



FSD 消防處)

The Boys in Red: Alexander Grantham Fire Boat



FSD 消防處) History

The formation of the Hong Kong Fire Service was promulgated in the Government Gazette dated May 9th, 1868. Charles May became the first Superintendent of the Fire Brigade. At the time, the Fire Department was part of the police force. The establishment was 62 with 100 Chinese volunteers.



"You'd better get something for that sneeze.
We can't keep coming out here like this."

In the 1920's, the fire department expanded to 140 members. Firemen used to work 144 hours a week prior to World War II – being on duty for 6 whole days with just one day off.

During the World War II Japanese Occupation of Hong Kong, the Service was disbanded. Two fire appliances were taken to Tokyo to become part of the Imperial Palace Fire Unit. They were only returned after the War. In 1946, operational firemen worked 84 hours a week. Their weekly

working hours were subsequently reduced by stages to 72 in 1967, 60 in 1980 and 54 in 1990. Unlike some countries, Hong Kong's ambulance service is tied directly with the Fire Department. At that time all emergency ambulance service was provided by the Fire Service while non-emergency was handled by the Medical Corps. In 1953, this policy was changed and all Medical Corps vehicles and crew were transferred to the Fire Service. Thus, leading to the creation to the present Ambulance Command. Over the past 50 years it has grown to accommodate 30 ambulance depots, 240 ambulances, 35 motorcycles and 2,350 uniformed staff.

The department has 9,351 (8,675 uniformed and 676 civilian) members. It is organized into seven commands – three operational commands, a Licensing and Certification Command, a Fire Safety Command, an Ambulance Command and a Headquarters Command. They are supported by an Administration Division. Commanding the department is the Director of Fire Services.

Alexander Grantham Fireboat



The Fireboat Alexander Grantham was built by the Hong Kong Whampoa Dock Company Limited in 1951. With a hull almost 40 metres in length, the fireboat had a displacement of 503 tonnes and a speed of 12.5 knots. The vessel was equipped with eight fire-fighting monitors, one of which was installed on a telescopic tower that could extend to about 18 metres above sea level. To extinguish fires aboard different types of vessels, the fireboat could pump 630,000 gallons of water per hour and generate 150,000 gallons of foam every 30 minutes. This fireboat, named after the Hong Kong governor (*left*) who launched it, was one of the most modern fire-fighting vessels of its time. (*Launch Day below*)



RMS Queen Elizabeth - Seawise University



The RMS Queen Elizabeth made her final Atlantic crossing on 5 November 1968. At the time she had already been sold to a group of Philadelphia businessmen for £3.25 million. After this she sailed to Port Everglades and was opened to the public in February 1969.

By the end of the year she had been closed down by the local authorities as a fire hazard and was losing money. She was sold to a group of businessmen headed by Mr. C. Y. Tung and renamed Seawise University. The plan was to convert her to a floating university.



On July 16, 1971 the now renamed Seawise University steamed into Hong Kong received by the Alexander Grantham Fireboat. The grand old lady was to be refitted in Hong Kong and the original interiors removed and new machinery and furnishings added. By early January 1972 much of the conversion work had been completed with the exception of the ship's fire suppression systems.

As a result, when the fire broke out on January 9th the workers on board were unable to quench the flames and the fire quickly spread. One of the Queens of the Sea, the grand ship was being consumed by the fire throughout the vessel. The Alexander Grantham Fireboat was in position but was unable to stop the conflagration. As the fire weakened the interior support structure of the ship, and more and more water was pumped into the ship portions of the ship began to collapse and she eventually capsized onto her side. The exact cause of the fire was never firmly established.



Alexander Grantham Fireboat Decommission



The Fireboat Alexander Grantham, the largest in the fleet of fireboats, was built by the Hong Kong Whampoa Dock Company Limited in 1953 and decommissioned in May, 2002, after 49 years of sterling service. During its service period from 1953 to 2002, it took part in numerous fire-fighting and rescue operations, including the fire on the vessel "Seawise University" in 1972 and the fire at Aberdeen typhoon shelter in 1986.



