

**The formation and early days of the St Andrew's Ambulance Association /  
by Sir George Thos. Beatson, surgeon to the Western Infirmary, Glasgow.**

**Contributors**

Beatson, George Thomas, Sir.

**Publication/Creation**

[Place of publication not identified] : [publisher not identified], [1910]  
(Glasgow : Alex. MacDougall)

**Persistent URL**

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/gvs67nbz>

**wellcome  
collection**

Wellcome Collection  
183 Euston Road  
London NW1 2BE UK  
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722  
E [library@wellcomecollection.org](mailto:library@wellcomecollection.org)  
<https://wellcomecollection.org>

---

---

THE FORMATION AND EARLY DAYS OF THE ST.  
ANDREW'S AMBULANCE ASSOCIATION.

---

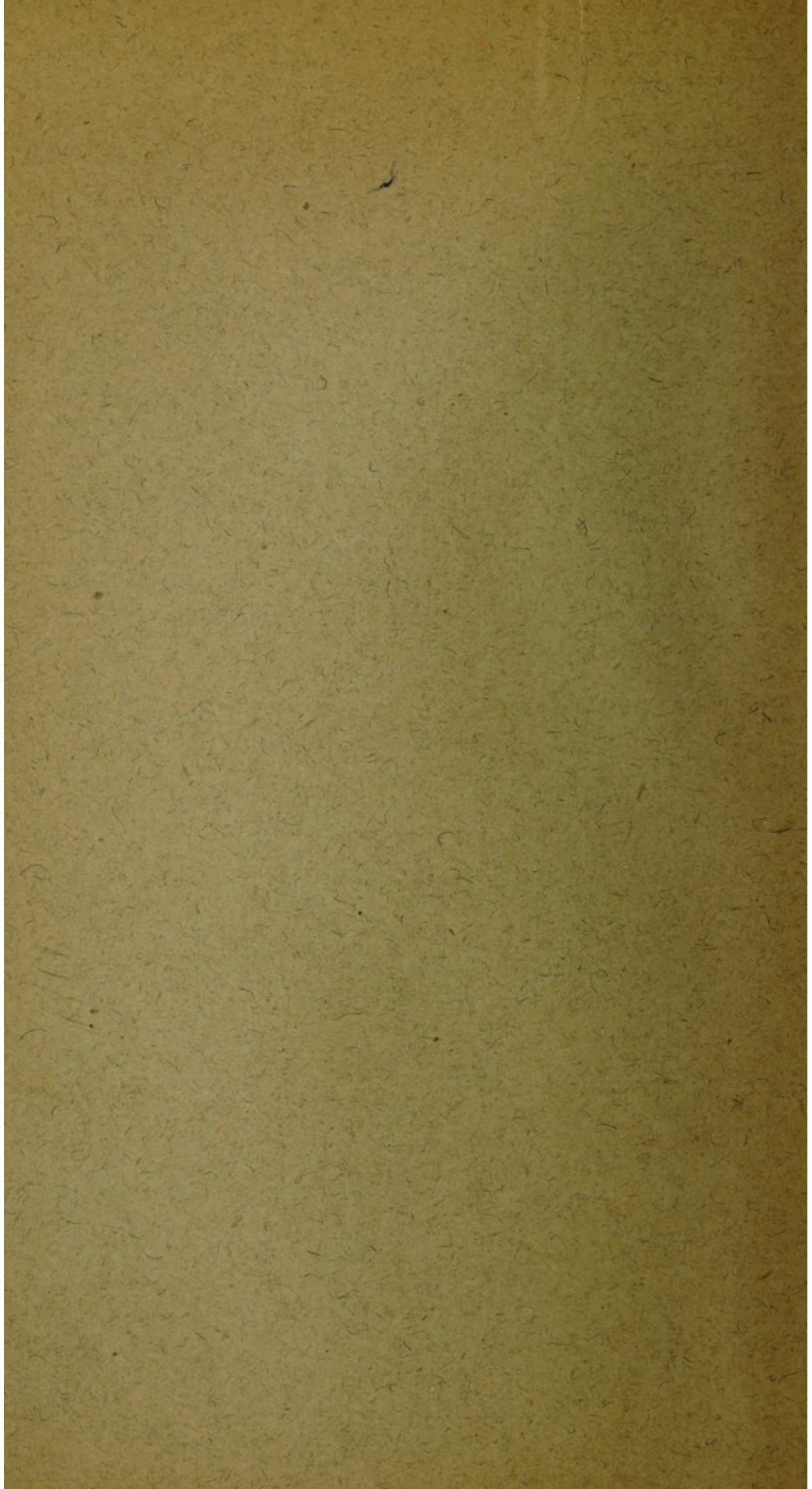
By SIR GEORGE THOS. BEATSON, K.C.B. M.D.,  
Surgeon to the Western Infirmary, Glasgow; and late Chairman of the  
Council of the Association.

