Historic Fire Engine Association

Celebrating 50 years

Researched and Prepared by the Museum of Fire
The Origins of the Historic Fire Engine Association (HFEA)

In 1968 Brian Blunt and Bob Winch purchased the #268 Dennis Big 4 from the Board of Fire Commissioners of NSW (today FRNSW). While Bob had recently joined the brigade, Brian was a member of the Historic Commercial Vehicle Association (HCVA) where the appliance was able to be registered. At a meeting of the HCVA Brian met with a number of other members who were interested in historic fire engines and from this meeting the idea of a separate association was born. Following the lead of England, who had a similar organisation, other members with similar interests were called together and on 13 March 1969 the first ever meeting of the Historic Fire Engine Association of Australia (HFEAA) was held.

Dennis Big 4, No. 268 acquired in October 1968.
(Photograph courtesy Brian Blunt)

This Booklet has been produced to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the HFEA at an event held on the weekend 9-10 November 2019.
1969 cont...

The original 11 members of the Association were:
Brian Nebenzahl (President)
Ron Franklin (Vice President)
Barrie Gillings (Secretary/Treasurer)
Brian Blunt (Registrar)
Gilbert Ashby
George Green
Ron Healy
Robert McCarthy
Ross Murray
Laurie Stewart
Bob Winch

The second meeting was held in July at which point more members were admitted to the Association.

Beginning a long association with the New South Wales Fire Brigade (NSWFB - now FRNSW), the President of the Board of Fire Commissioners of NSW, Len Verrills, was appointed Patron of the HFEA.

In late 1969 the Department of Motor Transport approved the Association’s application to join the “Club Plate” scheme which saw the distinctive HFEA plates appear from early 1970.

1970

1 February 1970 - First HFEA Rally held with a run from the Art Gallery NSW to St. Ives Showground.

Pictured here & Above: HFEAA members attend the Association’s First Rally, 1 February 1970.

(Photograph courtesy Brian Blunt)
1970 Cont...
From June 1970 the HFEAA begin regular bi-monthly meetings in the gymnasium of Headquarters Fire Station.

1971
An American La France appliance and a Diamond-T appliance are donated to the HFEAA by the South Australia Fire Brigades Board.

American La France and Diamond-T donated to the HFEAA, July 1971
(Photograph courtesy Brian Blunt)

Also in 1971 the first appliance obtained for preservation reasons was acquired by the HFEAA. This was the Leyland FT3 pumper which was the only example of this appliance in Australia. The need to preserve the history of the NSW Fire Service saw a number of other appliances acquired over the coming years.

The Leyland FT3 Pumper outside Pyrmont Fire Station, 1971.
(Photograph courtesy Brian Blunt)
1972
A branch of the HFEAA is formed in Melbourne.

1973
March - The Association’s newsletter is officially named “Flyer and Salvage”, inspired by the call-outs that interrupted early meetings at Headquarters.

Later in the year the HFEAA was granted permission to use Campbelltown Council properties to store vehicles. Brian Blunt took-up residency at one of the properties as a care-taker in January 1974. This allowed vehicles that would otherwise not be able to be stored to be preserved.

It was later negotiated for the Board of Fire Commissioners of NSW to retain ownership over select vehicles with them leased into HFEAA members Custody.

1974
In 1973 work had been undertaken with the HFEAA by electronics company A.W.A to produce a promotional calendar featuring six historic fire engines.
1976
In 1975 the Board of Fire Commissioners of NSW erect a new Training College at Alexandria. This new precinct includes a site set-aside for use as a museum. The HFEAA are invited to set-up the museum and run it. In August 1976 the first HFEAA meeting is held in the new site.

The HFEAA’s Dennis 300/400 at the Fire Services Museum, Alexandria, c. 1977
(Photograph courtesy Brian Blunt)

1979
By October 1979 the new Museum facility is finally completed. Other than appliances, the new Museum featured the old switchboard from Headquarters Fire Station. This is still on display in the Museum of Fire today.

Pictured: Images from the HFEAA operated Fire Services Museum, c. 1979
1980
After three years of negotiations with the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (MAAS - better known as the Powerhouse Museum), the Ahrens Fox, Shand Mason, Garford and other equipment were returned from loan to the NSWFB and were then transferred to the new Museum.

Also in 1980 the HFEAA received official notification that the Board of Fire Commissioners of NSW intended to expand the training facilities into the Museum space; but they would support the HFEAA to find new premises.

The 1980s were also a period of mass vehicle parades by the HFEAA and Museum. Such events included the Easter Show and 1984 NSWFB Centenary Parade.

