and by wearing on his breast a large star bearing the initials of the brigade.'*

*The manual engines from St Leonards, Rose Street and Fountainbridge stations, each drawn by a pair of horses, arrived at Parliament Square shortly after one o'clock. The new steam engine was also brought from the Kings Stables—the place where it is kept—and one of the manuals from the Central Station.*

*A large crowd collected in the Square, curious to see the turn-out and many were the remarks which were made regarding the new habiliments. The different sections of the men having taken their places on top of their respective engines, the order was given to drive off towards the Queen's Park. The firemaster, apparently anxious to make as great a display as possible, gave directions to proceed by way of Princes Street, and London Road to their destina-*

tion at St Margaret's Loch, and accordingly the majority of the afternoon promenaders on the principal and fashionable street of the city, were thrown into a state of great excitement at the unexpected appearance of the fire-engines drawn along the street at such a rate as to lead them to imagine that a conflagration of no small extent was in progress in the eastern part of the town.

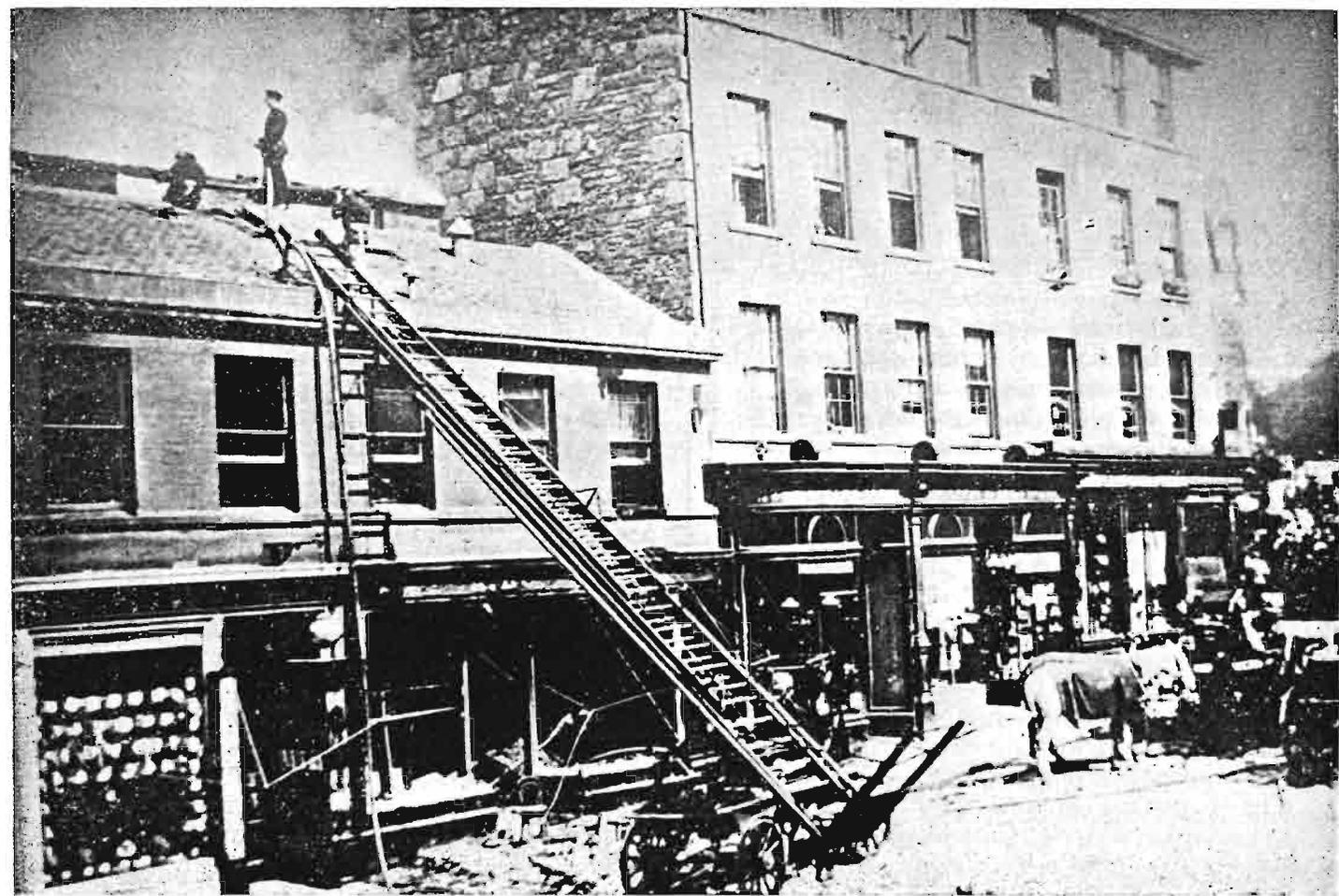
Of course the natural desire of the onlookers was to gain further intelligence regarding the cause of the turn-out of the brigade, but it was soon learned that it was merely an inspection. Accordingly people who were attracted from Princes Street retraced their steps, evidently chagrined at not having been afforded an opportunity of witnessing a good fire.

Meanwhile the brigade proceeded by the London Road to the Queen's Park, and took up a position at the eastern extremity of St Margaret's Loch. The

supposed, the working of the latter was far superior to that of the other engines. Four branches were then attached to the hose connected with the steamer, the water being thrown through two  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch and 1-inch nozzles with considerable power. This showed the advantage of the steam engine over the old manuals.

While the steam engine was working at full pressure—about fifty pounds to the square inch—a length of hose under water burst with a loud noise. From the flames which issued from the chimney of the engine, many thought that some mishap to the steamer itself had occurred. The broken hose was, however, immediately detached and a new length put in its place in a very short space of time, and thereafter the engine worked at as high a pressure as before.

In this report one can see the ideal image (as it still lingers in the minds of those who ever saw such a spectacle) of the fire engine, with its brass-helmeted



Gas explosion and fire which occurred at Todd's Mill, Bakers Place, Stockbridge on 16th July 1901 in which 6 people died and 10 were injured.

fire engines were then run a few feet into the water and immediately afterwards the men formed in line on the banks of the loch in order to be inspected by the Lord Provost. A number of members of the Town Council were present, as well as several leading citizens, all of whom manifested considerable interest in the proceedings. The Lord Provost having walked along the line of firemen, closely scrutinising their dress and accoutrements, the men were sent to their respective machines.

The four manuals were the first that began to play, the water being forced through  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch nozzles. In order to compare the strength of the manuals and the steamer, the latter was then set to work, a  $1\frac{1}{2}$ -inch nozzle being attached to the director. As was to be

crew clinging to its structure, its bell ringing and its chimney throwing off smoke and sparks as it dashes through the streets behind a team of galloping horses, in the very process of formation. But the report is also interesting for other reasons. One is that this is the first mention of horses being used not only to pull the heavy steamer, but also manual engines. There is no record of horses having been used for this purpose before and in this respect at least Captain Williams (who needs all the credit he can be given) may well have been a genuine pioneer, though effective 'horsing' of the Brigade did not take place till a long time later. In the early days the horses employed were not 'on the strength' of the Company but, like the early firemen, only hired as

required.

This was of course a far from satisfactory arrangement—how much so was demonstrated at the Theatre Royal fire of February 1875 when there was a long delay in the arrival of the steamer because no horses were at first available.

Another point worth noting in the report is the very convincing demonstration of the superiority of the steamer over the manual engines, and it is indicative of the attitude of the authorities at this time that this did not lead to the immediate acquisition of more of these new machines.

Though Captain Williams had obviously been appointed with great expectations, his salary of £200 a year was double that of his predecessor, the great parade was the high point of his period of office and when he resigned on March 28th, 1876, it was under a cloud.

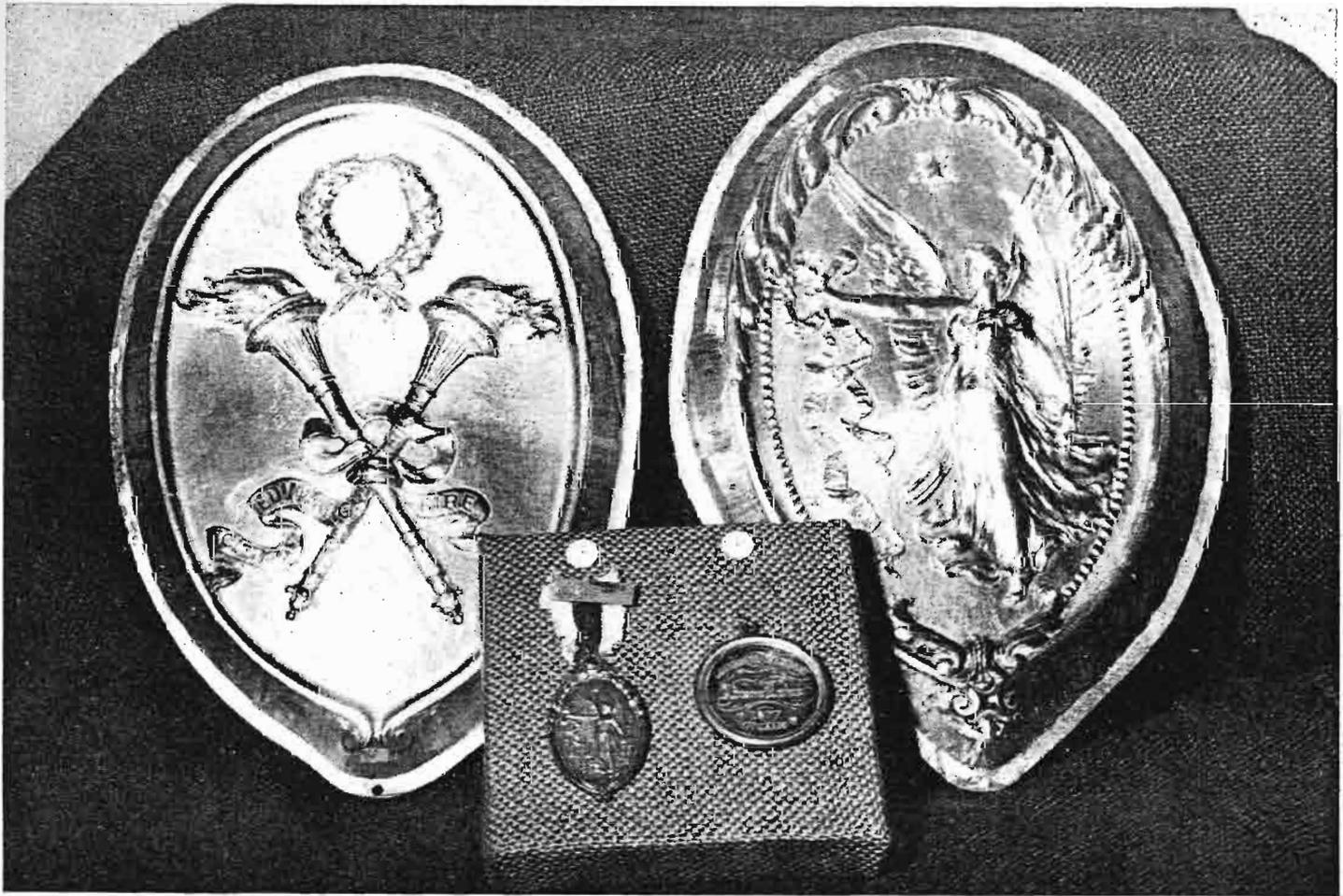
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*intoxicated, two of them being very much the worse for liquor. At first they refused to leave, but eventually they went away'.*

**They did not, however, go far!**

*'During the night the firemen went into the house of Mrs Marr where they were found on the following afternoon. One or two of them were sober, but the others were not. One of them was very intoxicated and said he would not leave except by force. There were other statements which were not yet fully elucidated but which were the subject of a rigid policy inquiry. It was stated to the committee that a number of wine and brandy bottles had been removed and that trinkets and jewellery of various kinds had not been accounted for. . . .'*

*'The sub-committee felt bound to state that they were not satisfied with the information they had been able to elicit from the firemaster.'*



Medals for valour 1880's.

When a fire broke out in Brandon Street, in the Stockbridge area, not only was the Firemaster unlocatable; later, when he did arrive, he generously but unwisely ordered supplies of whisky and wine for the firemen from the neighbouring public house and then went off again on his private affairs.

These sins were heinous enough in the eyes of the Edinburgh councillors, but even worse followed.

As came out in a later report to the Council by the Lord Provost's Committee, Firemaster Williams' hospitable gesture had been all too generous. According to an *'Evening News'* report of a Council meeting dated February 29th, 1876, after the departure of the firemaster, *'a Mr Murray of Callands found eight firemen in his house (no. 4), all of them more or less*

The Firemaster appointed following this scandal (which had revealed a considerable degree of demoralisation in the once much admired Edinburgh Brigade) was a Mr Samuel B. Wilkins who, prior to his Edinburgh appointment, had been Fire Superintendent at Barrow-in-Furness.

Firemaster Wilkins was a very different type from the flamboyant but undependable Williams.

When he came to Edinburgh he had already invented an improved fire-escape (an advance on the chain-and-bag escape of Braidwood); had a patent for a ball-cock hydrant and was already nursing ideas for an apparatus for coiling hose and a new rope ladder.

