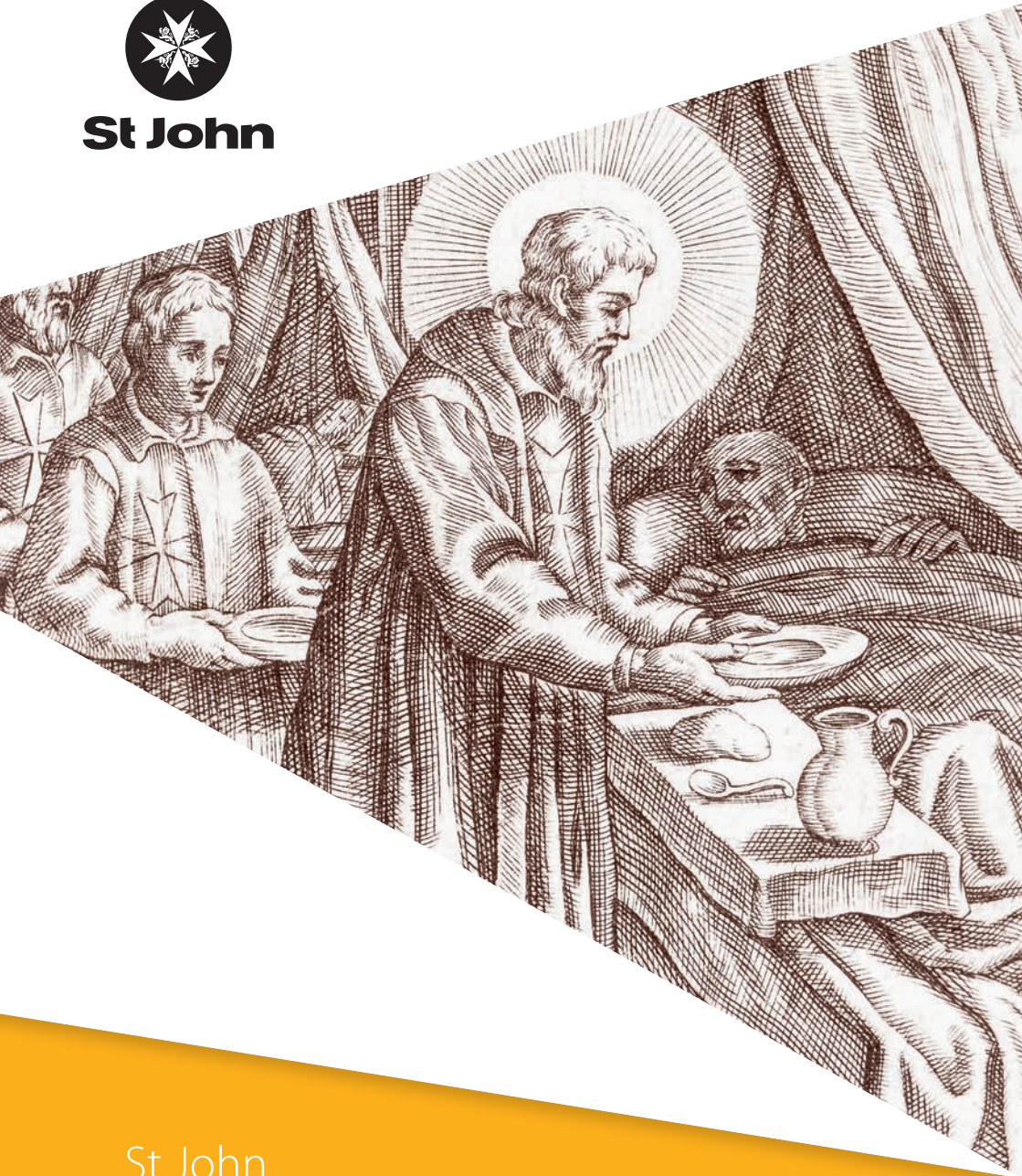




St John



St John
Our History

St John – An Order of Chivalry

The Order of St John is a Royal Order of Chivalry of the British Crown, in recognition of its establishment of the healthcare charity St John Ambulance. This means that the Order can award honours to people, recognising their good works. Those honoured are today's members of the Order of St John.

The Order of St John was the first of a number of religious military orders established in the Middle Ages at a time when various Royal Orders of Chivalry were being established with a code of conduct focused on virtues of courage and honour. To these two virtues the Order of St John added obedience; members of the Order swore religious oaths that bound them to a shared purpose.

First and foremost they pledged to care for the sick and the poor. Later, members trained as knights for warfare. For this, they became known as the Knights Hospitaller.



The Order's motto today is
Pro Fide, Pro Utilitate Hominum
For the Faith and in the Service
of Humanity.

This duty of care is just as
relevant today as it was
900 years ago in Jerusalem.



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Origins



Jerusalem remains a focal point for different faiths, and it has been a place of pilgrimage for thousands of years.

The Order of St John was founded in Jerusalem by monks with a mission to care for sick pilgrims, regardless of faith. By 1080 they had established a hospital, and the men and women who worked there became known as Hospitallers.

Soon after, Jerusalem became a focus for conflict. In 1095, the First Crusade was launched to overthrow Muslim rule in the region. In 1099, Jerusalem was captured by Christian knights. The Hospitallers continued to care for the sick, but around 1148, its members adopted a new military role as the Crusader Kingdom became politically unstable.

