

St John Ophthalmic Hospital

Most readers will know that the St John Ophthalmic [Eye] Hospital in Jerusalem is one of the Order's "Foundations". When the Order was being revived in England in the 1800s it was seen as highly symbolic to again do good works where the original Hospitallers were nearly 900 years earlier.

St John Headquarters in Adelaide are at 85 Edmund Avenue in Unley. By a curious coincidence the person who initiated the move to establish a hospital in Jerusalem was Sir Edmund Lechmere. Lechmere played many roles in English society, particularly around Worcestershire. He was interested in history and travelled to the Holy Land each year. He learned about the Hospitallers and joined the "Illustrious Order of St John: Anglia" in 1865. In 1876, he made a plea to the Ottoman government (as Jerusalem was at that time under Turkish control) for a grant of land in Jerusalem to establish a hospital. This was granted in 1882, but only after a personal approach by the then Prince of Wales. Note that St John Ambulance had not yet been granted its Royal Charter. It was only after this happened, in 1888, that the Prince of Wales became the Order's Grand Prior, and later, as King Edward VII, the Sovereign Head of the Order.

The decision to concentrate on eye diseases was because of the particularly high incidence of eye disease in the Middle East. The original Ophthalmic Hospital was built, and remains standing, on the Bethlehem Road, not far from the Jaffa Gate and within sight of a ruined 12th century Hospitaller church. Warfare has dogged the Middle East for centuries, and after one bout the boundaries for various states were re-drawn. This disadvantaged many patients and so in 1948 the hospital moved to another site within the Old City of Jerusalem. This was a house in the Muristan, but it proved too small. So a new hospital was built, this time outside the city on the Nablus Road, a little to the north of the Damascus Gate. It was opened in 1960.

The amount of work done by the Ophthalmic Hospital is amazing, especially given the political and related unrest in the region.. It has a bed capacity of 49 beds, two operating theatres and operates a 24 hour emergency service. Besides the main hospital in Jerusalem there is a secondary hospital in Hebron, a clinic in Gaza, a Centre at Anabta and a mobile unit.

In 2012:

- 45,238 patients were treated in the main hospital**
- 24, 369 patients were treated in the Gaza Clinic**
- 11,238 patients were treated at the Hebron Hospital**
- 20,097 patients were treated at the Anabta Centre**
- 10,511 patients were treated in the Mobile Unit.**
- That is a total of 111,453 patients in just one year!**

The Hospital is in a Jewish State, is run by Christians and caters mainly for Muslim patients.

Brian Fotheringham
Chairman

Next question:

Where in Adelaide is the statue of King Edward VII?



historical happenings



Above: St John Eye Hospital in Jerusalem.



Above: Young patient having his eyes tested at the St John Eye Hospital -vital work.

Answer to the previous question:

Annie Duncan was influential in establishing St John in Tasmania and was the foundation secretary of the first Tasmanian Centre of the St John Ambulance Association.



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