



St John



Understanding the
Most Venerable
**Order of
St John**

and the Order's relationship to
St John Ambulance Volunteers



ST JOHN AMBULANCE AND THE ORDER OF ST JOHN

First Edition

2012



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Cover images are reproductions of posters prepared by Anna Zinkeisen. The originals are on display at the St John Museum at St John's Gate, London UK.

The cadet on the back cover represents the future of St John.

PREFACE

Members of St John Ambulance Australia, if they give long and meritorious service to St John, e.g. in the Training Branch, the Operations Branch (now called the First Aid Services Branch) or Community Care, can be admitted to the Order of St John. This is a great honour and something that money cannot buy.

Please note that a member of St John Ambulance is not automatically a member of the Order of St John. On a world-wide basis, there are some 250,000 St John Ambulance volunteers but only about 25,000 members of the Order of St John.

Just what is “The Order” and how does the entire St John organisation fit together?

The St John organisation is indeed a complex one. The following notes are intended to provide some understanding of it, but please be aware they are only brief notes, not a comprehensive treatise.

It is somewhat grandly stated that this 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 will need revision.

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

The request to produce these notes 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.



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Former Priory Librarian
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April 2012

CONTENTS

Preface	3
PART ONE	7
<i>It is recommended that part one be read as it sets out how the Most Venerable Order of St John came to be formed and how it is different from St John Ambulance.</i>	
Introduction	8
Early history	8
Modern St John	8
The Royal Charter	9
The need for new arrangements	10
PART TWO	11
The Order of St John Worldwide	12
The Structure and Governance of the Order	12
The Governance of the Order at Priory Level	13
The Mottoes of the Order	13
The Arms of the Order	13
The Badge of the Order	14
Membership of the Order	14
Oblations	15
Ceremonial Occasions	15
Ceremonial Robes	17
Awards	17
St John Ambulance	18
The St John Ophthalmic Hospital in Jerusalem	19
The Ancient Order of St John	20
Other Orders of St John	21
Summary	21



INTRODUCTION

The following very brief history may assist readers to understand today's St John organisation and the way it has developed.

EARLY HISTORY

Centuries ago, in the year 1113 to be precise, Pope Paschall II created 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. That band of caring people was led by a man named Gerard, later referred to as the Blessed Gerard.

Members of that Order, known as the Knights of St John or the Hospitallers, were later forced to leave Jerusalem, but 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 Boneparte.

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 buildings. Thomas Docwra rebuilt the Priory's Gatehouse nearly two hundred years later, in 1504. Some 36 years after that, King Henry VIII confiscated church property in England including St John property.

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.

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, known more recently in Australia as the Training Branch. 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, later known in Australia as the Operations Branch and now changed to the First Aid Services Branch. This was formed in 1887 and provided uniformed trained first aiders at public events where large crowds gathered.

Sir Edmund Lechmere also purchased the old Gatehouse at Clerkenwell and presented it to the emerging modern St John in 1873. 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.

■ THE ROYAL CHARTER

The 14th May 1888 is a special date in the history of St John. On this date Queen Victoria, who had been impressed by the work of the volunteers of the newly formed St John Ambulance, granted St John the status of a British Royal Order of Chivalry. The present full name of this 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). The new Order was charged with the maintenance and development of both the St John Eye Hospital in Jerusalem and St John Ambulance. The new Order is dedicated to good works principally in the domain of pre-hospital care adopted from the traditions of the ancient Order.



Queen Victoria granted St John the status of a British Royal Order of Chivalry. The illustration shows her holding that Royal Charter.

■ THE NEED FOR NEW ARRANGEMENTS

From 14th May 1888 St John's activities could no longer be left in the charge of a group of well-meaning enthusiasts like Sir William Drogo, Sir Edmund Lechmere, Sir John Furley and Colonel Francis Duncan. They were certainly well respected and competent members of society but now leadership was required by a group more closely linked to British Royalty to guide and direct the activities of St John.

Thus in 1888 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 Ophthalmic Hospital in Jerusalem.

What now follows in Part Two are some details of both the Order and St John Ambulance.



PART TWO

THE ORDER OF ST JOHN WORLDWIDE

At the time of writing this brief history, the Venerable Order of St John has eight major working units distributed around the world. These units are called Priories. They are situated in England, Scotland, Wales, South Africa, New Zealand, Canada, Australia and the United States of America.

