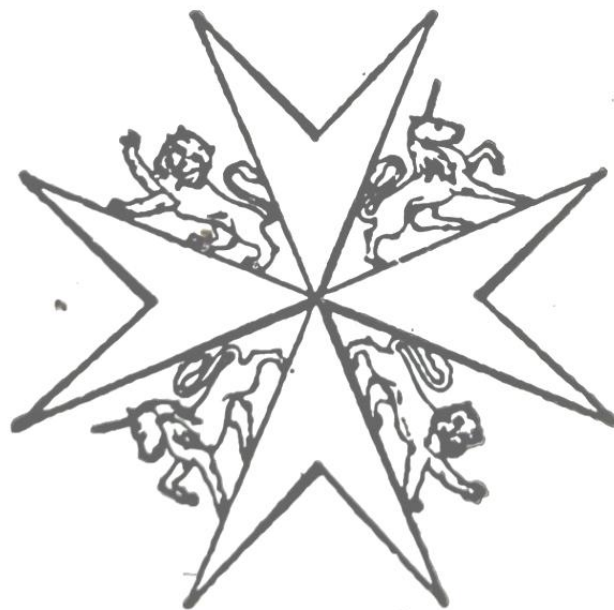


THE COMMISSIONERS OF ST JOHN AMBULANCE IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

1914 - 2026



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Brian Fotheringham
May 2026

INDEX

Algernon Lindsay	5
Robert Bulman	8
George Hussey	10
Sydney Dawkins	12
Roy Burston	14
Ernest Russell	16
Frank Mugford	18
Harvey Hurst	20
John Pedler	22
Jim Fotheringham	24
William Gove	26
Brian Ancell	28
Glyn Davies	30
Brian Fotheringham	32
Robert Edwards	34
Garry Coombes	35
Frank Bridgewater	37
Ray Greig	39
Noel Hender	41
Peter Jackson	43
William (Bill) Griggs	44

INTRODUCTION

The Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem is a British Royal Order of Chivalry. It came into being on 24th June 1888 with Queen Victoria as its Sovereign Head. Its members are inspired by the good works of the original Knights of St John, working in the Holy Land some 900 years ago. One of the functions of the Order of St John is to provide direction for the work of St John Ambulance in teaching first aid, providing first-aid services at public events and in community-care activities.

St John Ambulance was established in South Australia in 1885. Here, as with other areas of St John Ambulance expansion through the world, the first activity of St John was to form a St John Ambulance Association Centre, the arm of St John dedicated to the teaching of first aid to the public. The first classes for the public in South Australia were held at the Adelaide Children's Hospital. Classes were either for men or for women, but in strict accordance with the morals of the time, mixed classes were not allowed!

It was another 29 years before Divisions of the St John Ambulance Brigade were formed, i.e., organised groups of uniformed St John volunteers who provided first aid services at public gatherings. It was largely through the persistent efforts of Algernon Lindsay that the Brigade was brought into being in South Australia. His extraordinary story leads this account of the twenty-one South Australian commissioners of St John Ambulance who collectively have served 112 years in that role from early 1914 until late 2026.

I readily acknowledge that much of the information and some of the illustrations have come from *South Australians and St John Ambulance 1885 – 1985* written by my friend Dr. Ian Howie-Willis OAM, KStJ with the assistance of the former South Australian St John archivist, the late Beryl Fegan DStJ, BEM. Some of the information of more recent commissioners has come from Paul Rosenzweig OAM, JP, a member of the St John Historical Society in South Australia, and from issues of the St John publication *Spotlight*.

In this listing of Commissioners, emphasis is given to the early commissioners. Readers will find many more details about the first four commissioners, than those commissioners of more recent times.

I have endeavoured to ensure that all the information in the following pages is correct, and I apologise if there are any inaccuracies.

If this listing of commissioners is of particular interest to some readers they may like to visit the St John Ambulance Museum in South Australia.

The museum is a product of the St John Ambulance Historical Society of South Australia which began in 1988. The museum now has many exhibits and they occupy a large building, formerly a Scout Hall, at 7 Arundel Road, Brighton., a beachside suburb of Adelaide.

I wish to thank Jenny Nguyen of the St John State Office for adding the photographs of the various commissioners to the text.

Brian Fotheringham AM KStJ
May 2026

1. Algernon Sheppard Lindsay.

Assistant Commissioner 1914 – 1915



Photograph as in Open Airways, April 2015, courtesy of State Library of SA.

We should know much about A. S. Lindsay as he was the very first Commissioner, [i.e., leader] of the St John Ambulance Brigade in South Australia. To be more correct his title was actually Assistant Commissioner as in his day this title “Commissioner” was for the leader of the Brigade at National level. The term Commissioner was not used for the leader in South Australia until 1934.

In the two books written by historian Dr. Ian Howie-Willis, *South Australians and St John Ambulance 1885 – 1985* and *The Zambuks*, it is admitted that not a lot is known about A. S. Lindsay, not even his Christian names! Those books were published in 1985 and 2002 respectively. In June 2012 we learned from a person interested in military history that his full name was Algernon Sheppard Lindsay and that he was born in the Adelaide suburb of Woodville on 2 September 1880. His father was William Lindsay, a civil servant. His mother was Sarah Ann Lindsay, nee Sheppard, explaining Lindsay’s second Christian name.

Beginning in about 1895, Algernon Lindsay trained as a civil engineer at the South Australian School of Mines (now the Adelaide University). He is known to have passed Building Construction (3rd class) in December 1903. His occupation as an engineer has been confirmed, rather belatedly, when in July 2012, Ian Howie-Willis obtained a copy of his death certificate. He allegedly joined the Australian Army and one reason why there has been trouble learning about him is that there are now no records of enlistment in the 1st Australian Imperial Force (AIF).

In 1907 Lindsay moved to Christchurch, New Zealand, returning to Adelaide in 1909. The move may have been dictated by the Army as it is believed he was a Warrant Officer in the Australian Army’s No. 6 Field Hospital.

We know more of Lindsay's work in St John in New Zealand than we do for his efforts in Australia. Ian Howie-Willis had earlier written that while in New Zealand, Lindsay joined the St John Ambulance Brigade. St John Ambulance had established a branch of the St John Ambulance Association in Christchurch in 1885. Nine years later, on 24 November 1904, a Division of the Brigade was formed there. Algernon Lindsay was appointed as its Second Ambulance Officer on 25 March 1907. Eight months later, on 22 November in that same year, he was promoted to District Chief Superintendent of the Canterbury–West Coast District, based in Christchurch.

All of this was confirmed by Peter Wood who provided an emailed copy of relevant parts of Geoffrey W. Rice's book "Ambulances and First Aid: St John in Christchurch 1885 – 1987", published in 1994.

