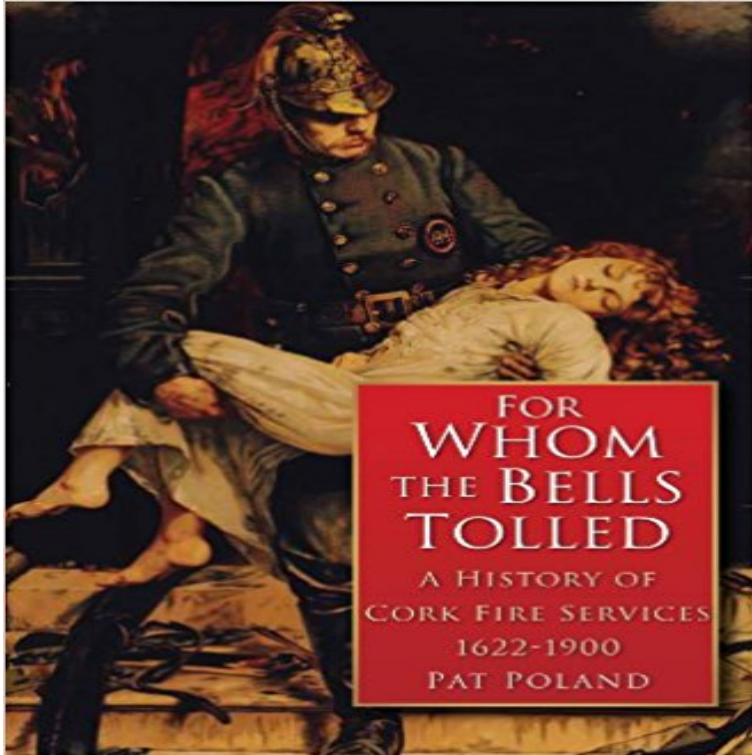


For Whom the Bells Told: A History of Cork Firefighting Services 1622 - 1900



Today, the sight of fire engines progressing through the streets of Cork on their way to yet another incident, is common-place. The people of Cork know that, in time of emergency, the fire service will answer their call for help with their state-of-the-art equipment and highly-trained members. But it was not always so. The settlement that evolved into the city of Cork has existed for almost 1,400 years, yet an official public fire service has been in place for less than one 10th of that time. In 1877, Cork Fire Brigade was established with just an officer and four men to serve a population in excess of 80,000. Previously, the Church of Ireland had provided fire engines (the ubiquitous parish pumps) to serve local communities. This account reflects the socioeconomic and political mood across the period under review. By its very nature, any chronicle of fires and accidents is interwoven into the fabric of the story of the very city itself: few people, in the course of a lifetime, will not be touched, in some degree, by the trauma of one or the other. For Whom the Bells Told is primarily the story of how the fire service in Cork evolved through centuries of bungling, incompetence, and human tragedy. The answers to such diverse questions as to why the brass helmet (primarily a military headgear) was adopted for fire brigade use, and why Napoleon Bonapartes flaming grenade badge is incorporated into the Cork City Fire Brigade cap badge, are given.

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