In addition there are smaller units known as Commanderies. Examples are the Commandery of Ards in Northern Ireland dependent on the Priory of England and the Commandery of Western Australia dependent on the Australian Priory.

Other units, generally smaller and confusingly known as St John Associations, exist in other parts of the world. Note, the word “Association” here has a different meaning to the one used previously for the Training Branch in Australia. These St John Associations are in Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Bermuda, Cyprus, Fiji, Ghana, Gibraltar, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Kenya, Malawi, Malaysia, Malta, Mauritius, Montserrat, Namibia, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Swaziland, Tanzania, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

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

THE STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE OF THE ORDER

As indicated above, 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, so that Queen Elizabeth II, the present Queen, is now the Sovereign Head of the Order. She 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. To assist him are the other “Great Officers”: the Lord Prior, who acts as his Lieutenant and Deputy; the Prelate and Sub-Prelate, who advise on matters of an ecclesiastical nature; the Deputy Lord Prior and the Sub-Prior.

Originally all the Great Officers were centred on the “Grand Priory” in London. In 1999 the situation changed as St John took on a multi-national leadership with some of the Great Officers coming from other Priories.

Another change was to involve the Priors of each of the eight Priories 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 feed-back from the Priories.



Queen Elizabeth II, is the Sovereign Head of the Order

■ THE GOVERNANCE OF THE ORDER AT PRIORY LEVEL

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, i.e., members of the Order of Grades I, II and III (see Robed Members below) and certain Representative Members.

At State level, the respective State Governors are the Deputy Priors of the Order and there are State Boards. Similar arrangements occur in the Northern Territory where the Administrator of the Territory is traditionally the Deputy Prior.

■ THE MOTTOES OF THE ORDER

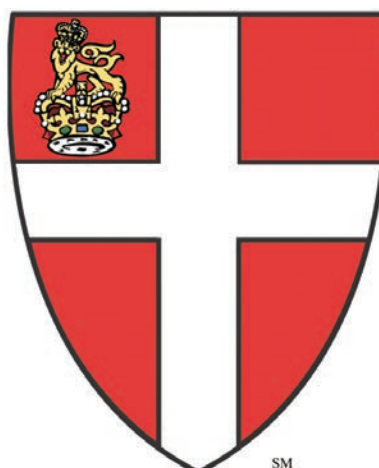
Until very recent times there have been two mottoes. These are, in Latin, "Pro Fide" which means (in English) "For the Faith", indicating "the encouragement of all that makes for the spiritual and moral strengthening of mankind".

The Latin motto is "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 ARMS OF THE ORDER

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



THE BADGE OF THE ORDER

The badge is a white eight-pointed cross 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), while the eight points represent the eight beatitudes which are found in the Bible (Matthew Chapter 5, verses 3 to 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.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE ORDER

Membership of the Order is an honour bestowed on individuals who have contributed very significantly to St John Ambulance or the St John Ophthalmic Hospital over a long period of time.

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. Please note that higher grades are denoted by lower numbers. The Grades are as follows:

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)

The letters in brackets are post-nominals that may be used in St John correspondence by persons to whom they apply. Although a Royal Order of Chivalry, 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 dated from the era of the Crusades.

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)

Please note that currently Knights and Dames may be either “of Justice” or “of Grace”. A Knight or Dame cannot be “of Justice” unless he or she has satisfied the Order’s Genealogist of his/her right to bear Arms, i.e., 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”. Accordingly members of the Order are obligated to contribute annually according to their Grade in the Order. The current oblation for a Knight in Australia is \$40 per annum, and this money goes to support the work of St John in deprived areas in countries neighbouring Australia.

■ CEREMONIAL OCCASIONS

On St John ceremonial occasions persons of Grade I, II and III may wear mantles, also known as robes. Ceremonial occasions include:

The Annual Church Service of Rededication,
Meetings of Priory Chapter,
Investitures.

Church Services

Each year, at a date as near as practical to 24th 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 Annual National Meetings of the Australian Priory, there is a Priory Church Service in the city where the meetings are being held.