As Betty Stirton of St John Archives in New South Wales found out, for she had joined the hunt for information on Lindsay, A. S. Lindsay was one of four members representing the Christchurch Centre who attended a St John Conference on 26 April 1910 at which it was decided that an approach be made to St John's Gate asking that New Zealand become a Priory of the Order. The Canterbury-West Coast District had eight divisions when Lindsay joined it, and had 19 divisions when he left scarcely three years later. Membership grew from 220 to 500 volunteers. His work was recognised in New Zealand as he was admitted to the Order of St John in the grade of Serving Brother (now called "Member"). Later, in a curious move, St John's Gate removed his name from the list of Order members, allegedly for non-payment of uniform fees. Then, in November 1910, Lindsay resigned as he was leaving New Zealand, possibly in another Army posting.

While in Christchurch, and when aged 29 years, Algernon married Jessie Marion Scougall on 29 September 1910. Subsequently they had a son Dudley H. Lindsay (who pre-deceased his father) and a daughter Fairlie J. Lindsay (married name "Bournes").

Soon after his marriage, Lindsay returned to South Australia and joined a Light Horse Battalion in Adelaide. The Adelaide St John Ambulance Association's Centre Committee met in November 1911 and invited Lindsay to attend. Lindsay spoke of his New Zealand experience and greatly impressed those present. At the next meeting in January 1912, the committee asked him to become a member, which he did. When the St John Ambulance Brigade started in 1914, Lindsay was appointed as its first Assistant Commissioner (now called Commissioner) for South Australia.

Before the end of 1914, Lindsay, by now a lieutenant in the Australian Military Forces, was posted overseas (without any St John farewell) and it seems he never returned to South Australia. He gave five years of service to the St John Ambulance Association Centre Committee and he established the Brigade in South Australia. Surely that was worthy of some recognition when he left for overseas!

Years later, when he enlisted in the Volunteer Defence Force Corps at Leichardt in NSW at the start of World War II, he gave his date of birth as 2 September 1890, probably to ensure he was accepted. Remember his birth was actually in 1880. He was usually self-employed as a chartered civil engineer, but at the time of his enlistment he was the draftsman in charge of the NSW Water Investigation Branch of the

Metropolitan Water, Sewerage and Drainage Board. His application was initially refused and he was deemed “temporarily unfit”, although the reason is unknown as the doctor’s writing is unintelligible. (Can you believe that?)! In March 1943 he was classified “fit” and assigned to the 28th Battalion of the VDC. He was described as “a shortish, slim chap, with ruddy complexion, blue eyes, spectacles and prematurely white hair; stood 5 feet seven and a half inches (171.45 cm.) tall and weighed 11 stone (70 Kg)”. His Service Number was N429430. He served for 2 and a half years and was discharged at the end of the war in September 1945.

He settled in the Sydney area. His last address was 3 Martin Street, Lidcombe. He died on 19 June 1969 at the Lidcombe Hospital at the age of 89 years, of pneumonia. The funeral was at the Rookwood Crematorium. His wife, Jessie, had died in Burwood, Sydney eleven years earlier, in 1958. As far as we know Lindsay did not become involved with St John Ambulance in New South Wales as the Annual Reports of both the Association and the Brigade make no mention of him.

The formation of the Brigade in South Australia did not take place until 1914, some 30 years after the St John Ambulance Association began in that State. Without Algernon Sheppard Lindsay’s drive, the formation of the St John Ambulance Brigade in South Australia may well have been delayed by many more years. We owe him respect and gratitude for his work in pioneering an important component of St John Ambulance in South Australia. There is little evidence that he received respect and gratitude at the time.

References:

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Brian Fotheringham, *Open Airways*, p 7, April 2015.
Ian Howie-Willis, *South Australians and St John Ambulance, 1885 – 1985*, Griffin Press, 1985.
Ian Howie-Willis, *The Zambuks*, 2002.
St John Ambulance Association, *Eighteenth Annual Report of the Auckland Centre*, NZ, May 1910.
Dr. R. Freeman, personal communication.
Betty Stirton, personal communication.

2. Robert Vernon Bulman, OStJ.

Assistant Commissioner (equivalent to Commissioner)
from December 1914 to February 1915.



Following Assistant Commissioner Lindsay's sudden departure, Mr. R. V. Bulman, the Railways Ambulance Officer, was temporarily appointed in Lindsay's place.

Robert Bulman was born in Adelaide in 1882. He probably joined St John Ambulance before 1900 by attending a first aid class especially presented for railwaymen. It is known that he achieved the St John Association medallion award in 1912 for passing three consecutive annual first aid exams. He was then 29 years old.

Bulman must have been appointed in December 1914, as it is known he resigned as Assistant Commissioner in February 1915 after less than two months in the position. The reason for his resignation was given as the pressure of his work as Railways Ambulance Officer. He did however continue to help St John in his former role until about May 1915 when the next Assistant Commissioner was appointed. In later years he was Acting Assistant Commissioner several times during absences of his successors Hussey and Dawkins (see below). Bulman's own role at these times was that of District Superintendent.

Mr. Bulman's involvement with St John was much greater than indicated by his fleeting period as Assistant Commissioner.

He taught and examined in first aid for both the railways and St John for nearly 40 years. He joined the Association Centre Committee in 1923 and was granted Life Membership of the Association in 1943. In 1923 he was admitted to the Order of St John as a Serving Brother, and in the very next year he was promoted to Officer Brother. Thereafter he refused further promotions in the Order.

He was one of two South Australian representatives on the Commandery Council (the fore-runner of the Australian Priory Council) when it formed in 1941. He was the main instigator on the Council for introducing National First Aid Competitions and he even wrote the regulations for conducting them. The first national competitions were

held on 22 November 1947 in the Melbourne Town Hall and continued annually until about 2010.

Robert Bulman died in 1946 at a time when few people in Australia could equal his service to St John Ambulance and to first aid generally.

References:

Ian Howie-Willis, *South Australians and St John Ambulance, 1885-1985*, 1985.

Ian Howie-Willis, *The Zambuks*, 2002.

Lyn Dansie, personal communication.

3. George Frederick Hussey, SBStJ.

Acting Assistant Commissioner 1915 – 1917, Assistant Commissioner 1917 – 1931
(NB: The term Commissioner was not used until 1934.)



George Hussey's involvement with St John Ambulance goes back to 1887 when he began organising first aid classes for members of the Literary Societies Union, a workers' self-improvement organisation. For a time, he was a Member of the House of Assembly and President of the Master Printers' Association. As a member of the St John Association's Centre Committee since 1899, he was also elected as the "Platoon Commander" (now Superintendent) of the Adelaide Central Ambulance Division, a division he formed with several other businessmen in November 1914. The Division met in the YMCA rooms at Gawler Place. Initially there were twenty-five members, but several left soon after to join the Army.

It was the First World War that brought about a merging of the previously separated men's and women's St John classes. Men were needed with Home Nursing qualifications to accompany returning war victims being transported between Adelaide and Melbourne. Hussey may have gained some kudos from this development.

In May 1915, Hussey self-funded a trip to Victoria and New South Wales to see how the Brigade was managed there. This act also probably counted for something, as soon afterwards he was promoted to Assistant Commissioner in 1915, some months after Bulman had resigned.

