



# Fire destroys famous church

John Stapleton

“THIS church is only for sinners,” the billboard at St Barnabas church in Sydney would declare.

“This pub is only for drinkers,” the billboard on the hotel across the road would joyfully reply.

Or when the church sign read: “You have nothing that God did not give you,” the pub’s sign said: “I know I have nothing, but I’m not sure who gave it to me.”

For decades, the friendly billboard rivalry continued on the fringe of the CBD.

But the hotel disappeared in 1998, and “Barneys”, as the church was known, burnt to the ground early yesterday morning.

The 149-year-old Anglican church in Sydney’s Broadway was a haven for foreign students attending nearby Sydney university, and yesterday messages of sympathy poured in to the church from around the world.

Behind the brick-and-stone walls, the church was gutted by the fire, which started at 3.30am.

Hundreds of residents were evacuated from the nearby Uni-



**Losing battle:** St Barnabas church burns

Lodge as the crews of 15 fire trucks battled the blaze. The church’s recently renovated roof collapsed.

A spokesman for the NSW Fire Brigade said arson had not been ruled out as a cause.

St Barnabas was a working-class church built in the 1850s in

a then industrial part of Sydney.

It was where former alcoholic Arthur Stace found God. Stace became famous for writing the word “Eternity” on Sydney’s pavements, done in copperplate hand-writing with chalk, more than half a million times over 40 years.

The last remaining original “Eternity” sign was rumoured to have been destroyed in the fire. The word “Eternity” was placed up on the church billboard late yesterday.

Parishioner Rowena Whittle said the church had meant a huge amount in the life of Sydney. “It’s always been a very vibrant and strong church,” Ms Whittle said.

Despite the high value of the land, church leaders insist they will be rebuilding on the site.