



now & then

The story of the capital's ambulance service



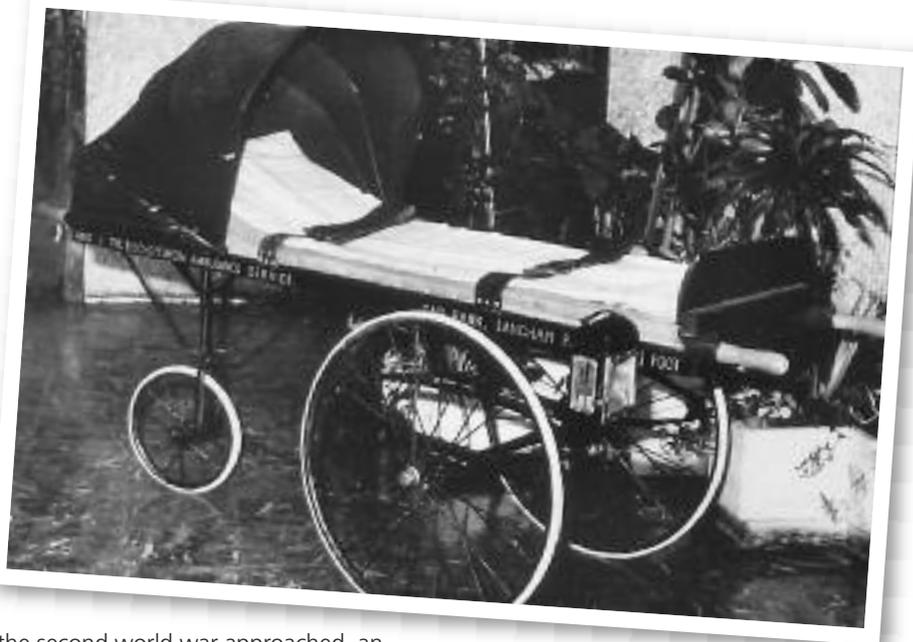
In July 2008 we commemorated the 60th anniversary of the National Health Service (NHS). Its central principle in 1948 was that healthcare would be provided free at the point of delivery, funded through taxation. That same principle still stands today.

Our Trust is an integral part of the NHS in London and we work closely with hospitals and other healthcare professionals, as well as with the other emergency services.

To mark 60 years of the NHS we are taking a look back at our own history, to discover how the London Ambulance Service began and evolved into what it is now – the busiest emergency ambulance service in the world.

Starting out

It may be hard to imagine today, but in the 1890s if you were injured, it was left to the police, firefighters and even taxi drivers to staff a fleet of wheeled stretchers, named 'litters', to take patients to the nearest hospital or doctor's surgery.



A full-time ambulance service was established shortly before the turn of the twentieth century. The Metropolitan Asylums Board (MAB) ran just six ambulance stations, each adjoining the Board's hospitals at Deptford, Fulham, Hampstead, Homerton, Stockwell and Woolwich. Almost the whole of London fell within a three-mile radius from one of the stations.

As the second world war approached, an auxiliary ambulance service was set up as part of the Government's civil defence service. Ennis Smith (pictured in article) became a well-known figure for she was the youngest ambulance driver at the age of just 16. After the war, she joined London Ambulance Service.

One of the first ever ambulance litters had to be taken out of service after it was damaged by a drunken member of the public

Early on, the ambulance fleet was horse-drawn. The first petrol-driven ambulance appeared in 1904 and could carry a single stretcher at up to 15 mph.

Major change came in 1930 when the Government announced proposals for the reorganisation of local government in England and Wales, including the transfer of responsibilities for the ambulance service to the county councils. So, on 1 April 1930, the Board's duties and responsibilities passed to the London County Council (LCC), which also took over responsibility for all the hospitals.

Clockwise from below: early staff members in uniform; a horse-drawn ambulance; a London County Council ambulance; an ambulance driver takes down patient details; auxiliary service staff member Ennis Smith



Anyone for teat the Ritz?

BEXLEYHEATH charity fund-raiser Mrs Ennis Smith is hoping to trace former colleagues who served with her in the London Auxiliary Service during World War II.

And if she manages to find enough of her wartime colleagues it will be afternoon tea at the Ritz to celebrate!

At the tender age of 16, Ennis became the youngest ambulance driver and attendant in the auxiliary ambulance service.

The service was based at Plumstead and was set up during the war years to form part of London's Civil Defence Services.