As far as St John's London Headquarters was concerned, Hussey should not, indeed could not, in 1915, be made Assistant Commissioner as he was not a member of the Order of St John. The South Australian Centre Committee was not informed of this until some seven months after Hussey had taken up the role. He was re-cast as *Acting* Assistant Commissioner until the South Australian Governor, Sir Henry Galway, invested him as a Serving Brother on 2 March 1917. By this time Hussey had served St John for close to 30 years.

As a member of the St John Ambulance Association's Centre Committee in South Australia, Hussey strongly advocated that the South Australian Centre affiliate with the Central (National) Council chaired by Dr. Storie Dixson of New South Wales. His pleas were ignored by other Association Centre members, at least for a considerable time.

Hussey is described by Ian Howie-Willis in *A Century for Australia* as "a craftsman, the partner in a printing business, a trade unionist and pioneer of workers' self-improvement schemes".

In his St John roles he was authoritarian and, eventually, after a still unbroken record of 16 years as Assistant Commissioner, he was forced to retire in 1931 by other senior Brigade personnel.

George Hussey's life came to a tragic end on 13th June when he was knocked down by a tram on King William Road near the "Adelaide Bridge" that spans the River Torrens. He was 82 years old. The circumstances were that it was a showery night and although family members said he had "perfect" eyesight and hearing, he walked directly into the tram's path. The tram driver saw him and sounded a warning but could not stop the tram in time. Hussey was taken to the Adelaide Hospital but was dead on arrival. An inquest was held on 17th June and it returned a verdict of "Accidental Death".

George Frederick Hussey was buried at the North Road Cemetery at Nailsworth on 15th June 1935 in a grave with his wife who pre-deceased him by 3 years and 7 months.

The tombstone bears the words "In Loving Memory of Kate Young, wife of George F. Hussey, Born Cornwall England September 20th 1851, Died November 30th 1931. ALSO

George Frederick Hussey husband of the above Accidentally Killed 13 June 1935. Aged 82 years.

References:

Brian Fotheringham, *Open Airways*, July 2017.

Howie-Willis, Ian, *A Century for Australia*, 1983.

Robert Dale, personal communication. 2023.

Helen Stein, *Before Their Time, Tragic and Unexpected Deaths*, North Road Cemetery, Page 145, 2022.

4. Sydney Letts Dawkins, OBE, KStJ, MB, ChB, JP.

Assistant Commissioner 1931, Commissioner 1932 – 1946.



Dr. Dawkins served as Assistant Commissioner for nearly as long as Hussey. In addition, Dawkins was the Australian Priory Commissioner while Australia held the status of a Commandery from 1941 to 1946. The term Chief Commissioner did not come into use until 1954.

Sydney Letts Dawkins was born at Gawler River in the Barossa Valley region of South Australia on 2 April 1873. His unusual second Christian name reflects that his grandmother's maiden name was Letts. He was one of seven children of Samuel Letts Dawkins and his wife Rebecca (nee Wilkinson). Samuel Dawkins had arrived in South Australia from the UK in 1839, less than 3 years after the Colony of South Australia had been proclaimed.

Sydney studied at Prince Alfred College in Adelaide and then went to Edinburgh where he graduated in medicine in 1899. The St John Ambulance Historical Society of South Australia has some 37 original certificates showing the various subjects he studied in his medical training. He returned to South Australia and worked as a general practitioner at Angaston, then Hamley Bridge and then Mount Lofty before settling in Adelaide in about 1912.

On 11 April 1901 he married Esther Marie Roediger at St Paul's Church in the Barossa.

When Dr. Dawkins was working at Hamley Bridge in the early 1900s, the town was a thriving Railways Centre where there was a change in railway gauges. In 1913, Dawkins began lecturing and examining in first aid, the pupils being railway men and members of the public. He met Mr. Bulman, the District Superintendent of St John Ambulance and the Railways First Aid Officer. Bulman in turn introduced Dawkins to Hussey, the Assistant Commissioner for St John in South Australia. Not long

afterwards, in 1922, Dawkins became the District Surgeon for St John. When Hussey resigned in 1931, Dawkins took over as Assistant Commissioner. Actually, like Hussey, he was officially Acting Assistant Commissioner initially, until admitted to the Order as a Serving Brother in 1932. Two years later his position title changed from Assistant Commissioner to Commissioner.

Dawkins organised the first District-level first aid competitions in South Australia. He gained the support of suburban mayors to provide help for suburban-based divisions of the Brigade. On hearing that Colonel James Sleeman, the Chief Commissioner of the Brigade Overseas, was to visit South Australia, Dawkins hurriedly arranged for cadet divisions to be formed, as he knew Sleeman encouraged cadets in St John. The first District Cadet camp was held at suburban Kingston Park in 1938/39.

Dawkins' wife Esther had died in 1928. He married his second wife, Gertrude Mary, in 1930. When in London in 1932, Dawkins and his wife were invited to the Hospitallers' Club. Back in Adelaide, Dawkins established a similar club, that later became the St John Auxiliary.

In 1937, Dawkins appointed his wife as District Officer. She had not previously been in the Brigade. Three years later he promoted Mrs. Dawkins to Lady District Superintendent. In this role she was in charge of all the Nursing Divisions in South Australia. Not surprisingly, this created considerable tensions! In 1946 Dawkins retired from being the Commissioner of the Brigade in South Australia. It seems he did however continue in his role as Priory Commissioner of the Commandery for another year. He had held both positions concurrently since 1941. He remained Vice President of the Adelaide Centre of the Association apparently until 1955. When the St John Council for South Australia came into being on 2nd February 1950, he was one of its three Vice Presidents.

Dr Sydney Dawkins served St John for 42 years, mostly in senior roles. He died in Perth on 17 July 1963 at the age of 90. His grave is in Payneham Cemetery in Adelaide.

Dawkins had two sons who were involved with St John. Lindsay Dawkins, an architect, volunteered his time to design the St John Ambulance Centre at Hindmarsh in Adelaide. Alec Dawkins, an orthopaedic surgeon, became the St John Commissioner in Western Australia, and later the Commandery Lieutenant there.

References:

Brian Fotheringham, *The Father and Son Commissioners*, St John History, Vol. 3, May 2004, page 31.

Lyn Dansie, personal communication.

5. Dr. Samuel Roy Burston,
KBE, KStJ, CB, DSO, VD, FRCP, FRACP, FRCP (Edin).

Commissioner 1946 – 1947



Samuel Roy Burston was rarely called by his first Christian name as there were others in the extended family with the same name. He was generally known as “Roy”, and was also known since his school days as “Ginger”, because of his hair colour. Roy was born on 21 March 1888, the same year that Queen Victoria granted a Royal Charter to St John.

Roy Burston was an Army man. He began as a bugler with the Victorian Infantry Brigade when he was just 13 years old. He graduated in medicine from the University of Melbourne and gained employment as a doctor at the Adelaide Children’s Hospital. He enlisted with the Australian Army and followed through all the promotions available to medical personnel, i.e., from captain to major to lieutenant-colonel to colonel to brigadier and to major-general. On retirement he became Honorary Colonel of the Royal Australian Army Medical Corps. In the early 1940s he controlled as many as 32,000 uniformed personnel spread through Australia, the Middle East, Papua, New Guinea and Borneo. He is particularly remembered for his work in combating *Plasmodium* parasites and *Anopheles* mosquitoes, the ingredients that made malaria a disease capable of bringing an army to its knees.

