



historical
society

Historical Happenings

GOVERNOR HINDMARSH AND HIS LINKS TO ST JOHN

Rear Admiral Sir John Hindmarsh was the first Governor of the Colony of South Australia. He was born in Chatham in the UK in 1785, and as a child of nine years accompanied his father on the *HMS Bellerophon*. One of his shipmates was Matthew Flinders, who soon after was to be the first European to circumnavigate Australia.

As a 13 year old midshipman, Hindmarsh was again on the *Bellerophon* when it was involved in the Battle of the Nile fought in August 1798. This sea battle, also referred to as the Battle of Aboukir Bay, was between the English and French navies. The *Bellerophon* engaged the French ship *L'Orient* which caught fire. The fire threatened to spread to the *Bellerophon*. Hindmarsh is said to have cut the cable linking the two ships, thus saving the *Bellerophon* from danger.

Napoleon Bonaparte had invaded the island of Malta, ruled by the Knights of St John since 1530, just two months earlier. Booty taken from Knights was on board the *L'Orient* when, soon after its tussle with *Bellerophon*, its gunpowder stores exploded and it sank some 10 kilometres off Alexandria. Valuable items, previously in the keeping of the St John Knights, were lost. As recently as 1999, a 600 kilogram canon from *L'Orient* was retrieved, as well as coins from the treasury on Malta.

On 14th July 1836, the now Sir John Hindmarsh received his commission to be Governor and Commander in Chief of the province of South Australia. At the age of 51 years, he commanded the *HMS Buffalo*, arriving in Holdfast Bay after a voyage of six months. On 28th December he carried out the Proclamation Ceremony establishing the Colony of South Australia.

One of the first suburbs of Adelaide, Hindmarsh, named after Sir John, was the location of a volunteer fire brigade service that later included a volunteer ambulance service. Years later, in 1955, a purpose-built St John Ambulance Centre was built on South Road at Hindmarsh.

References:

From Powder Monkey to Governor, by F. Stewart Hindmarsh, Access Press, 1955.

The Advertiser, 1 July, 1999.

Answer to the question in the previous Open Airways: To gain a St John Medallion, a first aider had to pass three consecutive first aid annual examinations.

Question: The son of a former Commissioner of St John in South Australia designed the former Hindmarsh Ambulance Centre. Who was the Commissioner and who was the son?

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

Brian Fotheringham
Chairman