Wilkins came to Edinburgh at a favourable time in

# A DAY IN THE LIFE OF AN I



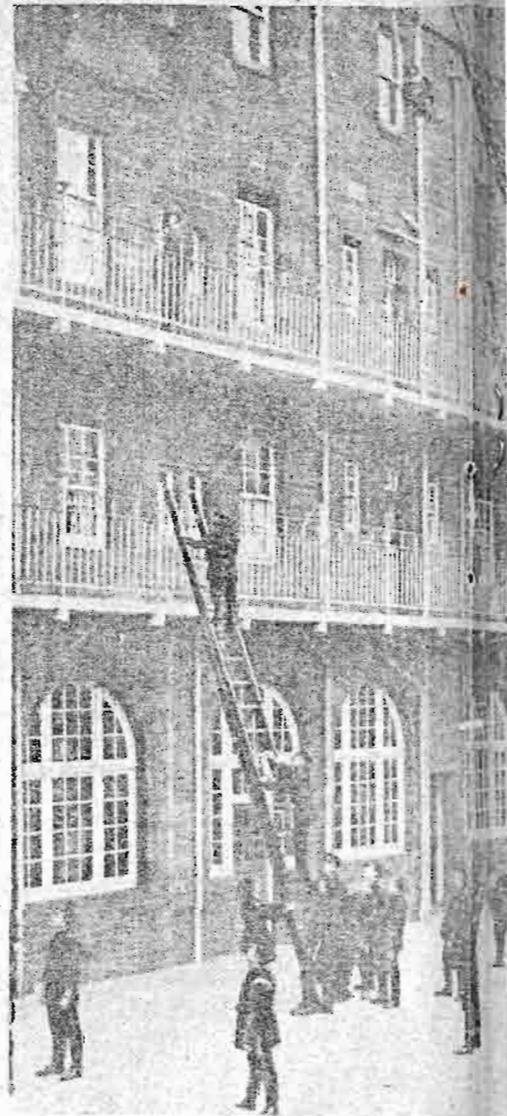
PHYSICAL DRILL.—Men at Edinburgh Fire Brigade Headquarters, Lauriston Place, have to keep fit for their arduous duties.



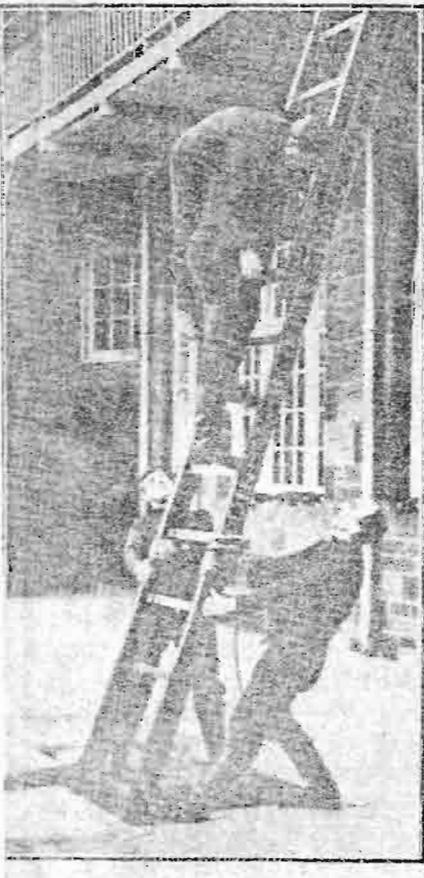
GIRLS AT WORK in the duty room.



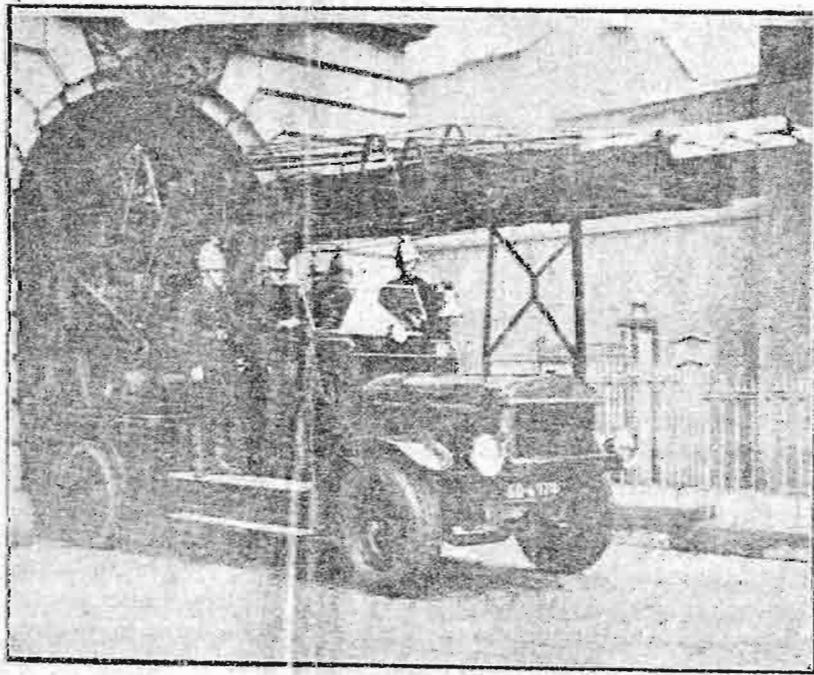
HEADQUARTERS OFFICIALS.—Left to right—Engineer-Lieut. Nelson, Deputy-Firemaster Smith, and Lieut. Curriek.



DIZZY HEIGHTS.—The brigade is equipped with all the latest apparatus, including a fire escape which can reach the top of the highest buildings.



DOWN TO SAFETY.—The work of rescue is an important part of the training.

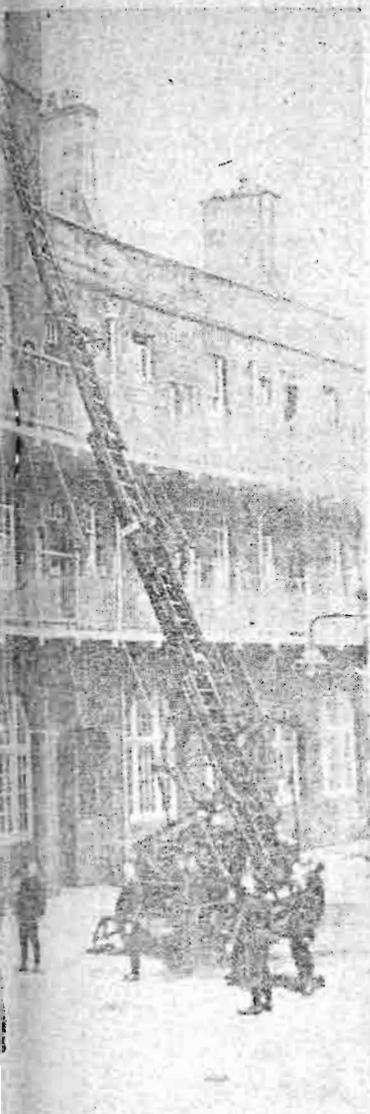


FULL SPEED AHEAD.—One of the splendid engines of the brigade leaving the station in response to a call.

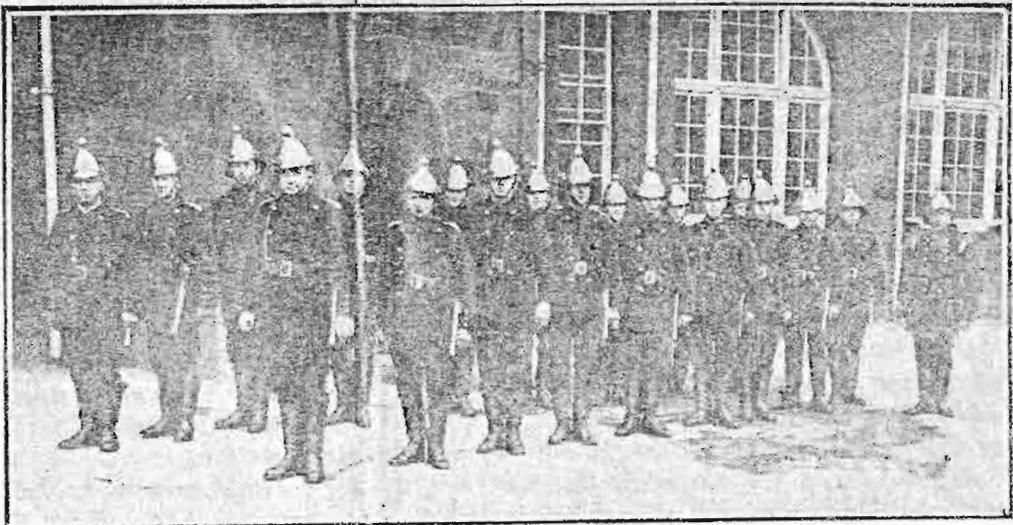


THE CHIEF.—Firemaster Smith, Edinburgh Fire Brigade.

# EDINBURGH FIRE FIGHTER



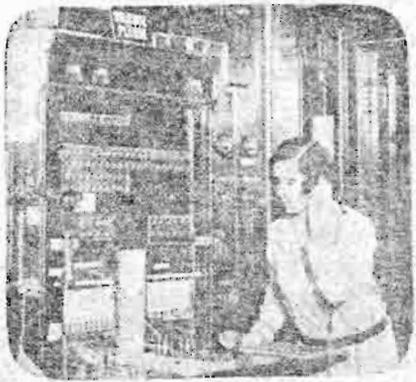
all the modern rescue appliances. Here, at any time, should the occasion arise.



**IN FULL DRESS**—The brass helmet is to be discontinued in Edinburgh in favour of one made of leather.



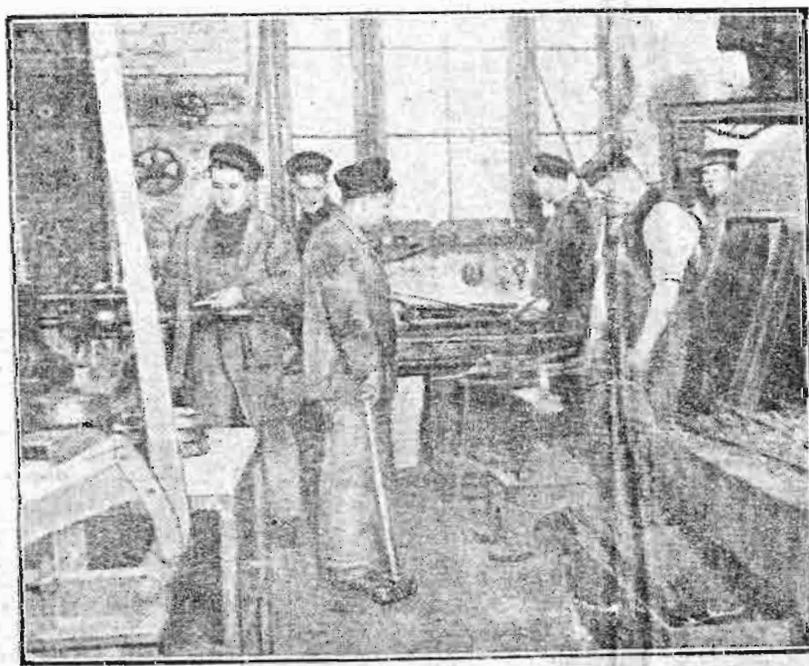
**AT THE HOSE**—A test to ensure that all is well with the hose.



**A CALL** comes through in the duty room.



**DAVY RESCUE ESCAPE**, with one of the female staff as "constrainer."



**IN THE WORKSHOP**—There are many tasks to be done, as this photograph from the workshop shows.



Edinburgh.

the sense that the Edinburgh Council had been sharply jogged by the Williams affair into a realisation that if the demoralisation of the brigade was to be overcome and the service brought up to the requirements, drastic changes were urgently required. And the new Firemaster had plenty of suggestions. These were for the establishment of three new fire stations, to be situated in Torphichen Street, James Street and Boroughmuirhead; a sizeable increase in the strength of the brigade (which had fallen to fifty-five) to seventy-six—including the Firemaster and his Assistant—and, most revolutionary of all, that the dependence on auxiliaries should be ended and the Edinburgh Fire Brigade be made a full professional force with its own horses.

Of these proposals the first two were accepted at once and within a fairly short time a start at least was made to the professionalisation of the Brigade. A force of full-time firemen was attached to the Central Fire Station and housed in flats close by, and so quickly proved their worth that in September 1880 the Plans and Works Committee unanimously agreed to recommend to the Council that the remaining auxiliaries, who then numbered thirty-five, should be dispensed with and a fully professional brigade established.

In March 1882, the North Berwick Marine Hotel went up in flames and a telegram sent to Edinburgh for assistance. An engine and crew was quickly despatched by special train but by the time they arrived, there was, unfortunately, little left to save.

Firemaster Wilkins himself was much in the news in 1882 when he had several exhibits of life-saving apparatus on view at an exhibition at Alexandra Palace, London. These included an impermeable stage screen for theatres; a model mill constructed to minimise fire risks; a 'simple and inexpensive fire escape for commercial travellers and others', and specimens of fire hose, hydrants, etc. Incidentally, on show at this exhibition was a working model of an Edinburgh manual fire-engine of the pre-Braidwood era which had been presented to Professor Playfair by Fletcher Yates, a Firemaster in Edinburgh in 1818, and a working model of 'the first modern fire-engine' introduced into Edinburgh in 1824.

On Firemaster Wilkins' urging, the Plans and Works Committee of the Council, in 1883, approved the installation of 136 new hydrants and agreed to 'give further consideration' to his proposals for three more district Fire Stations to be situated at Causeway-side, London Road and Tynecastle; the recruitment of six additional full-time firemen and the acquisition of a further three horses.

Though there was still some dependence on auxiliaries, the brigade, under Firemaster Wilkins' direction, was now moving slowly but surely towards his goal of a fully professional force. In comparison with several other cities, however, Edinburgh's progress in equipment was still slow. However, in 1886, thanks to its inventive Firemaster and the skill of the craftsmen of the Brigade, Edinburgh acquired a piece of equipment, entirely new in the history of fire-fighting, a combination fire-engine, fire-escape and hose carriage.