Roy Burston joined St John Ambulance in South Australia as a District Officer in 1934-5. In 1936 he was appointed Assistant Commissioner (second in command) and in 1945 he became the fifth Commissioner for South Australia.

Readers may recall that St John Ambulance in Australia achieved Commandery status in 1941 and Priory status in 1946. In January 1947, Roy Burston became the first National head of the Brigade. His title in this role was initially Priory Commissioner, but this was changed in 1954 to Chief Commissioner. He remained Chief Commissioner for ten years and then took on the role of Receiver-General, i.e., the

National Treasurer for St John. He remained in this role until his death in August 1960.

Major-General Sir Samuel Roy Burston was one of the outstanding men of the Australian Army Medical Corps. In addition, he served St John Ambulance for 25 years and brought to our organisation an aura of “respectability, probity and integrity”. He has the honour of being the very first Chief Commissioner of the St John Ambulance Brigade in Australia.

Reference: Ian Howie-Willis, *A Medical Emergency. Major-General “Ginger” Burston and the Army Medical Service in World War II*, Big Sky Publishing, 2012.

6. Ernest Alfred Harold Russell, OBE, KStJ, VD, MB BS.

Commissioner 1947 – 1951



Dr. Ernest Alfred Harold Russell (EAH) joined St John in 1929 after distinguished service in the Australian Army. He should not to be confused with his brother Dr. Henry Herbert Ernest Russell (HHE).

E. A. H. Russell enlisted for active service in World War I having graduated from the Medical School of the University of Adelaide in 1911. He became an Honorary Obstetrician at the Queen's Home (later the Queen Victoria Hospital and now the Women's and Children's Hospital). When his older brother returned from medical studies overseas, the two brothers went into partnership as General Practitioners at Unley.

It is part of St John folklore in South Australia that EAH Russell was known as "Skinny" while his brother, HHE Russell was known informally as "Fatty". The family was heavily involved with St John. The mother of HHE and EAH was in the early classes of first aid and home nursing in South Australia; her three daughters were qualified first aiders and HHE was District Surgeon for St John in South Australia for a remarkable 20 years (1931 – 1951):

During World War II, in May 1915, Dr. Ernest Russell joined the Australian Army Medical Corps as a Captain in the 3rd Australian General Hospital AIF. He served in Egypt, on the Gallipoli Peninsular, and in England and France. He was promoted to Major in 1916 and then served with the 6th Field Ambulance in Egypt, France and Belgium. In 1918 he was promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel.

EAH Russell was a District Officer for St John in South Australia when he was called upon by the then Commissioner, Dr. Sydney Dawkins, to form Cadet Divisions. This was to please the Chief Commissioner for the Brigade Overseas, Sir James Sleeman, who was a known supporter of Cadets in St John. Cadets from Norwood, Prospect and North Adelaide were on hand for a parade in front of Sleeman on 19th April 1936. Female cadets attached to Number 1 Nursing Division followed a little later in 1937.

Ten years later EAH Russell followed Sir Samuel Roy Burston as Commissioner in South Australia. That meant Dr. Russell was Commissioner in the period leading up to St John gaining permission to run the State's ambulance service. While this may have seemed a well organised transition, there were strong undercurrents between Edward Hayward (later Sir Edward Hayward, Chairman of the St John Council in South Australia). and Russell. Various individuals and organisations were involved in adjudicating the matters between Hayward and Russell, even up to and including St John's Gate in London.

Russell was the representative for South Australia on the Australian Priory, but when the tide swung against him, he resigned as Commissioner in 1951 but remained as Priory representative. He protested by never again attending Priory meetings. He died in 1968.

Dr. EAH Russell did much for St John in South Australia over forty years, and it is sad that his time in office did not end on a happier note.

You may have noted that Dr. Ernest Russell has the post-nominal "VD". In the Citizens' Military Forces he received the Colonial Auxiliary Forces Officers' Decoration which uses the post-nominals "VD". This is a carry-over from the previous decoration called the "Volunteer Decoration".

Lieutenant Colonel Russel donated the Russell Efficiency Cup for Cadet Ambulance Divisions (awarded annually from 1970 to 1976) and the Russell Efficiency Cup for Home Nursing in the Cadet Nursing Divisions (awarded annually from 1963 to 1983). Both trophies are on display in the St John Ambulance Museum at Brighton, South Australia.

Dr. Ernest Russell died in 1969.

References: Ian Howie-Willis, *South Australians and St John Ambulance, 1885 – 1985*, 1985.

Paul Rosenzweig in *Members of St John Ambulance with Military Service in World War I*, (unpublished).

7. Frank Kenneth Mugford, KStJ, MB, BS.

Commissioner 1951 to 1960



Frank Kenneth Mugford was one of fourteen children; he had seven sisters and six brothers. He was born on 16 November 1899, the fifth child and third son of the Reverend Samuel Clark Mugford and Clara Jane Mugford. He was born at Wilmington in the mid-north of South Australia. The family moved to various country centres including Mallala and Strathalbyn, and later to Stirling and Salisbury. Frank's secondary schooling was at the Adelaide Boy's High School.

While the family was living at Stirling, Frank met Ada "Donnie" Bower and played tennis at the Bower's home court. They married in a ceremony carried out by Frank's father.

Frank entered the Medical School of the University of Adelaide and graduated MB BS in 1925. He was the Medical Officer for BHP at Whyalla for some three years before entering General Practice. In March 1932 he began as Assistant Medical Officer in the Children's Welfare and Public Relief Department and he remained as Medical Officer in that Department until 1959. Also, in July 1932, he was appointed Medical Officer at Yatala Labour Prison.

He became a Justice of the Peace in December 1930. Later he was a Captain in the Australian Army Medical Corps and a surgeon to Number 402 Detachment of the VADs (Voluntary Aid Detachments). These operated during both World Wars and provided first aid, nursing assistance, comforts, domestic assistance and other supports for returned and wounded soldiers. He was a member of the Australian Medical Association and for a time was a member of the Medical Board of South Australia. In 1936 he was the Worshipful Master at the Salisbury Lodge. He was a leading bowls player with the Adelaide Oval and Burnside RSL clubs.

During World War II Frank enlisted as a Major in the second sixth Field Ambulance, and was Officer Commanding “B” Company. He served in the Northern Territory and Western Australia after spending time in the Middle East. He rose to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. While in the Middle East he had the opportunity to visit several places mentioned in both the Bible and by his Methodist Minister father. These included Jerusalem (including Calvary, Gethsemane and the Mount of Olives), Joppa, Gaza, and Beersheba to name but a few.

