



# Celebrating Our History

The National Ambulance LGBT Network celebrates  
LGBT History Month 2019



# National Ambulance LGBT Network





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A collection of images showing ambulance uniforms and insignia from the past. The main photographs show members of the National Ambulance LGBT Network committee at the National Emergency Services Museum in February 2019.

Compiled by Alistair Gunn

With grateful thanks to Holly Roberts and Matt Wakefield from the National Emergency Services Museum for their assistance designing this resource and Jonathan Gunn for the graphic work.

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The rainbow and trans star of life logos are registered trade marks of the National Ambulance LGBT Network

- | The lives of many lesbian and gay people in history are **invisible.**
- | Just over fifty years ago homosexual acts were **illegal.**
- | The lives of trans people in the past have been **misunderstood.**
- | Today bisexual people face increased levels of **discrimination.**
- | Young LGBT people are still more at risk of **suicide and harm.**
- | Older LGBT people experience higher levels of **social isolation.**

The words highlighted above are not nice ones but it doesn't have to be this way. You can make a difference to patients and staff by informing yourself about the communities we serve and how to improve their experience.

**#InformedCare** is great care.

## Introduction

If you search for ambulance service history you soon find that information is pretty thin on the ground. If you try and find information about LGBT people in the ambulance service you will find virtually nothing. After all, just over 50 years ago sexual acts between two men were illegal and so it is highly unlikely people's stories were ever recorded.

With some help from the staff at the National Emergency Services Museum in Sheffield we decided to pay homage to LGBT people in the past by collecting a series of photographs of current National Ambulance LGBT Network members in historical uniforms. We have also collected some interesting ambulance service facts to go with each photograph.

The National Ambulance LGBT Network is now actively working with the museum to collect people's stories and make sure they are preserved for future generations. The rainbow star of life is a small piece of history in itself and something that is helping to change the culture of ambulance services across the United Kingdom.

We hope you enjoy this resource and if you have some information or a story to share we would be delighted to hear from you.



*Alistair and Kirsten  
on behalf of the National Ambulance  
LGBT Network Committee*

## Follow Us

Find out more about the National Ambulance LGBT Network and view the range of history resources, visit the website at:

**[www.ambulanceLGBT.org](http://www.ambulanceLGBT.org)**

You can also find us on Twitter at:

**@NatAmbLGBTUK**



To find out more about the National Emergency Services Museum and how you can contribute to resources in future, visit the website at:

**[www.emergencymuseum.org.uk](http://www.emergencymuseum.org.uk)**

You can also find the museum on Twitter at:

**@NESMuseum**

Staff currently working for one of the blue light services can gain free entry into the museum on production of a valid identification card.



Photograph 1

## Photograph 1: Metal Hats and Trench Coats

In the war years ambulances came into their own. In the First World War ambulances were used to repatriate soldiers injured on the fronts. Between 1914 and 1918 many women took on traditional male roles for the first time and this included driving and conducting trams and buses as well as crewing the ambulances.

In the Second World War there was an urgent need to move people injured or killed in bombing raids and many additional vehicles were adapted for the purpose. Most of London's single-decker bus fleet were converted into ambulances, although the actual need for these turned out to be less than originally feared.

It is fascinating to consider what constituted as safety clothing in these times. A full length overcoat kept people warm but would hardly stand up to the rough conditions left after bombing raids. The metal helmet looks feeble today when compared to the gear issued to our Hazardous Area Response Teams; at least it offered some protection from flying debris.

If you look carefully you can see the small 'ambulance' badges sewn on to the shoulders of the coat. To make themselves more conspicuous many ambulance personnel fashioned white armbands with the red cross on it to show their role.

In a recent BBC programme the daughter of a former volunteer ambulance driver from the war period provided an insight into the harrowing work. Poignantly she described how her mother was reported and reprimanded for crying after delivering the bodies of four babies to a makeshift mortuary. Hopefully the advances in wellbeing of our ambulance staff matches the progress in safety clothing.



Women operating ambulances in World War One.



The photograph shows Dom Gaffney who is part of the National Ambulance LGBT Network committee. Dom is a Trainee Paramedic at East of England Ambulance Service. In this photograph Dom is wearing a 1930s coat and metal helmet.



Photograph 2

## Photograph 2: Ring the Bell

Today all emergency vehicles are equipped with blue flashing emergency lights and audible warning equipment. In fact in modern times you would be forgiven for mistaking an ambulance with a disco as more and more flashing lights are added. It is a requirement that every side of an ambulance has flashing lights displayed.

Ambulance service vehicles have traditionally been white in the past. To help increase the visibility of vehicles and distinguish ambulance vehicles from the other emergency services, vehicles throughout Europe now use a standardised 'Euro Ambulance Yellow' base colour. The current NHS livery in England and Wales is yellow bodywork with yellow and green high visibility markings on the side. In Scotland ambulances are still white.