'The Scotsman' for October 6th, 1886, reported a demonstration of this new machine as follows:

*'There has just been added to the equipment of the Edinburgh Fire Brigade a new set of appliances designed by the Firemaster (Mr Wilkins) and constructed by the men in his service. The apparatus consists of a manual engine, escape and hose carriage, etc, combined, the whole weighing rather under a couple of tons. The workmanship reflects great credit on the establishment. Yesterday afternoon the working of the machinery was tested in the presence of the Corporation, a number of interested gentlemen from a distance and a large number of spectators. The fire escape, or hose ladder, which is in three divisions, was hoisted from its horizontal position on the car to a height of sixty feet against the Police Chambers in the east corner of Parliament Square. The time occupied in doing so being only a few seconds less than a minute and a half. Four firemen at once ascended to the top of the building and two of them "rescued" their fellow workmen by carrying them down the ladder, the couples descending one after the other. The next ascent was taken part in by five men, one of whom carried a portable canvas shute. Immediately the shute had been adjusted four men were sent through it in turn, the fifth man returning with the shute, etc.*

*The car, it should be stated, has a strong wooden frame and can be drawn either by men or horses. On*

Hand-drawn cart. Rose Street Fire Station 1890.



*the front part there is a wooden box, the top of which supports the ladder when in a horizontal position, and also forms a seat for the driver. Inside the box are several hundred feet of hose and other necessary fire-fighting articles. In its present form this, it is*

claimed, is the first fire-engine, fire-escape and hose carriage constructed and in use in this country.'

Samuel B. Wilkins resigned from his post of Firemaster of Edinburgh on November 28th, 1895, 'owing to infirmities brought on, and the effects of operations, caused through accidents sustained' while carrying out his duties.

Very much a professional fireman, he had raised the Edinburgh Brigade from one of the lowest points in its history to a level of efficiency in which it compared once again with the best of the brigades in the country and this, despite the reluctance of the Edinburgh Corporation to invest as fully as the needs of the city required in up-to-date equipment.

There is no doubt that after Braidwood, Firemaster Wilkins made a larger contribution to the Fire Service in Edinburgh and, through his inventions, to fire-fighting in general, than any other of the city's firemasters. Though it is usually to his successor, Arthur Portage, that the credit for the 'transformation' of the Edinburgh Brigade is accorded, it was Wilkins who sowed and nurtured the harvest which his successor reaped.

His practical aim throughout his period of office was the professionalisation of the Brigade, which he achieved, and the nature of his inventions makes it clear that, like Braidwood, his primary interest in fire-fighting was the prevention of suffering and

loss of life.

Besides his specifically fire-fighting inventions, he also produced what can best be described as a wheeled invalid carriage which, he suggested when he demonstrated the machine before the Royal Scottish Society of Arts, could be used in hospitals, for street accidents, as well as for the transport of the mentally deranged.

In pursuit of his aim to professionalise the brigade, his object was to make it—so far as possible—a self-sufficient organisation and if he gave offence at one time to the auxiliaries (to whom the city owed a great debt for their past services) this was perhaps inevitable.

According to a newspaper report in October 1895, when Firemaster Wilkins retired he had a case 'stuffed full of medals for inventions' which presumably included the silver medal of the Royal Scottish Society of Arts—an award which has seldom ever been made to a fireman.

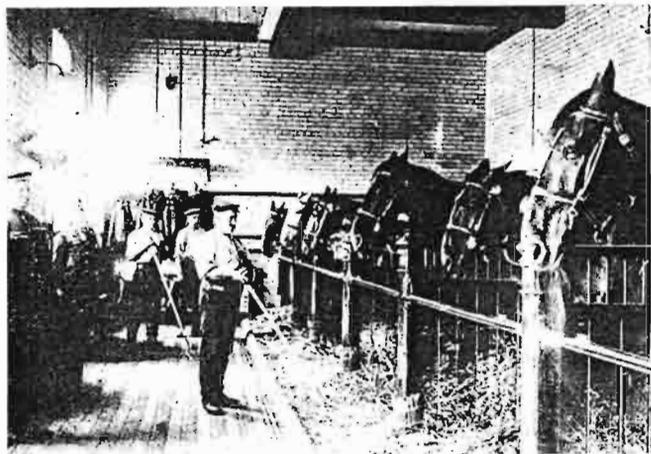
In the last decade of his office he had many serious fires to contend with. These included several other theatre fires, besides those already mentioned; a great blaze at the City Paper Works; a serious fire at the extensive printing works of Thomas Nelson & Son, with damage estimated at £200,000; and a huge fire on Princes Street, in October 1892, when the premises of Jenners & Company were burnt out by a fire at which four members of the Brigade were

Horse-drawn pump outside London Road Fire Station 1902.



injured and the material loss was in the neighbourhood of £240,000.

At all these fires he and his Brigade acquitted themselves with great distinction, and it is strange that he is not better remembered in the City.



Stables at Lauriston Yard. Circa 1900.

## Sleigh Bells, Zeppelins and Motorised Vehicles

Arthur Pordage, who succeeded Wilkins as Firemaster was also very much a professional fireman, but otherwise the two men were very different. Wilkins won the respect of the people of Edinburgh by the ingenuity of his inventions and by a long series of small reforms the good sense of each of which was evident even before it was proved in practice. Arthur Pordage, on the other hand, was something of a revolutionary. A forceful and colourful personality, he foresaw the future needs of the city so far as its fire service was concerned and was remarkably successful in persuading the City Councillors to prepare in advance to meet them.

The first of the new Firemaster's innovations—hanging sleigh bells on the harness of the Brigade's horses—did not however win the approval of one newspaper commentator, who, in discussing the failure of the Brigade to deal promptly with a fire which broke out 'a stone's throw' from main High Street Station, went on to charge Arthur Pordage with frivolity:

*'So far Firemaster Pordage has signalled himself chiefly by making the Fire Brigade turn out something like an exhibition of Cooke's Circus or Wombwell's Menagerie. Besides substituting sleigh bells for the original whistle, Mr Pordage has put his name to grand expansion schemes for his department. Probably for the present it would be better to make use of the appliances in existence.'*

Perhaps inspired by fears that Edinburgh had acquired another Captain Williams, this article was unfair on almost every count.

The Brigade's poor performance at the fire referred to had been due to a delay in locating a water supply, and as a newcomer to the City the new Firemaster

could hardly be expected to know the situation of every hydrant.

But it was the writer's sarcasm about 'circus horses' that was most misdirected. Among Firemaster Pordage's more personal contributions to the efficiency of the Edinburgh Brigade one of the most important was the introduction of a new type of harness, of his own invention, which could be fastened in place in a fraction of the time previously necessary; and it was also during his period of office that the Brigade horses were so well trained that on the sounding of an alarm, the horses would go of themselves to their required places before the engine and under the suspended harness.

The effectiveness of this system was vividly demonstrated some years later when the performance of the Edinburgh Brigade was judged against that of the Paris Pompiers, then acclaimed as the finest Fire Brigade in the world; and the Edinburgh team beat the Frenchmen by a handsome margin in the speed with which their engines were manned, horsed and on the road.

But if Arthur Pordage was at first viewed with scepticism in Edinburgh, he was soon a hero to the people of Leith.

There had, for centuries, been competition and occasionally hostility between the citizens of Edinburgh and of Leith, and this extended at times to the two Fire Brigades. The Brigades, nevertheless often co-operated and when a destructive fire broke out in a Leith wool broker's premises in 1897, a call for assistance was answered so promptly by Edinburgh that the Edinburgh machines were at the fire well ahead of those of Leith. The Edinburgh firemen were indeed actually on the point of going into action when their water supply was suddenly cut off. A member of the Leith Brigade had detached their hose from a hydrant to secure the use of the latter for the local service; the result of this 'sabotage' was the Edinburgh machines stood idle for twenty minutes while the Leith steamer was still ineffective.

The incident naturally caused an uproar of protest in Leith and when an even more serious fire occurred at a cork factory at the foot of Easter Road a few months later, the arrival of the Edinburgh machines at the factory was greeted with cheers and cries of 'Edinburgh, first again!' The Edinburgh Firemaster recognised, hailed with shouts of 'Good old Dunbar'—Dunbar being Arthur Pordage's nickname.

The most important item in the new Firemaster's 'grand expansion scheme' was the creation of a new Central Fire Station at Lauriston to replace the old premises in the High Street.

There was strong opposition to this project on the grounds of its expense but in the end the Firemaster's proposals were accepted and the new station (which cost £43,000 including the site) was formally opened on June 7th, 1900, by Lord Provost Mitchell Thomson—who had originally opposed the building.

As part of the opening ceremonies, there was an experimental turnout by the Brigade, when the first fire-engine was clear of the station in fifteen seconds and the second in twenty-nine seconds.

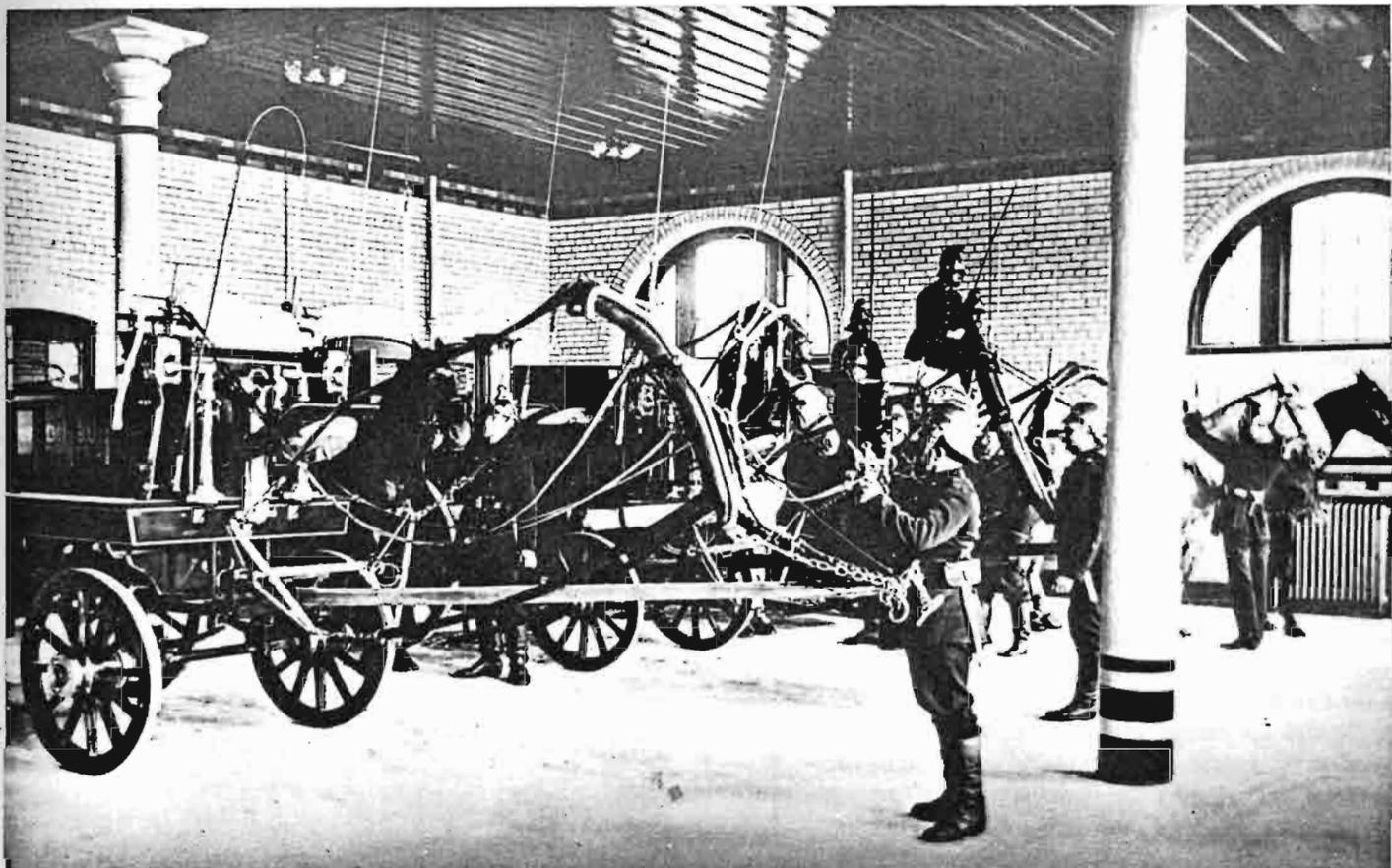
One feature of the new station much commented on was the steel sliding pole by which, on an alarm, the firemen housed above slid down to the engine

room. This was the first mention of such a device being used in Edinburgh.

Firemaster Pordage's expansion scheme did not stop with the new station. It also included an increase of the strength of the Brigade from forty-one to sixty-two and the acquisition of ten additional horses. In practice, the Committee agreed to thirty-nine men and seven horses. In addition, the count of steamers

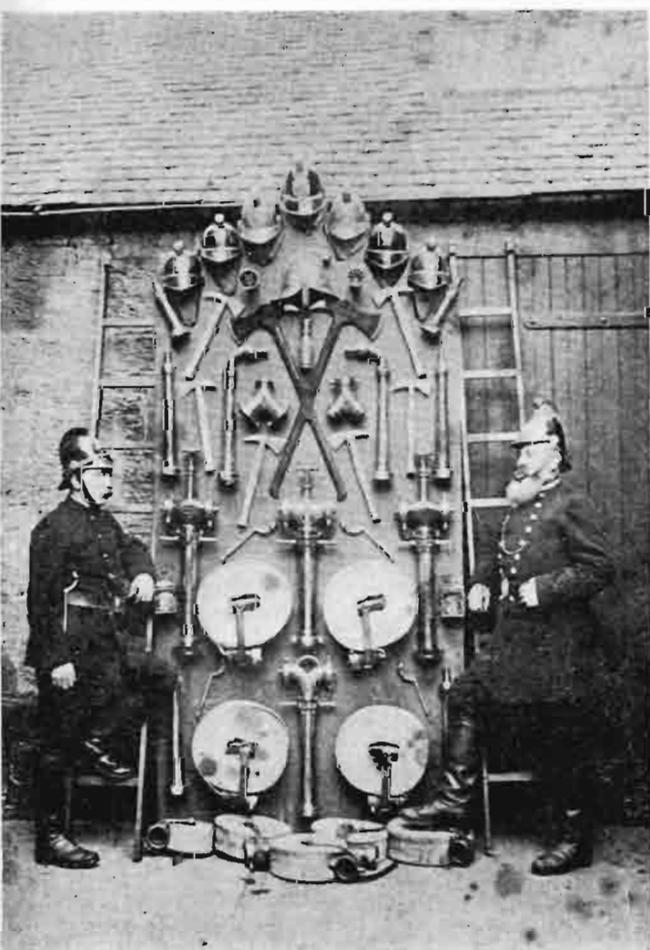
in the City was raised to six—which the then Treasurer of the City incidentally considered 'one too many'. After these 'sweeping improvements', the annual maintenance cost of the Brigade was still only £10,045—though this was in a period of inflation when the expenditure on other City departments had also risen by approximately fifty per cent in ten years.