Dr. Mugford’s career in the St John Ambulance Brigade began in 1935 as a Divisional Surgeon for the Thebarton Division. In 1950 he became Deputy Commissioner. One year later Frank became the State’s seventh Commissioner, a post he held for nine years. It is claimed that Dr. Russell was “eased out” as he was not supportive of the moves for St John to become involved in a “commercial” ambulance service. It was a dramatic time in the history of St John in South Australia. Sir Edward Hayward was Chairman of the St John Council for South Australia and he brought about the merger of the various separately run ambulance services in Adelaide, and later in all of South Australia, under the aegis of St John. This happened incrementally, starting soon after Frank Mugford became Commissioner, so this newly expanded ambulance service came under his command.

Dr. Mugford is described as being quiet and unassuming, but an effective leader and capable administrator. He is credited by Mr. Ken Shapter, the then St John Council’s Secretary, with making the Brigade “function well” during this time of change.

Frank Mugford retired from being Commissioner in 1960, but then served as the Priory Executive Officer for South Australia until his death in 1963. He was also the Priory Librarian from 1959 until his death.

Frank was admitted to the Order of St John in 1949 and then progressed rapidly through the various Grades of the Order to become a Knight of the Order in 1958.

As a doctor, Frank knew that some back problems could be alleviated by traction. In an amusing incident, police were once called to his Greenhill Road, Eastwood, rented home. (Frank never owned a house: he always rented). Neighbours saw a man hanging by the neck from the limb of a tree. It was Frank treating his bad back by stretching!

Dr. Mugford died suddenly at his Eastwood home on 21 August 1963 at the age of 63 years. He and his wife Donnie had recently returned by car from taking part in Bowls Tournaments in the Gold Coast and Maroochydore in Queensland. Donnie lived to the age of 94 and died in 1991.

REFERENCES

Ian Howie-Willis, *South Australians and St John Ambulance, 1885 – 1985*, pp 244, 259, 260 and 340.

Ian Howie-Willis, *A Century for Australia*, pp 472 and 476

Peter Bird, CStJ, personal communication.

8. Harvey Herbert Hurst, KStJ, MB, BS.

Commissioner 1960 – 1963



Dr. Harvey Herbert Hurst graduated from the University of Adelaide's School of Medicine in 1929. Initially he worked as a general practitioner at Balaklava, north of Adelaide. Later he moved to Adelaide and a property on Richmond Road, Richmond, that featured a lawn tennis court. He became a partner in the Western Clinic, a multi-doctor practice, said to have been one of the largest in Australia. Dr. Jim Fotheringham (qv) was also a partner in this practice.

Dr. Hurst joined St John Ambulance and rose to be the eighth Commissioner in South Australia for the period 1960 to 1963.

One of his delights was taking part in the Annual St John Cadet camps at Angaston. On one memorable occasion he and his wife stayed at the Angaston Oval (the site of the camps) in his large two-door caravan. His breakfast was interrupted one morning by a knock at the door. What followed was a conga-line of the entire cadet camp troupe tramping Indian-file in one caravan door and out through the other. Harvey Hurst was a man who laughed easily. Just as well!

In 1960, Dr. Hurst realised that the Henley and Grange Municipal Band was struggling to survive and that the Councils involved were not prepared to continuing providing funds for it. Dr. Hurst and District Officer R. MacLachlan arranged for the band to become part of St John, and in January 1961 the band was registered as a Brigade Division. Two years later it performed in Melbourne at the Priory Centenary celebrations of St John in Australia. The band continues to add colour to St John ceremonies in South Australia, performing at events such as the annual Church Service and Awards Day, held annually in the grounds of Government House.

St John in South Australia was thriving in the 1960s. The Annual Review in 1962 was held on the University Oval and 800 Brigade members were on parade.

Harvey Hurst and his wife Ina had two children, David and Cynthia.

Dr Hurst died on 3 June 1981 at the age of 81 years.

9. John Meavious Pedler, KStJ, MB, BS.

Commissioner 1963 – 1969



Dr. John Pedler was born in the Adelaide sea-side suburb of Semaphore on 18 April 1911. He was the son of Rupert Pedler, a bank general manager, and Ada Jane Yeo. He attended St Peter's College and won the Bowman Scholarship for physics and chemistry in his final year there. He entered the School of Medicine at the Adelaide University after paying the university 40 pounds. He played lacrosse for the University and was included in the All-Australian University team. He gained a University Blue for lacrosse.

After completing the medical course in 1935, he married Meg Kennedy who was a nursing sister at the Adelaide Children's Hospital. They went to England for John's post-graduate training, but returned to Australia when World War II started.

On enlisting with the Australian Army, John joined the 2/7th Cavalry Division and was posted to Palestine. Most of the fighting had ceased by the time he arrived, but the field hospital there had many injured soldiers to treat. His Unit was returned to Australia, narrowly missing being diverted to Singapore. Then it was posted to jungle training in Queensland before being sent on to the Sanananda Trail in New Guinea. Like so many soldiers he caught malaria and Dengue Fever.

After discharge from the Army in 1946, Dr. Pedler entered General Practice on Payneham Road, not far from the city of Adelaide. The practice had been that of Dr. Llewellyn Davey, who moved from general practice to specialising in gynaecology. Three other doctors joined Dr. Pedler's practice, namely doctors Paddy Finnegan, Don Sidey and Tommy Norman. In those days, in common with general practices elsewhere, the doctors covered obstetrics, surgery and anaesthetics.

Dr. Pedler became a life member of the Australian Medical Association and for a time was President of the Medical Benevolent Association of South Australia. He was a

foundation member of the Rotary Club of St Peters in suburban Adelaide. For years he played tennis with medical colleagues on Saturday afternoons.

Dr. Pedler had a great interest in camellias. He was a member of the Camellia Society for many years and was President and later Patron of the world-wide Camellia Research Society.

Sadly, Dr. Pedler's wife Meg died of cancer when she was only 46. Years later he travelled overseas on camellia-themed trips with his second wife.

Dr. Pedler gave 25 years of service to St John Ambulance. Initially he was the Divisional Surgeon for the St Peters Nursing Division, and after rising through the various ranks in St John, became the ninth Commissioner for South Australia from 1963 to 1969. He became a Knight of the Order of St John and a Vice-President of the St John Council in South Australia. It was during Dr. Pedler's term of office as Commissioner that the St John Air Ambulance Service began operations.

After serving the community in St Peters for 46 years, Dr. Pedler died in 2009 leaving his second wife and five children from his first marriage.

REFERENCES:

Dr. Adam Pedler, *Medic SA*, May 2009, page 15.
Spotlight, Volume 3, No. 2, page 29.:

**The former St John House, the St John State Headquarters,
1957 - 1978**

10. James (Jim) David Fotheringham, MC, KStJ, MB, BS.

Commissioner 1969 – 1973



James David Fotheringham, always known as Jim Fotheringham, was born on 29 January 1912, son of David and Alice (nee Warne) Fotheringham. He was educated at Unley Primary and High Schools. While in Primary School Jim broke his leg and was taken home in Dr. “Skinny” EAH Russell’s fashionable Italian Ansaldo car, where treatment was carried on by the family doctor, Dr. Henry Gilbert. It was Dr. Gilbert who inspired Jim to study medicine. As listed above, Dr. E. A. H. (Skinny) Russell later became the 6th Commissioner for St John Ambulance in South Australia.