Most ambulances use 'wail and yelp' sirens that were first seen on United Kingdom emergency vehicles in the 1980s. From the late 1960s emergency vehicles used two-tones sirens, often mimicked for the 'nee-nah' sound they made. Interestingly these were not the first emergency audible warnings used on emergency vehicles.

The bell shown in the photograph would have been 'clanged' by the crew sat in the front passenger seat and there would be no missing this as it rushed through the streets. It is hard to pinpoint an actual date that bells started to be fitted to ambulances but by the 1940s mechanical bells were either fitted to the front or roof of many vehicles.

If you want to hear what this sounded like take a look at the opening scenes of the 1967 film Accident starring Dirk Bogarde. The film opens with a London ambulance rushing to hospital.



Wartime ambulances made use of all resources available. No blue lights and sirens here.



Our photograph shows Alistair Gunn who is the Chair of the National Ambulance LGBT Network. Alistair is a Planning and Development Manager at Yorkshire Ambulance Service. The coat shown in this photograph is from the 1980s.



Photograph 3

### Photograph 3: The Role of Women

Before we address LGBT rights, you don't need to look far back in history to see that other aspects of equality were challenged by the ambulance service. A 1970s book entitled *The Complete Handbook for Ambulance Personnel* provides just one short chapter about the role of women. It states:

*'Female ambulance attendants are employed by some Authorities, but obviously the duties they can perform normally have to be of a limited nature. Their true value comes in the daily transportation of the more mobile out-patients, using the sitting-car type of vehicle and in dealing with old people and children.'*

*'I would not in any way decry the worth of female ambulance attendants, because they do most certainly ease the out-patient work-load, allowing double (male) crews to be available for emergency work.'*

Although this represented acceptable views at the time, the assertion that women should *'be placed on the more sedentary aspects of the service'*, is not permissible today.

One woman, Nellie Singleton, battled with her male colleagues to become the first emergency ambulance woman in Yorkshire. When Nellie first joined the ambulance service, she transported children to special schools. However, she had a fight on her hands when she wanted to do emergency work in Bradford during the 1970s, a time when the service was dominated by men. Her male colleagues even took industrial action when Nellie and her colleague threatened to join the night shift. Fortunately she won her battle and in 1976 commenced emergency shift work. Nellie retired in 1987.



Nellie Singleton (left) with her colleague Jean Hardaker at Bradford Ambulance Station.



Our photograph shows Jules Lockett who is the Mental Health Lead for the National Ambulance LGBT Network. Jules is a Practice Learning Manager at London Ambulance Service. The coat and helmet shown in the photograph are from the 1990s.



Photograph 4

## Photograph 4: Metropolitan Ambulance Services

The National Health Service Act 1946 gave county councils in England and Wales a statutory responsibility to provide an emergency ambulance service, although they could contract a voluntary service if required. There was a total of 142 ambulance services across England and Wales, most serving an individual town or city.

The 142 existing ambulance services in England and Wales were transferred from local authority to central government control in 1973 after the National Health Service Reorganisation Act was implemented. This reduced the number of services to 53 and the term 'metropolitan ambulance services' was first adopted to describe the larger organisations which largely mirrored county boundaries.

Over subsequent years ambulance services have reduced in number and got larger. After the 1990 National Health Service and Community Care Act 31 ambulance trusts were formed. In 2006 ambulance services were merged into the thirteen ambulance trusts we recognise today.

### Other Areas

The origins of the Scottish Ambulance Service begin in 1948 when the National Health Service commissioned the British Red Cross and St Andrew's Ambulance Association to provide services. The British Red Cross withdrew in 1967 and in 1974 the remaining service was reorganised and named Scottish Ambulance Service.

In Northern Ireland the service was the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Hospitals Authority before 1974. It was then transferred to the four health and social services boards.



South Yorkshire Metropolitan Ambulance Service vehicle from the early 1970s.



Our photograph shows Mike Taylor who is a committee member of the National Ambulance LGBT Network. Mike is employed by the Royal Air Force and does bank shifts as a Paramedic at South Western Ambulance Service. The coat with shoulder patches stating Metropolitan Ambulance Service is from the 1980s.



Photograph 5

## Photograph 5: The Millar Badge

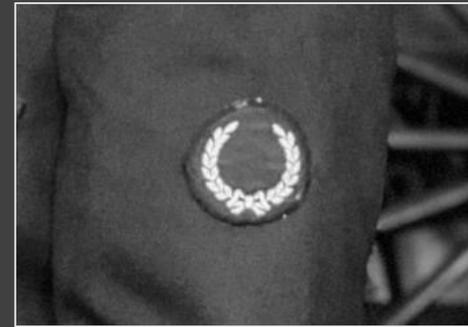
Although ambulances were linked to the National Health Services from its creation in 1948, it wasn't until 1977 that any standards were put in place to define training requirements. The Millar Report written in 1964, drew together the findings of three working groups; one recommendation stated that patients should be treated en-route to hospital.