On June 4th, 1903, Mr Pordage's inventive powers



Above: Engine Room at Lauriston showing the quick fastening harness suspended from the ceiling. When the alarm was given it also sounded a bell in Croall's stables in Johnston Terrace and fresh horses were brought up to the station to stand by.

Left: Firemaster Brown and Deputy with a selection of Brigade equipment at Leith Fire Station 1892.



were displayed in a demonstration of a fire-escape built to his own design in the Brigade's workshops.

Mounted on a four-wheel carriage, the escape was on the telescopic principle and could be extended to a height of 75 feet. At the same time improved life-saving was demonstrated and it is interesting to note that as early as December of that year the Town Council 'considered'—though it was decided against—the acquisition of a motor-driven fire-engine.

Other inventions of Firemaster Pordage manufactured in the Brigade workshops included a light portable escape specially designed for the needs of Edinburgh, where the rear of buildings can often only be reached through narrow closes and pends; and of a patent hose nozzle, with three jets, which could be 'stopped down', as necessary to diminish water damage.

The Edinburgh press and public were now loudly approving of the City's Firemaster.

'Unquenchable fire!', cried one orator on the Meadows (refuting a protagonist of orthodoxy). 'Man, there's nothing unquenchable! Pordage and

his men could put out Hell!

The Brigade obtained its first motorised fire-engine in 1906, a sixty h.p. Merryweather 'Fire King' of the largest type, with an output of five hundred gallons per minute. The fuel of the unusual vehicle was paraffin, stored in tanks under the hose box. It had water tanks on each side of the boiler containing enough water for the engine to run for thirty to forty minutes and the fuel carried was sufficient for about four hours.

This was by far the most powerful machine which had ever operated in Scotland and its performance fulfilled all expectations. Its only serious deficiency was that it was difficult to steer and tended to get caught in the tram lines when, local legend alleges, it sometimes ended up in the tramway depot!

A second machine of the same type was purchased in 1908 and stationed at Stockbridge. Machines of this type were, however, still considered extravagant. It was not till 1912 that the Council agreed to the purchase of a third motorised engine—this time a petrol-driven pump and First Aid Tender. The body-work of both these appliances was built in the Brigade workshops.

The slow progress in the motorisation of the Brigade was probably due to the freedom of the City from any really disastrous fire between the date of Pordage's appointment and the Spring of 1911. On the evening of May 9th of that year however, any complacency which had arisen was shattered by the worst theatre fire in the history of Edinburgh.

The theatre concerned was the Empire Theatre of Varieties in Nicholson Street which, on the night of the fire, was occupied by the company of the famous illusionist, Lafayette, and the cause of the outbreak was the fusing of wire carrying electricity to a stage light while a melodrama entitled 'The Lion's Bride' was moving towards its conclusion.

As the setting of the play was an Eastern potentate's harem, the stage was crowded with highly combustible props, which, ignited by sparks from the fuse, flared up immediately.

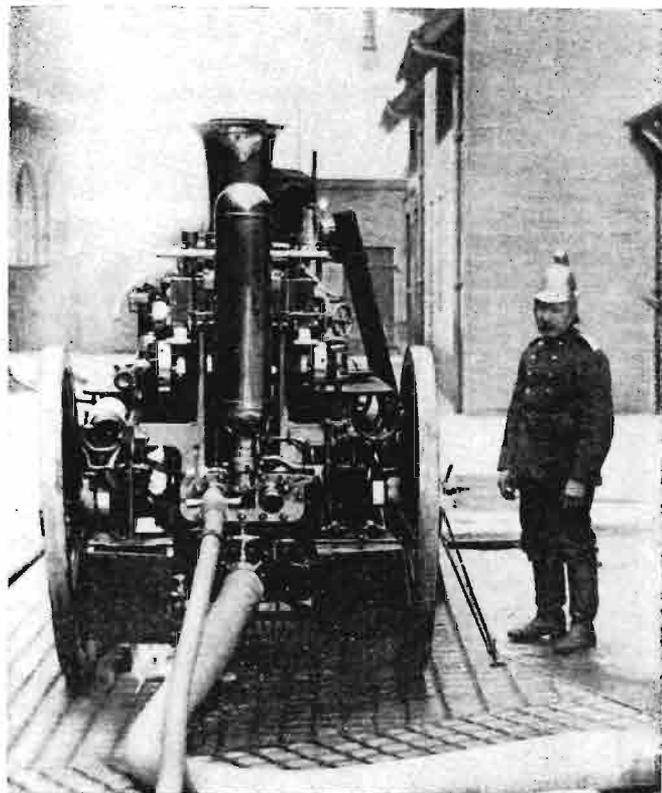
Thanks to the safety curtain, not one of the audience (which left the theatre in a self-disciplined and orderly fashion) was injured but the performers were less fortunate.

According to the obituary of Arthur Pordage's in an issue of 'The Scotsman' of 1954 (probably more accurate than the figures given in the reports of the day) no less than eleven artistes, including the great illusionist, lost their lives in this fire while eight other persons (including one fireman) received injuries of various degrees of seriousness.

Among the many dramatic incidents associated with this tragic fire was one of a distinctly macabre nature. When the coffin containing the charred remains of 'Lafayette' was actually on its way for burial, the body of the real Lafayette was discovered beneath the stage! The corpse in the coffin was that of the illusionist's double.

One of the Edinburgh Brigade, John L. Grinton, was awarded the Fireman's Medal for valour 'for bravery and the saving of life' at this fire of which some older citizens of Edinburgh may still have recollections.

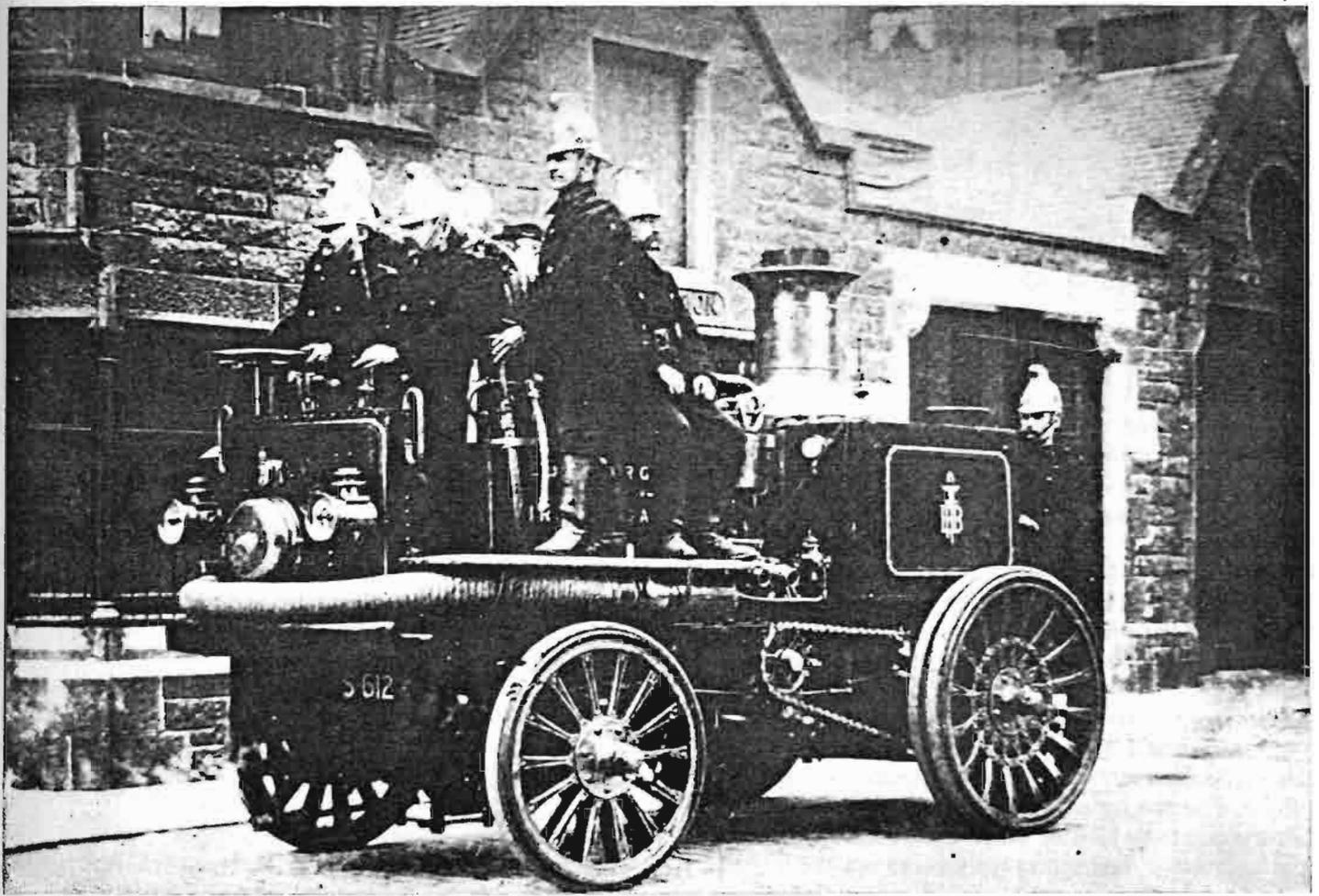
Edinburgh experienced a Zeppelin raid during the



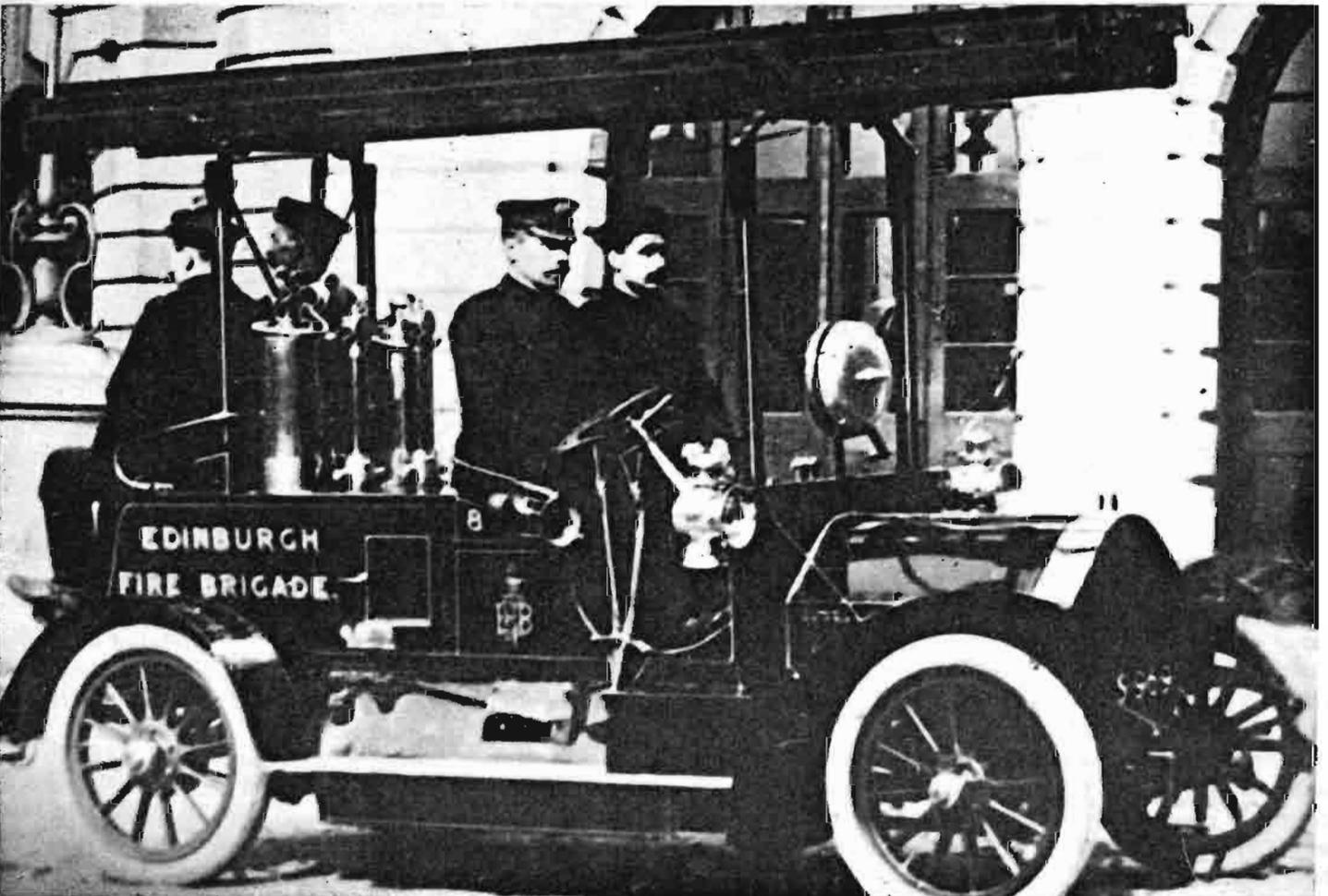
Top; Fire drill showing engines, hose and ladders at Headquarters (Lauriston) circa 1900.

