



# Understanding the Most Venerable Order of St John of Jerusalem

THE ORDER'S RELATIONSHIP TO  
ST JOHN AMBULANCE VOLUNTEERS





St John Ambulance Australia SA (ABN 4294745570)

85 Edmund Avenue, Unley SA 5061

Tel: 1300 360 455 Fax: (08) 8306 6995

[www.stjohnsa.com.au](http://www.stjohnsa.com.au)

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*Understanding the Most Venerable Order of St John  
and the Order's Relationship to St John Ambulance  
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# Preface

Members of St John Ambulance Australia, if they have given long and meritorious service to St John, can be admitted to the Order of St John. This is a great honour and something that money cannot buy.

Just what is 'The Order' and how does the world-wide St John organisation fit together?

The St John organisation is indeed a complex one. This publication is intended to provide some understanding of it. There are many histories both in print and online, that explore the many elements of the 900 years of history of St John Ambulance.

It is somewhat grandly stated that this particular publication is the 'First Edition'. This is because the St John Regulations, Statutes and even the Royal Charter are subject to occasional review. Whenever any revision of them is published, these pages also may need revision.

I thank Dr Ian Howie-Willis and Professor John Pearn for perusing these notes and kindly providing useful comments. Other persons have provided feedback anonymously. The support and encouragement of the former SA CEO, Sharyn Mitten, and Peter LeCornu, immediate-past National CEO, is greatly appreciated. Special thanks are given to David Hayes for the layout and illustrations in this booklet.

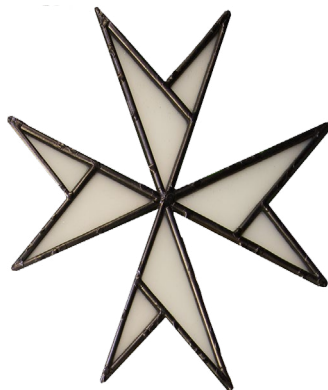
The request to produce this publication arose from a finding that a proportion of St John Ambulance volunteers knew little or even nothing about the Order of St John. The aim is to reduce that proportion.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Brian Fotheringham". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Brian" and last name "Fotheringham" clearly distinguishable.

Brian Fotheringham AM, KStJ  
Former Priory Librarian  
Priory of Australia

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# **The Most Venerable Order**

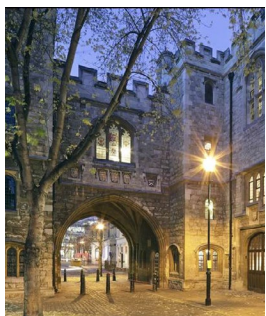
## The Ancient Order

Centuries ago, in the year 1113, Pope Paschall II issued a Papal Bull, creating what we can now call the ancient Order of St John. This was done as a way of recognising the good work done by a group of dedicated people who cared for sick and injured persons in Jerusalem.

Members of this group, the original Hospitallers, were working in Jerusalem even before the First Crusade reached that city in 1099. Their leader was known as Gerard, later referred to as the Blessed Gerard. The monks who worked under his direction wore long black cloaks featuring an eight-pointed white cross derived from that of the Italian Republic of Amalfi. Merchants from Amalfi had supported the monk's hospital situated in an old monastery of St John the Baptist.

Members of that Order, known as the Knights of St John or the Hospitallers, were later forced to leave Jerusalem when it became too unsafe. They moved to Acre on the Mediterranean coast and later continued their caring work in Rhodes (1309–1522) and then Malta (1530–1798). This original Order of St John also developed a significant military (including naval) force that continued through until the Knights of St John were expelled from Malta by Napoleon Bonaparte.

A Priory of this ancient Order was established in England in about 1144 at Clerkenwell, now a suburb of London. Wat Tyler led a rebellion in 1381 that burnt down the Priory's buildings. Thomas Docwra rebuilt the Priory's Gatehouse in 1504 but less than forty years later, in 1540, King Henry VIII confiscated Church property throughout England. This confiscation applied to St John property, including the Gatehouse.