---

*(Reprinted from the "Glasgow Medical Journal," January, 1910.)*

---

---



Reprinted from the "Glasgow Medical Journal," January, 1910.]

## THE FORMATION AND EARLY DAYS OF THE ST. ANDREW'S AMBULANCE ASSOCIATION.<sup>1</sup>

BY SIR GEORGE THOS. BEATSON, K.C.B. M.D.,

Surgeon to the Western Infirmary, Glasgow; and late Chairman of the Council of the Association.

At the time I came to Glasgow (August, 1878) ambulance work in civil life was practically non-existent, but in that year there was started in London "The St. John's Ambulance Association," its object being to furnish instruction in the preliminary treatment of the injured in peace and of the wounded in war. Very great success attended this new movement, and within a short time numerous local centres were formed in important towns and districts in all parts of the kingdom. In the winter of 1879-1880 the movement spread to Scotland, and it was then, or shortly afterwards, that St. John established its centres in Edinburgh, Dundee, Falkirk, and other places. Glasgow was never a centre, but detached classes were held in the city, and I was one of the first lecturers.

The classes were large and were attended well, and there was considerable enthusiasm. We usually met in one of the small St. Andrew's Halls, and I often recall those lecturing memories with their amusing incidents and picturesque surroundings, for on the days when the lecture was devoted to practical work, the ladies of the class would bring extempore triangular bandages of varied and brilliant hues, together with several of their offspring, for bandaging purposes. These latter they would bind and secure with a firmness and ingenuity that brought out forcible protestations from the victims of their new-born zeal. All the time I would be

<sup>1</sup> Read at a complimentary dinner given to Sir George T. Beatson on his retiral from the Chairmanship of the Council of the St. Andrew's Ambulance Association after ten years' service.

subject to a kind of electioneering heckling, and I would be catechised on all manner of subjects, being expected to say exactly at a moment's notice what should be done if the baby fell into the soup tureen, or there happened the rare but possible contingency of a broken heart.

Courses of instruction in home nursing were also added subsequently to those on first-aid, and each winter saw large and successful classes in both subjects carried on. From this you will understand that the ambulance movement in those days had really caught on in Scotland, and was being very generally taken up, not only in Glasgow, but in other parts of the country. Amongst the Volunteer regiments, too, the matter was receiving very active attention and support, and some very successful public displays were given. Almost the first one in Scotland was by two ambulance classes of the 1st Lanark Rifles, on their old drill-ground at Burnbank, in March, 1880, when there was a very large attendance of spectators to witness the novel and interesting proceedings. I remember one, too, given in July, 1880, by the 1st Lanark Artillery when in camp at Irvine. It was a very hot day, and we had some difficulty in getting individuals to act as wounded. I was in despair about obtaining a subject for a competing squad, when there emerged from the crowd a gentleman with a somewhat rubicund nose. He approached me, and inquired confidentially if the wounded got any stimulants. I said I thought that could be arranged for, and he immediately accepted the situation!

Such, then, was the position of matters in those earlier years. In Glasgow, and some other towns in Scotland, a good deal of interest was shown by the public in ambulance work and home nursing, but all instruction in these subjects was given under the ægis of the St. John's Ambulance Association, either by the agency of local centres or detached classes.