Above; Last of the steamers in Lauriston Yard circa 1910.

First World War and this new danger probably helped to speed up the motorisation of the Service. At any rate, in 1915 and 1916, further power vehicles were acquired. Another interesting development of the war years was the reappearance of 'volunteer firemen'—forerunners of the Auxiliary Firemen who gave such



Merryweather Fire King introduced into service in 1906.



The first Motor Tender 1908—Humber Chassis—Bodywork made in Edinburgh Fire Service workshop.

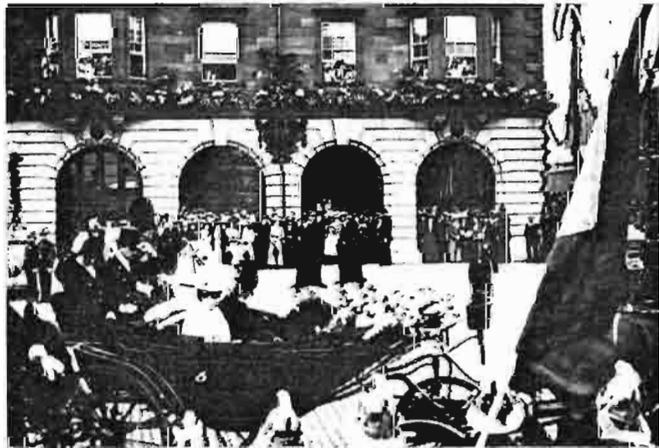
excellent service in World War II.

In 1920, as a result of the City of Edinburgh Act, the boundaries of the capital were extended to take in the Burgh of Leith, and the districts of Cramond, Corstorphine, Colinton, Slateford, Longstone, Liberton, Gilmerton, Newton and Straiton in the County of Midlothian.

In Leith, the 'takeover' of the port (for such it was) was bitterly resented and the merger of course involved among much else, the end of the Leith Fire Brigade as a separate entity. Under the new dispensation, Mr Pordage was confirmed in his appointment as Firemaster of the enlarged City, while Mr John Guthrie, previously Firemaster of Leith, became Senior District Officer in charge of the Leith Station and District, with seniority rank after the Third Officer.

Founded as a municipal force in 1837, the Leith Fire Force had at one period been more advanced in its equipment than Edinburgh. It had two steamers to Edinburgh's one, and larger than the Edinburgh machine.

During its history it had had many dangerous fires to contend with, for the Port, with its large docks, mills and bonded warehouses was, and remains, a high risk area and dealing with large fires, had often had the assistance of the Edinburgh Brigade and, in its turn, had helped Edinburgh. Conflicts between the two Brigades, of the kind of which an example has been given, were in fact the exception and not the rule. When, for example, the bonded warehouse of



Queen Mary's Royal Visit 1910.

Drover Limited, in Mitchell Street, went up in flames on August 14th, 1901, it was Firemaster Pordage who took command of the fire-fighting operations in the absence, on holiday, of Leith's Firemaster.

This incidentally was a very dangerous fire in which the 'drouthie' among the 'Leither' spectators viewed, with sorrow as well as wonder, a river of blazing spirits flowing down their streets!

Arthur Pordage continued as Firemaster of Edinburgh until his retirement on reaching the age limit of the service in June 1927.

During his long period of office he had seen the passing of the last manual engines and the transition through the romantic era of the horse-drawn, steam-pumped fire-engine to the advent of powerful machines which in principle if not power of performance were very similar to the engines of today. All these changes he played a major part in promoting and

when he left Edinburgh, he left the City Fire Brigade in a state at least equal in efficiency to the very best of the brigades then operating in Britain.

Originally trained as a seaman-navigator in the colourful days of sail, Firemaster Pordage learned the art of fire-fighting in the London Metropolitan Fire Brigade and in Portsmouth.

His contributions to the advancement of the Fire Service in general were recognised both in the United Kingdom where he was made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire and in France which, in recognition of his educational work, made him an Officer d'Academie and also presented him with the gold medal of the French National Centre of Research and Invention.

Founder, first Secretary and—from 1925 to 1927—President of the Institution of Fire Engineers (the registered office of which is still at the Lauriston Fire Station and the badge of which bears a remarkable resemblance to the Edinburgh Fire Brigade's badge), he was the originator of the Edinburgh Fire Brigade Widows' and Orphans' Fund. Besides the other inventions, he was the originator of a system of hand signals which is still in use. He collaborated with Doctors Gilbert Burnet and Cameron in a text book entitled 'Chemical Fires', and was instrumental in persuading John Bowman to write his influential 'Hydraulics for Fire Engineers'.

He has been called, with some justice, 'The Greatest Fireman of his Age'.

Arthur Pordage was succeeded as Firemaster by



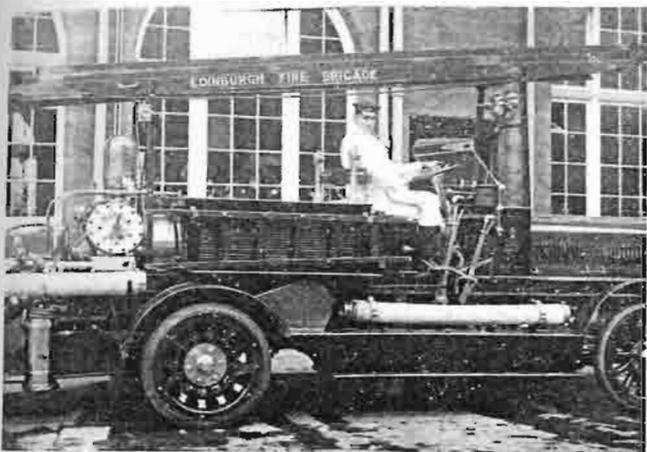
Funeral of the great Lafayette. Piershill Cemetery.

Peter Methven, who continued the general policies of his predecessor.

The personnel of the Brigade at this time consisted of the Firemaster, a First and Second Officer, six District Officers and a hundred and four other ranks; the rise in numbers being accounted for by the larger built-up area for which the Brigade was responsible.

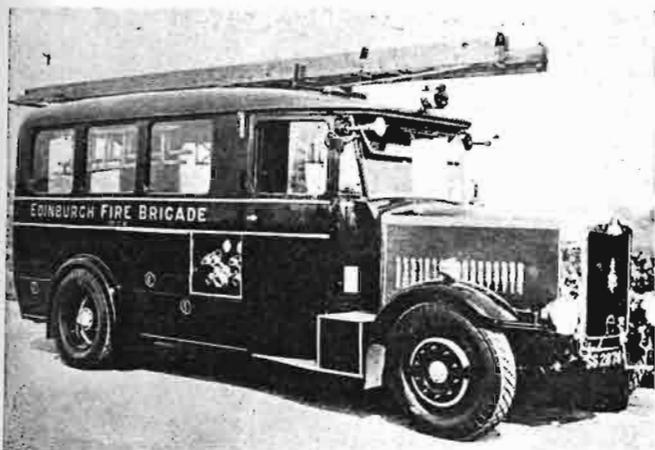
Like Braidwood and Pordage, Mr Methven was much concerned for the wellbeing of his force and it was he who, in 1931, commissioned—despite criticism that such a device was 'pampering'—Edinburgh's first 'limousine' pump—a Merryweather SC0134 on an Albion six-cylinder low-load chassis.

The novelty of this new appliance was that the body was wholly enclosed, giving full weather protection to the firemen and ensuring that they arrived at the fireground in a fit condition. The pump was a Merryweather turbine which could deliver 500 g.p.m.;



Top Left; Merryweather Fire Engine with Hatfield Pump 1912.

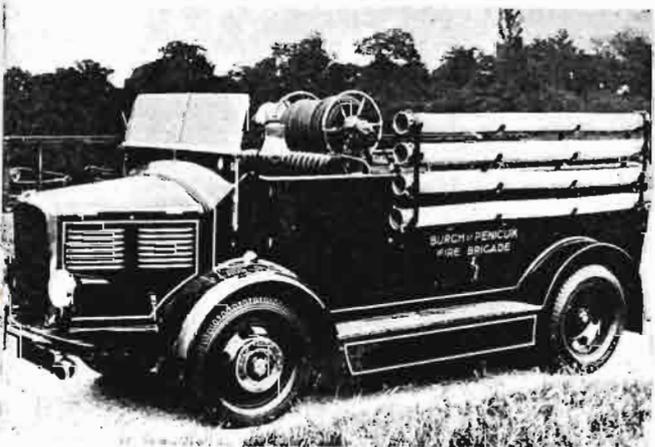
Above; Halley Fire Engine SS3617. 1914.



Middle Left; First Limousine Pump 1932—Dennis Big 6.

Bottom Left; Dennis New World Ace (Penicuik Fire Brigade 1932).

Below; 1938 Albion Fire Engine (Western Burghs-Tranent) with Drysdale pump.



the bodywork was in vermilion with the inscription 'Edinburgh 1931' on the sides in gold lettering, and mounted above the cab was a large warning lamp with a green lens.

Some years after its introduction the first 'limousine' overturned in an accident and to avoid a similar mistake the height of the vehicle was reduced by nine inches in the Brigade workshops.

Meanwhile, however, the Brigade had had to deal with the worst city fire since the fire at the Empire Theatre.

It broke out at 9 a.m. on January 11th, 1930, in a 120-foot high warehouse in Leith Docks with storage accommodation for approximately twenty thousand tons and though contained by 1 p.m. went on smouldering for several days.

Every available fireman in Edinburgh was mustered to deal with this outbreak in which the firemen were

at constant risk from falling walls and though there were no casualties, the material damage was estimated at at least £350,000.

Another serious fire in July of the same year at the garage of Gordon C. McAndrew Limited in Lauriston Gardens, has a special interest because it was at this fire that 'fire-foam' apparatus was first used in Edinburgh. Fifty employees of the firm had a narrow escape from becoming trapped in this fire, at which as many cars were destroyed, and where the firemen had to work under the constant threat of exploding petrol tanks.

Though many of the fires of the late 1930's occurred in commercial premises, there were also numerous incidents involving householders and, in July 1937, residents of a building in Blair Street had to be rescued by firemen leading them to safety via the stairs of an adjoining tenement.



Opposite Page:

The Firemasters.

James Braidwood 1824-1832 (not shown).

James Paterson 1832-1839 (not shown).

Robert Hardie 1839-1846 (not shown).

John Wood 1846-1849 (not shown).

Top row from the left:

John Mitchell 1849-1872

Richard C. Williams 1872-1876.

Samuel B. Wilkins 1876-1895.

Middle row;

Arthur Pordage, O.B.E. 1896-1927.

Peter Methven, M.I.FIRE.E. 1927-1941.

William Bell Muir, O.B.E., M.I.FIRE.E. 1941-1948.

Bottom row: Alexander B. Craig, O.B.E., M.I.FIRE.E.

1948-1962.

Frank Rushbrook, C.B.E., M.I.FIRE.E., A.I.MAR.E.,

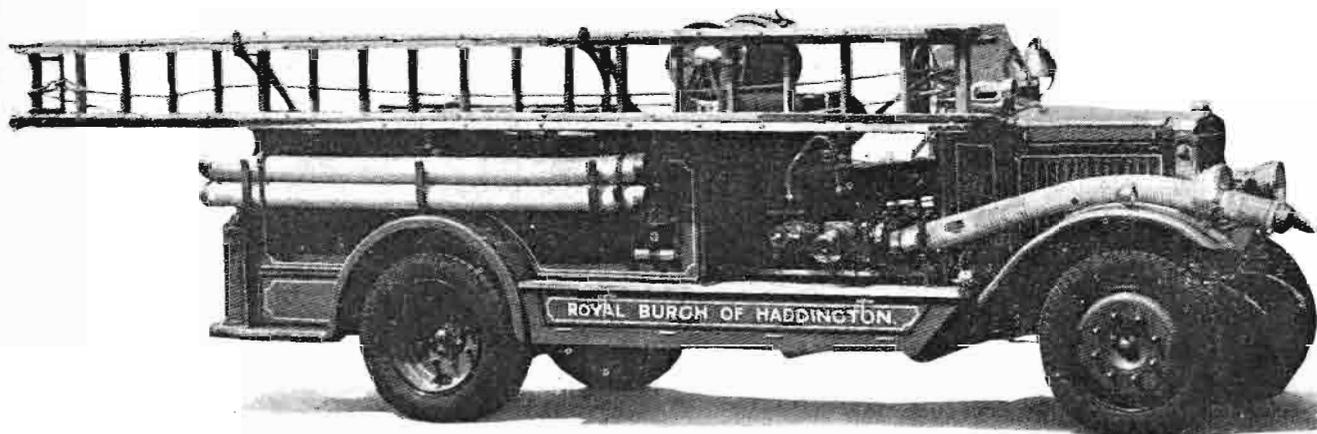
1962-1970.

James Anderson, F.I.FIRE.E., 1970-

This page:

Below; Morris New World as supplied to Haddington 1932.

Bottom of page; Members of the Edinburgh Fire Brigade before going to Glasgow fireman's funeral who was killed on Christmas Eve 1927.



452. A large number of both the high explosives and incendiary bombs fell on open ground, and a fair number failed to explode.

Accidental fires did not, of course, cease during the war years and fire-fighting in war conditions brought new dangers.