St John's Gatehouse, circa 1800s (top) and today (bottom).

## The New Order

In the 1800s, some enterprising Englishmen used the history of the ancient Hospitallers as the inspiration to again establish an organisation of volunteers caring for sick and injured patients. Influences at the time were the casualties from the Franco–Prussian War and, nearer to home, casualties as the result of mining accidents.

Over the years, St John's Gatehouse was owned by a succession of people who put it to various uses until it was bought privately by Sir Edmund Lechmere in 1873, who then presented it to St John. By doing this, he linked the new organisation with the site used by the Hospitallers hundreds of years before. The Venerable Order of St John still uses the Gatehouse for its museum of St John memorabilia.



Sir Edmund Lechmere

## The Royal Charter

A special date in the history of St John is 14 May 1888. On this day Queen Victoria, who had been impressed by the work of the volunteers of the then newly formed St John Ambulance, granted St John the status of a British Royal Order of Chivalry.

The full name of the Order (slightly changed from the original of 1888) is 'The Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem'. There is an approved shortened name, simply 'The Order of St John'. The word 'venerable' means 'entitled to deep respect' (Oxford English Dictionary).

Now with the status of a British Royal Order of Chivalry, St John's activities could no longer simply be left in the charge of a group of enterprising and well-meaning enthusiasts like Sir William Drogo (7th Duke of Manchester), Sir Edmund Lechmere, Sir John Furley and Colonel Francis Duncan. They were certainly well-respected and competent members of society, but now it was necessary that they be joined by others more closely linked to British royalty to guide and direct the activities of St John.

The newly constituted Order of St John came to guide, direct and control St John Ambulance's teaching of first aid to the public, its provision of first aid services at public events and to oversee the work of the St John Eye Hospital in Jerusalem.



Queen Victoria holds the Royal Charter that she granted to St John giving the organisation the status of a British Royal Order of Chivalry.

## Modern St John

There were three building blocks established on which today's St John activities are founded. The first was the St John Ambulance Association (now referred to in Australia as First Aid Services). Founded in 1877, its members taught first aid to the public, a new venture at that time.

The second was the St John Ophthalmic (Eye) Hospital in Jerusalem, founded in 1882. Sir Edmund Lechmere was influential in establishing this aspect of St John, which by its positioning, linked the new St John movement with the Hospitallers of old.

The third building block was the St John Ambulance Brigade (now known in Australia as Event Health Services). This was formed in 1887 and provided uniformed trained first aiders at public events where large crowds gathered.

### How the Ancient Order relates to the Venerable Order

The Lord Prior, Professor Anthony Mellows, when in Sydney in 2012, drew attention to the Grand Council's view of this part of St John history:

The Venerable Order of St John, incorporated by Queen Victoria's Charter, is not the same as the original Order.

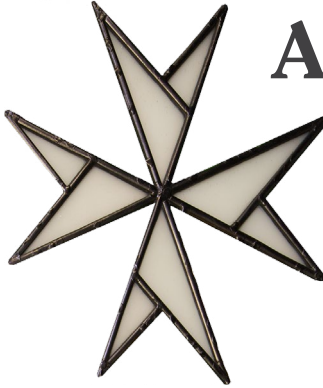
There is an unbroken factual connection to the original Order.

The Venerable Order does not derive its legitimacy because of that connection.

The Venerable Order does derive its legitimacy from a direct act of the British Crown.



# **St John Ambulance**



## The Order worldwide



HRH Queen Elizabeth II,  
Sovereign Head of The Order  
of St John.

Becoming a British Royal Order of Chivalry brought with it the need for change.

To govern the Order, Queen Victoria took the title of Sovereign Head of the Order, and all British monarchs have followed in this role.

Queen Elizabeth II, the present Queen, is currently the Sovereign Head of the Order.

## Structure and governance

### Priories

The Venerable Order of St John has, today, eleven major working units around the world. These units are called Priories. They are situated in England and the Islands, Scotland, Wales, South Africa, New Zealand, Canada, Australia and the United States of America, Kenya, Singapore and Hong Kong.