1981
On 10 January 1981 the NSW Fire Service Museum officially opened to the public at No. 1 Wharf, Walsh Bay. This marked a turning point for the HFEAA and the museum. The name “NSW Fire Service Museum” was adopted to reflect that, though the museum preserved the history of the NSWFB it was a separate entity. A Trust Deed was also established to make the museum a legal entity. The first members of the trust included the President and Secretary of the Board of Fire Commissioners of NSW with members of the HFEAA appointed in their own right to the
The NSW Fire Service Museum is closed at Pier 7 Campbell’s Cove after being re-located from Walsh Bay. It is then re-located to Penrith. Many members of the HFEAA were involved in the move and preparing the new Museum space. On 16 November 1986 the Museum was officially opened as the Museum of Fire.

The move of the Museum to western Sydney was met with enthusiasm by many western-based HFEAA members and this saw a number of HFEAA events begin to take place in the “west”.

Trust. From this point forward the management of the museum became independent from the HFEAA, though both bodies continued to support each other in their common goal, with the museum open weekends and public holidays, fully staffed by volunteers.

HFEAA attend a pump day in Penrith on the Nepean River, 1987
(Photographs courtesy Brett Williams)

A display of HFEAA vehicles at Pier One, Walsh Bay, c. 1981
(Photograph from Museum of Fire Collection)
In October 1988 the HFEAA attended their first NSW Fire Brigades Demonstration. Held at Port Macqaurie this established the precedent of the HFEAA attending the bi-annual event all over NSW.

(Photograph Courtesy Brett Williams)

HFEAA attend the first “Alert” Rally, 1991  
(Photograph Courtesy Brett Williams)
On 6 January 1995 the HFEAA is incorporated as the Historic Fire Engine Association (HFEA). This saw a change in the association structure with a portion of membership fees no longer going to the now independent Museum. Despite this the two bodies continued to work closely together.

In June 1995 the 100th issue of Flyer and Salvage was published after a two year hiatus.
1999
The HFEA celebrates 30 years with a parade and visit to rural fire stations around Cowra.

HFEA 30th anniversary event outside City of Sydney Fire Station, March 1999
(Photograph courtesy Gerard Duck)

HFEA attend a City of Sydney pump Day on the Harbour, 24 October 1999
(Photograph courtesy Brett Williams)
2000’s

HFEA members inspecting the manufacture of a Varley, 2000.
(Photograph courtesy Brett Williams)

(Photograph courtesy Steve Baistow)
2000’s Cont...

HFEA members attend Rescue Expo at Clarendon, 2002.

(Photograph courtesy Steve Baistow)

HFEA at the re-opening of City of Sydney Fire Station following renovations, 2003.

(Photograph courtesy Brett Williams)
HFEA celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Dennis D600 outside City of Sydney Fire Station, 26 July 2009.
(Photograph courtesy Brian Blunt)
2010’s
Following a period of financial difficulty the HFEA approaches the Museum of Fire for support. This saw a greater relationship embarked upon by the HFEA and Museum, which in turn saw the HFEA be able to continue. Today the HFEA and Museum have a very close association. Particularly as the HFEA considers the Museum a major sponsor. The two regularly attend events and parades together. A number of HFEA members regularly volunteer at the Museum to assist with appliance restoration and maintenance.

HFEA AGM and Pump Day in Parramatta, 2012
(Photograph courtesy Chris Moore)

HFEA attend Australia Day festivities in the city, 2014.
(Photograph courtesy Chris Moore)
2010’s Cont...

HFEA at Australia Day in the city, 2015.
(Photograph courtesy Mark White)

FRNSW marching girls and the HFEA attend the re-opening of Pyrmont Fire Station after renovations, 2016
(Photograph courtesy Chris Moore)
2010’s Cont...

HFEA at the Sydney Classic and Antique Truck Show held at the Museum of Fire, 2016

(Photograph courtesy Chris Moore)

HFEA attend All British Day, 2017

(Photograph courtesy Chris Moore)
HFEA members often participate in local community activities. Here member Doug Messenger helps Santa on his way in Wangi Wangi!

(Photograph courtesy Doug Messenger)
HFEA and Australia Day

Each year one of the HFEA's flagship events is attending Australia Day festivities. The HFEA's involvement in Australia Day began with a motor display at City of Sydney Fire Station. This was part of the NRMA's Motorfest which took place each year in the city throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Members of the HFEA would exhibit their vehicles with many donning full vintage uniform to complete the look, this was always a hit with the public - especially tourists!

