

# SEEING BEYOND THE CONFLICT IN GAZA – A SPECIAL EDITION OF THE JERUSALEM SCENE

PLUS Hear from Waleed  
S.S. Khatib- Head of  
Nursing in Jerusalem

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CEO Update Snapshot of 2023  
Renewed strategic direction in the West Bank



St John of Jerusalem  
Eye Hospital Group

# JERUSALEM SCENE

Winter 2023  
Treatment for all regardless of  
ethnicity, religion, or ability to pay



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**YOUR SUPPORT  
KEEPS OUR VITAL  
SIGHT-SAVING  
SERVICES RUNNING**

# CEO UPDATE: UPDATE ON THE CRISIS



**DR AHMAD MA'ALI GStJ, PhD, MPH, BSN**  
**CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER**

**W**elcome to our winter edition of the Jerusalem Scene. Thank you as always for your continued support. Since my last update in August, regrettably, we have seen increasing violence in the Holy Land.

The war in Gaza, which started on the 7th of October, has been playing out on the world stage for the past six weeks. At the outset of hostilities, all clinical activities at our hospital in the north of the Gaza Strip stopped as we were ordered to evacuate the building. The hospital has since sustained heavy collateral damage due to fighting in the vicinity, the extent of which we have not been able to fully assess. Regrettably, some of our staff have been injured and others have lost family members.

Our response to the unfolding humanitarian crisis in Gaza can only happen when it is safe for staff to return. We very much hope that once this war is over, we will be able to restore our hospital and resume our much-needed work in the Gaza Strip. If this is not possible, we will conduct outreach work, initially in the Strip's southern regions where it is reported there are over 1.2 million displaced people.

The security status and the movement of both people and goods in the West Bank and Jerusalem have been heavily impacted by recent events, with surgical patients from across the region denied entry to Jerusalem for treatment.

Recently, we have been able to overcome such restrictions and coordinate access which has meant a return of clinical activities in Jerusalem to 65% of normal levels. Outreach services are back to 100% capacity.

The Hebron hospital has sustained its level of clinical activity and doubled its surgical interventions. In Kufor Aqab, our clinic continues to play a pivotal role in the provision of services, especially for those patients unable to reach Jerusalem.

Despite all the complexities, up to October this year, SJEHG treated 114,000 patients, 33,000 of which are children. As for major and sight saving eye operations, we performed close to 5,500 surgeries, of which 730 were performed on children.

Further, we recently launched a Child Vision Screening initiative with three teams of nurses, optometrists and orthoptists having so far screened some 2,000 children in refugee camps in Bethlehem, Ramallah, and Nablus. Those found to have visual abnormalities have been referred to our other facilities for further diagnosis and/or treatment.

Due to escalating violence and increasingly complex travel restrictions in the West Bank, especially its northern districts, our Board of Trustees has taken a strategic decision to establish a day-care facility in Nablus, where we have purchased 1000 sq m of space for the purpose. It is envisaged that the hospital will be functional by July/August 2024. Read more on page 7.

In the face of such profound challenges, we remain committed to enhancing patients' accessibility to quality eye care. We are aware that the next few months may prove critical, but we are determined to continue providing our expert eye care services, as we have done for the last 140 years, to all regardless of their race, religion, social class, or ability to pay.

**In the Strip's southern regions it is reported there are over**

**1.2M**  
**displaced people**

**Up to October this year, SJEHG treated**

**114,000**  
**patients**

**New initiative has so far screened some**

**2,000**  
**children in refugee camps**



# ST JOHN OF JERUSALEM EYE HOSPITAL GROUP: A BRIEF HISTORY

*The Hospital's recently erected 'Out-Patient Department' in early 1897. The crowd outside waiting for the doors to open appears to contain both Muslim and Jewish people as well as men, women and children. (Image from the Hospital's Annual Report for 1896.)*

**Dr Matthew Glozier** - Official historian of the St John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital Group, Deputy Librarian of the Order of St John, Librarian of the Priory in Australia of the Order of St John



*A little patient receiving his eyedrops (early-1970s).*

In November 1882, the Scottish ophthalmologist Dr J. C. Waddell arrived in Jerusalem to open an eye hospital for the Order of St John. He got to work straight away, beginning surgery for the benefit of local people just weeks later. The clinic was an immediate success as word spread quickly that everybody was welcome regardless of race or religion, and treatment was free. Further, while the Order was a Christian institution, it did not seek to try and impose its religion on local people. Its first patients were a mixture of Jews and Arab Muslims and Christians.

In the first six months, 6,138 consultations were achieved, and 1,952 patients treated. The doctor conducted up to 140 consultations each day, assisted by an interpreter, but with no clerical or nursing support. The need for such treatment lay in the extraordinarily high rate of infectious eye diseases in Palestine, with trachoma and acute conjunctivitis predominating. The hot, dry, dusty conditions, and lack of water for washing faces and hands produced annual epidemics of these contagious diseases during the long summers, resulting in high rates of blindness.



