

# St John History

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# Fifty years of St John Ambulance in Papua New Guinea

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*Mr John Waingut is the Chief Commissioner and Chief Executive Officer of St John Ambulance Papua New Guinea (PNG). Originally from Vunamurmur Village, Kokopo (a town east of Rabaul in the East New Britain Province), he now lives in the national capital, Port Moresby. A graduate in communications engineering from the PNG University of Technology in Lae, Mr Waingut worked for 26 years in the technical services branch of the PNG National Broadcasting Corporation, of which he was branch head. After a period in the Vocational Education and Training branch of the PNG Department of Education, in 2005 he was appointed Private Secretary to the PNG Governor-General, a position he held for the next six years. He joined St John Ambulance PNG as Chief Commissioner in June 2011. It is a key appointment because in PNG St John is responsible for ambulance transport services, blood bank transport services, a hospital and day clinic as well as first aid training and delivery services.*



From the outset, on behalf of the National St John Council of Papua New Guinea (PNG), St John Ambulance PNG, and myself as Chief Commissioner and Chief Executive Officer, I wish to express our thanks and gratitude to the St John Ambulance Historical Society of Australia for the invitation to address this seminar. You have enabled me to share with our Australian St John colleagues a summary of our history and a snapshot of the work that St John Ambulance PNG is doing at this stage of our institutional and national development.

I begin by thanking James Cheshire (the Historical Society Secretary), Edith Khangure (Deputy Secretary) and Allan Mawdsley (President) for including me on the seminar program. I thank Gwyn Balch and Vicky Spence (the conference organisers) for ensuring my passage to and from Darwin and my accommodation. For advice on what my audience will expect of me, I also thank Dr Ian Howie-Willis, the St John Ambulance Australia Historical Advisor, who was actually at 'Unitech' in Lae when I was an engineering student there in the mid-1970s. I am delighted to be here to talk about St John work in my homeland and so I thank the people I have just named for the opportunity of addressing your Historical Society's fifteenth annual national seminar.

Before telling you about the much needed services that St John Ambulance PNG provides to Papua New Guineans under the governance of the National St John Council of PNG, I wish to comment briefly on the links between your country and mine. The long close ties between PNG and Australia extend back over 130 years to the 1880s. The bond of friendship between our two nations continues today. It has been shaped by our shared histories in peace and in war and through certain institutions which, like St John Ambulance, have been important in our development as nations. My presence at this seminar is an affirmation of that bond.

St John Ambulance history in Papua New Guinea is best understood by considering the six main stages or phases through which it has passed. We can characterise these as follows:

1. the first six 'early' years, 1957–1963
2. the 'pre-self-Government' decade, 1964–1974
3. the first 'post-Independence' decade, 1975–1985
4. the second 'post-Independence' decade, 1986–1996
5. the 'rebuilding' decade, 1997–2007
6. the past five years of 'rapid expansion', 2008–2013.

I will now deal with each of these six phases in turn, summarising its main developments.

## **The early years, 1957–1963**

The teaching of St John Ambulance first aid classes in PNG began during the early to mid-1950s, sponsored by Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) missionaries at various SDA schools and mission stations. In 1956 classes were held in places as far apart as Rabaul on New Britain, Wewak on the north-west

Sepik coast, Inus on Bougainville, Madang on the Rai coast and Goroka and Kabiufa in the Eastern Highlands—a total of 123 certificates were issued.

In December 1957, a meeting was held in Port Moresby of those interested in forming a sub-centre of the St John Ambulance Association New South Wales Centre. The sub-centre subsequently formed, at first with arranged first aid classes, the certificates for which were issued from NSW.

Pastor RE Hare of the Seventh Day Adventist Church at Wahroonga in NSW was a keen promoter of this work. He visited PNG in 1958. He was an enthusiastic St John member and presented a complimentary report on the activities of St John in the 'Territory' (which was what the region of Papua was known as before independence in 1975).

In 1963, the 'Territory of Papua and New Guinea (P&NG) Centre of the St John Ambulance Association within the Priory of Australia' came into existence. Administratively, it continued functioning as a branch of the St John Ambulance Association New South Wales Centre. The Australian-controlled administration of PNG granted the P&NG Centre a block of land at Boroko, a Port Moresby suburb, and work began on constructing a St John building there.