As a result of the Millar Report, training schools were set up and ambulance staff trained. These trained staff were referred to as 'Millar trained' and wore a badge of laurel leaves. Training was basic first aid with a few extended skills in the use of oxygen and entonox. At this time staff were referred to as ambulance men or driver attendants.

Early ambulances were kitted out to very basic standards compared to today. The Millar Report recommended that:

*'Each ambulance should have two padded stretchers, six blankets, various canvas stretchers including poles, one carry chair, wooden splints, burns dressings, a maternity pack, light rescue equipment and each ambulance person should carry a first aid satchel.'*

It wasn't until the late 1980s that the term 'paramedic' came into being and staff received new levels of training designed to stabilise patients at the scene of incidents. Skills such as defibrillation, cannulation and intubation were first introduced and new equipment was included on vehicles. It is amazing to think that equipment we take for granted now, like defibrillators, were first introduced in the late 1980s. Early response cars were set up enabling an area's paramedic and equipment to be deployed where needed.



The Millar Badge was first introduced in the late 1970s.



The photograph shows Kirsten Willis who is the Deputy Chair of the National Ambulance LGBT Network. Kirsten is a Head of Operations at South Central Ambulance Service. The coat, complete with Millar Badge, is from the 1970s.



Photograph 6

## Photograph 6: The Crown Badge

If you thought the red cross was the symbol used to identify emergency pre-hospital care, you would be mistaken. This is actually the symbol of the International Red Cross and will normally only be found on ambulances utilised by this organisation. The exception to this is military ambulances which must clearly display a red cross on each surface. The Geneva Convention makes it unlawful to fire upon, or attack, a vehicle displaying the red cross symbol.

Civilian ambulance services only became a requirement after the creation of the National Health Service and at this point there was no definitive symbol for the ambulance service. Councils decided what vehicles should look like and they often displayed the town or city's coat of arms.

The Crown Badge was created and presented to each ambulance service in 1985 at a service of dedication held at York Minster. This was given as a mark of royal approval and there is still great pride in this today. Many ambulance services still display this prominently on the sides of vehicles and on uniforms.

The Crown Badge used to denote the Ambulance Service is made up from various components:

- The crown which signifies royal approval.
- The wheel which represents transportation and mobility.
- The serpent climbing the staff is the symbol of healing.
- The Maltese cross is the badge of the Knights of St John; an Order dedicated to the sick and injured.
- The laurel wreath which is an Award of Honour dating back to Roman times.



The ambulance service Crown Badge was created in 1985.



Our photograph shows Jonny Holmes who is a committee member of the National Ambulance LGBT Network. Jonny is a Paramedic at East Midlands Ambulance Service. The fluorescent jacket and helmet would have been worn by Derbyshire Ambulance Service staff around the year 2000.



Photograph 7

## Photograph 7: The Star of Life Symbol

The Star of Life is the symbol used internationally to represent prehospital emergency care. This symbol was created in 1973 in America after a complaint was lodged by the American Red Cross, which wanted to reserve the right to use the red cross symbol on its own vehicles and uniforms. The complaint was upheld so a new symbol was created by Leo Schwartz, a Chief Ambulance Officer.

The six branches of the star represent the six main tasks associated with the role of emergency medical staff. These are:

- As the first people on scene, medics have to observe the dangers and ensure safety for their colleagues and their patients.
- Calling for more help if this is required.
- Providing immediate care to the patients to the extent of their capabilities.
- Collecting observations ready to hand on to other medical staff.
- Providing specialised care during transportation.
- Moving the patient to a place of definitive care.

The snake and staff symbol, denoting the Rod of Asclepius, has its origins in Greek Mythology. Asclepius, who was the son of Apollo, learned the art of healing and was worshipped by people for his ability to cure ailments with prescribed remedies. Representations of Asclepius usually show him standing and holding a staff with a serpent coiled around it. The staff and serpent symbol is now the main emblem representing medicine.

The blue Star of Life sign was registered in America in 1977 and is now recognised internationally as the symbol for emergency care vehicles and personnel.



For the anniversary of the NHS a special version of the NHS70 graphic was created to be used at Pride events around the country.



In 2011 staff at Yorkshire Ambulance Service created the rainbow star of life which is a fusion of the star of life and rainbow flag used to represent LGBT communities and services. In 2016 it was adopted as the logo for the National Ambulance LGBT Network.



Our photograph shows an ambulance at York Pride in 2018, featuring the rainbow and trans star of life logos and the NHS Pride 70 graphic.



For more information about the National Ambulance LGBT Network visit:

[www.ambulanceLGBT.org](http://www.ambulanceLGBT.org)



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