Dr. Fotheringham gained his medical degrees (MB, BS) in 1937 and after a year as a House Surgeon at the Royal Adelaide Hospital joined the General Practice of Dr. Renfrey Burnard at Torrensville. The practice later grew to become the Western Clinic, which is still extant. Jim married Lorna Scoble at Norwood Wesley Church on 15 April 1939. They raised a son, Brian, (later a Commissioner of St John (qv) and a daughter, Gay, (who lives in New South Wales).

Late in 1941, Jim was called up for military action and was attached to the 3rd Field Ambulance with the rank of Captain. He was posted to New Guinea and saw intense action in the Sanananda – Buna – Gona area on the northern side of the island. On 7 December 1942 he established a Regimental Aid Post close to the front line, but when the Australians retreated, he was in “no man’s land” but continued treating casualties. His actions were seen by DDMS Major General Norris, who incidentally later became Chief Commissioner of St John Ambulance in Australia. Dr Fotheringham was awarded the Military Cross for his “conspicuous gallantry” on that day.

The other thing Dr. Fotheringham gained in New Guinea was a severe series of attacks of malaria. He was not allowed back on active service overseas and was

posted to the Repatriation Hospital at Daws Road in Adelaide where he was placed in charge of the Psychiatric Ward. His interest in psychiatry continued for many years and he was an Honorary Clinical Assistant Psychiatrist in the Outpatients Department at the Royal Adelaide Hospital, besides resuming work as a General Practitioner.

Dr. Fotheringham first became involved with St John Ambulance in early 1940 and was appointed Divisional Surgeon for the Thebarton Nursing Division. He was promoted through the ranks and became the tenth Commissioner of the South Australia District on 24 June 1969, a position he held until 1973. The Country Liaison Officer for St John, Raymond Schilling accompanied Dr. Fotheringham on an extensive range of visits to country Divisions throughout the State.

Dr. Fotheringham gave 33 years of active service to the Order of St John and the St John Ambulance Brigade. He was involved at a time when St John was expanding its ambulance service throughout the State and there were many ambulance centres opened during his time in office.

Reference: *Spotlight*, Volume 3, No. 5, page 29.

11. William Gove, KStJ, MB, BS.

Commissioner 1973 - 1978)



William Gove was born in Melbourne and was educated at Melbourne High School and the University of Melbourne. His parents were William and Nina Gove.

He graduated from Melbourne University's School of Medicine and after a few years came to Adelaide with his wife Eve to live in suburban Beaumont. Dr. Gove was a solo General Practitioner with a special interest in Police medicine (see below).

He joined the St John Ambulance Brigade as Divisional Surgeon of the Unley Nursing Division in 1958, was promoted to District Surgeon in 1963, became Deputy Commissioner in 1969 and Commissioner in 1973. This was at a time when St John was very much a household name as it had been running the State's ambulance service since the 1950s. Dr. Gove remained as Commissioner until 1978.

As Commissioner, Dr. Gove travelled extensively throughout South Australia in a personal endeavour to meet as many St John members as possible. He was Commissioner at the time when Cyclone Tracy struck Darwin and supervised some of the response from South Australian St John Ambulance members.

Dr. Gove's wife Eve was an active St John Ambulance member and was District Superintendent (Nursing) from 1980 to 1984.

Earlier, when Dr. Gove lived for a time in Victoria, he was a member of the Victorian Branch of Legacy. When he transferred to Adelaide he was appointed to the Medical Committee of Legacy, a position he held for 20 years. In addition, he served two terms as Chairman of Legacy in SA, 1956/60 and 1971/73.

During World War II Dr. Gove served as a member of the 7th Division of the Australian Army Medical Corps and was mentioned in despatches. He attained the rank of Major.

While earlier in Victoria, Dr. Gove was Assistant Medical Officer to the Victorian Police Department and following his move to Adelaide he was appointed Medical Officer to the South Australian Police Department, a position he held until his death.

Dr. William (Bill) Gove died on 4th February 1980. Some 60 uniformed St John members attended his funeral in Gartrell Memorial Church.

REFERENCE:

Ian Howie-Willis, *South Australians and St John Ambulance*, 1985, pp 314, 353 and 354.

12. Brian Edward John Ancell, AM, KStJ, MB, BS, DO, FRACO.

Commissioner 1978 – 1983



Brian Ancell was educated at St Peter's College where he was cox of college's crew in the Head-of-the-River contest on the River Torrens. He studied Medicine at the University of Adelaide and earned a "Uni Blue" with the University's Rifle Club. He graduated from the University of Adelaide's School of Medicine in 1957 and went on to gain his Diploma in Ophthalmology in Melbourne in 1967, followed by Membership and then Fellowship of the Royal Australian College of Ophthalmologists in 1977. He studied various research areas in ophthalmology and was responsible for introducing fluorescein angiography (a means of recording capillary circulation in the eye) at the Royal Adelaide Hospital.

Dr. Ancell joined the St John Ambulance Brigade in 1959 as Divisional Surgeon of the Goodwood Park and Marion Nursing Division. He was promoted through the ranks to become Commissioner in 1978. As Commissioner he was also on the St John Council and its Executive Committee.

Dr. Ancell was promoted in the Order of St John to Knight of Grace, receiving the insignia of that Grade from the Governor and Deputy Prior of the Order, Sir Donald Dunstan on 21st March 1985.

He was the first of the Commissioners to have to cope with the threats coming from Dr. Cornwall, a Labor politician who was undoubtedly influenced by left-wing unionists who belittled St John and its volunteers. Readers are directed to *South Australians and St John Ambulance, 1885 – 1985* by Dr. Ian Howie-Willis, for the commentary he has given, starting under the heading *Challenge: official inquiries*, on page 369.

Dr Ancell was relieved that the matter did not come to a head during his time as Commissioner and he retired to spend more time on his 350-acre property

“Treegoodwill” in the Adelaide Hills where his main interest was breeding Murray Grey cattle.

Dr. Ansell went on to be the Chief Surgeon of St John in Australia. One of the projects he supported was the development of Bushland Park near Lobethal in the Adelaide Hills. St John had priority usage of this park and its campsite facilities, all in a beautiful country setting. It was officially opened by the Governor of South Australia, Sir Donald Dunstan on 6th December 1986.

13. Glyn Anthony Davies, AM, KStJ, RFD, ED, MB, BS, DO, FRACO, JP.

Commissioner 1983 – 1987



In similar vein to his predecessor as Commissioner, Glyn Davies was an Adelaide University graduate in Medicine who went on to become a specialist ophthalmologist.

As a medical student, Glyn was influenced by first aid lectures given by Professor R. P. Jepson, the Professor of Surgery at the University of Adelaide. At the end of 1959, Glyn Davies, Ian Buttfield, Peter Gartrell, Robert Black and his brother Andrew Black all joined St John Ambulance as Probationary Surgeons, no doubt also encouraged by Jock Berry, then in charge of ambulance transport. All five students went out on ambulances and learned much about the details of patient transport and the care of the sick and injured. They combined to produce the *Manual of Ambulance Transport Nursing*, the first in a series of texts used to train volunteers in Transport Divisions.

