



June, 2017

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **CONVICT'S VOLUNTEER HEROISM STILL RESONATES AFTER 166 YEARS**

The heroism of a convict deported to Australia in the 1840s is still resonating today in a CFA volunteering dynasty.

Born in Chesterfield in 1803, William Yates was a chimney sweep and at 20 was convicted for the burglary of a petticoat and sentenced to transportation for life. William Yates was sent to Australia from England and had found himself living in the rough and tumble world of Tasmania.

His continuing disregard for authority found him working on a road making chain gang.

It was in 1841 that William Yates was pardoned by the Lieutenant Governor for his exertions to extinguish a fire in Launceston. There was even a suggestion that he received a block of land as a reward.

At the same time was able to turn his life around; sometime later he married and eventually lived in Geelong.

He also started a tradition of volunteer firefighting that continues today.

His great, great, grandson Bill Pressey carries the family link as a long-serving volunteer of the Mortlake Fire Brigade.

"All I know is that he went to the pub at night and there was a fire and he saved some people and he was pardoned," Bill Pressey said.

Becoming a volunteer firefighter continued through the generations and Bill has been a member of the Mortlake CFA Brigade for more than 55 years.

"My family has been in the fire brigade since it was formed in Mortlake," he said.

"It's just one of those things you did."

Now 79, Bill continues to attend meetings and takes a keen interest in the future of CFA volunteers. "I go along to the local brigade meetings; I don't take part in firefighting any more but I'm still interested."

The Ash Wednesday fires of 1983 and the a blaze that destroyed Clarke's Pies factory in Mortlake were among the biggest incidents where he joined fellow volunteers in

Bill is a strong advocate of the CFA system where volunteers and paid staff work together as an integrated team. Bill shares concerns of thousands of volunteers across Victoria about the Government's plan to radically change the CFA and is extremely disappointed with the lack of consultation with volunteers about this change.

"The volunteers do a good job, splitting the CFA volunteers and paid staff is a recipe for disaster," he said.

"You have a strong community if you have a strong volunteer CFA brigade."

"I'm sad to see the proposed splitting of the CFA as announced by the government and would have liked to have seen an exhaustive dialogue with the volunteers. I feel the government is not respecting the previously signed charter it made to respect volunteers and paid staff equally."

...Ends