During this period the Secretary of the NSW St John Ambulance Association Centre, Miss Marjorie Higgins, visited Port Moresby regularly to provide assistance and advice. She did this with the support of the Chancellor of the Australian Priory, Sir George Stening, and she kept him informed of St John progress in PNG.

### **The pre-self government decade, 1964–1974**

A St John Council for PNG formed in 1967 with the Administrator, Sir Donald Cleland (1901–75) as the patron. We count that year, 1967, as our foundation year because that was when we separated from the NSW Centre and became an autonomous Territory St John branch. The main function of the Council was to co-ordinate activities of the Association (Event Health Services) and Brigade. The Association began conducting first aid classes regularly in the main cities and towns: Port Moresby, Lae, Rabaul and Goroka. Brigade divisions formed in these towns too and began undertaking public duties. In 1966 the first Commissioner, Dr P Booth, was appointed.



*Sir Donald McKinnon Cleland.*

The St John headquarters building in Boroko was completed on schedule and officially opened by Sir Donald Cleland on 30 October 1965. Sir George Stening attended as the representative of the Australian Priory.

The Australian Priory in 1967 approved the Rules for the St John Council of P&NG. There had been vigorous debate within the Priory over how much independence the PNG St John Council should be allowed. In the end the Priory agreed that the PNG Council should operate like the state St John councils in Australia; that is, it should be fully autonomous and allowed to manage its own affairs. This was in keeping with political developments in PNG, which during the late 1960s and early 1970s moved steadily towards independence from Australian rule. PNG achieved self-government on 1 December 1973 and was on track for full independence in 1975.

*The official opening of the St John Ambulance Headquarters building. Sir Donald Cleland is standing (in the gray suit) and the Australian Priory Chancellor, Sir George Stening, is seated second from left immediately below the St John Badge. The audience was mainly European expatriates.*



Meanwhile St John work had been expanding. In 1969 a 'Tok Pisin' (Melanesian Pidgin) edition of a first aid manual was published. The number of Brigade divisions grew and by 1972 approximately twelve divisions were active.

### **The first post-independence decade, 1975–1985**

Papua New Guinea gained its independence on 16 September 1975 amidst much national rejoicing. The official ceremony marking the occasion took place in the Hubert Murray Stadium in Port Moresby and was attended by HRH Prince Charles, the Prince of Wales, on behalf of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, and the Australian Governor-General, Sir John Kerr, on behalf of the Australian Government. The Australian flag was lowered and the PNG flag raised, with the PNG Governor-General, Sir John Guise, then handing the Australian flag back to Sir John Kerr. This brought to an end 69 years of Australian control in the former separate Territory of Papua and 61 years in the former Territory of New Guinea. The two Territories had been administered together since the end of World War II in 1945, but now they had become the one nation, Papua New Guinea.

The PNG St John Ambulance organisation also separated from its Australian 'parent' at this time. The St John Council for PNG became the National St John Council of PNG, with Brigadier-General ER (Ted) Diro as its Chairman. The PNG Governor-General, Sir John Guise, became the St John Patron, succeeding Sir Donald Cleland (who had died in Port Moresby three weeks before Independence Day). At the time of his appointment as Chairman, Brigadier-General Diro was the Chief of the PNG Defence Force, but he later entered politics and served as Minister for Defence and Deputy Prime Minister. He remained Chairman of the National St John Council for six years, until 1981.

In 1976, Sir Maori Kiki presented to the National Parliament a Bill to incorporate the National St John Council of PNG. The Act was passed by Parliament and the National St John Council of PNG was incorporated and took full responsibility for the work of the Order of St John in PNG.

