

Hong Kong Rotarian Chiefs of St. John Ambulance Organization

By Herbert K. Lau (劉敬恒) (Rotary China Historian)

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The Rotary Club of Hong Kong (香港扶輪社) has been the home of 8 volunteer-chiefs of the Hong Kong St. John Ambulance Organization (香港聖約翰救護機構) and 5 of them had also served as Rotary International officers. There were 7 past club presidents in the chronological order of their years: (1) Arthur W. Woo (胡惠德) 1940-1941; (2) Tseung Fat-Im (蔣法賢) 1947-1948; (3) Kenneth Fung Ping-Fan (馮秉芬) 1949-1950; (4) Abbas Din el Arculli (夏高理) 1950-1951; (5) Kwok Chan (郭贊) 1951-1952; (6) John Louis Marden (馬登) 1964-1965; and (7) George Choa (蔡永善) 1971-1972. In addition, Charter President 1964-1965 Norman Garner Rolph (盧樂夫) of Kowloon North Rotary Club (九龍北區扶輪社) has served as St. John Ambulance Brigade Commissioner from 1963 to 1966.

The Order of Saint John



The Order of Saint John, short for the “the Grand Priory in the British Realm of the Venerable Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem” (英國耶路撒冷聖約翰醫院德望崇隆榮譽團), is a royal order of chivalry constituted in 1888 by Royal Charter from Queen Victoria and dedicated to St. John the Baptist, and later by virtue of a Charter granted on 12 June 1926 by George V, King of the United Kingdom and the British Dominions, and Emperor of India.

The Order traces its origins back to the Knights Hospitaller in the Middle Ages, which was later known as the Order of Malta. A faction of them emerged in France in the 1820s and moved to Britain in the early 1830s, where, after operating under a succession of grand priors and different names, it became associated with the founding in 1882 of the St. John Ophthalmic Hospital near the old city of Jerusalem and the St. John Ambulance Brigade in 1887.

The Order is found throughout the Commonwealth of Nations, Hong Kong, the Republic of Ireland, and the United States of America, with the worldwide mission “to prevent and relieve sickness and injury, and to act to enhance the health and well-being of people anywhere in the world.” The Order’s approximately 25,000 members, known as confrères, are mostly of the Protestant faith, though those of other Christian denominations or other religions are accepted

into the Order. Except via appointment to certain government or ecclesiastical offices in some realms, membership is by invitation only and individuals may not petition for admission.

The Order of St. John is perhaps best known for the health organizations it founded and continues to run, including St. John Ambulance and St. John Eye Hospital Group. As with the Order, the memberships and work of these organizations are not constricted by denomination or religion. The Order is a constituent member of the Alliance of the Orders of Saint John of Jerusalem. Its headquarters are in London and it is a registered charity under English Laws.

St. John Ambulance Organization in Hong Kong

The St. John Ambulance Organization's structure comprises the Council of the Order of St. John in Hong Kong (香港聖約翰理事會) as the primary governing body, responsible for policy, fundraising, and resource management; The St. John Ambulance Association (聖約翰救傷會), which oversees training led by volunteer medical professionals; and The St. John Ambulance Brigade (聖約翰救傷隊), which handles operational services, administration, and youth programs such as the Cadet Command (聖約翰救傷隊見習隊) established in 1948 to engage teenagers in first aid and community service.

The St. John Ambulance Association was established in the British Crown Colony Hong Kong in 1884 as a branch of the international organization founded in London in 1877, during the British colonial period when the territory was rapidly urbanizing as a key trading port. This volunteer-based initiative aimed to promote first aid knowledge and emergency preparedness among the population, operating under the auspices of the Order of St. John and adhering to its motto 《Pro Utilitate Hominum》 (For the Service of Mankind) 《為人類服務》. The founding reflected broader British efforts to extend humanitarian services to colonial outposts, with early involvement from expatriates and local elites who recognized the need for organized medical response in a bustling, multi-ethnic society.

In its formative years, the Association focused on delivering basic first aid training to civilians, British expatriates, and members of the colonial police force, addressing the growing risks posed by urban density, industrial activities, and frequent maritime incidents. The organization also provided ad hoc ambulance services during emergencies, emphasizing aid without distinction of race, class, or creed, though operations were constrained by modest funding and reliance on volunteer contributions.

These early activities laid the groundwork for community resilience, particularly in responding to disasters such as typhoons that periodically devastated the region, despite challenges like scarce equipment and limited personnel in the pre-20th century era. These efforts led to the establishment of the St. John Ambulance Brigade in 1916 to formalize practical emergency operations.

The Ambulance Brigade of Hong Kong St. John Ambulance was formally established in 1916, separating operational ambulance services from the training-focused St. John Ambulance Association founded in 1884, to provide dedicated first aid and transport during public events and emergencies.