### Commanderies

In addition there are five smaller units known as Commanderies—the Commandery of Ards in Northern Ireland and the Commanderies of Guernsey, Jersey and the Isle of Man which are part of the Priory of England and the Islands; and the Commandery of Western Australia, which is part of the Priory in Australia

### Associations

Other units, generally smaller exist in other parts of the world. These 32 St John Associations are in Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Bermuda, Cyprus, Dominica, Fiji, Ghana, Gibraltar, Grenada, Guyana, India, Jamaica, Malawi, Malaysia, Malta, Mauritius, Namibia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Saint Lucia, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Swaziland, Tanzania, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. There is also an Associated Body in the Republic of Ireland.

You can see why it is said that the sun never sets on St John!

## The Grand Prior and the Great Officers

The Sovereign Head delegates some of her powers and responsibilities relating to the Order to a member of the royal family. This person is known as the Grand Prior and currently is the Duke of Gloucester.

Assisting the Grand Prior are the 'Great Officers', who carry the titles of:

- Lord Prior, who acts as his Lieutenant and Deputy
- Prelate and Sub-Prelate, who advise on matters of an ecclesiastical nature
- Deputy Lord Prior
- Sub-Prior.

Originally all the Great Officers were centred in the 'Grand Priory' in London. In 1999 the situation changed as St John took on a multinational leadership with some of the Great Officers coming from other Priorities.

## Grand Council

Another change was to involve the Priors of each of the eleven Priorities to join with the Great Officers in an annual meeting called the Grand Council. A Prior could delegate his Chancellor to attend on his behalf. The Grand Council assists in formulating policy, in disseminating information from the Great Officers and in providing feedback from the Priorities.

## Mottoes and symbols

### The Mottoes

Until very recent times there have been two mottoes. These are (in Latin):

#### ***Pro Fide***

which means 'For the Faith', indicating 'the encouragement of all that makes for the spiritual and moral strengthening of mankind';

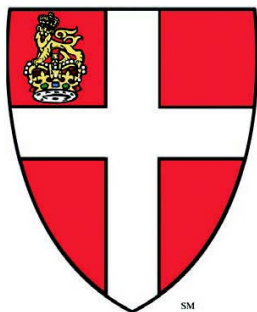
#### ***Pro Utilitate Hominum***

which means 'For the Service of Humanity', indicating 'the encouragement and promotion of all work of humanity and charity for the relief of persons in sickness, distress, suffering or danger, without distinction of race, class or creed'.

Recently, these two mottoes have been merged into one, represented in English as 'For the Faith and in the Service of Humanity'.



The international badge of St John featuring the Cross and the Beasts.



On becoming a British Royal Order, St John obtained its official Arms.

## The Cross

The Order of St John cross is white, eight-pointed, and embellished in its four principal angles, alternately by a lion and a unicorn.

The four arms of the cross represent the four Christian virtues of Prudence (carefulness and forethought), Justice (fairness), Temperance (moderation in all things) and Fortitude (courage and endurance). The eight points represent the eight beatitudes which are found in the *Bible* (Matthew 5: 3–10). The whiteness of the cross is a symbol of the purity of life.

The lions and unicorns are either white or silver, except in the case of Bailiffs or Dames Grand Cross, or Knights or Dames of Justice when they may be gold.

## The Arms

The Arms comprise a red shield with a silver cross and the Queen's Crest in the first quarter.

## The Standard of the Order

The Standard of the Order is the international emblem of the Order: it features a white Cross on a red field reflecting that of the Knights Hospitaller, but with the Royal Crest in the upper left quadrant.

## Membership

A member of St John Ambulance is not necessarily a Member of the Order of St John. Becoming a Member of the Order is a special honour bestowed on individuals who have contributed significantly to St John Ambulance or the St John Ophthalmic Hospital over a long period of time.

On a world-wide basis, there are some 414,200 St John Ambulance volunteers but only about 25,800 have been admitted to the Order as a Member.

