

## The History of the Ambulance Service

The concept of ambulance service started in Europe with the Knights of St. John. During the Crusades in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the Knights of St. John received instruction in first-aid treatment from Arab and Greek doctors and acted as the first emergency workers. They treated soldiers from both sides of the war and provided care to the poor, sick and injured pilgrims.



## Timeline of the History of the Ambulance Service

- 1882** St John Ambulance Association introduced Invalid Transport Corps free of charge to the poor. Becomes St John Ambulance Brigade in 1887.
- 1912** Horse drawn ambulances replaced by motor vehicles.
- 1918** War time ambulances released for civilian use and national ambulance service planned.
- 1925** Public Health Act provides for transport of non-urgent cases and ambulance services spread slowly across the country until WW2.
- 1937** 999 telephone number was introduced.
- 1946** National Health Services Act requires local authorities provide ambulances 'where necessary'. Initially staffed by volunteers, professionals are introduced gradually.
- 1964** The Millar report recommends that the ambulance society should provide treatment as well as carry people to hospital.
- 1970/80** Modernisation of communications.  
Introduction of helicopters and motorbikes to speed up response times  
Defibrillators became portable and introduced onto all ambulances.
- 1990's** Staff with extended training re-qualify as Paramedics.

## 1887-1888 Formation of Northampton Ambulance Corps

On 14<sup>th</sup> September 1887, the Northampton Ambulance Corps was founded and a wheeled litter was bought. This was a wheeled carriage, with iron rimmed wheels, that carried a canvas stretcher and was kept at Northampton Infirmary.

Many patients were brought to the Infirmary by train and met at the station but it was still a laborious way to carry patients to and from the Infirmary and so in 1888 it was decided to purchase a horse drawn carriage.

Mssrs. A.F. Mulliners, cab manufacturers of Bridge Street, Northampton built this first ambulance at a cost of £48.00, plus £6.10s for the rubber tyres.

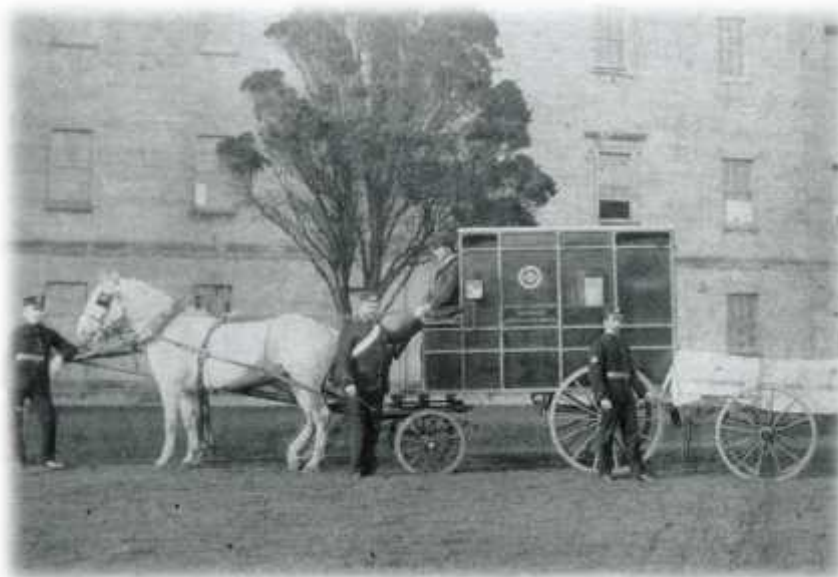
Provision for supplying horses was by a Mr Frisby, Carriage and Cab Proprietor of 29 Market Square. He stipulated that his business took priority with regard to use of his horses, funerals and weddings coming first, followed by his cab hire and before ambulance wagons.

Charges for use of Horse Ambulance = 3 shillings per mile

Charges for Wheeled Litter = 2d per mile

Reduced charges for persons holding Infirmary letters or leaving the Infirmary.

Accident cases moved free of charge.



This photo, provided by Joy Arthurs Page, shows her great grandfather Sydney-Clench Arthurs on the right by the litter. Sam Frisby is sitting on the box, John Perry standing by him and Harvey Reeves, the Transport Officer, on the left. Harvey Reeves went on to be

the Superintendent of Northampton Headquarters Division of St John Ambulance Corps, and is better known as Mayor of Northampton in 1912 and 1920. In his first year of office, he raised money to provide this motorised ambulance.



*Lft-Rt. Mr F Newton, Councillor Harvey Reeves (Mayor of Northampton),  
Dr W M Robson, Supt. E.F. Rice and Corporal Ricks*

On April 26<sup>th</sup>, 1913, this Napier motorised ambulance arrived in Northampton, having aroused great interest on its way from the London firm of Napes.