In 1882, however, a movement took place to establish an association in Glasgow for instruction in ambulance work generally, and for providing proper treatment and transport for the sick and injured. Glasgow was to be primarily its headquarters, but it was to labour all through the country. It was to be called "The St. Andrew's Ambulance Association." I first heard of it, I remember, when out at dinner one evening, when I happened to be seated next a lady, then very well known in Glasgow society, Mrs. Mactear. Her husband (Lieut.-Colonel Mactear, of the 5th L.R.V.), she told me, was taking an active interest in it, and that an association

was in process of being formed. The next step was the issue of a circular, a copy of which I happen to have retained, and it is of interest, as I think it was the first public announcement of the St. Andrew's Ambulance Association. It is signed by James Mactear, convener, and Daniel Brown, secretary. I have brought it with me to-night, as I thought it might be of interest in connection with the early history of our Association. Personally, I heard nothing of the Association until I received a notice, which I have also preserved, to attend an adjourned meeting of members of the Association in the Religious Institution Rooms, on 2nd June, 1882. I attended that meeting, which had evidently been called to establish the Association on a wider basis, and bring into it the medical men of Glasgow. It was at that meeting that Mr. James Gilchrist and I were elected members of the first executive. On the next day there appeared in the *Glasgow Herald*, of 3rd June, 1882, the following paragraph:—

“*St. Andrew's Ambulance Association.*—A meeting of the members of this Association was held yesterday afternoon in the Religious Institution Rooms—Mr. James Mactear presiding. A draft of the proposed constitution of the society was gone over clause by clause, and, after several alterations had been made, it was approved of. In connection with this part of the business Dr. Beatson, in the course of a few remarks, in which he expressed warm approval of the formation of an ambulance corps in Glasgow, suggested that the name of the association should be ‘The Glasgow Hospital and Accident Ambulance Service.’ The adoption of such an appellation as ‘St. Andrew's,’ was, he considered, calculated to mislead and to centralise the work in a way that would not be to the advantage of the society. Ambulance work was a catholic thing, and the same all the world over. A motion by Dr. Beatson in favour of an alteration of the name of the Society did not find a seconder. A general committee and an executive committee were afterwards appointed, and office-bearers were elected, the Marquis of Bute being chosen as the president.”

As that paragraph did not correctly represent the position I took up, I wrote a letter to the *Glasgow Herald*. That action on my part has now some interest for me, as it was my first letter to the newspapers! Doubtless you all remember the story of the gentleman who had his clothes stolen while bathing, and was left with only a *Times* newspaper. In this he had to wrap himself, and go into the neighbouring town to purchase new clothing. As the situation created was

a delicate one, his friends when referring to it always spoke of it as his "first appearance in print." My position, as regards my letter to the *Glasgow Herald*, may be similarly described, but I wish it to be understood that no such "First-Aid" associations belong to it. That letter is too long to read, but the gist of it was that we should form in Glasgow a centre of the St. John's Ambulance Association for instructional purposes, and have a separate hospital and accident ambulance service for removal of sick and injured, the wagons being stationed at the infirmaries.

If reference is made to the letter announcing my appointment to the executive, it will be noticed that I did not reply to it until 24th June. I think you will quite understand my delay in answering. I had lectured for three winters for the St. John's Ambulance Association, and I felt under some obligation to it. Further, I hesitated to accept office when I held such divergent views from the whole body of my colleagues, for I hold that if an individual cannot conscientiously in a matter accept the ruling of a majority, he is bound in honour to stand aside. I considered the matter for three weeks, when I decided that I would sink my own individual opinions and go in loyally with the majority; so, on 24th June, 1882, I wrote accepting office, and since that day I have been a member of our Association, and seen it through its career of progress and ultimate success.

