



# historical society

## Historical Happenings

### TWO PIECES OF STONE

A focal point for St John Ambulance and the Venerable Order of St John is St John's Gate in the London suburb of Clerkenwell. The early English Knights of St John owned a large property there. The original substantial building was destroyed by Wat Tyler, who was a leader of the Peasants' Revolt over a Poll Tax being enforced in England in 1381. The destruction of St John property may well have come about as follows: Sir Robert Hales, was the Lord High Treasurer of England and responsible for collecting the tax, even though he did not institute it! Sir Robert was also the Grand Prior of the Order of St John at the time, which may explain why St John was targeted.

Work was done to repair / replace the ruined buildings but in 1540, King Henry VIII, in his dispute with the Catholic Church, confiscated religious properties including the St John buildings at Clerkenwell. Subsequently St John's Gate, the Gatehouse to the entire property, was used in a variety of ways by a succession of different owners. One such use was as a drinking establishment known as the Old Jerusalem Tavern frequented by some quite distinguished gentlemen. Eventually, in 1873, Sir Edmund Lechmere bought the Gatehouse and facilitated its return to the emerging Venerable Order of St John.

On display in the passageway near classroom 1 at St John State Office in Unley there are two stones taken (with permission) from St John properties in Clerkenwell, London, by Dr J D(Jim) Fotheringham, a former Commissioner in South Australia. The inscriptions read:

***"A fragment of the original stonework of the ancient Grand Priory Church in Clerkenwell, London, which was consecrated on the 10th March 1185"***

and

***"A stone from the ancient fabric of St John's Church, London, destroyed by enemy action in 1940".***

In our St John Museum at 72 Edmund Avenue, Unley, we have two framed sketches of St John's Gate dated 1845 and 1892. They were donated to our Museum in 2006 by Pamela Willis who is now the Head of Heritage Research and Collections Adviser of the Museum at St John's Gate. In recent years St John's Gate has undergone a multi-million pound refurbishment and has established a research centre to complement its amazing museum stocked with items dating back many centuries.

**Brian Fotheringham**  
Chairman

#### Next question:

Sir Edmund Lechmere was influential in establishing a significant St John enterprise in a land other than England. What was it?



#### Answer to the previous question:

The heraldic unicorn on the St John badge came from the Coat of Arms of Scotland, when King James VI of Scotland also became King James I of England.



The St John Ambulance  
**Historical Society**  
of South Australia