Councillor Reeves, along with Superintendent Rice of the local foundry family, was responsible for the design and many ambulances of this type were sold throughout the country.

*Oops! Unfortunately this ambulance was involved in a road accident a short time later. ( Not sure of the year)*



## **Alderman W. Harvey Reeves OBE. DL. JP. ( 1871-1932)**

When William Harvey Reeves came to Northampton from St Albans, his first introduction to public work was working in the office of the clerk to the borough magistrates. When his step-father Mr E Barnes became ill, he was called to assist in the business of Messrs. E Barnes and Co., waste merchants of Kingswell St., taking full charge of the business after his death.

He was a councillor and served two terms as Mayor of Northampton, 1912 and 1930. During his first term of office, his charity was to provide funds for a motor ambulance and Northampton Ambulance Corps and Northampton Corporation jointly purchased this at a cost of £700. In his second term, he took a lead in the endeavour to clear the Northampton General Hospital's huge debt. Nearly £9,000 was raised and the deficit cleared.

He was an ambulance driver and worked with the Order of St. John of Jerusalem for 43 years, holding the office of Transport Officer in 1889 and becoming Superintendent of Northampton Headquarters Division.

During WW1 he worked as a Red Cross worker for the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD). The Red Cross took over the responsibility of caring for the war wounded.

He was a Deputy Lieutenant and served as a JP.

As a Freemason he was Worshipful Master of Kingsley Lodge in 1918, held the office of Provincial Grand Warden and as a member of the Northampton Chapter had held the office of Provincial Grand Sojourner.

He worked for children in the early days of the Crippled Children's Fund and was Chairman of the Manfield Hospital Finance Committee.



W. Harvey Reeves. Mayor 1912-13 and 1920-21

## **Thomas Henry Woolston CBE. DL. JP. (1855-1927)**

Mr Woolston was a qualified pharmacist and acquired a business in Bridge St, Northampton in 1892. He joined forces with Mr North and this chemist shop was later known as 'North and Roper'.

At the time he had been the pioneer of the ambulance movement in Wellingborough and rose from the ranks to be Superintendent. He also founded and became the Superintendent of the Kettering Corps. On coming to Northampton he threw himself heart and soul into ambulance work and was lieutenant to Mr Harvey Reeves. Before long he was promoted to Assistant Commissioner of No.3 Central and Eastern District.

At the start of WW1, Mr Woolston was asked by the War Office to mobilise the VAD's and he supervised 32 hospitals dealing with 22,558 stricken soldiers.

He suffered heart problems in later life and whilst convalescing in Wales, he and his wife were out taking a gentle stroll when he collapsed. An ambulance was called for but he died on his way to hospital. His family thought that with all his involvement with the ambulance movement, it was a fitting way to die.



*A young Mr Woolston*



## World War 1

As far back as 1910 the War Office had called upon members of St. John Ambulance Brigade to volunteer in case of war. There was a great response, from both males and females, and they were formed into Voluntary Aid detachments.

Mr Woolston was appointed County Director, Mr W. Harvey Reeves as Assistant Director and Mrs Harvey Reeves Assistant County Directress.



*W1 Red Cross/VAD photo showing Mr Woolston on the left, Harvey Reeves on the right, flanking Earl Spencer.*

By general consent, it was a marvel of organisation, foresight and tender and well trained care and was highly regarded by the military authorities. Northamptonshire Red Cross was held as a model to all other counties.



*A Model T Ford ambulance outside NGH 1918*

**Joseph Grose**



*Joseph George Grose (1861-1939)*

Joseph Grose owned a car show room in Marefair Northampton and workshops and garages around the corner in Pike Lane. Considerable business was done converting private cars to ambulances, many of which were donated from patriotic locals and businesses.

The firm also developed a two-wheeled ambulance trailer for use of the VAD and similar organisations. These could be towed behind any car and carried two stretchers, were lightly sprung and vibrationless.

Joseph's second son was an ambulance driver for the British Red Cross.

His youngest son, Lieutenant Albert George Grose, was killed in action in 1917, serving with the Royal Flying Corps.

## World War 2

Before the war started, locally administered ARP (Air Raid Precautions) casualty service groups were established utilising St John Ambulance and Red Cross volunteers.

The local St John Ambulance Brigade was badly in need of a new ambulance at this time and Mr Sears ( Boot and Shoe manufacturer) came to the rescue, commissioning Grose to build a body on a (probably second hand) Rolls Royce chassis.



Grose's garage in Marefair/Pike Lane were again converting several private cars to serve as ambulances. Two brand new Vauxhall chassis stored on joists in the Pike Lane works were retrieved and given ambulance bodies.