Ennis was then fondly known as Dainty "Dangle" Moor and many of her colleagues attended her wedding at St Stephen's Church, Welling in December 1944.

After the war ended Ennis went on to join the London Ambulance Service itself and stayed with them until 1947.

To help jog some memories Ennis has let us publish this photo of her (right) as an 18-year-old member of the auxiliary ambulance service.

If you would like to get back in touch with Ennis and your former colleagues please contact her by either writing to her at 36 Mallards Hill, Bexley or telephone Crayford 525227.



The NHS is born

Post-war reorganisation led to the National Health Service Act of 1948. As part of this, for the first time, there was a requirement for ambulances to be available for all those who needed them.

By now, a more recognisable Service was beginning to take shape. In the 1950s the LCC's Ambulance Service moved to Headquarters at Waterloo Road, but it was already clear this wouldn't be large enough. By the early 1960s it was agreed a new HQ would be built further up Waterloo Road. Londam, the Service's newsletter, described it as 'the promised land'.

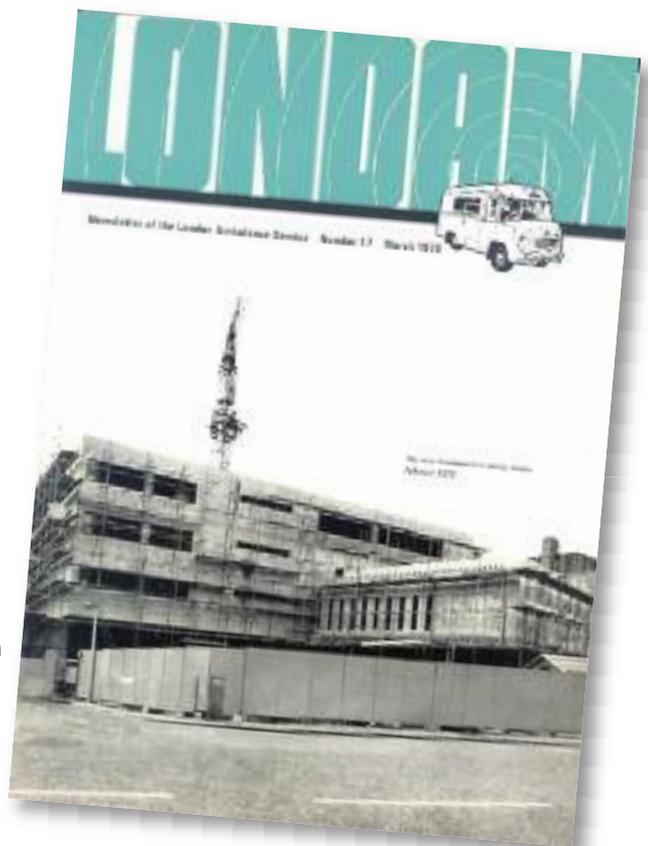
A London-wide service was created in 1965 when one ambulance service was formed in London from parts of nine existing services. It comprised nearly 1,000 vehicles and 2,500 staff.

In 1974, when the National Health Service was reorganised, the London Ambulance Service was transferred from the control of local government to the South West Thames Regional Health Authority.

In 1989 staff took part in a nationwide strike for better pay and working conditions. Every station was involved with many giving out the phone number of the stations so that the public could call the crews directly in case of emergency. After six months of not being paid and living on donations from the public, a pay deal was reached and the crews went back to work.

In 1992 the failure of a new computer system led to worldwide public and media interest. The crash of the computer aided dispatch system led to many delays in dispatching ambulances.

Service managers continued to report to South West Thames until 1 April 1996, when the Service became an NHS Trust. London Ambulance Service as we know it today officially came into being.



The Service magazine reported on the new headquarters in Waterloo

Clockwise from right: A London-wide service takes shape in the 1960s; one of the first motorcycle response units; staff take part in classroom-based training; a community fun day raises awareness of the work of our staff; control unit and radio communications of the time; the Queen visits the Service headquarters; a staff member at work



A 21st century service

The Trust has many years experience of dealing with terrorist incidents in the capital and responding to major incidents including the King's Cross Underground fire of 1987, the Harrow and Wealdstone train crash of 1952, and the various IRA bombings of the 1970s-1990s.