After a fierce blaze in a rope and sail maker's premises in Bath Street, Leith, on December 16th, 1939, no less than five firemen required hospital treatment and at a fire at the Military Quarters in Gosford House, Aberlady, another fireman had to be removed to the Royal Infirmary with injuries to his head and hands.

Another large fire of accidental origin, in which several firemen suffered injuries, occurred on June 14th, 1941, in McDougall's Education Company Limited, a book-binding works in East Claremont Street, when much valuable machinery and stock was destroyed and the material damage estimated at £80,000.

Of the fires resulting from enemy action, one of the worst occurred on September 29th, 1940, when a 500-lb. bomb fell in Duff Street at 5.15 a.m. As a result of the explosion and the fire which followed, a five-storey bonded store belonging to the Distillers Company Limited was wholly destroyed and many tenements in Duff Street, Springwell Place and Downfield Place badly damaged. It took 30 appliances and 148 firemen under the command of Second Officer R. Wylie to deal with this fire, as a result of which 135 families were evacuated and fifty had to be rehoused. Among the many odd incidents associated with this fire was one in which a large cask of whisky, blown out of the store by the explosion, crashed through a tenement roof and came to rest on a table, still half full of blazing spirits!

Another serious fire of the war years occurred on the evening of December 22nd, 1943, when there was an explosion in the engine-room of an Admiralty barrage vessel lying in the Victoria Docks, as a result of which six naval ratings lost their lives and nine naval ratings, four civilians and two firemen were injured.

1944 saw the Service in action at many fires in industrial concerns, among them large fires at the Scottish Motor Traction Company Aircraft Factory at Fountainbridge, at the Pumpherston Oil Works of Scottish Oils Limited, and in a range of two- and three-storey buildings belonging to British Malt Products, Beltonford Maltings, West Barns.

During the war years, the Fire Service also had to contend with aircraft crashes accompanied by fires. In 1943 there were thirteen such crashes involving the loss of twenty-two lives; in 1944 eight aircraft were destroyed and ten Air Force personnel killed; in 1945 three aircraft and seven lives were lost.

Members of the Brigade took part in all the activities of the National Fire Service, contributing a detachment of 22 members to the Fire Services Overseas column which was formed to protect the build-up of equipment on the south coast of England and to follow up the invasion of Europe in 1944. The column was utilised behind the lines to protect vital supplies and equipment and served in France, Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg and Germany with great distinction.



Breathing apparatus in use in 1932.

## The War Years and After

In September 1939, with the outbreak of the Second World War, general mobilisation of the Emergency Fire Brigade was ordered and Sir William Y. Darling became District Commissioner, Firemaster Methven Area Officer and Sir A. Murray (Convener of the Edinburgh Fire Brigade on the Lord Provost's Committee), Commandant of the Auxiliary Fire Service. Three Deputy Commandants were appointed and Edinburgh was divided into five divisions, each with its District Officer. On mobilisation, the whole-time strength of the Brigade rose to 1,200 but in 1940 this figure was reduced to 640 full-time and 850 part-time auxiliary firemen—five firemen of the regular brigade being seconded to the Auxiliary Fire Service as Divisional Instructors.

In August 1941, the Edinburgh Brigade was nationalised and became part of the No. 3 South Eastern Area of the National Fire Service with responsibility for protecting Edinburgh, the Lothians, Peeblesshire and the Border counties. At the same time Firemaster Methven retired, and the area force came under the command of Fire Force Commander W. B. Muir, O.B.E., M.I.Fire E. It consisted of 120 Regulars, 285 part-time retained Regulars, 973 whole-time and 1,717 part-time Auxiliary Fire Service personnel.

The Area Headquarters were in Edinburgh and the Area was divided into three Divisions and these into three, four and five sub-divisions. The total number of whole-time stations was twenty-six, of which eleven were in the outer area.

Though enemy planes were over Edinburgh close on the outbreak of the war, the City had a relatively quiet time so far as bombing went. In all there were fourteen raids and the civilian casualty list was 18 killed and 212 injured—a large proportion of the latter as the result of a single landmine which blasted David Kilpatrick's School and badly damaged the Leith Town Hall.

The total number of high-explosive bombs and mines dropped on the City was 47 and of incendiaries

The lifetime of the N.F.S. saw considerable improvements in conditions of service for the regular fireman.

Previous to this period, the duty system was one day off in eight and occasional evenings short leave, otherwise the fireman was on continuous duty. This system was improved first to 48 hours on, 24 hours off and eventually, in 1944, to 24 hours on duty, 24 hours off. On denationalisation in 1948 the 60 hours shift system was introduced.

One of the most unusual incidents in the history of the immediate postwar Brigade took place on January 10th, 1947, when an explosion and fire occurred in the Burn Grange Oil Shale Mine at West Calder.

The incident, in which 15 lives were lost, occurred at a depth of approximately 450 feet and the area of workings at that level was approximately 300 acres, of which some three acres were involved in fire or heavily smoke-logged. Although not trained for this work, the Fire Service immediately responded with 'Proto' breathing apparatus and went down to the affected level, but after a time were persuaded to hand over their sets to colliery personnel who had more knowledge of the workings and consequently stood more chance of locating fourteen missing miners.

The firemen meanwhile tackled the fire with extinguishers and arranged for reinforcements. Pumps and hose were taken down the mine and the crews under Commander Muir, with colliery officials as safety men, then began to fight the fire.

Fire-fighting and sealing off of 22 roadways continued for four days before the area could be penetrated sufficiently to allow the bodies of the fourteen missing miners to be recovered.

Water supplies were a problem at this fire. Eventually, however, the pumps were 'got to work' from surface burns in the vicinity. The water pumped down the mine to the working face had to be conveyed some 4,000 feet.

In all some 700 members of the Brigade took part in this incident and the Report by the Commission of Enquiry contained the following paragraph:

*'I feel a special word of praise should be given to the members of the National Fire Service, who for the first time in their short history, and I believe in the annals of mining, played a valuable part in the fire-fighting operations underground. Although intended and trained for fire-fighting on the surface, the team concerned never hesitated for a moment when they knew the fire was down the workings of the mine.'*

In addition to the foregoing tribute, letters of congratulations were received from the Secretary of State for Scotland and from Mr Gaitskell, the then Minister of Fuel and Power.

The advantages resulting from the ability to concentrate large numbers of men and machines at points of danger during the war years had been so obvious that though the Fire Brigades were denationalised they did not revert to their pre-war status. Instead,

Ensigns Armorial charter, 1949, for the Scottish Fire Brigade Service.



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Do or May Concern, We, Sir Thomas Innes of Learney, Knight Commander of the Royal Victorian Order, Baron of Learney, Kinnairdy and Lochrie, Advocate, Lord Lyon King of Arms, send Greetings; WHEREAS the Right Honourable ARTHUR WOODCURN, His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for Scotland, having by Petition unto Us of date 23rd day of November 1949 SHOWN: THAT under the Fire Services Act 1947 several Fire Service Areas were delimited in Scotland as in the said Act is at length set forth; THAT it is expedient that a general Fire Service badge be by law constituted and established for the use and distinction of such of the Fire Authorities and Fire Brigades of the said Areas as desire to use a general Fire Service badge, which said badge may be used by the said Authorities and Brigades either by itself or, if the Fire Authority of any of the said Areas so desire, conjoined with such other cognisances as may, upon the application of such Fire Authorities, be found severally appropriate and matriculated for them; THAT it is therefore expedient that such general Fire Service badge be now brought into existence for the demonstration and cognisance of the said Fire Authorities and Fire Brigades under the Fire Services Act 1947, and duly made of record according to law; AND the Petitioner having prayed that Ensigns Armorial be constituted in name of the Secretary of State for Scotland for the said Fire Authorities and Fire Brigades in Scotland; KNOW YE, THEREFORE, that We have Devised, and Do by These Presents Assign, Ratify and Confirm unto the Right Honourable Petitioner for the said Fire Services in Scotland the following Ensigns Armorial, as depicted upon the margin hereof, and matriculated of ever date with These Presents upon the sixth page of the seventh Volume of Our Public Register of All Arms and Bearings in Scotland, videlicet:—

Or, on a pile base; wavy Argent and Azure, a lion of flame Gules, all between two thistles slipped Vert, flowered Proper, which is to be borne as the Fire Service badge within a circle Gules inscribed in letters Argent with the titles of the several Area Fire Service Authorities and upon their cap-badges and where otherwise appropriate all upon an eight-pointed star, each point of seven rays, also Argent, which badge may be used by the said Area Fire Service Authorities and Brigades either by itself or, if the Fire Authority of any of the Areas so desire, conjoined with such other cognisances as may, upon the petition of such Fire Authorities, be found severally appropriate and first matriculated for such Area Fire Service Authority in the Public Register of All Arms and Bearings in Scotland and only thereafter by such Area Fire Service Authority, being a body corporate, upon the seal of such Area Fire Service Authority until first severally matriculated with such due and congruent differences as may be necessary according to the Laws of Arms; IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF We have Subscribed These Presents and the Seal of Our Office is affixed hereto, at Edinburgh this fourteenth day of December in the fourth Year of the Reign of Our Sovereign Lord George the Sixth, by the Grace of God, of Great Britain and Ireland and the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith etc. hundred and forty-nine.



*Thomas Innes of Learney*  
 2015

in 1948, the Scottish Home Department grouped the 140 Fire Brigades of Scotland within eleven large organisations.

In this reorganisation the Edinburgh Fire Brigade, along with the Brigades of Bathgate, Linlithgow, South Queensferry, Broxburn, Bo'ness, North Berwick, Haddington, Tranent, Dunbar, Eyemouth, Duns, Galashiels, Hawick, Melrose, Kelso, Coldstream, Peebles, Jedburgh, Selkirk, Innerleithen, Penicuik and Musselburgh, were merged to form the South Eastern Fire Brigade under the command of Firemaster A. B. Craig, O.B.E., M.I.Fire E.

In 1949, when there was fear of another war, the Auxiliary Fire Service was reconstituted but on a new organisational basis. This time, it was fully integrated with the Regular Brigades and worked with the latter at fires. Members of the professional Brigades also took part in exercises with the Auxiliary force in which they broke out equipment in Home Office Stores to form mobile columns ready to move to any point of danger.

As the targets set for the recruitment of auxiliaries were not achieved, to ensure a sufficiently large force servicemen were trained in fire-fighting techniques before demobilisation and for this purpose two training schools were established, one at Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucestershire, and the other at Washington Hall, Lancashire. The first named of these schools is now the main Fire Brigade training centre in Britain and is probably the finest fire training college in the world.

The first appliances available to the new Auxiliary Force were 'left-overs' of 1939-1945 war-time equipment, but these were gradually superseded by new machines, known from their colour as 'Green Goddesses'.

Purpose-built and manufactured by the thousand, the Green Goddesses consisted in the main of a powerful pump and first-aid/fire-fighting apparatus. Special vehicles for fireground communications, mobile workshops, transportable water units, inflatable rafts and transportable pumps for use in docks and on inland waters as well as a large variety of support vehicles, were also produced in large numbers. The general aim was to equip mobile columns which could be moved with speed to wherever they were required and which would be more or less self-supporting.



Austin Towing Vehicle with Standard Gwyn Trailer Pump.

In 1968, when the Auxiliary Fire Service was again disbanded, most of this equipment was stored for use in any new emergency. The vehicles, however, are still occasionally called on by the regular Brigades for training purposes and two are at present in use for this purpose in Edinburgh.

The post-war period saw the gradual replacement of the whole-time Fire Stations in the South Eastern Area. These stations were either of a temporary construction or had been built during the manual and horse-drawn eras of the Brigade. Today all the full-time stations of the Brigade have been replaced with the exception of the Headquarters Station at Lauriston Place, Edinburgh.

Of the new Stations, the largest is that in McDonald Road, Edinburgh. This replaced the old station at Junction Place which until the amalgamation of Edinburgh and Leith had been the Headquarters of the Leith Fire Brigade. In addition to its operational functions, it is also used for training officers of the Merchant Navy and trawler fleets as well as professional firemen. In the drillyard of the two-storey L-shaped station (originally designed to accommodate both whole-time and auxiliary firemen) is a simulated section of a modern ship with an engine-room, First Deck, Second Deck and Bridge Deck. To simulate fire-fighting conditions aboard ship, heating equipment has been introduced as well as a humidifier and smoke-producing equipment. Approximately twelve hundred sea-going officers are trained at this station every year by instructors who have all had some sea-going experience and the station is visited by fire officers and instructors from many countries who are interested in opening similar training departments.

The drill tower, one of the largest in the country, rises to seven storeys and is designed for two purposes: first as a hose-drying tower and secondly as a drill tower, where exercises simulating the kind of action which would be necessary in dealing with fires in multi-storey flats, can be carried out.

Among the facilities at McDonald Road are an unusually large washdown bay—which also provides a covered drill area; an appliance room with six bays; a watch room where the watch-room attendant has complete visual coverage of the appliance room and (the largest single room in the Station) the A.F.S. Lecture Room which seats approximately 300 persons. In addition there are workshops, dormitories and recreation rooms, all of the most modern design. It is interesting to note that as early as 1937, Firemaster Methven reported to the Edinburgh Town Council that McDonald Road would make an ideal site for a new district station. His recommendations finally bore fruit when the new station was opened in 1965.

Attached to the station is the *Braidwood and Rushbrook* Museum with a large collection (now in process of being catalogued) of fire-fighting equipment. The exhibits range from the iron cliques of the early eighteenth century 'for pulling down timbers that are fired', through examples of appliances and paraphernalia used down the ages by the world's fire services up to the latest modern equipment.

Opposite page: Fire scene at Brunton's Wire Mills, Musselburgh, 3rd March, 1950.



McDonald Road Fire Station Edinburgh; Six bay, whole time, Sub. Divisional station accommodating marine and brigade training, brigade sports and social club and museum. constructed 1965.

Architects—Bamber Grey & Partners Edinburgh.