## Grades

As in other Orders, for example the Order of Australia, there is a series of Grades within the Order. Usually a person who is to be recognised as a Member of the Order will be admitted at Grade V, and then, with continued good service, may be promoted serially to higher grades.

The Grades are as follows, with higher grades denoted by lower numbers:

- ▶ Grade VI Esquires (EsqStJ), a Grade almost never used in Australia
- ▶ Grade V Members (MStJ)
- ▶ Grade IV Officer (OStJ)
- ▶ Grade III Commander (CStJ)
- ▶ Grade II Knight or Dame (KStJ or DStJ)
- ▶ Grade I Bailiffs or Dames Grand Cross (GCStJ).

By tradition, Order Members do not use these post-nominals outside the domain of St John work. This custom relates to the ethos of humility, dating from the Crusades era.

The term 'Member' (MStJ) for a person at the Grade V level is recent. Formerly they were called either a Serving Brother (SBStJ) or a Serving Sister (SSStJ)

## Knights and Dames

Currently Knights and Dames may be either 'of Justice' or 'of Grace'. A Knight or Dame cannot be 'of Justice' unless they have satisfied the Order's Genealogist of their right to bear Arms, that is, to have an approved Coat of Arms. Knights or Dames 'of Grace' are awarded that title by the grace of the Order.

## Oblations

The Order is devoted to works of Charity and Humanity and it is a fundamental rule that those who belong to the Order should contribute to its Charities.

Members of the Order are obligated to contribute annually, commensurate with their Grade in the Order. The current oblation for a Knight in Australia is \$40 each year. This money goes to support the work of St John in less fortunate countries.



The robe (or mantle) with the St John emblem on the left.

## Ceremonial occasions

Ceremonial occasions include the Annual Church Service of Rededication, meetings of the Priory Chapter, and Investitures,

For St John ceremonial occasions, persons of Grade I, II and III may wear mantles, also known as robes, and participate in the Capitular Procession. The robed members of the Order enter in Capitular Procession, their robes recalling those of the monks of the ancient Order of St John.

## Awards

There are numerous awards, but only two of them will be mentioned here: the Service Medal and the Grand Prior's Award.

### The Service Medal of the Order

'The Service Medal of the Order is awarded to recognise long and efficient service to the Order, its Establishments or its Foundations'. While the word 'long' is included in this explanation, the medal is nevertheless a 'Service Medal', not a 'Long Service Medal'. In Australia, a member deemed eligible for the Medal usually will have given qualifying service each year for at least twelve years. Bars to the medal may be awarded for each additional five years of qualifying service and a gilt laurel leaf is awarded for 52 years service.



The Service Medal of the Order (top), and the laurel leaf pin awarded for 52 years service.

The medal is unique in that it is the only currently minted medal that still bears the image of Queen Victoria. The image was created by Queen Victoria's daughter, Princess Louise.

### The Grand Prior's Award

The Grand Prior's Award is an international award of considerable prestige. It may be awarded to a person who is a Cadet or who has been a Cadet for at least three years and who has completed twelve badges including those for the subjects 'Knowledge of the Order' and 'Family Care'. The person receiving the Award is given a Grand Prior's Award Certificate and the Grand Prior's badge, that can be worn on the left sleeve. This badge is unique in being the only St John badge that can be transferred from the Cadet uniform to the adult uniform of the person who gains it.



The Grand Prior's Award badge.

## The Australian Priory

It is traditional for the Governor-General of Australia, as the Monarch's Representative and Head of State, to be the Prior of the Australian Priory.

The Order has a Board of Directors and the chairperson of the Board is titled the Chancellor.

There is a National Meeting each year when the Board meets with the Priory Chapter, that is, Members of the Order of Grades I, II and III (see page 9), and certain Representative Members.

At State level, the respective State Governors are the Deputy Priors of the Order and there are State Boards. In the Northern Territory, the Territory's Administrator is traditionally the Deputy Prior. St John Western Australia is a Commandery dependent on the Priory of Australia.

### Ceremonial occasions

#### The Annual Church Service

Each year, at a date as near as practical to 24 June (the anniversary of St John the Baptist's birth), the various States and Territories hold an annual Church Service.

