**Stratford sub Castle Guild April 2019 Report**

**An overview of the history of the Ambulance Service of Great Britain**

David Tovey drew upon his wealth of knowledge and experience with both the London Ambulance and Wiltshire Ambulance Service to deliver a very engaging presentation. Later in his career he had also enjoyed time on set as the script advisor to the BBC for the TV programme, ‘Casualty’ and in 2000 he became an independent consultant, advising Ambulance Services across Great Britain until his retirement in 2013.

The use of the word Ambulance is derived from the latin word ‘*ambulare’* which means to walk or move about; presumably as patients were wheeled or moved in the process of their care. People with infectious diseases needed to be conveyed to suitable facilities where they could be isolated from the general population.

Infectious diseases such as plague were common; 172 people were recorded as having died of plague in Salisbury in 1627. Isolation was achieved by moving people to public ‘Pest Houses’, more favourably known as ‘Houses of Recovery’. The Bugmore Workhouse became the dedicated Pest House for Salisbury in 1623, the site of which is now occupied by the Friary Housing Estate on Exeter Street.

Cholera caused the death of 190 Salisbury inhabitants in 1849 and David drew attention to the Salisbury Civic Society Blue Plaque on the Waterstones Bookshop site. This records that “Andrew B Middleton MRCS eradicated cholera in Salisbury by replacing open canals with drains and covered sewers as recommended by the Public Health Enquiry held in this building in1851”.

It is generally accepted that the birth of the Ambulance Service was in 1879 when horse-drawn ambulances were supplied by provincial authorities to convey patients with infectious diseases to isolation hospitals. Accidents and emergencies were attended by the Police as these were better established and more numerous and they were recorded as using hand-drawn litters in 1883 and wheeled litters to carry patients in 1889. By 1902, some Police forces had introduced horse-drawn ambulances.

In 1903, hospitals experimented with steam-driven ambulances but these were found to be ineffective and soon disbanded. By 1905 motorised ambulances were starting to appear and their use expanded during World War I when labour shortages meant women were recruited as Ambulance drivers. In 1915, the Grand Duke Michael of Russia donated a motorised ambulance to the London County Council (LCC) which was able to get authority to use it for accidents and emergencies. During World War II vehicles were commandeered and used as auxiliary ambulances operated by volunteers from all walks of life.

With the birth of the Welfare State, the 1946 NHS Act required Local Authorities to provide Ambulance Services which resulted in 1948 with the formation of 29 Ambulance Services in Great Britain. The 1974 NHS Act led to responsibility for the Ambulance Services being passed from Local Authorities to the NHS where it remains to this day. As a result of mergers, the original 29 Ambulance Services now comprise 12 Ambulance Services in Great Britain plus one in Northern Ireland.

David described the attempt of a 1967 national committee to produce an optimal ambulance design and that he had been involved in road-testing an early prototype which though well equipped, was too large for our streets. Eventually, the Bedford Motor Company achieved success over the rejected Sovam-Reeve prototype, adopting equipment and storage advantages of the former, but was smaller and more compatible with narrow streets. It also incorporated a stretcher with independent suspension but this made patients feel travel-sick and was abandoned.

The bodywork of current emergency service vehicles is finished in highly visible yellow with a contrasting ‘Battenburg’ pattern in green for the Ambulance Services, blue for Police, and Red for Fire &amp; Rescue. These high-visibility liveries diminish the risk of them being sources of road traffic accidents themselves. The modern ambulance is highly equipped and the portfolio of rapid response vehicles now includes cars, motor-cycles, helicopters and even bicycles.

In concluding his fascinating talk David commented, “from 1879 to the world of 2019, the Ambulance Service in Great Britain has come a long, long way”. A retiring collection was taken to be donated to the Wiltshire Air Ambulance Trust.

Our next meeting, on Wednesday 8 May, will start with a short AGM before hearing from Jim Platt on American Diners – not to be missed.

**Bruce Court**