

Melbourne Fire Services Museum – 2006



The year was 1891 and standing on the highest hill in the maturing township of Melbourne looking one way you observed Victoria Parade, the other Gisborne Street. Looking up, and up, and up for 150 feet was a Lookout Tower manned 24 hours a day by firemen keeping a constant vigil for the outbreak of fire. The Tower in fact finally closed down in 1960 compliments of some local high-rise but we had no doubt we were at the right location, the uniformed staff may have all retired but none had lost their spring - out on the footpath to ensure correct direction to the entrance of their Museum and Fire Station in a blink. They were obviously well trained in crowd management as everyone within cooee - Marc, Lorraine and Bronco, Wayne with his son Bradley, Marcus escorting a sparkling American friend Evelyn and Cameron with his two littlies (all except our club's famous Tail End Charlie, Eddie, who was still looking for a parking space) – when corralled were all inside in seconds.

Geoff was the master of ceremonies of our tour, keeping up a most fascinating running commentary on all we could survey, starting with the magnificent completely renovated 1893 Board Room. The gold leaf work around the cornices, the fireman's helmet centrepiece, gentlemen's library chairs with buttons costing thousands of dollars, the cast iron Victorian fireplace, the collage of photographs over it's mantelpiece of every moustachioed member of the 1909 Brigade drew us back into history. Luckily Cameron's smallest one escaped through the retaining cord and with dad charging after him we came back to the 21st century and on we went.



Following Cameron chasing a certain little bloke through the Chief Officer's Office and Station Watchroom, we ended up in the heart of the station, the Engine Room. A world of hand drawn hose reels of the early 1800s, horse carts with manual steam operated pumps to motorized vehicles including Dame Nellie Melba's car, breathing apparatus, alarms, bells, insurance plaques, uniforms, helmets from the time of Napoleon to the year 2000 hi-tech stainless steel (Darth Vader fans take note) - the list just goes on. Ask Bronco, with Geoff beside him all the time at least he heard everything. Especially when MFB's brave billy cart was brought out to put in dad's beloved (when he was pulled out of the exhibit) to let him have a honking on the wake the dead horn and flashing of lights, fireman's coat and helmet complete.



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A demure little lady was given the duty of activating a red alarm box used in the days of gasoline and we saw how headquarters were notified the exact location, of course that baby brother had to have a go but shortly after he finally ended up on dad's shoulder, rather stuffed.



Whilst strolling through the Drill Yard, Wayne and Marc reminisced of not so long ago connecting calls through a similar manual cord switchboard and how some stations still use the type of bicycle that MFB has put in a museum, when seeing those multi-million dollar trucks memories evaporated.



A garbled announcement, traffic lights on the wall beside the rising mammoth doors going from red to amber to green and another truck was gone. Geoff pointed out no more are the days when one of the firemen ran out to manually control traffic who would have ignored him anyway as they were trying to enter numbers on those new things called mobile phones, as technology has finally arrived. To see how they now get out was most informative.

There was no problem with swallowing Eddie's sizzling sausages cooked out in the lovely warm sunshine on the station's impressive bbq, for one of their ladder cages drove into the yard, stood on it's legs and started extending and doing a full 360° spin, a full grown giraffe tiny in comparison. The sausages slid down the throat all right. Then time to leave, a few more of us started to feel a bit stuffed in both legs and ears, but we will be back to go through and have a thorough and hopefully more quieter look at how slowly out of the fire the Phoenix of MFB Headquarters had emerged.