## The Modern Brigade

With such a large territory to cover, approximately 2,500 square miles—including rural areas difficult of access and where water supplies are often a problem, the fires with which the new South Eastern Brigade had to deal were, of course, more varied than those which had faced the pre-war Edinburgh Brigade. Nevertheless, it is the burghs, and particularly the City of Edinburgh, which remain the main fire risks, and it was in Edinburgh in 1955 that the new Brigade was put to the first severe test by several very dangerous outbreaks.

The first of the large fires of this year occurred on June 8th in yet another of the City's bonded warehouses, that of Hill Thomson & Company Limited, in Water Street, Leith.

Fires in spirit warehouses are always difficult to deal with not only because their contents are highly inflammable, but because there is always the danger of explosions and falling masonry to contend with. The financial loss on this occasion amounted to £350,000.

Serious though this fire was, worse followed on November 9th, when fires broke out almost simultaneously in C. & A. Modes in Princes Street, and in a large wholesale footwear store in Jeffrey Street, situated within half a mile of each other.

Both premises were located in the high fire risk area of the City. The battle against them stretched the resources of the Brigade to their limit, and once again the losses were enormous. In the case of C. & A., they amounted to fully £500,000, and of the Jeffrey Street premises to at least half that figure.

1959 saw several serious fires in the Burgh of Hawick.

The first outbreak occurred on September 10th when Messrs Turnbull's Dyers and Woollen Mill in Slitrig Crescent went up in flames. Seven days later this fire was followed by a still fiercer blaze at Messrs Wilson & Glenny's Tweed Mill in Wilton Park where the loss was estimated at approximately three-quarters of a million pounds. On October 20th, the last fire of this series occurred at Messrs Scott & Hood's Teviotdale Mills in Commercial Road. As a result of these fires, the Station at Hawick became professionally manned.

At all these Border County fires, as also at a great blaze on February 8th, 1965, at the Tweedside Saw Mills, Peebles, the value of the new Brigade with its ability to concentrate a large number of men and machines at a crisis point was fully demonstrated and there is no doubt that, lacking this ability, the damage, large as it was, would have been even worse.

In 1962 Firemaster A. B. Craig, O.B.E., M.I.FireE., retired and was succeeded by Deputy Firemaster Frank Rushbrook, who had joined the Brigade in 1938, left to serve with other Brigades, and returned to the South Eastern as Deputy in 1959.

One of his first tasks was to carry out a com-



Above: Whitburn Fire Station, West Lothian; Single bay retained station manned by 10 men. Constructed 1973/4. Architects: James Cunning, Cunningham & Associates, Edinburgh.

Right: Original Police & Fire Brigade Headquarters, High Street, Edinburgh

prehensive survey of the requirements of the area, so far as the fire service was concerned and his recommendations included an increase in the number of Edinburgh stations from five to eight and the opening of a new station at Livingston. This was a reversal of a previous trend reducing the number of district stations. During the war the danger of districts becoming isolated as a result of enemy action was too obvious to be neglected and in the post-war era the increasing congestion of roads, especially during the rush hours, has reinforced the argument for maintaining and increasing the number of district stations.

The new station at McDonald Road (already described) was opened in 1965. Tenders have now been accepted for a new district station in the Liberton area and sites are at present being surveyed for a station to cover the Morningside/Colinton areas. At present there are five whole-time stations within the City boundaries and six whole-time stations, situated respectively in Musselburgh, Dalkeith, Galashiels, Hawick, Livingston and Bathgate.

In addition there are twenty-three part-time stations serving rural areas and small communities and manned, as in the Braidwood era, by 'retained' firemen who follow other occupations when not required for fire-fighting. Retained firemen receive an annual fee (retainer) for being available and additional sums relative to rank, for answering fire-calls.

Firemaster Rushbrook also made a study of ship-board and dockside fires and was largely responsible for the establishment of the Brigade's Marine Training School. The 'ship' at this School (previously described) was constructed to meet his own specifications and his book 'Fire Aboard' has become a standard work for those dealing with the problems



of fire prevention and control in ships and port installations.

In 1963 the importance of the Brigade in the life of the community was officially recognised when it was invited to take part in the Edinburgh Festival Tattoo.

This was the first occasion on which a Fire Brigade had ever been asked to take part in a military display of this kind and in the event, the Brigade's contribution was one of the most spectacular and popular items on the programme—the highlight of its performance—the rescue of a 'maiden in distress' from a 'burning' building.

Among the vehicles which were seen on the Castle Esplanade at this performance was a horse-drawn manual engine which had been in Edinburgh in 1824.

The Brigade has again been invited—as part of its 150th anniversary celebrations—to contribute to the Festival Tattoo of 1974.

In 1970, Firemaster Rushbrook, M.I.FireE., A.I.Mar.E., retired and was succeeded by Mr J. Anderson, F.I.FireE., who occupies the post today. To assist him he has a Deputy Firemaster, Mr D. R. Close, F.I.FireE., A.M.B.I.M., and an Assistant Firemaster, Mr A. Fender, F.I.FireE., who are responsible to the Firemaster for various aspects of the Service.

The Brigade covers an area of approximately 2,500 square miles and includes the City of Edinburgh, the Counties of East, West and Midlothian, Roxburghshire, Berwickshire and Peeblesshire.

#### *Administration*

#### *Fire Committee*

Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Clerk, Treasurer.

#### *Members of Committee*

Seven from the City and one from each of the Counties.

#### *Establishment—Operational*

Firemaster: Deputy Firemaster: Assistant Firemaster:  
2 Divisional Commanders: 2 Deputy Divisional  
Commanders: 6 Sub-Divisional Commanders:  
7 Station Commanders: 7 Assistant Divisional  
Officers: 333 Firemen.

#### *Fire Prevention*

1 Divisional Officer Grade I: 3 Divisional Officers  
Grade III: 7 Station Officers: 7 Sub-Officers.

#### *Staff R Training*

1 Divisional Officer Grade II: 1 Divisional Officer  
Grade III: 5 Station Officers: 4 Sub-Officers:  
1 Leading Fireman.

#### *Retained*

5 Station Officers: 26 Sub-Officers: 31 Leading  
Firemen: 204 Firemen.

#### *Whole-Time Stations—11*

Retained—23 plus 3 Retained Units on whole-time  
stations

Fire Calls per annum—10,250.

#### *Appliances*

53 Pumping appliances (P.E., P., Wr.L., Wr.T.)  
13 Special Appliances (T.L., H.P., E.T., C.U., FST)  
29 Ancillary Vehicles (W.Car, Vans, Lorries)  
Breathing Apparatus Sets—140 Operational  
38 Training

#### *Fire Prevention Responsibilities*

Factories—1,033      Hotels—899  
Total inspections during 1973 by Fire Prevention  
Department—6,940  
Total inspections during 1973 by Operational—3,516  
Plans inspected by Fire Prevention Department—1,184

The Brigade is also heavily involved training Marine and Industrial personnel. Approximately 1,500 are trained annually.

The Brigade is financed, in the main, by contributions from the rates of the public authorities within the area it serves and is governed, as in 1948, by a Committee made up of Councillors elected from these authorities. The Government, through the Home

Office and the Secretary of State for Scotland, has responsibility for the general efficiency of the organisation.

The Firemaster is responsible for the day-to-day running of the Brigade and for giving expert advice to the Committee on whatever measures, in the way of fire-fighting, fire prevention as well as the general organisation and equipment of the Brigade, are necessary.

Highly complex technical equipment and an equally complex organisation is necessary to operate a modern fire brigade such as serves Edinburgh and the South East of Scotland and seems, ostensibly, very different from the original Edinburgh Brigade which James Braidwood organised and led.

But although appliances have advanced considerably they basically still carry out the same functions; that of providing means of putting water on fires and rescuing trapped persons. The fire appliance developed from the hand drawn manual pump to the horse-drawn steamer, through the steam-driven steamer, to the period when electricity was tried for propulsion to the petrol driven power take-off pump and the present-day multi-purpose 'Perkins' diesel engine appliance. A modern engine with its powerful pump can deploy more water than all the manual pumps of Braidwood's Brigade put together.

Special appliances have also evolved from the earliest water caddies or carts for transporting water, to dam units used during the war, and on to today's composite water tender.

The modern turntable ladder is an integral part of the vehicle chassis which owes its origin to the simple one-piece ladder which itself became more sophisticated with an extending piece. Fire brigade ladders have been used in Britain in excess of 150 feet and a 1930 ladder of 105 feet is still in use in Edinburgh today. The extension ladders were transported by affixing large cart wheels and were pulled by hand, then horses, and eventually mounted on a powered vehicle. One early turntable ladder in the South Eastern Fire Brigade was originally horse-drawn and extended by means of carbon dioxide gas; this vehicle was later pulled by a tractor unit.

A fairly recent development in the 1960's, of which there are two examples in the Brigade, is the hydraulic platform, or more colloquially the 'Simon Snorkel'. This is an articulated hydraulically powered arm which has a cage on the top end that can be extended to 90 feet in height. The cage can hold four people for rescue purposes and act as a water tower or indeed as a platform for gaining access to upper levels.

Other vehicles with special purposes include hose layers, salvage tenders, emergency tenders and high expansion foam trailers. Most of the apparatus is in essence no different from their earlier forebears.

Behind the latest rocket line-throwing apparatus is Firemaster Braidwood's steel cross bow; behind the latest chemical agent for smothering fires, rise the ghosts of the Edinburgh muck-men of the beginning of the 1700's with their creels of dung. Even the modern breathing apparatus, which enables firemen to work in areas logged with smoke and lethal gas fumes, is not entirely new. A smoke helmet of a sort, was in use in Edinburgh in the era of Firemaster

Pordage, over half a century ago.

There is one very basic, and probably most important difference between the old and the new—**COMMUNICATIONS**. From the Braidwood days of the running ('until breathless') watchman, we see a steady progression towards 1974 and its push-button era.

Today, all fire calls are accepted at Brigade Headquarters Control where within seven seconds of receiving a fire call, the Controller has alerted the appropriate appliances to attend the incident.

Should the attendance be required from a 'full-time' professional station all of which are linked to Brigade Headquarters by private Post Office telephone link, the operator presses the appropriate switch which engages a 'MAGNETA' high-grade public address system. This system automatically activates a bleeping alarm signal at the selected station and the Controller transmits the necessary address and attendance instructions.

The station doors automatically open, the crews board the appliances, and, on leaving the station, the Officer-in-Charge confirms with Headquarters by radio the address of the incident after which the doors automatically close behind the machine.

If the appliance is required from a 'retained' station, again it is a push-button operation. Each retained unit is equipped with 'MULTITONE' remote radio paging system and all retained men carry a

Simon Snorkel SS263. Hydraulic platform mounted on Dodge K1050 long wheelbased chassis, powered by 'Perkins' V8-510 diesel engine. Working range 0ft. to 91ft., maximum outreach 47ft. 6 inches through 360°. Safe working load in cage 800lbs; time to set in and reach any working position—100 seconds. Operable from either cage or turret. Supplied by Simon Engineering Dudley Ltd., through Scottish agents Balbardie Ltd., Glasgow. Bodywork by H.C.B.-Angus Ltd.

pocket radio alerter. In this case the Brigade Headquarters Controller selects the appropriate numbered button on the encoder unit which transmits a double radio tone over the network. The double tone is received at all stations but is decoded only at the appropriate one which automatically switches on its transmitter to operate the local pocket alerters. The retained firemen report to their station, ask for the address over the radio network and proceed to the fire.

All appliances maintain radio contact and the crews on arrival at the fire send back details to Brigade Headquarters; can request information on building contents, chemicals, special hazards, and can summon assistance if required. In the case of large fires, a special appliance called a Fire Control Unit attends to act as a fireground control and communications centre.

The whole area is served by a 'STORNO' radio scheme which comprises a control, a reserve control, a main and three remote based transmitter receivers. The remote transmitter receivers switch themselves on and off as required by Control or any mobile set and act as links throughout the area. All brigade appliances and officers' cars are equipped with mobile radios and certain vehicles have special sets capable of being operated in the vehicle or by means of a rechargeable battery unit outwith the vehicle, or from the normal electricity supply within buildings. The flexibility of the latter sets is of great advantage as they enable the Officer-in-Charge of an incident to use his radio about the fire area whether it be at the top of a block of flats or deep into a forest area. It permits him to remain in touch with the Fire Control Unit, Brigade Headquarters and other vehicles on the fireground and to receive immediate feed-back information.

The 'MULTITONE' also provides an officers' paging system similar to that used for alerters to retained men.

Throughout its history the Brigade has had its own





Top left: 100ft. Turntable ladder. Magirus DL30 ladder mounted on Dodge K1050 long wheelbase chassis, powered by 'Perkins' V8-510 diesel engine. Working height 30 metres; maximum outreach 26 metres through 360°. Elevation—17° to +75°. Fitted with detachable 2 man cage and flood-lighting equipment. Time to set in and reach any working position 65 seconds. Supplied by Messrs. Carmichael and Sons (Worcester) Ltd.

Bottom left: Breathing Apparatus, Ancient and Modern: left; Siebe Gorman Mark IV compressed air set, duration 45 minutes. right; Siebe Gorman smoke helmet in use by the brigade between 1890 and 1930. Air pumped through tube by hand-operated bellows situated in clear air situation.

