

TRAIN TALK

QUEENSLAND RAILWAYS AMBULANCE CORPS CELEBRATES 120 YEARS

In 2012, it will be 120 years since the Queensland Railways Ambulance Corps was formed. A meeting was convened on 2 September 1892 to initiate first aid classes among railway employees in Queensland. This first meeting was held in the Engine Drivers, Fireman and Cleaners Association Hall in Brisbane.

The move was supported by the Queensland Railways Commissioner, provided that the training conformed to the rules of the St John Society and that the railway employees join that group. The Railway Medical Officer, Dr John Thomson, offered to conduct first aid classes free of charge.

The Order of St John, formed to provide medical aid during the Crusades, dates back to the seventh century. Its namesake, the St John Ambulance Association, was first founded in Australia in Melbourne in 1883. The Queensland branch of the St John Ambulance was founded in 1909 although first aid training using the St John Ambulance methods had begun in Queensland in May 1889.

It appears that the founding of the Queensland Rail Ambulance Corps was ahead of other Australian states. The Corps was formed in this state before the precursor to the Queensland Ambulance Service. The City Ambulance Transport Brigade, which later became the Queensland Ambulance Transport Brigade and then the Queensland Ambulance Service, had its first official meeting on 22 December 1892. This was almost four months after the Queensland Railways Ambulance Corps was formed.

The three organisations, Queensland Rail Ambulance Corps, Queensland Ambulance Service and St John Ambulance have worked together closely over the years. Queensland Rail Ambulance Corps members became honorary and sometimes permanent Ambulance Bearers and Officers of the Queensland Ambulance Service, serving in senior positions in St John Ambulance.



Rail Ambulance competition team, shield competition, RNA Exhibition, Brisbane 1945. Image courtesy of The Workshops Rail Museum / Queensland Rail.

Inset: A Thallon Medal awarded to Mr G B Wilkinson, Rockhampton in 1921.

This object is on display in the Rail in Queensland exhibition at The Workshops Rail Museum.

Team and individual first aid competitions were held for Queensland Railways Ambulance Corps members at Brisbane, Toowoomba, Rockhampton and Townsville commencing in 1914.

These competitions took place at the same time as the annual first aid examinations. The Railway Commissioner approved a Challenge Shield be made for presentation to the winning team. The polished fine cedar timber shield was made at Ipswich Railway Workshops with a Brisbane firm of silversmiths mounting the silver plate design.

Queensland Railways Commissioners have supported the Queensland Rail Ambulance Corps since its inception. James Forsayth Thallon was Railway Commissioner from 1900 until his death in 1911. Thallon was a much admired Commissioner by all railways staff in Queensland.

He initiated a fund in 1908 to establish a medal for outstanding results in the annual first aid examinations held amongst Queensland Railways employees. The fund he established was continued following his death and the Thallon Medal, as it was named, is a highly sought after recognition by those railway employees who participate in the Rail Ambulance Corps to this day.

The Medal was originally awarded to the employee who gained the highest mark at the first aid examinations held each year. Today, the medal is awarded following a special Thallon Medal Examination as distinct from the normal annual first aid examinations. In November, Peter Carden, a Principal Finance Consultant received this year's Thallon Medal.

David Mewes – Curator