During World War II, the Brigade played a critical role by supplying volunteers as stretcher-bearers to the Royal Army Medical Corps ahead of the Japanese invasion in December 1941, with

56 officers and members losing their lives in the line of duty. Operations were disrupted under Japanese occupation, during which Brigade facilities were repurposed by military police. Post-War revival began immediately after liberation in 1945, with services resuming and the governing body---Council of the Order of St. John in Hong Kong (香港聖約翰理事會)--- established in 1949 to oversee policy and coordination. In the 1950s, the Brigade contributed significantly to relief efforts following the devastating Shek Kip Mei fire (石硤尾大火) on Christmas Day 1953, deploying personnel for weeks to support emergency aid, medical assistance, and community recovery for the over 50,000 affected residents.

The 1950s also marked infrastructural growth, including the opening of a new main headquarters on MacDonnell Road (麥當勞道) in 1958, which repurposed the original 1935 Tai Hang Road (大坑道) building as the Hong Kong Island Area Command Headquarters. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Brigade expanded its ambulance fleet and operational capacity amid Hong Kong's rapid urbanization and rising demand for emergency services, integrating more closely with the Colony's public health system through enhanced training programs and volunteer recruitment to handle increasing incidents.



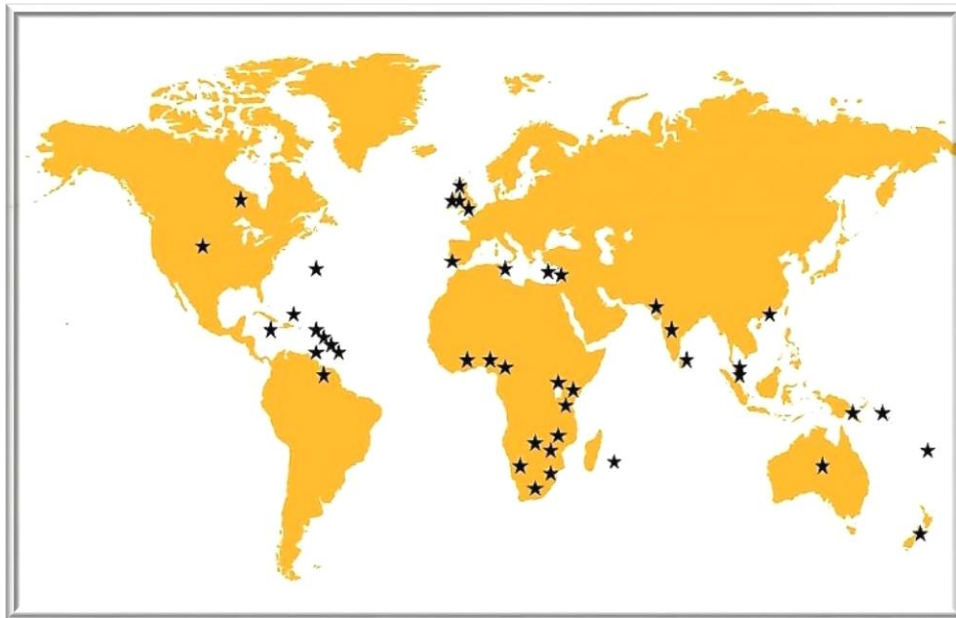
In the British Crown Colony Hong Kong, the St. John Ambulance Organization was a charitable organization with a long history stretching back over a century and has been serving the community since 1884 when the St. John Ambulance Association was established, followed by the Ambulance Brigade in 1916, the Council in 1949. Since its establishment 1884 until 30 June 1997, the Order of St. John in Hong Kong has been operating in accordance with the regulations given by St. John Ambulance Headquarters in London, United Kingdom, with Queen Victoria---King Edward VII---King George V---King George VI---Queen Elizabeth II as the Sovereign Head of the Order.

The St. John Ambulance Association (香港聖約翰救傷會), a foundation of the Order of St. John, officially incorporated on 25 January 1935 under the 《St. John Ambulance Ordinance Chapter 313》《聖約翰救傷法團條例》 in the Laws of Hong Kong, was responsible for training members of the public in the principle and the practice of First Aid, Home Nursing and other allied subjects, together with publication of textbooks to facilitate such instruction. It also organized examinations and issued certificates of proficiency to successful candidates.

St. John Ambulance Brigade (聖約翰救傷隊), the service arm of St. John, was responsible for the organization, training and equipment of men, women and young persons to undertake, on a voluntary basis, either as individuals or as organized groups, First Aid, Home Nursing and allied activities in public places, or elsewhere as occasions may require, for welfare to those in need. The service is free. Under the leadership of the Commissioner, the Brigade has a strength of several thousands of volunteers who were trained to be efficient and competent at all times to perform public duties in various aspects: Ambulance services; first aid service; dental care for the handicapped; cadet service, etc.

The Council of the Order of St. John in Hong Kong (香港聖約翰理事會) was established in 1949, and was officially incorporated on 29 June 1951 under the 《Order of St. John Ordinance Chapter 1047》 《聖約翰榮譽團條例》 in the Laws of Hong Kong. It was the governing body of the Organization, responsible for policy making, fund raising, allocation of resources, and providing support and co-ordination of the functions of the St. John Ambulance Association and Brigade.

In view of the change of sovereignty in 1997 as provided by the 《Sino-British Joint Declaration on the question of Hong Kong》 《中英聯合聲明》, the above-mentioned laws were repealed and was replaced by the 《Hong Kong St. John Ambulance Incorporation Ordinance Chapter 1164》 《香港聖約翰救護機構法團條例》, enacted on 27 June 1997, enabling autonomous operations while preserving its fraternal relationship with the UK-based Order.



