



historical society

Historical Happenings

TWO SURGEONS OF THE ADELAIDE No. 2 (YWCA) NURSING DIVISION

One of the early Divisions of St John Ambulance in South Australia was the Adelaide No. 2 (Young Women's Christian Association) Nursing Division. In 1914 it was reported that the Division had 40 members. It achieved some publicity by placing metal boxes containing First Aid equipment on tramways poles at two sites in the city. This initiative failed after a short time as vandals kept scattering the contents and damaging the boxes.

The first Divisional Surgeon (Medical Officer) of the YWCA Division was Dr. Phoebe Chapple (*left*), daughter of the headmaster of Prince Alfred College. Dr. Chapple was remarkable for several reasons. Firstly she graduated as a doctor from the University of Adelaide in 1904, one of only two women (and four men) who passed the final exam. She was only the equal fifth female to graduate from the Medical School, despite it producing 49 graduates since 1889. Secondly, during the First World War she worked as a surgeon at a military hospital at Aldershot, UK, and later in France where she was awarded with the Military Medal for gallantry. The role of women in the Australian Army is still a topic of discussion 100 years later!

Joseph Verco (*left*) was born in Adelaide in 1851. He was educated at the Adelaide Educational Institution conducted by John Lorenzo Young and later at St Peter's College. He studied medicine in London and became a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons before returning to Adelaide. He was very influential in guiding the development of medical standards in South Australia as he was a founder of the both the Medical School and the Dental School at the University of Adelaide.

In 1885, Dr. Verco was one of six doctors who each gave a lecture to both the first and the second First Aid classes ever conducted by the St John Ambulance Association in South Australia.

On his retirement from the medical staffs of both the Adelaide Hospital (before it was "Royal") and the Children's Hospital he became, at the urging of his wife, the Divisional Surgeon of the Adelaide No. 2 (YWCA) Nursing Division. He was a religious man who began each meeting with a session of Bible study.

He was knighted in 1919 while he was still the Divisional Surgeon of the YWCA Nursing Division.

Question: In his Will, Sir Joseph Verco left some money as an endowment for St John Ambulance. St John bought a training aid with that money. What was it?

The answer is in the St John Museum at Unley and will be revealed in the next issue of Open Airways.

Brian Fotheringham
Chairman



Answer to the previous question: The former St John House on Greenhill Road, Eastwood, was officially opened by the Grand Prior, Richard, Duke of Gloucester.