This Priory Annual Church Service has a range of ceremonial features. The robed members of the Order enter in Capitular Procession, their robes recalling those of the monks of the ancient Order of St John. 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 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 Cross of the Order is the eight-pointed one with lions and unicorns as reproduced on the robes of those in the Capitular Procession. 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.

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.

Meetings of Priory Chapter

These 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.

Investitures

Investitures occur usually once per 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.



The Deputy Prior of the Order in South Australia (in robe) with people being admitted to the Order in 2011

■ CEREMONIAL ROBES

The robes (sometimes referred to as mantles) are black and bear the St John badge on the left breast. The diameter of the badge is 12" (30 cms.) for Grades I and II, and 9" (23 cms.) for Grade III.



■ AWARDS

There are numerous awards, but only two of them will be mentioned here. They are:

1. 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 person 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 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.



Service Medal

2. The Grand Prior's Award

This 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, a badge that can be worn on the left sleeve. It 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.



ST JOHN AMBULANCE

As indicated earlier, St John Ambulance in this context encompasses both the Training Branch, the Operations Branch (now called the First Aid Services Branch) and the Community Care Branch. In England the “St John Ambulance Association” (the Training Branch in current Australian terminology) began in 1877. The “St John Ambulance Brigade” (the First Aid Services Branch in recent Australian terminology) began in 1887. As a sub-set of the Brigade, the St John Ambulance Cadets began in England in 1922 and in Australia just three years later.

St John Ambulance began in Australia, 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 Australian States/Territories generally consists of:

- (1) A Training Branch that teaches first aid to the public;
- (2) A First Aid Services Branch that provides uniformed first aiders at public events;
- (3) A Community Care Branch (previously called the Fellowship Branch). This is by far the most recent major activity of St John in Australia. For the last twenty years it has provided a range of community services. The need varies from state to state and in South Australia, for example, 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.

These aspects of St John, together with fund-raising for the St John Ophthalmic 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.

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 he/she 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 OPHTHALMIC HOSPITAL IN JERUSALEM

The St John Eye (Ophthalmic) 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 conducted by Christians and most of its patients are Muslims.

As a place, Jerusalem immediately has resonance with the modern 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. Note that 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.

More recently it is not simply disease but injuries to eyes that have featured heavily because of the on-going conflicts in the area. As transport is difficult for many of the patients through road-blocks and in areas of conflict, the hospital conducts an outreach program to the Gaza Strip and elsewhere.

In addition to raising funds for the Eye Hospital, Australia has sponsored a number of ophthalmologists and nurses to work at the hospital for periods of up to a year.

St John also works to treat disadvantaged people in Australia with eye disease. This work is concentrated in outback aboriginal communities.



THE ANCIENT ORDER OF ST JOHN

The original Hospitallers were members of a religious group 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. In 1113, Pope Paschal II issued a Papal Bull declaring that the monks constituted a new order, the Order of St John.

When Jerusalem became too unsafe, members of the Order were forced to move to Acre on the Mediterranean coast, and then successively to Cyprus (from 1291 to 1309), Rhodes (1309 – 1522) and Malta (1530 – 1798). They were expelled from Malta by none other than 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. Subsequently the Gatehouse was owned by a succession of people who put it to various uses until it was bought privately by Sir Edmund Lechmere who then presented it to St John. This was in 1873 by which time there had been a revival of St John in England. St John's Gate recently has undergone a major refurbishment, including the upgrading of its superb museum that showcases the history of the Order.



St John's Gate

Sir Edmund Lechmere



■ OTHER ORDERS OF ST JOHN

There are five “Mutually Recognised” Orders of St John. They are:

The Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem (the subject of these notes).

The Sovereign Military and Hospitaller Order of St John of Jerusalem, called of Rhodes, called of Malta (the Catholic Order most directly linked to the ancient Order of St John).

The Johanniter Orders of Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden.

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

■ SUMMARY

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 (1) the St John Ophthalmic Hospital in Jerusalem and (2) St John Ambulance, encompassing both the teaching and the operational aspects of St John.

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

■ REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

[The main references used in these notes are in bold type. Any quotations in these notes have been taken from the main references.]

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NB: The Charters, Statutes and Regulations, dated 2003 and 2004, are the latest published ones. They are currently being reviewed and revised.

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