

UK's leading first aid charity to celebrate 900-year history at Durham Cathedral

CIVIC leaders will join hundreds of representatives from St John Ambulance (SJA) at Durham Cathedral this weekend to celebrate the charity's 900-year history.

The Visitation of the Order of St John will commemorate the 11th century origins of St John Ambulance, which is dedicated to the teaching and practice of medical first aid.

The last event of its kind took place in Durham twenty-four years ago, and as the Visitation covers all the counties of England, it will be another quarter of a century before it comes to the region again.

Alastair Cartwright of St John Ambulance Durham County explained: "It is the most important date in our calendar. As an association we were formally established in 1877, but our roots can be traced back to the 11th century Hospital of St John in Jerusalem.

"The event is also a real opportunity to recognise the work of the association throughout the world, and to say a big thank you to our members across the region, the majority of whom are volunteer workers."

The event will start with a formal dinner on Friday night at Durham Castle and will culminate in a ceremonial procession at Durham Cathedral on Saturday led by the Prior of the Order in England Sir Brian Jenkins GBE. Trumpeters from the King's Division Normandy Band will mark his arrival followed by Bishop of Durham the Rt Revd Nicholas Thomas Wright, and the Lord Lieutenant of Durham Sir Paul Nicholson. Civic leaders and other voluntary groups as well as members and friends of the Order will join SJA members in uniform from Durham, North Yorkshire and Northumbria. As well as providing first aid cover at events, the association is the region's leading health and safety and first aid training provider offering courses in everything from essential food hygiene to emergency aid in schools and first aid at work.

The association's Durham headquarters is based in Meadowfield on the outskirts of Durham City and features several training rooms while a new centre opened in Darlington last April.