In 2016 the event was moved to Parramatta Park and the HFEA continues to support the event.
The Recollections of a HFEA President - Gerard Duck

In 1984 the NSW Fire Brigades were having their 100 Year Celebrations. I was a Retained Fire Fighter at Richmond, and we were being told about all the things happening to mark this special time. There was going to be a parade and vintage fire engine display at Riverstone, and the crew from Riverstone Fire Station were involved in the organisation. I went to Riverstone on that day with Brett Williams, and some members of the crew from Richmond Fire Station. There I had my first encounter with the Ahrens Fox. It was driven by Ken Poulter. I also met Mark and Elizabeth White, and Marks family, who were there selling promotional bits and pieces, and promoting the Fire Service Museum and the HFEAA. (Not much changes). Everyone who I spoke with on that day made me very welcome, and I came away thinking the HFEAA would be a great group to join and become a member. The only down side was that the meetings were held at the Museum at The Rocks. But that thought did not last long, and it became a great night out in the City, on a Thursday, every three months.

I remember walking into the Museum at the Rocks for my first meeting. The Museum was in darkness, with the old fire engines parked along each side, and the small amount of light around reflecting off the brass. This is where I met Brian Blunt, Paul Anley, Graham Vatcher and Sandy Feirson, and Mr Garford Ted Pike, and thirty five years later I can say that I am very pleased that I went to Riverstone to have a look. At that time owning a vintage fire engine was a very distant dream, and more to the point, something that I thought could not happen. Little did Brett and I know then, how things would evolve, and that this would become an interest that has given us many memorable occasions, and more importantly many great friends.

I could write a book on the special times that belonging to the HFEA has given me. Other members I am sure would say the
same. This shows what hard work and enthusiasm can achieve, and their efforts have given us reason to continue. Thinking about things, for me, the Museum coming to Penrith was the event that really cemented my involvement for all this time. The packing up from The Rocks, and having members help move, was the start of a new enthusiasm for me, and many others, that has continued through till now. When you consider how the Museum and HFEA worked together, we can be very proud of all that is there for us now. The Museum moving was a huge achievement, but most of all it was a fun time. Weekends at the Rocks were a regular, leading to the moving of the fire engines. It was such a display, and it was reported on television news and in the newspapers.

The need for many helpers to get a very run down Power Station ready to be a Museum seemed at that time an extremely difficult task. But difficult was not an issue, and each weekend we would turn up and get dirty. Doing things you would usually run away from. There were many great achievements and you went away with a smile on your face. You would go home and be there ready to start again the next time.
As mentioned earlier, owning a vintage fire engine was a dream. Being a member of the HFEA made it possible. Ted Pike mentioned that he knew of a Dennis Ace for sale. Ted said if you don’t want it, I will buy it. That was the start, with Bob Green, Brett Williams and Gerard Duck becoming the owners of a Dennis Ace. The Ace came from Colleambly Bush Fire Brigade. Brett went for the long drive and gave it the thumbs up. It was delivered to Flemington Markets by a local, who was bringing produce to the markets. Bob and Brett drove it home to Richmond, with Brett taking no risks, wearing his motor cycle helmet. We were very proud of the Ace and we were able to improve it over time, with the help of members of the HFEA. We also found a 1924 Garford. We first thought that it had served at Richmond Fire Station. This was eventually determined as not the case, but it was reason enough to bring it home. It is still an active participant in HFEA events. Again being a member of the HFEA has been a factor in helping keep this ninety five year old fire engine in great condition and be able to continue to turn up for events.

The first event that I can recall at the Museum, that the HFEA played a part organising was a swap meet. I was overwhelmed, seeing all that other members had in their collections, and they were willing to swap or sell. Patch collections, helmet collections, brass nozzles and branches, standpipes, a treasure of bits that you would probably not see now. It was a lot easier to complete your fire engine when there was lots available at reasonable prices.

In the early days of my membership Paul Anley had a great relationship with the Tech Colleges. Their apprenticeship classes were able to do some work on your fire engine and you paid for materials. We had the front seat of the Ace reupholstered by a Tech College, and my Mack had its first coat of red, after I had completed all the body work. I later had it repainted by Skills West. The people who had the ability to offer you help, and to organise you through to completion of a project, using contacts that were happy to help, was a bonus that made your project doable.
Over the years I have done some great things with my fire engines. I purchased the Mack in the early eighty's with many people telling me that I am mad. I can thank Brett for finding the add in the paper. Two lines, Mac Fire Engine ex NSWFB with hoses and pump, two thousand dollars. We made a phone call straight away, and drove to Sutton Forrest to have a look. It was a bit rough after sitting in a paddock, and we could not get it to run, but why not. Three weeks later with Brett sitting in the passenger seat, and my dad in the car behind, we drove the Mack home. Brett had to sit beside me because I only had a car licence. It took a lot of time and work to complete, and it was only able to happen because of friends, HFEA members and the Museum, who helped me along the way to make it a reality.

