



Historical Happenings

THE CENTENARY PLATE 1877 - 1977

In December last year the St John Museum in Arthur Street, Unley received a Centenary Plate from the estate of the late Norman MacKinnon. On the back of the plate is written:

"This plate commemorates a century of service to mankind performed by members of St John Ambulance, a Foundation of THE MOST VENERABLE ORDER OF THE HOSPITAL OF ST JOHN OF JERUSALEM dedicated to the relief of suffering without distinction of race, class or creed".

On the front is a representation of the St John badge and the words "ST JOHN AMBULANCE 1877 - 1977". You may recall that the year 1877 was the year in which the St John Ambulance Association began in England. It was followed by the St John Ophthalmic Hospital in 1882 and the St John Ambulance Brigade in 1887. All this occurred before Queen Victoria granted St John its Royal Charter.

As if continuing the mention of heraldry given in the last edition of Open Airways, around the edge of the plate, between representations of flowering St John's wort plants, are symbols of St John in its world-wide context. There are the Arms of the Order of St John (at the 12 o'clock position) followed clockwise by a lion representing the Grand Priory, a springbok representing South Africa, a southern cross representing Australia, a swan for the Commandery in Western Australia, a maple leaf for Canada, a red hand for the Commandery of Ards in Northern Ireland, a gryphon representing Wales and fern leaves representing New Zealand. Since 1977, when this plate was produced, the United States of America has also gained Priory status within St John.

In May this year senior representatives of all the St John Pories will gather in Sydney, Australia for their annual meeting. It will be a grand occasion.

The myth behind the Red Hand symbol is extraordinary. There are several versions, perhaps the main one being that, long ago, the kingdom of Ulster had no heir. It was agreed that there be a boat race and that "whosoever's hand is the first to touch the shore of Ulster, so shall he be made king".

One of the race contestants, said to be of the Ui Neill clan, realised he was losing the race. He cut off his hand and threw it to shore, beating those with attached hands, and thus became king!

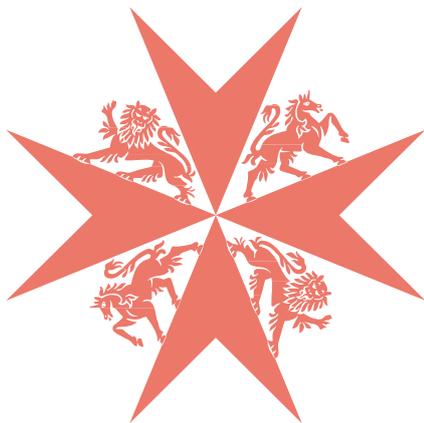
The Centenary Plate will now be on show in the St John Museum, as a rare and interesting representation of St John history world-wide.

Question: In February 1979, now just 33 years ago, one of the "Great Officers" of the Order of St John officially opened the former St John Headquarters Building on Greenhill Road, Eastwood. Who was he?

The answer will be published in the next edition of Open Airways.

Brian Fotheringham
Chairman

historical
society



Answer to the last question: the eight pointed cross embellished with the Queen's Beasts is called the BADGE of St John.