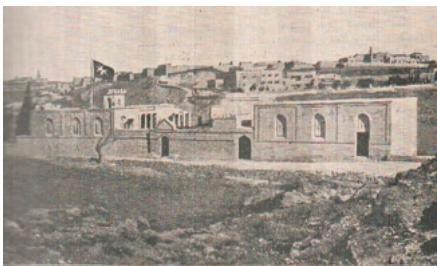
*Sir Edmund Lechmere, 3rd Baronet Lachmere*

The eye hospital was the brainchild of Sir Edmund Lechmere (1826–1894), the Secretary-General of the Order of St John. Sir Lechmere was a wealthy philanthropist and humanitarian whose frequent

travels to the eastern Mediterranean made him aware of the eye health needs of Palestinians. He decided that the Order should open an eye hospital in Jerusalem, a place that had great symbolic significance for the Order as it was where the original Order of St John, the medieval Knights Hospitaller, had established their hospital during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Sir Edmund gained permission from Sultan Abdul Hamid II in early 1882, thanks to the support of the Prince of Wales (future King Edward VII). The British Ophthalmic Hospital at Jerusalem, as it was first called, found a permanent home in a two-story Turkish house on the Bethlehem Road, a kilometer south of the Jaffa Gate. The hospital occupied this site from 1883 until 1948, during which time significant additions and expansions of the building were made to increase the scope of the hospital's services and patient capacity.

The hospital closed in 1914 at the outbreak of the First World War given that the Ottoman Empire was allied to Germany. The Order of St John hoped that the hospital's closure would be

temporary, but it did not reopen until 1919. By that time Ottoman military forces had commandeered the hospital buildings, using it to store ammunition while looting and stripping it of all its furniture, fittings, and medical equipment. In the end retreating Turkish troops attempted to demolish the building with explosives, but the hospital buildings were subsequently restored. The eye hospital then ran continuously until 1948, when it was overrun by Israeli troops during the first Arab-Israeli War, at which point the Order lost the building forever.



*The Hospital on the Bethlehem Road, 1897. The outpatient waiting room erected in 1896 is the building at the right with two arched windows and an arched doorway. (Image from the Hospital's Annual Report for 1897.)*

It then relocated into the Old City of Jerusalem, occupying Watson and Strathearn Houses, properties owned by the Order of St John in the Muristan precinct near the Jaffa Gate, where the Blessed Gerard had operated the original Hospice of the ancient Order of St John from about 1070. Though, the houses were cramped and unfit for the treatment of high numbers of patients. This created

the need for a new, purpose-built campus in Sheikh Jarrah in the Palestinian sector of Jerusalem, a mile north of the Damascus Gate. In 1960 the Order opened this new eye hospital, which still operates today as the flagship for the humanitarian eye care offered in Palestine by the Order of St John.

The main eye hospital is now part of network of eye care hospitals and clinics covering the extent of the occupied Palestinian territories, to which in 1980, a mobile outreach program was added. This reality explains the modern name "St John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital Group," adopted in 2015 to reflect the complexity and wide-ranging scope of the eye care offered today in the Holy Land by the Order of St John.

From its inception through to the present day, the St John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital Group's history has reflected the peoples it serves, surviving four governmental changes as Jerusalem and its environs were successively controlled by the Ottomans, the British, the Jordanians and the Israelis. Devastated twice by war, and indeed closed for four years between 1914 and 1918, the upheavals which beset the hospital forced it to move through ten successive premises and a series of mobile outreach services.

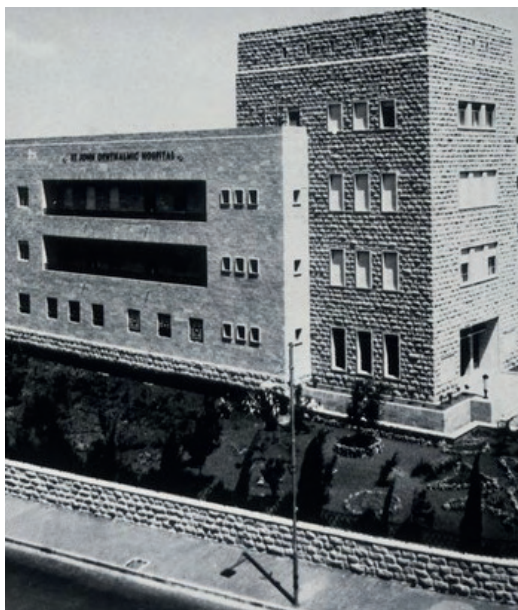
And, more recently, having triumphed over the insurmountable difficulties of the Covid-19 pandemic where to the major

credit of its staff, there were no cases of cross infection in the hospitals, and outreach work was expanded through the launch of the Kufor Aqab clinic. And, again in 2021 when the crisis in Gaza displaced thousands of people after losing their homes, businesses, and livelihoods. This is a story of hope and survival in which the heroes are generations of nursing and medical specialists, administrators, fundraisers, council members and ancillary staff.