### **The second post-independence decade, 1986–1996**

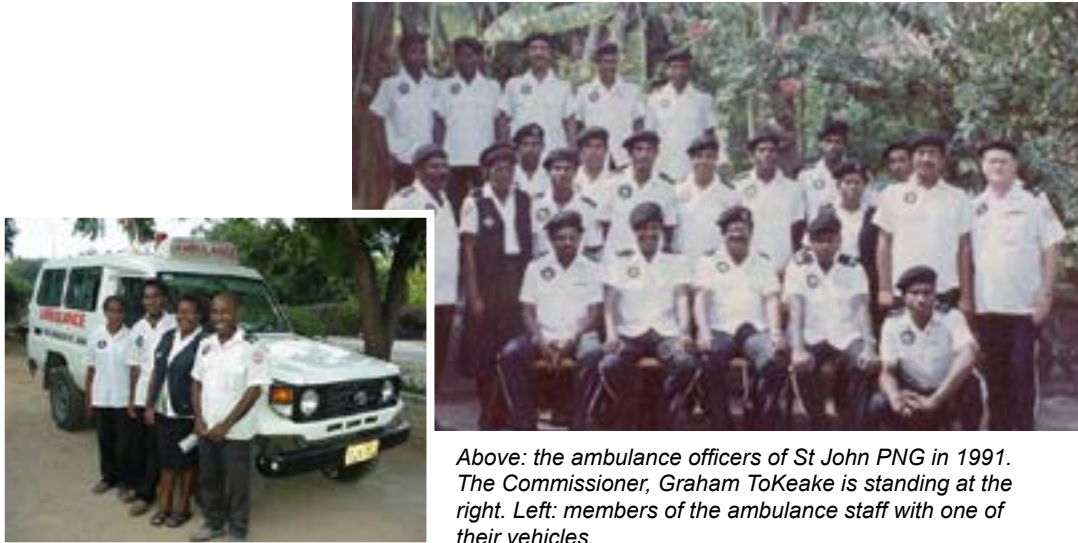
The late Commissioner Graham ToKeake (née Smith) joined St John Ambulance Brigade in 1969 as a member of the Port Moresby Division. A division was also formed in Lae in that year under Mr D Hay, Mr Ian Arnold, and Mr David Bennett as Area Superintendent in the mid-1970s.

Mr ToKeake, formerly Mr Graham Norman Smith, was an Australian who had settled in PNG and had become the Superintendent of the Brigade division in Goroka. During the early 1970s, Mr Keake had risen to prominence in the PNG St John organisation and at Independence in 1975 was appointed salaried manager of the national organisation at the Boroko headquarters. He took out PNG citizenship at Independence and changed his surname from Smith to the Melanesian name 'Keake'. He later added the Tolai (Rabaul area, East New Britain Province) honorific title 'To' (analogous to 'Mr') to his name, thus becoming Graham ToKeake. As well as manager, he became the St John Commissioner for PNG.

Under Mr ToKeake's leadership, St John in PNG expanded its range of activities during the 1980s and early 1990s and began taking responsibility for the operation of the ambulance transport services in the main towns.



*Brigadier General ER 'Ted' Diro. Top, as Chief of the PNG Defence Force in 1975 and at the 2008 Remembrance Day Ceremony.*



Above: the ambulance officers of St John PNG in 1991. The Commissioner, Graham ToKeake is standing at the right. Left: members of the ambulance staff with one of their vehicles.

### The re-building decade, 1997–2007

For a time during the late 1990s and early 2000s St John in PNG made good progress under Mr ToKeake's leadership. When possible, he attended the meetings of the Australasian Ambulance Convention, which kept him in touch with both St John and the State/Territory ambulance authorities in Australia. Unfortunately Commissioner ToKeake died in 2003 after a long illness. Because he was so central in St John affairs in PNG, St John Ambulance PNG collapsed after his death.

A revival began when Mr Douglas Kelson MES, MBE, OstJ, another Australian-born 'St Johnny', succeeded Mr ToKeake. He assumed duty on 28 August 2003. He began by holding a parade of five members of St John Ambulance, at which he performed a commissioning of a new Superintendent of Ambulance.



Mr Douglas Kelson.

Under the leadership of Mr Kelson, St John took over the running of the Government Blood Collection Service in 2004. Mr Kelson instituted retraining of staff and re-established the organisation on a sounder basis. He began sending ambulance staff for training under the State/Territory ambulance authorities in Australia.

An important event in 2007 was a visit to PNG by the Grand Prior, Prince Richard, Duke of Gloucester. The visit was arranged as part of the 50th anniversary of the formal establishment of the St John Council for PNG. A history of St John PNG was also published and a commemorative set of postage stamps and a 'first day cover' were issued. In addition a 50-toea coin (roughly equivalent to the Australian 50¢ coin) was struck and a commemorative medal released.



reverse

obverse

The 50-toea coin and the 50th anniversary medal, commemorating the 50th anniversary of St John Ambulance PNG.