Glyn initial appointment as Probationary Surgeon to the Hindmarsh Division began in 1960. In 1962 he was appointed Divisional Surgeon also at the Hindmarsh Division. His next promotion, to Corps Surgeon came in 1972 and he was further promoted in 1978 to District Surgeon.

In 1981 he became the Chairman of the St. John Council's Medical Advisory Committee. This committee was responsible for research into the training of ambulance officers and to recommend any changes to the Council, together with advice on related issues such as equipment and ambulance design.

Dr. Davies was appointed Commissioner in South Australia in 1983, and served in that role up to 1987. The unrest on the political front continued through his time as Commissioner and he was, like Brian Ancell, pleased that it did not reach crisis point while he was Commissioner. He later commented that the dramatic scenes that followed were "inevitable".

During Dr. Davies' time as Commissioner, 1985 was a special year for St John. It marked the organisation's 100th year in South Australia. Amongst the activities was the launching of Ian Howie-Willis's book "*South Australians and St John Ambulance 1885 – 1985*".

There was a Centenary Dinner at which an extraordinary 25-minute-long speech was given by "Dr. Hale Christensen", purported to be the Executive Director of St John in Vancouver. In fact, the speaker was Campbell McComas, a comedian from Melbourne. He received a standing ovation!

Given that the two Commissioners Ansell and Davies were both ophthalmologists, it is appropriate to recall that St John has great links with that medical speciality in that it has maintained an Eye Hospital in Jerusalem since 1882.

Details of the Eye Hospital are contained in the Museum Library, notably in the book "A Beacon of Hope" published in 2024 by the Australian authors Matthew Glozier, Ian Howie-Willis and John Pearn.

Adelaide ophthalmologist John Crompton was the Australian St John Fellow at the Eye Hospital for some months.

**14. Brian James Fotheringham,
AM, KStJ, MB BS, B. Med. Sc. (Hons), FRACMA, FACHSM.**

Commissioner 1987 – 1990



Brian Fotheringham officially began his association with St John Ambulance when he joined the Hindmarsh Transport Division in 1961, while still a medical student. He already knew a good deal about St John as his father, Dr. Jim Fotheringham (qv), had been active in St John since 1940.

Brian thoroughly enjoyed his time at Hindmarsh and his regular Wednesday all-night shifts that at times made it difficult to concentrate on the following day's lectures in the Medical School.

He was promoted to Divisional Surgeon of the Hindmarsh Centre in 1965, followed by Corps Surgeon in 1971, District Surgeon in 1977, Deputy Commissioner in 1978 and Commissioner from 1987 to 1990.

It was during Dr. Fotheringham's time as Commissioner that the union (to which the paid St John staff belonged) increased their campaign for a fully paid service. There were ugly scenes as unionists refused to work and volunteers stepped in to maintain the ambulance service. The Australian Priory thought it quite unbecoming for St John volunteers to be engaged in such altercations and directed that St John withdraw from the ambulance service. Thus ended an era.

Dr. Fotheringham's St John career covered other roles included being a Member of the St John Association Centre Committee (1978 - 1984), Member St John Council for SA (1978 - 1990), Member Ambulance Board of SA (1987 - 1989), Member National Priory Council (1990 - 1998) and President of the St John Council in SA from 1994 - 1995. In addition, Dr. Fotheringham was the Priory Librarian from 1990 for an unusually long period of 13 years, and was the inaugural Chair St John

Historical Societies at both South Australian and National levels. He was also the inaugural Chair of the St John Assembly in South Australia, a forum that held regular meetings to keep all who attended keep up-to-date with St John activities.

Dr. Fotheringham worked at the Adelaide Children's Hospital (later the Women's and Children's Hospital) for 30 years, mostly as Medical Superintendent. He was heavily involved with the Australian Council for Health Care Standards and the Child Accident Prevention Foundation of Australia.

Dr. Fotheringham received the National Medal and Bar in 1987, was made a Member of the Order of Australia in 1989 and was admitted to the Order of St John in 1973 as a Serving Brother. He was promoted through the grades to become a Knight of the Order in 1991. He readily acknowledges his wife Jan and their three sons for their support during his many hours of working with St John.

The Emcare Ambulance built in 1977

15. Robert Murray Edwards, OAM, KStJ, FFARACS, FANZCA.

Commissioner 1990 – 1996



As a child he, his mother and sister escaped from New Guinea as the Japanese were advancing in World War II. His father, a District Commissioner in Rabaul, did not survive the invasion. Brought to Adelaide by his mother to be with relatives, Bob was encouraged to study medicine.

Robert (Bob) Edwards graduated from the University of Adelaide's School of Medicine in 1963 and studied to be an anaesthetist, gaining his Fellowship of the Faculty of Anaesthetists of the Royal Australian College of Surgeons in 1969 and Fellowship of the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists in 1992.

He did post-graduate study in Birmingham, UK, and returned to take up specialist appointments at The Royal Adelaide Hospital and Modbury Hospital. He was involved with the RAH Cranio-Facial Unit and travelled to South East Asia on occasions to treat patients there.

When he decided it would be a good idea for his sons, Timothy and James, to learn first aid, his sons pointed out that there was no instructing doctor at their Campbelltown centre. Dr. Edwards took up the challenge!

He later worked on the Echo Program, was involved in many first aid competitions, the *Operation Four Minutes* endeavour (teaching first aid to the public), and the Community Care arm of St John of which he was Chairman,

Dr. Edwards was the last in a 45-year continuous line of twelve Commissioners in South Australia to hold a degree in Medicine, completing his six-year term in 1996.

Reference: Spotlight, May 1985.

16. Garry Leslie Coombes, AM, KStJ.

Commissioner 1996 – 2002



Garry Coombes was an educator and the first non-medical Commissioner for 65 years since George Frederick Hussey in 1931.

He joined the Unley Ambulance Division in 1962 and was appointed Superintendent of that Division seven years later. Garry moved to the Stirling Division in 1971 and joined the District Staff in 1979.

Outside St John, Garry worked in education in teaching and as an administrator, notably as a senior Technical and Further Education (TAFE) executive. He was involved in the national development of the Vocational Education and Training (VET) quality system and its implementation in the South Australian TAFE sector.

He was the State Executive Member of the Australian Institute of Emergency Services and the Deputy Chairman for many years. He was the St John Ambulance representative on the State Disaster Committee.

When Garry was with the Aldgate Stirling Division of St John, which was situated in the Adelaide hills, there were times when bushfires threatened. Examples of those times are in *The Zambuks* by Ian Howie-Willis, published in 2002.

Garry was admitted to the Order of St John as a Serving Brother (now called Member) in 1975, rising through the Grades to Officer in 1986, Commander in 1989 and Knight of Grace in 2000 by which time he was Commissioner. After his term as Commissioner, he was Chairman of the St John Council in South Australia from 2002 to 2008.

In 2009, he was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia (AM). The citation states *“For service to the community through St John Ambulance Australia, and to the technical and further education sector in South Australia.”*

Reference: Paul Rosenzweig, personal communication.