During the time that I was able to purchase a few fire engines, my involvement in the HFEA had a bit of a change. At an AGM held at the Museum, with my guard down, I was nominated as President, and before I knew it I had the job. This went on for more years than I can remember. During my time as President, Brett was my mainstay. He was Treasurer, Secretary and Flyer and Salvage Editor. His contribution in helping run the Association, is not matched, and as we will see in November, his recording of events, taking lots of photos, and contributions to Flyer and Salvage were first class. The Pedley’s were also great event recorders, and have provided lots for us to enjoy at our Fifty Year Celebration. The HFEA has had many members in the last thirty years that have contributed greatly, to make the Association what we have today. Guy took the reins from me about fifteen years ago, and did a great job for a long period.

Big events have been the most memorable for me, and we have done a few. We decided to go to Wagga Wagga. There was a large transport related event held at the showground. Why we decided to attend I do not remember, it was probably the challenge of going all the way to Wagga. We drove from Penrith leaving at 5am, with Terry Wilkinson in a Bedford and me driving the Mack. Brett and a
number of others took their cars. Considering the distance we had a faultless drive, getting to Wagga arriving in the mid afternoon. That was when fuel was cheap. My fuel consumption averaged at three kilometres to the litre. Today that would be the reason you would not drive to Wagga in a Mack.

In 1998 I was able to organise a pump session with City of Sydney Fire Station. Station Officer Sam Walker and his crew was our host. This was the first event Guy Ellis was to attend, as he was the Station Officer on shift at the Rocks. The Mack made some history, pumping into a Bronto, and then we were able to draught from the wharf. The crew was given a chance to use a 70mm brass branch that was not a shut off. Inspector Keith Blades made sure everyone had a go, and there were some very surprised younger members who had to hang on.

Wellington Centenary was another standout. Again like Wagga a three day stay over, that saw lots of members make the effort. Peddles drove his D400 and I drove the Mack. We had the support of the Zone Management, and were able to get the Garford and Reg Varley’s Ace taken by Brigade float. We all stayed together in a guest house that provided our meals as well. At the training facility we were able to give a firefighting display using our vintage vehicles. A successful weekend was an understatement.

In 2000 we went to the Shannons Rally in Canberra. We were able to stay at the Federal Police Academy and again meals were provided. We did rallies around Canberra, and the people who were there had a ball. The Mack made it on the front cover of the entry folder, given to all the participants. I have spoken about the big events, but you were always asked to be at the local things as well. Vintage fire engines are a real crowd pleaser, and supporting your local community was something I have always tried to do. I have done lots of weddings with the Garford and Mack. If I got a request from a serving firefighter I always tried to assist. School Formals and School visits with Richmond Fire Station, were always great to
HFEA pump day at Werombi, 1999.
(Photograph courtesy Phil Pedley)

(Photograph courtesy Phil Pedley)
great to be involved in. I remember in the late eighties leaving the Ace at the Training College at Alexandria for a couple of weeks, and we did Santa runs for the two weeks around the area. You might say that having a vintage fire engine can provide you with some memorable times. They have always left you with a smile, especially when you get home without a drama, or breakdown. I hope that there might be some more detailed event recordings done by some others later.

I was given the job of President again about eight years ago. I am not one to remember things in detail. I will leave that to others if they would like to recall things differently. The Association had lost members over a period and there were some real concerns attracting office bearers, especially a Secretary. Our financial position was starting to be a bit of a worry, with some members starting to ask if we would be able to continue. I was starting to think that we needed some help, and with some consultation with committee members The Museum was approached. This at the time might not have been a decision that had total support, but now I consider it the best decision that the committee has made. When it comes to the Association’s longevity I think it was a no
brainer. When you look at where we are now, it has been a real winner.

I have been involved with the Museum and the HFEA for many years and for me when I walk into The Museum of Fire I am at home. The Museum is a place that I have seen grow beyond anything I could have imagined. The HFEA has very much been a contributor, and now is benefiting in lots of ways, again beyond anything that I could have imagined. I am convinced that our small group of members are happy. When you see the number of HFEA members at The Museum, helping at the big events, being there on Tuesdays and Fridays, and working with Museum volunteers, contributing, but most of all having a great time, nothing has changed. That is what Brett and I did thirty five years ago, and we are still with lots of others still doing that, and very happy doing it.

The HFEA Fifty Year Celebration is going to be a fantastic weekend. I hope everyone appreciates those who had the drive fifty years ago, to push ahead and make a Museum happen. We are enjoying The Museum and Historic Fire Engine Association at their best. I look forward to continuing, and enjoying our unique hobby.

(Photograph courtesy Phil Pedley)
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