Although it was June of 1882 before the draft constitution of the Association was gone over and passed and the first active executive was appointed, those who had primarily launched the Association earlier in the year were not idle, and they issued notices bringing its aims and work before the public. One of the earliest of these I have also preserved, and it states explicitly the proposed objects for which the Association was established, and also gives an indication of the amount of money that would be needed. This is stated to be about £2,000, it being expected that the future cost of the Association would be fully covered by the members' subscriptions and annual donations. A very hearty response was given to the appeal, and an ambulance wagon was ordered. Colonel Mactear, the Chairman, also designed a special ambulance box, which was adopted by the Association, as being in every way convenient, and holding all the necessary material for treating the wounded.

In April, 1882, the new ambulance wagon was delivered, and there were issued notices in reference to it. Copies of

these I have also preserved. In the *Glasgow Herald* for 20th April, 1882, a full description of this new wagon was given, and it seems to have been quite an up-to-date vehicle. I well remember its first appearance on the streets of Glasgow, and the notice it attracted, for it was undoubtedly driven furiously. The secretary did not believe in keeping one's light under a bushel, and he saw in this wagon great possibilities in the way of making the Association known. As we are all aware, there is a popular idea that the stock in trade of every commencing medical practitioner includes a small boy with an elastic conscience, whose chief duty it is, in addition to his domestic work, to call his master out of church, lecture-rooms, theatres, or any public gathering he may be attending. The secretary realised that the wagon could play the small boy's part, and at all times of the day it could be seen careering through our streets on imaginary journeys at a break-neck speed, the secretary himself not infrequently accompanying it, seated beside the driver or standing up on the footboard, gesticulating wildly, and blowing a shrill-sounding whistle. I hope Colonel Barnes will not think his office has been shorn of any of its importance seeing that we no longer demand these services from him. This sort of thing, however, may be overdone, even in the case of the medical boy, as a budding medico once found out. He had instructed the boy to come to the theatre and say he was wanted, impressing on him that he was to clearly indicate that it was a serious case he was summoning him to. He was not, however, quite prepared for the announcement made by the manager of the theatre from the footlights, that if Dr. So-and-So was present he was wanted immediately to a very urgent case, as the gentleman he had prescribed for in the morning had been taking fits ever since! In the same way with our wagon. Its performances on the public thoroughfares became a matter of notoriety and got on the public nerves, while the Fire Brigade felt that it was being quite snuffed out, the result being that a less demonstrative attitude was taken up.

The appointment of the Executive Committee in June proved a turning-point in the career of the Association. Upon that Executive were business men, and they insisted on the affairs of the Association being conducted methodically and on business lines. At the different meetings held it was quite apparent that this was not the case, and without going into details it was found necessary to make changes in the management, and on 13th November, 1882, at a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Association, Mr. W. M. Cunningham, of the



firm of Cunningham & Henderson, writers, was elected to fill the vacant office of secretary, and the offices of the Association were transferred from 29 Bath Street to 93 West Regent Street, notice to that effect being sent out to the public. At the same meeting Colonel Mactear retired from the chairmanship of the Executive, and Mr. Thomas Johnstone, surgeon, was chosen in his place. The president was the Marquis of Bute, and both Colonel Mactear and Mr. John Hamilton were created vice-presidents. Large additions were made to both the General and Executive Committees, and a number of influential patrons were secured. From the date of Mr. Cunningham's appointment the Association made steady strides, as reference to the issued Annual Reports will show. Interested in his work, and a most capable organiser, with a tactful and agreeable personality, Mr. Cunningham proved a most excellent secretary, and it was with a good deal of regret that many of us learnt that he had been chosen as Secretary for the Glasgow International Exhibition of 1887. His partner, Mr. Henderson, took up his duties and held office until 1902, when he was succeeded by our present able and valued secretary, Colonel Barnes. Upon the history of the Association since 1882, I need not dwell. Reference to the Annual Reports will show its steady and encouraging progress, but I hope I have not tired my hearers by my recital of the early days of the Association, and of the circumstances under which it had its birth. It is because I think I am the only one in Glasgow that is fully cognisant of the facts that I have ventured to touch upon them. Some day when the history of our Association comes to be written, this short communication may come in useful, and much as I cherish some of these old documents that I have above referred to, I am quite willing to hand them over to the Association whose birth and infancy they record.