### The recent years of rapid expansion, 2008–2013

The past five-year period could well be called 'the years of turbulence, prosperity and rapid expansion'. Much has happened since 2008. First, in 2009 we opened a District Hospital and a Clinic in Gerehu, a large residential suburb on the northern side of Port Moresby. Second, in 2010 we got caught up in a Commission of Inquiry into the Department of Health, which was established to inquire into corruption within the Department. On 24 June 2011, St John the Baptist's festival day, a new Chief Commissioner was installed and tasked with rebuilding the management team. I was the new appointee and I spent the next 18 months being understudy to my predecessor, Douglas Kelson MES, MBE, OStJ. I finally took over full control of the organisation as both Chief Commissioner and Chief Executive Officer at the end of 2012. Meanwhile, Mr Kelson had retired to the Solomon Islands, where he was available to advise the St John organisation there.

The St John Gerehu District Hospital deserves special mention because St John Ambulance Australia, our 'parent' organisation, has never embarked on a project like it, although during World War I the St John Ambulance Brigade in England did run its own hospital. The hospital was officially opened on 21 May 2009 by His Excellency Sir Paulias Matane, the PNG Grand Chief [also called the Governor-General]. The hospital was renovated and improved by St John Ambulance with funding from the National Department of Health. In the four years since its opening the hospital has quickly become a key public health facility. It currently treats between 15,000–20,000 patients a month. The hospital never closes and is always open to treat the many hundreds of patients who daily seek its services.

Also worthy of mention is the Gordons Clinic, a day clinic which St John PNG runs in Gordons, the Port Moresby suburb immediately north of Boroko. The clinic was an early health extension venture but unfortunately it closed in 1997 and remained closed for the next 11 years. In 2008 St John renovated the building with support from the Indian Association and the Sustainable Development Fund. The building has now been modernised and new facilities added. The clinic has over 25 staff and sees around 250 patients each day.

In early 2013 we moved our headquarters to the original Port Moresby ambulance base at Taurama, the area on the south-eastern fringe of the city where the army barracks are located.

Undoubtedly there are many challenges ahead for us but we are sure that the services we offer will be increasingly in demand. Papua New Guinea is currently experiencing a natural gas and mining boom. The potential for further development is enormous. Among the great developmental challenges will be extending our health and medical services beyond the towns and cities to the rural majority in the villages. For them life goes on as it always has done since their distant ancestors first settled our islands. Improving their lives and helping them share in the nation's prosperity will be a huge but hopefully achievable goal.



*A St John staff member assessing one of the many hundreds of patients who arrive daily at the St John Gerehu District Hospital in search of treatment.*



*The renovated Gordons Clinic, reopened by St John PNG after being closed for 11 years.*



'Preserving and promoting the St John heritage'

The front cover of *St John History* Volume 14 shows the members of the Order of St John who took part in the Capitular Procession of the Priory in Australia at their annual service of rededication in Christ Church Anglican Cathedral in Darwin on Sunday 2 June 2013.

The members of the Order are pictured outside the porch of the cathedral, which is all that remains of the original structure built and consecrated in 1902. Constructed from the local red limestone, the original cathedral was damaged during a Japanese air raid in February 1942. After that the Australian military forces used the building until the end of the war. Cyclone Tracy destroyed everything but the porch of the repaired cathedral in December 1974.

The new cathedral, built around and behind the porch, was consecrated in the presence of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Reverend Donald Coggan, on 13 March 1977. Several weeks later, Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh visited the Cathedral during that year's Royal Visit celebrating the 25th anniversary of her reign.

The cathedral porch today reminds Darwin residents and tourists of the vicissitudes of settlement in Australia's 'Top End' over the past century. It is also an emblem of the enduring faith of the Christian community of the Northern Territory.

Because of its setting, the front cover picture resonates with the leading article in this edition. The article, by Frank Dunstan MStJ, the Northern Territory St John historian, deals with the colourful history of St John Ambulance Australia in the Territory as recorded in his book *Awkward Hours, Awkward Jobs* (St John NT, 2013). The book was launched at Government House, Darwin, on Friday 31 May 2013.