**17. Franklin Herbert Griff Bridgewater,
OAM, KStJ, MB, BS, FRACS, FRCS.**

Commissioner 2002 – 2008



Franklin, a Surgeon, trained at the Royal Adelaide Hospital but in addition gained wide experience in several countries through his extensive work with the Australian Army.

He joined St John in 1977 initially as a Divisional Surgeon. Dr. Bridgewater was appointed as St John Ambulance's Chief Surgeon in 1996 and in the following year the role and title changed slightly so that he became the Chief Medical Officer from 1997 to 2002. At about this time he became involved with Research Ethics in St John and helped initiate the ten-point self-assessment for physical fitness of St John members.

In 2002, he was appointed as South Australia's 17th Commissioner.

Some years after his term as Commissioner, he was appointed as the Director of Ceremonies for the Australian Priory, serving in that role from 2011 to 2017.

He was admitted to the Order of St John in 1987 as a Serving Brother (now Member) in 2008, was promoted to Officer of the Order in 1992, to Commander in 1998 and later to Knight of Grace.

Other awards to Frank Bridgewater include the National Medal, the Anniversary of National Service Medal and the Humanitarian Overseas Service Medal.

Reference: Paul Rosenzweig, personal communication.

18. Raymond John Greig, OAM, KStJ, SJ, JP.

Commissioner 2008 – 2014



Ray Greig has spent over 50 years in volunteering with St John in South Australia. He joined St John in 1969 when 16 years old and over the years contributed in various senior roles within the organisation.

Some of these roles were Divisional Officer, Divisional Superintendent, District Officer, State Superintendent, and in 2008 Ray became the 18th Commissioner of St John Ambulance in South Australia. In 2014, he ceased as Commissioner but continued his work with St John by being a Member of the St John Board.

Besides the roles listed above, Ray was a long-standing member of the South Australian State Disaster Response Advisory Committee, the State's Search and Rescue Committee and the State Emergency Management Training Committee. He was also a member of the State's Pandemic Influenza Working Party and represented South Australia in the development of guidelines for coping with major events at the national level.

Ray's educational background was in Mechanical Engineering and Business Management, especially International Business.

When not volunteering for St John, Ray became a Justice of the Peace in 2004 and since 2008 has been a volunteer Special Justice of the Peace in the Adelaide's Magistrates Court.

Ray was admitted to the Order of St John as a Serving Brother (now called Member) in 1984, and progressed through the Order's Grades to be admitted as a Knight of Grace in 2008.

He was awarded the Centenary Medal in 2001 "*for long and voluntary service through St John*" and in 2020 received the newly-introduced Ultra Long Service Medal in recognition of 50 years of service in St John.

Reference: Paul Rosenzweig, personal communication.

19. Noel Rex Hender, OAM, CStJ, BEM

Commissioner 2014 –2017



Noel Rex Hender joined the Glenelg Ambulance Cadet Division of St John Ambulance in 1957. In 1963, he transferred to the Hindmarsh Transport Division and on one occasion when on duty there was required to attend a fire in a building owned by News Limited in the city. Noel stayed and treated a casualty in a dangerous situation in the burning building, an act of courage that earned him the British Empire Medal (BEM).

Noel Trained as a school teacher. He holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree, a Diploma of Teaching, a Graduate Diploma in Educational Administration and a Diploma of Business. He spent 10 years as a Secondary School Principal.

It was his teaching career that necessitated his move in 1969 from Adelaide to Mount Gambier in the South East of South Australia where he joined the Division there.

By 1984, Noel was on District Staff and in 2012 became the Officer Administering Command. He was a member of the St John Ambulance Board in South Australia.

For a time in 2012 and 2013 Noel reverted to being the Divisional Superintendent of the Campbelltown Cadet Division and in the 18 months

he was there, significantly boosted the number of cadets involved in the Division.

Noel became the 19th Commissioner for St John in South Australia on 24 June 2014 and remained in that post until the end of 2017, when the changes in reporting relationships recommended in the Sutton Review were implemented by the Board.

Noel reverted to being an active member with the Woodville Division as a first-aider (Event Medic 22) involved in a variety of situations. These included attending the sites of significant bushfires and led to Noel being awarded the National Emergency Medal in 2022. Noel has been a Project Officer for the St John Chief Executive Officer in South Australia, and is heavily involved in the State Branch of the Order of Australia Association.

20. Peter Jackson, OStJ, LLB, BA.

2017 – 2019



Peter Jackson was the first lawyer to hold the position of Commissioner in South Australia. He graduated from the University of Adelaide with a Bachelor of Arts in 1997 and as a lawyer in 1999. He was the managing solicitor at Nick Xenophon & Co. Lawyers working mainly in civil litigation, and later as a Partner with the firm Duncan, Basheer & Hannon. Peter was admitted as a barrister in both the Supreme Court of South Australia and the High Court of Australia in 2001. Peter undertakes several roles for the Law Society of South Australia.

Peter Worked as a volunteer with St John Ambulance for 14 years covering such roles as Group Leader in State Administration and in Member Support; in Emergency Management of Major Events, and as State Superintendent from 2011 to 2015. He was also State Coordinator of the Duty Officer Group.

He was appointed as the 20th Commissioner in South Australia in November 2017.

Peter resigned as a volunteer with St John Ambulance in November 2019, shortly before the Annual General Meeting of St John in South Australia on 27th November 2019.

21. Dr. William (Bill) Middleton Griggs, AM, ASM, MBA, DUniv.

2021 to present



The citation relating to Bill Grigg’s membership of the Order of Australia states for

“Service to medicine, particularly through trauma, emergency care management and education and critical care and retrieval and in support of the Australian Defence Force”.

This summarises a very active career in just a few words, but gives an impression of Bill’s great influence in his chosen aspect of medicine.

Bill was educated at Prince Alfred College and graduated in Medicine from the University of Adelaide in 1981. He then gained qualifications in Anaesthesia and Intensive Care, and in later years in Business Administration. His numerous qualifications are not listed here but are extensive and even include Aviation Medicine.

In 1977, Bill joined St John at Walkerville and then transferred to Hindmarsh Division. He later worked with Ambulance Services in London, Brighton, Cardiff, Wellington, Sydney and Melbourne.

Mainly based at the Royal Adelaide Hospital's Emergency Service, Bill attended countless scenes of trauma both around Adelaide and in various places overseas where disasters had occurred. As an example, Dr. Griggs was on board the first foreign aid aircraft (RAAF) to arrive at Banda Aceh, Indonesia, following the horrific tsunami that struck there on Boxing Day in 2004.

Dr. Griggs started the *Roads to Survival Program* in 2004 in an effort to reduce the road toll. He retired from Medicine in 2018.

Many years after Bill first worked as a volunteer in St John Ambulance in the 1970s, he re-joined St John in 2021, this time in the role of Commissioner, a position he still holds in May 2026.

References: Paul Rosenzweig, personal communication.
The Advertiser, November 20. 2024.
Spotlight, December 1985.

This overview of the twenty-one St John Ambulance Commissioners who have volunteered for St John in South Australia over the last 136 years now comes to a close in May 2026.