The Order of St. John is represented through its 11 Priors (議院), 5 Commanderies (郡縣), and 27 Associations (地區) throughout the world. On 1 March 2015, Hong Kong St. John was promoted from Association to one of the 11 Priors. The Priors, Commanderies and St. John Associations generally carry out their charitable activities, which include first aid and first aid training, ambulance and rescue services, home-based care, maternal, newborn and child health care and hospitals and care homes for the elderly under the name of St. John or St. John Ambulance. Specialized care activities have been developed to meet specific needs in different countries. These include a kidney dialysis service in Malaysia and a therapy pets program in Canada. St. John is also a major organization for the training and development of young people.

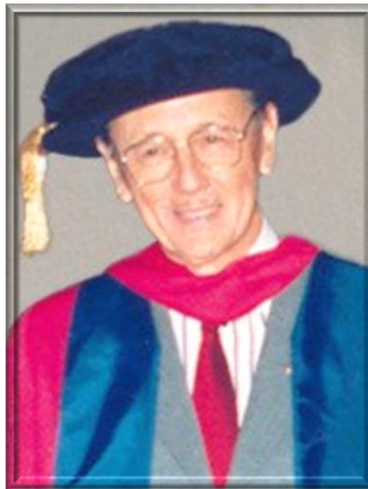
Abbas Din el Arculli (夏高理), OBE, KSJ



President 1950-1951, Rotary Club of Hong Kong
Commissioner 1947-1951, St. John Ambulance Brigade

Dr. George Choa Wing-Sien (蔡永善醫生)

GBS, CBE, KStJ, *Hon*LLD (*HKU*), FHKAM, FRACS, FACS, FRCS, DLO, MBBS (*HKU*), JP



President 1966-1967, Rotary Club of Hong Kong
Rotary International District 345 Governor 1979-1980
Director 1980-1987, St. John Ambulance Association
Chairman 1987-2002, Council of the Order of St. John in Hong Kong

Dr. The Honorable Sir Kenneth Fung Ping-Fan (馮秉芬爵士)

Kt, KStJ, *HonDSocSc (HKU)*, *HonLLD (CUHK)*, JP



President 1949-1950, Rotary Club of Hong Kong
Rotary International Administrative Advisor 1957-1958
Rotary International District 345 Governor 1961-1962
Commissioner 1953-1958, St. John Ambulance Brigade
Chairman 1971-1974, Council of the Order of St. John in Hong Kong

The Honourable KWOK Chan (郭贊議員), CBE, KStJ, JP



President 1951-1952, Rotary Club of Hong Kong
Director 1956-1958, St. John Ambulance Association

The Honourable John Louis Marden (馬登議員)

CBE, JP



President 1964-1965, Rotary Club of Hong Kong
Rotary International District 345 Governor 1967-1968
Chairman 1976-1987, Council of the Order of St. John in Hong Kong



17 July 1977 -- John L. Marden (center), Chairman of the Council of the Order of St. John in Hong Kong, officiating at the opening ceremony of an ambulance station, accompanying by Daniel Koo Shing-Cheung (left 1), President of the Mainland Area of the St. John Ambulance Brigade. Daniel Koo Shing-Cheung (古勝祥) was later President 1984-1985 of Hong Kong Island West Rotary Club (香港西區扶輪社).

Norman Garner Rolph (盧樂夫)

OStJ, QOM, CPM



Charter President 1964-1965, Rotary Club of Kowloon North, Hong Kong
Commissioner 1963-1966, St. John Ambulance Brigade

The Honourable Charles Edward Michael Terry (泰利議員)

CBE, CStJ, JP



Active Member, Rotary Club of Hong Kong
Chairman 1962-1971, Council of the Order of St. John in Hong Kong

Dr. Tseung Fat-Im (醫師蔣法賢博士)
OBE, KStJ, *HonLLD (HKU)*, MBBS (*HKU*), JP



President 1947-1948, Rotary Club of Hong Kong
Rotary International Administrative Advisor 1958-1959-1960
Commissioner 1958-1963, St. John Ambulance Brigade

Dr. Arthur W. Woo (胡惠德醫生)
OBE, CStJ, FRCS, MBBS (*London*), MRCS, LRCP, JP



President 1940-1941, Rotary Club of Hong Kong
Rotary International Administrative Advisor 1951-1952
Director 1952-1955, St. John Ambulance Association



1930s



Today

Hong Kong St. John Ambulance Brigade



St. John Ambulance depot at 2 Tai Hang Road, Causeway Bay, Hong Kong Island.



St. John Ambulance Brigade Kowloon & New Territories Command, 104 Waterloo Road, Kowloon.



*Hong Kong St. John Ambulance Association Haw Par Hospital (長洲醫院), Cheung Chow Island
A gift from Mr. Aw Boon-Haw (胡文虎) and Mr. Aw Boon-Par (胡文豹) in 1934.
Today, this hospital is operated directly under the Hong Kong Hospital Authority.*