In 1187, Sultan Saladin conquered Jerusalem.

The eastern Mediterranean

Driven out, the Hospitallers re-established themselves at Acre, now in northern Israel.

In Europe the Hospitallers built up a network of properties and lands, known as Priors and Commanderies, which generated income to finance their care for the sick and their military campaigns.

In 1291, Acre was captured by Muslim forces, and the Hospitallers were forced to relocate again. The Hospitallers retreated to Cyprus for 20 years, during which time they took part in the conquest of Rhodes.

It was on Rhodes that the Hospitallers then established their main base, remaining for a further two centuries. Rhodes was attacked numerous times, and on 1 January 1523 it fell to the army of Suleiman the Magnificent, Sultan of the Turkish Ottoman Empire, and the Hospitallers were permitted, in view of the courage they had shown, to withdraw with colours flying and their honour intact.



Malta

In 1530, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V granted the Hospitallers the island of Malta, which became their headquarters.

The Great Siege

From their new base, the Hospitallers patrolled the Mediterranean, and it was not long before the Ottoman Turks attacked. In May 1565, an invasion force of 25,000 Ottoman Turks invaded the island.

The defence of Malta is perhaps the most famous episode in the Hospitallers' military history. The brutal siege lasted nearly four months, there were heavy losses on both sides, but in September reinforcements arrived and the Ottoman Turks were finally driven off.



Malta and Napoleon

The Hospitallers thrived on Malta for more than two centuries before a serious new threat arose. Following the French Revolution, General Napoleon Bonaparte captured Malta in 1798 with almost no resistance.

Russia and Rome

Suddenly bereft of their island home, some of the Hospitallers returned to their own countries, others settled briefly in Russia, with Tsar Paul I as their de facto Grand Master (although he was an orthodox Christian).



Following Tsar Paul's assassination in 1801, the Hospitallers re-established themselves in Rome, where the Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St John of Jerusalem, of Rhodes and of Malta continues today.

Reviving the Order in England

As a Catholic order, the Hospitallers in England were dissolved by Henry VIII in 1540. The Order was briefly revived in 1553 by Henry's Catholic daughter Mary I. Following her death in 1558, England reverted to Protestantism, and the Order's properties were confiscated.

In the late 1820s émigré knights from France joined in a plan to found a non-Catholic branch of the Order in England; this was not recognised in Rome. Nevertheless, it continued to grow propelled by the medieval Hospitallers' traditional mission to care for the sick and injured. By the 1860s it was well established and had attracted some attention from The Royal Family.

Recognising the need for medical assistance for civilian victims of accidents, the St John Ambulance Association was launched by the Order in 1877, organising training and the distribution of first aid kits and stretchers. A decade later, the St John Ambulance Brigade was formed as a uniformed volunteer organisation.

A global Reach

Meanwhile, St John was expanding overseas. By 1891, first aid centres had been established in Australia, India, Gibraltar, Malta, the West Indies, New Zealand and South Africa.

Another important development was the St John Eye Hospital in Jerusalem, founded in 1882. This quickly became a vital provider of ophthalmic care to thousands of patients in a region where eye complaints are common.

In 1888, Queen Victoria recognised the enormous public value of the new Order and granted it a Royal Charter, as an order of the British Crown.



War Service



The Order took an active role during conflicts, beginning with the Franco-Prussian War and the Turco-Serbian Wars of the 1870s.

A conference held by the British government in 1898 led to the formation of the Central British Red Cross Committee, to co-ordinate medical support for the British forces during wartime.

In 1899, the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) broke out in South Africa, and St John volunteers provided valuable support to army medical services. By the time the First World War began in 1914, St John and the Red Cross were well prepared, and the Military Home Hospitals Reserve and Royal Naval Auxiliary Sick Berth Reserve were quickly mobilised. In recognition of their courage, the title of the Order was changed to The Most Venerable Order in 1936.

During the Second World War of 1939 to 1945 many thousands of St John volunteers worked with the army and navy overseas, and at home. When German bombing raids hit civilian targets in the UK during the Blitz, the Order provided both medical treatment and first aid training.

Towards the end of the war, St John volunteers were among the first to provide relief to those imprisoned in Nazi concentration camps.

The Order in modern Times

The Order of St John is a unique international charity, with its chief headquarters in London. It is managed on the ground by a network of separate Priors and Associations around the world.

Today St John is a modern organisation delivering first aid, healthcare and support services around the world. Its programmes are community-based and volunteer led. They provide high impact at low cost.

From mobile clinics in Malawi to eye clinics in the Palestinian Territories, ambulance services in Australia and New Zealand, kidney dialysis in Malaysia, hospice care in Antigua and first aid worldwide, St John provides thousands of people with essential medical care every day.

At the core are the 200,000 St John volunteers who give their own time and effort to help others. In England and Uganda, in Jamaica and Canada, in South Africa and Wales, and in over 30 more countries, volunteers are wearing the eight pointed cross on their uniforms, proud to be part of our worldwide charitable movement.





“St John’s focus on health care, especially amongst the poorest of the poor, and its capacity to tap the most generous and caring human impulses, gives it a special place in our hearts.”

Nelson Mandela, Knight of the Order of St John



Learn more

To learn more about the rich history of St John, please scan the code on the left with your mobile and watch our history video.

Don't forget to visit our wonderful **Museum of The Order of St John** at St John's Gate in London, or online: <http://museumstjohn.org.uk>.



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