Most recently, our staff were called upon to put into practice all their planning and training during the London bombings on 7 July 2005. More than 250 members of staff were involved with the emergency response to the bombings of three Underground trains at King's Cross, Aldgate East and Edgware Road and a bus at Tavistock Square. They treated more than 400 patients, some of whom had sustained horrific injuries, giving them the emergency care and support they needed and clearing all scenes within three hours.

Just like the capital itself, the Trust continues to grow and develop. The London Ambulance Service of today, and the skills and capabilities of our staff, bear little resemblance to the Service of even 20 years ago. There are now more than 4,000 staff based at 70 ambulance stations and support offices across London.

We continue to see a rise in demand for our service. November and December 2007 were the busiest months on record and we responded to 163,000 incidents – an increase of five per cent on the same period in 2006.

Historically, we have designed our service around a small number of our patients – those with life-threatening conditions. We are now turning our attention to our largest

group of patients whose conditions, whilst not life-threatening, still need medical care; many of these need different treatment to that offered by an A&E department. This could be treatment at home, referrals to a GP or social services, or treatment elsewhere at minor injuries units or walk-in centres.

The way we respond to calls is changing too. Our staff now attend to patients in cars, and on motorbikes and bicycles, as well as in ambulances. This enables us to reach patients quicker in busy built-up areas. We are increasing public access to defibrillators and are providing training in how to use this equipment, so that people in the community can provide life-saving treatment while ambulance staff make their way to a call.

As we move forward we are now preparing for our biggest challenge yet. The 2012 Games will require us to continue to provide day-to-day emergency services to Londoners whilst also providing medical care to Games-related patients.

Clockwise from below: An artist's impression of the Olympic stadium; one of our current motorcycle responders; staff unite following the bombings of 7 July 2005; an emergency medical dispatcher takes 999 calls assisted by a sophisticated software system; our patient transport service



London Ambulance Service chronology

- 1880s First full-time ambulance service run by the Metropolitan Asylums Board (MAB). At this time all of the ambulance fleet were horse-drawn
- 1900s Introduction of petrol-driven ambulance
- 1912 Last horse drawn ambulance used
- 1930 London County Council takes responsibility for the ambulances in London
- 1948 National Health Service is established
- 1952 8 Oct - Triple train crash at Harrow and Wealdstone kills 112 and injures 170 people
- 1965 London Ambulance Service is established from nine existing services
- 1972 Visit from the Queen (again in 1975)
- 1973 HQ is opened at Waterloo
- 1974 London Ambulance Service transfers to control of the South West Thames Regional Health Authority
- 1984 Crown badge awarded by the Queen
- 1989 London Ambulance Service museum opens at Ilford
- 1989 £2 million Fulham Ambulance Station opens. At the time it was the largest ambulance station in the UK
- 1989 7 July - Princess Diana visits
- 1991 First paramedic motorcycles used
- 1991 Permanent emergency planning unit established.
- 1992 Major failure of software in control room causes delays in attending to calls
- 1996 1 April - London Ambulance Service becomes an NHS Trust
- 1998 May - Queen Mother visits
- 2000 First bicycle ambulances used
- 2004 Community defibrillation officer appointed to co-ordinate installation of defibrillators in public places and training of members of the public in how to use them
- 2005 Dedicated urgent operations centre opened
- 2005 7 July - more than 250 staff involved in the emergency response to the London bombings
- 2007 Ambulance community responder volunteers introduced
- 2007 Nov/Dec are busiest months on record for the Service
- 2008 London Ambulance Service rated best ambulance service in the country in the Healthcare Commission annual health check

1880s
Metropolitan Asylums Board (MAB) ambulance service vehicle



1948
NHS Established



1952
Train crash at Harrow and Wealdstone



1970s
HQ under construction



1984
Crown badge awarded by the Queen

1989
Princess Diana visits the Service



1996
The Service becomes an NHS trust

London Ambulance Service **NHS**
NHS Trust



2005
Victims of the London bombings remembered

2007
Ambulance community responders introduced

London Ambulance Service

museum

Want to know more about the capital's ambulance service?
Why not visit our museum.

We have a collection of vintage radio equipment, memorabilia from both World Wars and a photographic and document archive. Our museum also houses a collection of more than 20 vintage vehicles, from a horse-drawn ambulance of 1870 to one of the first paramedic motorcycles used in 1991.



Visits are by appointment only

For more information, please contact
our Museum Curator:

Telephone 020 8557 1767

or write to the
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Aldborough Road South,
Ilford, IG3 8HQ

www.londonambulance.nhs.uk