



historical society

Historical Happenings

SURGEON-MAJOR PETER SHEPHERD

You may recall that the St John Ambulance Association began in England in 1877. The initiative and the writings of Surgeon-Major Peter Shepherd were pivotal in the success of the Association at this time.

Dr Shepherd was born in 1841 near Aberdeen, Scotland. He joined the British Army's Medical Department and in 1872 was posted to the Royal Herbert Military Hospital. This was a huge hospital and a part of the even larger military establishment at Woolwich on the banks of the River Thames. Woolwich is downstream from London, past Greenwich, and just beyond where the modern flood-stopping Thames Barrier is now situated.

At Woolwich, Shepherd met up with Colonel Francis Duncan, a lawyer who was an artillery officer. Some would say that lawyers probably do well as artillery officers! Duncan had served in Canada for six years before being posted to Woolwich in 1875. Both Shepherd and Duncan attended the Scottish Church in Woolwich. Both were innovative. They decided to set a precedent by relaying to the public some of the skills they had learned in the Army to do with managing and transporting injured persons.

A public meeting, conducted under the auspices of St John Ambulance, was called in January 1878 to initiate these civilian classes. Dr Shepherd and a Doctor Coleman conducted the first class in the hall of the Presbyterian School next to the Scottish Church at Woolwich. The first and subsequent classes were enthusiastically received. There were separate classes for men and for women.

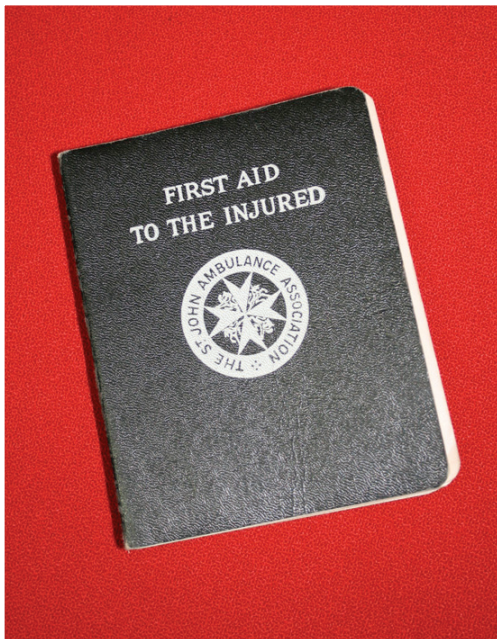
Shepherd knew that the lecture notes he had produced for the classes would need revision and he intended doing this. However, on learning he was to be posted overseas he asked his colleague, Dr. Robert Bruce, to keep and give thought to revising the notes.

Dr Shepherd was sent to South Africa with the First Battalion, 24th Regiment of Foot to help quell the Zulu uprising. In the infamous Battle of Isandhlwana, fought on 22nd January 1879, some 2,000 British troops were killed. Sadly, Surgeon-Major Shepherd was one of them.

His legacy is that his lecture notes were developed into the textbook subsequently called *First Aid to the Injured*, studied by thousands of people throughout the world, and known universally as 'The Little Black Book'.

Question: What is unusual about the title of the little black book's predecessor 'Shepherd's First Aid to the Injured' published in 1885 and edited by Dr Bruce?

Brian Fotheringham
Chairman



Answer to the last question: Rosetta Head is named after George Fife Angas's wife, Rosetta. Rosetta Head is commonly known as 'The Bluff'.