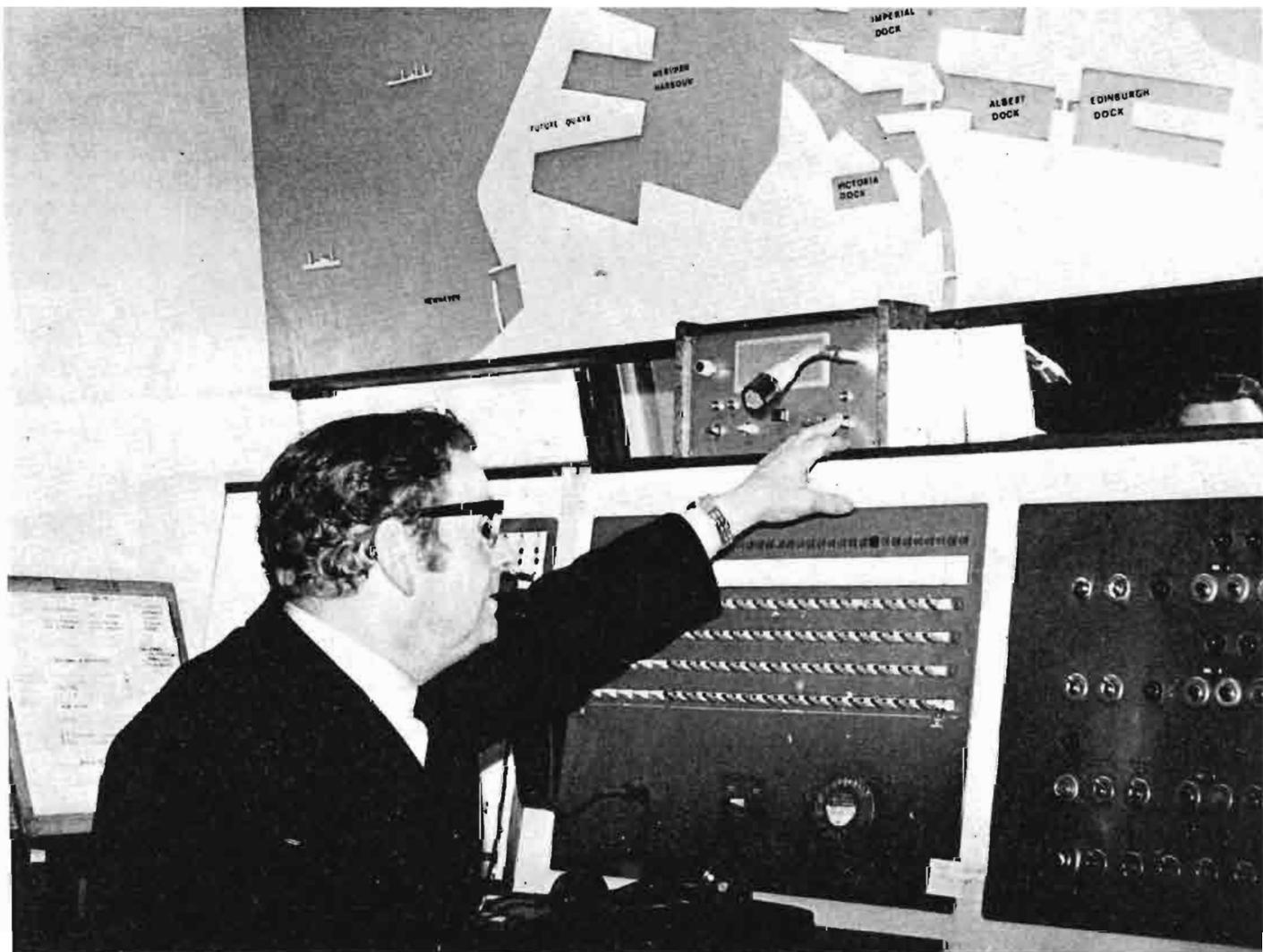
Below: 'Magna' Audio Callout System. Remote station control panel at the brigade reserve operational control at McDonald Road. System facilities include local and remote callout and public address, running call alarm at station, administrative paging, music input, amplifier output 100w, battery standby for mains failure, surveillance alarm.

Workshops and have built and modified appliances and all types of equipment. Today it carries out practically all necessary repairs and adjustments to its large fleet.

Fire prevention today is one of the most important aspects of the Brigade's work and certainly is the area which is growing most rapidly. It started in the late 1800's with firemen doing standby duty at hospitals and theatres but did not develop into a separate department of the Brigade until 1940. From then until 1960 the majority of the work was of a 'goodwill' nature taking the form of offering advice when requested.

Between 1959 and 1971 a series of serious fires all involving loss of life, led to the introduction of preventive legislation covering factories, offices, shops and railway premises and more recently, almost all buildings to which large numbers of the public have access. In all these matters the Fire Service has been given the responsibility of ensuring that adequate means of escape are available, that fire-fighting equipment is provided and that fire alarm systems are installed. Once premises attain the fire precautions standard prescribed, a certificate to this effect is issued by the Firemaster on behalf of the Joint Area Fire Committee.

A large number of 'goodwill' inspections are still carried out by the Fire Prevention Department, and lectures, film shows and talks are given on request to various organisations and clubs. In an effort to improve fire prevention awareness in the coming generation, a programme of fire prevention lectures







Opposite page: Top; Firegrounds Control Unit. Bedford KDS 135" wheelbase chassis, 330 diesel engine fitted with 'Luton' style body. Facilities include:— mobile office, full information services, radio communications both rearward to brigade control and forward to walkie-talkie, internal intercom, tape recorded logging, breathing apparatus control. Power by either standby generators or mains power. Bedford chassis are also used for the basic first line appliance on the twenty-four retained stations.

Bottom; Water Tender Type 'B'. Based on Dodge K850 158" wheelbase chassis, powered by 'Perkins' V8-510 diesel engine developing 185 b.h.p. Carries a crew of five or six, 400 gallons of water usable either through high pressure fog hose reels (up to 600 p.s.i.) or through 500 g.p.m. main pumps. Ladders either 45' or 35' light alloy, 15' short extension and folding roof ladder. This is to be the standard basic fire appliance for the brigade. Supplied by and Bodywork by H.C.B.-Angus Ltd., Totton, Southampton.

This page: Above; Storno Transportable Radio CQP600. Crystal controlled 12 channel F.M. radio telephone, 10 watt output. Powered by either vehicle, rechargeable battery or mains which enables use as mobile, base station or portable.

Bottom right: 'Multitone' Radio paging system. Officer with radio paging unit weighing 5 ozs. enabling brigade control to page any officer individually and pass instructions. A similar unit is carried by each retained fireman to alert him when he is required to report to his station. The entire area of 2,500 square miles is paged from the brigade control at Lauriston.



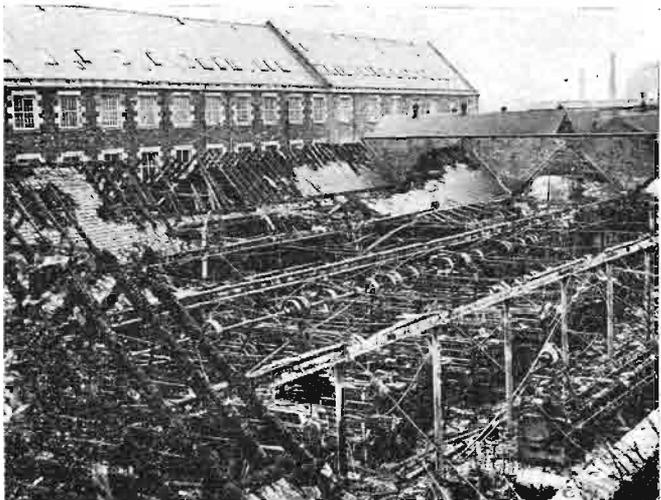
Above: Appliances outside Lauriston Headquarters  
Top; Horse-drawn steamers and ladder. circa 1905.  
Middle; Limousines 1932. Bottom; present day vehicles.



Below: Fire which occurred at Messrs. Wilson & Glenny's Tweed Mill, Wilton Park, Hawick 1959 (photograph: courtesy of Hawick News).

Middle: Damage after a fire which occurred at Tweed Mill, Galashiels 26th May 1963 (photograph: courtesy of Border Telegraph, Galashiels).

Bottom: 1927 fire engine shown in background as supplied by the brigade for the making of the B.B.C. series 'Doctor Finlay's Casebook'.



in schools has been introduced.

The number of fire prevention specialists available are too few to complete the heavy workload within the Brigade's area and in order to relieve the specialists for the more complicated matters, it has been necessary for all operational personnel to receive training in fire prevention and to undertake this work locally.

Throughout the South East of Scotland and in the City, the ubiquitous fire engine can be seen while the crew, remaining in radio contact with Brigade Headquarters, undertake the inspection of buildings and combine the work of the specialist and operational staff. Annually fire prevention inspections currently exceed 13,000.

As in the past the efficiency of the Brigade depends as it did 150 years ago on the courage, endurance and the initiative of the firemen. Should these attributes be wanting, all the technical advancement and devices in the world would be worthless.

Recruitment is open to all men between the ages of 18 and 25 years who can pass the educational entrance examination and meet the stringent medical and other requirements.

Seldom is there any difficulty experienced in obtaining suitable recruits for the Fire Service as it is a vocation which offers, to an almost unique extent, an outlet for all the attributes of a healthy human being.

The world has its share of monuments raised to the 'glory' of men whose chief claim to fame was that they were responsible for the deaths of large numbers of their fellow human beings and putting towns and homesteads in flames.

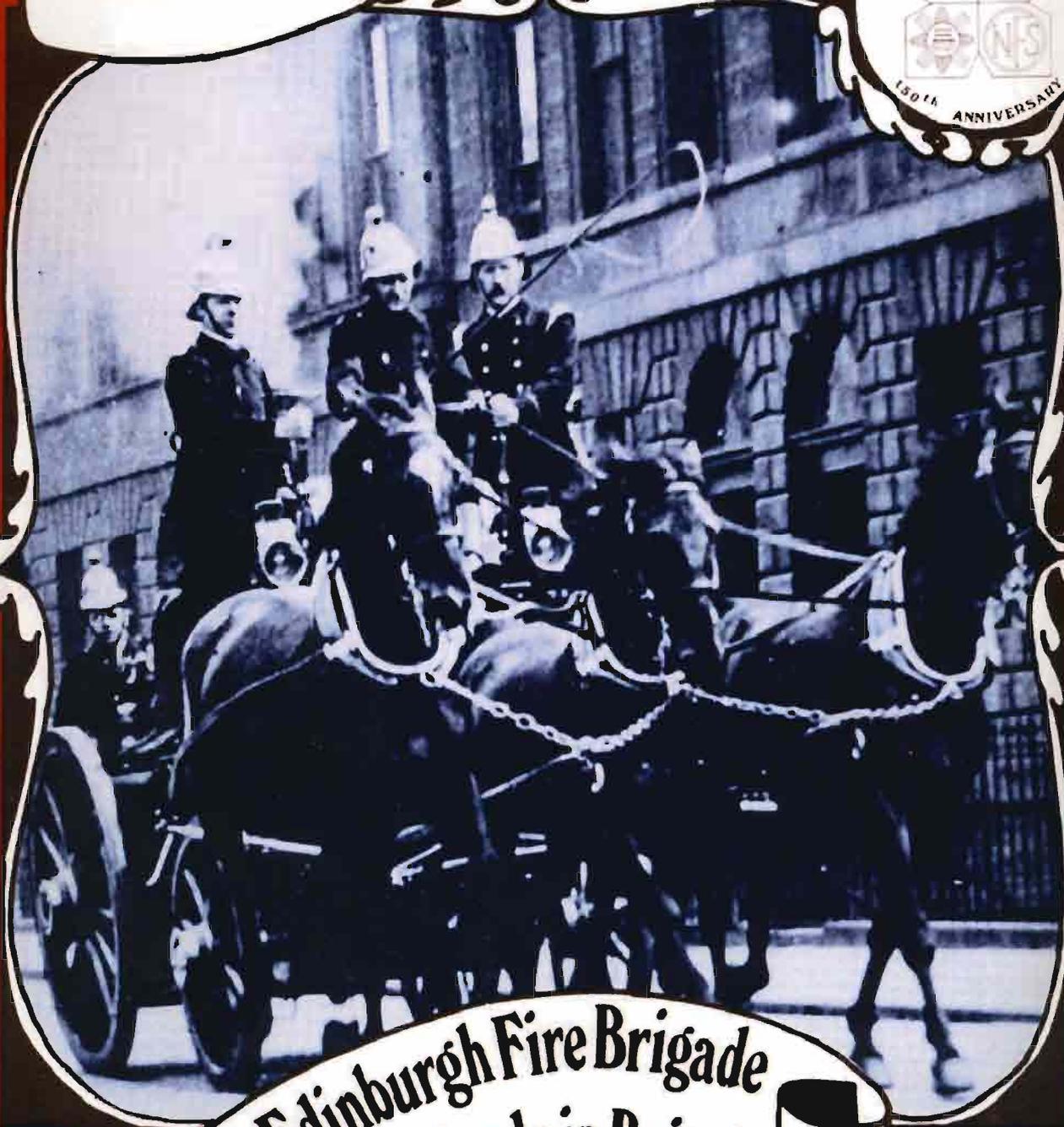
Perhaps, when we are truly civilised a day will come when we will knock false 'heroes' from their pedestals and replace them with figures representative of the real protagonists of life: the men who man the lifeboats; who make up mountain and mine rescue squads; who serve in the emergency ambulance services and the various Fire Brigades.

Within Edinburgh itself, we might make a start with a monument to the two unnamed firemen who died in the Great Fire of Edinburgh of 1824—only the first of many who have died in the service of the citizens and their property.

As one citizen of Edinburgh, I take the opportunity in writing this brief history of the Edinburgh Fire Brigade, to now salute them.

In conclusion, I would like to thank Deputy Fire-Master Close and the other members of the South Eastern Brigade staff for their continual help and advice in preparing this history, and also for providing the larger part of the research material. I am also grateful to Dr Nora Smith for background material about early high buildings in Edinburgh.

**"AYE READY!"**



**The History of Edinburgh Fire Brigade  
The Oldest Municipal Brigade in Britain**

**BY ALEXANDER REID**