Also, at about this time, in conjunction with the yearly national meetings of the Australian Priory, there is a Priory Church Service in the city where the meetings are being held.

In the Capitular Procession are carried the Cross of the Order, the Standard of the Australian Priory and the Order Standard.

Also in the Procession, are the Sword Rests, formed in silver in the shape of a lion and a unicorn, and the great two-handed Ceremonial Sword.

The emblems and standards are placed on the High Altar before the Service begins, and are returned as the Capitular Procession leaves the Cathedral at the conclusion of the Service.



The Church Service held during the Grand Council meeting in Sydney in 2012.

## Investitures

Investitures occur usually once a year and are the occasions when new members are formally admitted to The Order of St John or when current members are promoted in the Order, for example from Officer (OStJ) to Commander (CStJ). The Deputy Prior in each state conducts investitures in that State's Government House, and similar arrangements are made in the territories. Those who are promoted to Grade III (Commander) are ceremonially robed by the Deputy Prior.

## Priory Chapter meetings

Priory Chapter meetings are occasions when Members of the Order of Grades I, II and III meet with senior Members of the Order who hold National appointments to raise questions and to receive reports on the progress of the organisation.



The Deputy Prior of The Order in South Australia (centre, in robe) with members being admitted to The Order in 2011.



## Emblems

### The Sword and Rests



The Queen's Beasts sword rest for the Australian Priory sword.

The Sword is a replica of a medieval knight's sword, a symbol of the times when members of the ancient Order fought for the Christian faith. The sword is never drawn in St John ceremonial occasions, but remains in its sheath, indicating the Order's role is now a peaceful one, *Pro Utilitate Hominum*.

The sword rests are in the form of a lion and a unicorn and this reflects the connection of the Order to British Royalty.

Both the Ceremonial Sword and the Queen's Beast Sword Rests were presented to St John in Australia by a former Duke of Gloucester when he came to this country as Governor-General. The present Duke of Gloucester, the Order's current Grand Prior, is the son of this former Governor-General and Grand Prior.



The Australian Priory Arms.

### The Australian Priory Standard

The Standard of the Australian Priory is similar but features the Stars of the Southern Cross in silver on a blue disc at the centre of the Cross.

### Ceremonial robes

The robes, or mantles, are black and bear the St John badge on the left breast. The diameter of the badge is 30 cms for Grades I and II, and 23 cms for Grade III. Robes are worn during Church Services, Investitures and Priory Chapter meetings.

## Foundations of The Order

The Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem with its designated officials and defined structure has, since its inception in 1888, sponsored, guided and governed its two so-called Foundations.

The foundations are St John Ambulance (encompassing both the teaching and the operational aspects of St John) and the St John Eye (previously, 'Ophthalmic') Hospital in Jerusalem.

In England the 'St John Ambulance Association' (First Aid Services in current Australian terminology) began in 1877.

The 'St John Ambulance Brigade' (Event Health Services as it is now known in Australia) began in 1887. As a subset of the Brigade, the St John Ambulance Cadets began in England in 1922 and in Australia just three years later.

### St John Ambulance Australia

St John Ambulance Australia began in Melbourne, in 1883, and in South Australia in 1885. It was more than 50 years later that St John in Australia was deemed to have developed a national leadership structure able enough to be granted a degree of autonomy.

In 1941 St John in Australia was granted the status of a Commandery linked to the Priory in England. Before this, St John in each state was under the direct control of St John in England.

Five years later the degree of autonomy for St John in Australia was increased to that of a Priory. St John Ambulance in Australia encompasses First Aid Services, Event Health Services, and Community care programs.

### First Aid Services

Today in Australia, the First Aid Services program covers diverse areas. The primary area is training of first aid to the community; training of our members and volunteers in first aid management; production of first aid kits and supplies; and publication of print and online learning resources.



A commemorative stamp celebrating 100 years of St John Ambulance in Australia.

