

Eltham's Fire Brigade – the early years

A talk to the Eltham Society given by John Kennett for Gus White

Thursday 5th May 2005

This lecture was typically meticulously researched by Gus White with a wealth of detail of the Eltham Fire service since its inception. In the 1870s Eltham's nearest brigades were at Blackheath and Catford until at the end of the decade the first Shooters Hill station was built. Even then Eltham had to plead for a telegraph system to be provided instead of relying on messengers having to run up Shooters Hill to raise an alarm.

In 1891 Eltham did acquire premises by Blunts Road to house a hand-pulled fire-escape cart with ladder and hose, together with a watch-box for overnight security. Then in 1896, after the demise of the Metropolitan Board of Works, the LCC bought 160/162 Eltham High Street from Carter Paterson, subsequently demolishing the shop to create facilities for two firemen with a truck and hose, three additional firemen being in lodgings within easy reach.

In 1903 work was started to create a complete fire station to be completed by October 1904. Woolwich Borough Council arranged the supply of electricity for the lighting and alarm bell. The station foundation stone was laid on 27 February 1904. Initially horses had to be bought and trained for Eltham but soon more up-to-date transport was introduced.