

# The St. Johns Ambulance Association, Riverstone

*Ernie Byrnes*

*Items in the Windsor & Richmond Gazette in the early 1920s show the St. Johns Ambulance Brigade in existence in Riverstone. The Brigade closed after a period of time and in this article, Ernie Byrnes documents the formation of the Brigade in the 1940s.)*

In the *Windsor and Richmond Gazette* of 22 December 1943 it was stated that a St. Johns Ambulance Brigade was to be formed. Albert Keegan to be Superintendent, Pilton Marlin to be Ambulance Officer, Fred Purvines Treasurer and J. Mason as Secretary.

The Brigade was officially formed on 20 January 1944 and was allocated the Number 47, thus it became a Division of the St. Johns Ambulance Brigade. This number was worn on each shoulder of the uniform.

During the early years, the Brigade used the C.W.A. building near the railway station for its meetings and training, before moving to the Masonic Lodge and also the school in Garfield Road .

My Uncle Pilton Marlin asked me to join the brigade, on 7 February 1945. After doing examinations I qualified for membership to the brigade.

Each year all members were requested to have an examination to test their skills. We went to Windsor to what was, back then, the Windsor Council Chambers in George Street and were examined by the local Windsor doctor, Dr. Bateman. Later our local doctors conducted the exams.

I had to go into Sydney to be measured for my uniform. The uniform consisted of a coat with a high collar closed tight around the neck, silver St. Johns buttons and an emblem "S.J.A.B." on each shoulder and long trousers with a white stripe down on the outside of each leg. Coat and trousers were of black material. A wide black leather belt with a large silver buckle was worn outside the coat. Our hat had a peak with the S.J.A.B. emblem on the front. Later the coat was redesigned to an open neck for more comfort and we wore a white shirt with black tie and black shoes.

Each member was issued with a wooden first-aid box. This consisted of small sections containing small bottles with different items for use, such as Iodine, Salvolatile and Mercurochrome. The bottom held slings and bandages. The box was sturdy and used as a seat on the sideline at events.

Tourniquets were used for snake - spider bites. There was a small hollow container made of wood. On one end it had a sharp metal scalpel, the other end was hollow and contained "Condies Crystals". In the event of snake bite the tourniquet was applied to stop the flow of blood and stop the poison from reaching the heart. The bite was then cut open with the scalpel and the condies crystals was put into the cut. [This method is banned these days]. Another early practice was to suck the venom from the wound [also banned].

The kit also contained several St. Johns slings for fractures and limb support and also assorted small bandages. In the lid of the box there were good quality scissors and tweezers. There was also an eyewash vessel, which was necessary because, back then, football sidelines were marked using lime mixed with water.

We carried a water bottle over the shoulder and a small canvas bag about six by four inches in which was cloth material saturated with water. This was applied to an area such as a kick injury, and was

referred to as “Magic Water” as it seemed to miraculously get the person mobile again. Smelling Salts were used if a person was knocked unconscious and this was an effective reviver.

We attended as many sporting events as possible, both local and away or to whoever requested our services. Being a voluntary organization we sometimes could not assist.

Rosehill racecourse was a regular event visited. The main events attended were the local football matches, home and away. I was asked to travel with the local team wherever they played and to look after them. The Hawkesbury Agricultural College at Richmond had their own football days that we attended.

On football training nights I was asked to attend and massage the player’s leg muscles after training, I had a special mixture for rubbing that we made ourselves from components bought at the chemist. It was Uncle Pilty’s own formula.

The highlight of my attendances was when Her Royal Highness Queen Elizabeth and Prince Phillip paid our country a visit during 1954 and a parade was held through Sydney streets. All available St. John personnel were mustered for the occasion. I was fortunate to be stationed at Broadway in front of a very large crowd and managed to get some photos as they passed by. When the parade was over we were sent to Bondi Beach for the surf lifesaving carnival which had been put on in her honour and at which the Queen was in attendance.

For the Queen’s parade and Bondi carnival we didn’t take the wooden first aid box as it was too cumbersome to carry amongst the huge throng of people. Instead we were supplied with a calico bag, slung over our shoulder and carried just the necessary items, mostly to treat people who fainted.

Some of our members came from Windsor and, because of the travelling, they decided to break away and form their own brigade at Windsor. We carried on for a number of years. Eventually our brigade later closed on 31 December 1952, due to lack of members.

**Records supplied from the St. Johns Ambulance Archives in Sydney. - Riverstone Division**

- Date of Formation of Division. 20 January 1944.
- Surgeon – Dr. M.A. [Molly] Lapin 1944 - 1945. Surgeon – Dr. J. F. Boag 1946 - 1952.
- Superintendent - Albert Keegan and 12 members.
- The Division met at the Public School Riverstone.
- In the 9 years of the Division’s existence the members:
  - Attended 3,202 casualties on Public Duty.
  - Attended 5,207 instructional meetings, drills and inspections.
- Officers and members of St. John attended Divisional meetings either weekly or fortnightly to practice and to arrange attendances at public duties.
- Inspections of Divisions were carried out annually by Senior Officers.
- The Annual inspections of all Officers and Members of St. John in New South Wales were performed at Government House by:- Lord Wakehurst Governor of N.S.W/ - Major-General S.R. Burston, Director-General of the Medical Services of the Commonwealth Military Forces.  
1947 1948 His Excellency Lieut-General J. Norcott Governor of N.S.W.  
The Governor-General of Australia the Rt. Hon. W.J. McKell.  
Lieut-General F.H.Berryman, Eastern Command.  
Lieut-Governor and Chief Justice of N.S.W. The Hon. K.W. Street.  
His Excellency Lieut-General Sir John Norcott Governor of N.S.W.