## Event Health Services

St John volunteers attend various community and organisational events around Australia, providing first aid and health care services. Volunteers may attend major stadium sporting events, to local community fetes.

## Community Care

As well as the ambulance services in Western Australian and the Northern Territory, and the recent expansion of patient transport services, the Community Care program provides a range of community services that vary from state to state depending on their needs. In South Australia, for example, care concentrates on home-based assistance to those in need—a worthy endeavour considering the increasing numbers of elderly people in our community. The assistance given is not first aid but assistance with shopping and other domestic tasks, the most important aspect being the provision of friendship to those with few or no companions.

## Australian State and Territory Boards

These aspects of St John, together with fund-raising for the St John Eye Hospital in Jerusalem, are under the direction of the St John Board in each Australian state and territory. Each of these Boards can seek guidance from their local Deputy Prior, traditionally the Governor of each State or the Administrator of the Northern Territory. Each Board employs a Chief Executive Officer and other staff to provide support at their respective headquarters.

## Australian National Board

At the National level there also is a Board which includes Priory Officers and representatives from each state and territory that gives direction to St John throughout Australia.

The chairman of the National Board is termed the Chancellor and that individual reports to the Prior of the Order in Australia, traditionally the Governor-General. Again, the National Headquarters employs a small staff under the direction of a Chief Executive Officer.

## The St John Eye Hospital in Jerusalem

The St John Eye Hospital in Jerusalem is an outstanding example of how people of different cultures can work together—the Order's hospital is situated in a Jewish state, is managed by Christians and most of its patients are Muslims.

As a place, Jerusalem has resonance with the Order of St John as it was here that the original Order cared for patients some 900 years earlier. The early Knights of St John were forced out of Jerusalem late in the 13th Century.

Many years later, in 1876, the first successful steps were taken to re-establish a St John presence in that city. Sir Edmund Lechmere wrote to the Turkish Ambassador in Constantinople to ask if Turkey would grant St John some land in Jerusalem to establish a hospital (Turkey ruled Jerusalem at this time). After further lobbying by the Prince of Wales a portion of land was given to St John and a hospital established. The St John Ophthalmic Hospital in Jerusalem was officially founded in 1882.

The decision to specialise in diseases of the eye was made on the grounds that eye disease is especially common in the Middle East, and with sight saved, children can return to education and adults can return to work

Today, the Eye Hospital provides charitable eye care to an internationally recognised expert standard, and with locally trained Palestinian medical staff, swiftly and indiscriminately across the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

With funds contributed by the Australian Priory, the Eye Hospital now has charitable clinics in Anabata, Hebron, the Gaza Strip, Jordan, and The Muristan province; mobile outreach clinics; a medical research unit; and training programs for ophthalmic doctors and specialist nurses.



The St John Ophthalmic Hospital in Jerusalem.



## Mutually-recognised Orders of St John

There are five mutually-recognised Orders of St John, all of which come from the same beginnings.

1. Order of St John
2. Order of Malta
3. Johanniterorden, of Germany
4. Crown Order of St John in The Netherlands
5. Crown Order of St John in Sweden.

The Johanniterorden was previously an Order under the protection of the King of Prussia and is now recognised as an Order of Chivalry by the Federal German Republic and by several countries in which it has Commanderies, including Finland, France and Hungary.

The Orders of St John in The Netherlands and in Sweden are recognised by the Sovereign authorities in those countries.

All five Orders use the eight-pointed white Maltese (or Amalfi) cross, either by itself or with distinguishing features.

Each of the Orders is autonomous, but there is increasing cooperation between them, particularly at the practical level.

One or more of these Orders has a presence of some form in about 150 countries of the world.

In addition there are many 'Non-Recognised Orders' with names similar to our own Order.

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**St John**

St John Ambulance South Australia

The 'Pel Fesq' stained-glass windows (top–bottom): the Golden Wattle (*Acacia pycnantha*), the Commonwealth of Australia's floral emblem; Sturt's Desert Pea (*Swainsona formosa*), South Australia's floral emblem; and St John's Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*), the floral emblem of the Order of St John.