*A Grose bodied ambulance for St John Ambulance Brigade on 1939 25hp Vauxhall chassis, based at the Margaret Spencer Convalescent Home in Dallington.*



*Women of the ARP service team learn how to drive and repair a Corporation bus. Many of these buses were converted to use as ambulances.*

At the outbreak of WW2, the Ambulance Corps with the British Red Cross were put on full alert. Converted horse boxes were used as first aid posts which, after the war,

would be used at large public events. Five converted horse boxes and 513 static first aid posts existed throughout the county.



*The picture above also shows a doctor and nurse in attendance, all part of the County Emergency Committee.*



*An ARP War Ambulance taken near St James, Northampton.*

## **1948. The Formation of Northampton County Council Ambulance Service.**

The Ambulance Service as we know of it today has evolved since 1948 when the government of the day decided that a service should be provided free to all patients in need. It was made the responsibility of the County and Borough Council to provide this service. It was decided initially to provide this service through the St John Ambulance Brigade on an agency agreement and in addition to the mileage allowance, an annual retainer fee was paid.

In 1956 the County Council started to buy their own vehicles and employ their own staff to increase efficiency. In 1957 the County Borough Council left the St John Ambulance Brigade and transferred the service to the Fire Brigade in Upper Mounts, Northampton.



*The Ambulance Depot in King Street Northampton prior to the move.*



*....Now sharing the Mounts Fire Station*

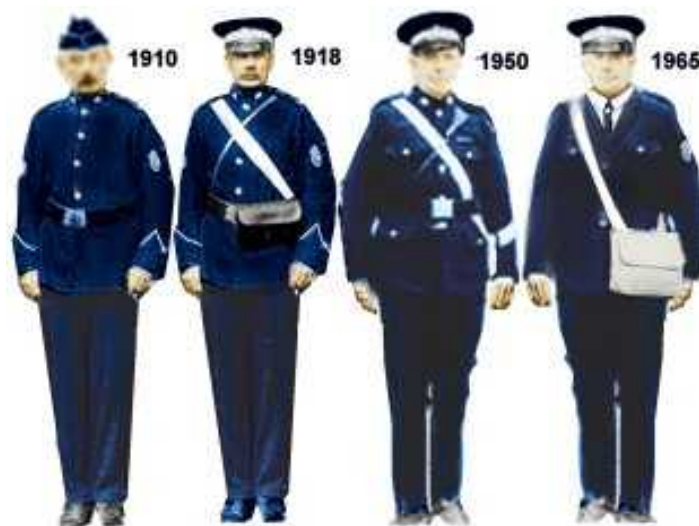
## **The 1960's. A Time of Great Change**

The **1964 Millar Report** recommended that the ambulance service should provide treatment as well as transporting people to hospital.

Training schools were set up and ambulance staff were trained in basic first-aid with a few extended skills in the use of oxygen and Entonox .

Early ambulances were kitted out to a very basic standard. It was recommended that each ambulance should have

- ) 2 padded stretchers, and various canvas stretchers with poles
- ) 6 blankets
- ) 1 carry chair
- ) wooden splints
- ) burns dressings
- ) a maternity pack
- ) Each ambulance person should carry a 'first-aid satchel'



The **M1**, Britain's first full-length motorway, opened in 1959. The early M1 had no speed limit, no central reservation or crash barriers and no lighting...and did not fulfil the hopes of being a safe road.



It was recognised early on that the motorway traffic could not hear or see approaching ambulances very well and it became necessary to adopt the louder German 'Martin's Horn' system, and a more noticeable blue rotating lamp, to ensure they got the motorist's attention.



*A Bull-nose Bedford circa 1966*

## **1970/80's Modernisation of Communications**

### Control Rooms

All requests for ambulance transport, both emergency and non-emergency, are routed to the Central Control room.





*Control room in County Hall, Guildhall Road, Northampton Circa 1960*

*Control room at Northampton House circa 1973*



*Control room at 39 Billing Road circa 1986*



In the 1990's, ambulance livery changed from the

**'Jam Sandwich'.....**



*Ford Transit, 1986*

...to the 'Battenberg'



The ambulance service of today has....

**Helicopters**



## Motorbikes



## Paramedic cars



## And bicycles....



..... to speed up response times.

## Miscellaneous

*Ambulance Headquarters Billing Road 1989*



*RTA Bedford Road 1973 Using a scoop stretcher.*



*Incident in 1963 Dr Halsted Smith (middle), with Dr K Oldham and Sister Labrum.*



*Premature baby arriving at the Barratt Nursing Home*

*L-R John Checkley, George Hardy and Sister Henbest*





East Midland Ambulances. Photos provided by John Coyles



*With thanks to T. MacFarlane and Alan Pinnell ( Rushden Research Group)*

*Alan Burman, Joseph Grose & the Motor car: A True Pioneer*