

REPORT ON SEPTEMBER MEETING.

Speakers: St John Ambulance representatives.

Topic: Centenary of St John Ambulance in Wollongong.

One of the representatives, who has been with St John for over 40 years, described the setting up of the organisation in Wollongong, which followed some years after the North Illawarra Branch. Before going into details the origins of St John Ambulance were disclosed. In 1888 a group of men in London formed the St John Ambulance Association taking the name of the old Order formed way back at the time of the Crusades. The Association reached Australia not long after with the setting up of the Bulli St John Ambulance Company. Enter Dr John Kerr in 1893 who saw the necessity to teach miners first aid because of the severe injuries they easily sustained during their work. As a doctor was not close by Dr Kerr saw the benefit not only for the miners but also for the general public to apply first aid in cases of sudden illness or accidents. Twelve miners who attended one of Dr Kerr's earliest first aid classes in 1902 established the Wollongong Ambulance Corps, offering the community free transport for the sick and injured.

The 'transport' was a stretcher usually carried by 2 men or 4 when negotiating a steep incline. A collection in 1906 provided sufficient funds to purchase a wheeled litter. Wollongong Council gave some space at the Town Hall to store the litter and a stretcher. In 1909, with the generous help of the community, a horse drawn wagon to transport casualties was purchased. The very first Ambulance Station in Wollongong was built in 1912 with the energy and enterprise of St John volunteers. The station was owned by St John Ambulance and was situated on the corner of Market and Church Streets, presently the loading dock entrance to Crown Central. Continued on page 75

The new ambulance station included a lecture hall to teach first aid classes. All those who passed the final exam were duly inducted into the St John Ambulance or returned to their place of work as qualified first aid volunteers. Over the decades many people have passed through these first aid classes and return regularly for updates and refresher courses. The service runs first aid classes on a regular basis and teaches all state ambulance personnel as well as nursing staff for hospitals. Teaching is one of its major income sources.

St John Ambulance members have been and still are in attendance at sporting fixtures, open air festivals and where ever large groups of people congregate. St John Ambulance members are usually the first on the scene of an accident giving assistance until the ambulance arrives. The speakers mentioned some of the accidents they attended in the Wollongong area. One interesting point brought up was that when someone rings 000 in an emergency from a fixed line, usually from a home, factory, etc. the operator knows the location where the call is made from, but when a call is made from a mobile the location is not shown. In such a case it is advisable to dial 112 so that the operator immediately knows that the call is not from a fixed phone.

To coincide with the centenary of St John Ambulance Australia the Museum has put together an exhibition on early medical services in Illawarra which will run from September till mid December.