Alexander Grantham Fireboat Renovation

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department decided to restore the fireboat to its former glory and construct an exhibition gallery for the public to learn more about its contribution thus enhancing their knowledge of local sea rescue operations.

After several years of organization, preparation and painstaking hard work the "Fireboat Alexander Grantham Exhibition Gallery" was officially opened on September 29 2007 in Quarry Bay Park, Hong Kong Island. The setting up of the gallery on land will help to conserve this historic fireboat, enhance visitors' knowledge of the history of Hong Kong's sea rescue operations and preserve the collective memories associated with this very special fireboat.



The "Fireboat Alexander Grantham Exhibition Gallery" is divided into three sections: "Before the Emergence of the Alexander Grantham" (1883–1953), "During the Service Period of the Alexander Grantham" (1953–2002) and "After the Decommissioning of the Alexander Grantham" (2002 to present). It showcases some 70 artefacts and historical photographs.





1953年前的滅火船隊伍 The Fireboat Fleet before 1953

香港第一艘滅火船「浮動消防車」在1896年退役，由另一艘速度較快的新滅火船取代。二十世紀初的香港水域，雖然隨著1898年《拓展香港界址專條》的簽署，由原來的維多利亞港擴展至新界及離島，但消防隊仍然只有一艘滅火船。直至1910年，才有另一艘滅火船投入服務。

為方便調配及指揮，消防隊將這兩艘滅火船以號碼編配，分別是1號和2號滅火船，這種編號制度一直沿用至今。1926年至1937年間，曾有第3艘滅火船投入服務，原有滅火船的設備亦加強，提升船隊整體的救援能力。

二次大戰後，消防隊迅速恢復海上救援的工作；至1951年，在中區灣山碼頭、油麻地四力街碼頭及香港仔都有滅火船駐守。

Hong Kong's earliest fireboat, the *Floating Fire Engine*, was decommissioned in 1896 when it was superseded by a new and faster vessel. Despite the signing of the Convention for the Extension of Hong Kong Territory in 1898, which expanded the colony to include the New Territories and outlying islands, the Fire Brigade still only had one fireboat. This situation continued until 1910, when one more fireboat was put into service.

To facilitate deployments and command, the Fire Brigade assigned numbers to the two fire-fighting vessels, which were thus named Fireboats No. 1 and No. 2, a system which continues until this day. Between 1926 and 1937, a third fireboat was put into service, while the two existing ones had their fire-fighting equipment retrofitted and their rescue capabilities upgraded.

After World War II, the Fire Brigade quickly resumed its maritime rescue operations. By 1951, Central's King Shan Wharf, Yau Ma Tei's Public Square Street Pier and Aberdeen were all serviced by fireboats.



Past & Present **HK Fireboats**



MY DADDY'S A FIREMAN

We're seldom named in poems though we do have charm and poise,
Firemen never seem to have girls; it's always boys, boys, boys!
Well, my Daddy's a fireman, and I'm proud as I can be,
While my name isn't Tommy or Billy, he loves me 'cause I'm me.
He needs both me and Mommy to remind him of things to do,
Like going to Church on Sunday and emptying the garbage, too.
One day he took me with him to his firehouse downtown, I sat in the big red engine and
pushed the siren down.

At times, I like to fool him; make him believe I'm asleep at night,
He'd whisper "Nite-nite, little darlin', don't let the bed bugs bite!"
Please don't tell anybody, I once saw my Daddy cry,
He fought a real bad fire and told Mommy he saw someone die.
Why he fights these fires, I guess I'm too young to know,
He's always helping people...and, that's why I love him so.
The reason I wrote this poem is to explain the best I can,
Girls, just like boys, can say with pride...

MY DADDY'S A FIREMAN

By Brian L. Coak