To continue reading, turn to page 14 to purchase a copy of Matthew Glozier's *A Beacon of Hope – 140 years of eye care in the Holy Land, 1882 -2002*.



*St John Eye Hospital Group Mobile Outreach vehicle in operation in the West Bank (mid-1990s).*



*The maturing gardens of the St John of Jerusalem Ophthalmic Hospital (1970).*



*Patients crammed into a waiting room of the Hospital in Watson-Strathearn House during the 1950s. Matron Wagstaff is visible at the top right. (Image from archival collection of the Museum of the Order of St John, St John's Gate, London.)*



# NAVIGATING THE HEALTHCARE CHALLENGES: A CONVERSATION WITH WALEED S.S. KHATEEB, HEAD OF NURSING

*Children in UNRWA schools being screened as part of the new paediatric screening service*

In a recent interview, we spoke with Waleed S.S., the Head of Nursing at the Eye Hospital in Jerusalem. With a master's degree in teaching methods and over three decades of experience, Waleed has played a pivotal role in the hospital's journey, from quality management to his current position as the head of nursing, managing a team of 70 nurses across East Jerusalem, Gaza, and the West Bank.

Waleed shed light on the hospital's pursuit of its Joint Commission International (JCI) accreditation, emphasising the pivotal role of the quality manager and nurses. Further in 2023 the hospital won the world's most prestigious award in the field of vision, the António Champalimaud Vision Award. Despite the hospital's long-established importance and high quality of care, it still faced significant challenges, especially with restrictions hindering the movement of patients from the West Bank to Jerusalem. He went on to give an example, of how at one of the main hospitals in Jerusalem, patients were barred from going for urgent cancer treatments or dialysis. Only recently (mid-November) were some patients issued permits to go to Jerusalem to receive their much-needed treatments.

Discussing the broader healthcare

landscape, Waleed outlined the complexities faced in Palestine, where patients often require special permits to travel between regions. Recent political developments and conflicts have added new layers of complication, impacting the hospital's ability to provide essential services.

Waleed provided insights into the challenges faced during the recent, temporary ceasefire emphasising the uncertainty surrounding patient access to Jerusalem and the unpredictability of the situation. The hospital's operations have been deeply affected, leading to a reduction in the number of patients able to travel to Jerusalem for essential eye-care services.

Waleed expressed concern for his nursing team, especially those facing difficulties commuting due to increased travel times. He noted what was no more than a 30-minute drive to the hospital, now takes nearly an hour and a half with all the restrictions. Despite these challenges, the working hours remain unchanged, and the dedication of the nursing staff unwavering.

Highlighting the hospital's resilience, Waleed shared details about a new paediatric screening programme.

With movement restrictions in place, nurses visit UNRWA schools to conduct screenings, addressing refractive errors in young children. The programme has already screened over 2000 students, with plans to expand its reach.

Waleed discussed the hospital's vision for the future, revealing plans to open a new clinic in Nablus, aiming to provide surgical and outreach services. This expansion aligns with the hospital's commitment to ensuring eye care accessibility, especially during times of crisis.

As the hospital faces challenges in patient access and reduced surgical capacity, Waleed remains hopeful for the future. The dedication of the nursing team and the hospital's vision for expansion signal a commitment to overcoming obstacles and continuing to provide vital eye care services.

In the face of adversity, St John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital, under the leadership of professionals like Waleed, continues to navigate challenges, adapt its strategies, and envision a future where quality eye care remains accessible to all, irrespective of geopolitical challenges.



# RENEWED STRATEGIC DIRECTION IN THE WEST BANK: THE NABLUS EYE HOSPITAL

Photo of the Building where the Hospital will be located in Nablus City

**O**ur clinic in the town of Anabta in the Tulkarm province was established in 2007 to provide eye care services to the people residing in the north of the West Bank. As the only provider of ophthalmic care to refugees in six refugee camps in the northern districts, we provide care to 15,000 patients in the region every year.

Those patients who require further treatment are referred on to our flagship hospital in Jerusalem, which tends to treat the most complex cases from across the region. While as many as 80 patients are referred each month, 30% of those fail to reach the hospital. Increasingly severe movement restrictions have made it more difficult for patients, especially the elderly, to travel to Jerusalem. These hurdles have been compounded by the hostilities in Gaza, and those travelling in the West Bank, a geographically separate region, must negotiate numerous military checkpoints to reach the East Jerusalem Hospital.

On account of these complexities, SJEHG's Board of



Views of the surrounding town and countryside

Trustees and senior leadership took the decision to establish a comprehensive medical and surgical day-care eye hospital in the city of Nablus, capital of the Nablus Governorate and situated about 50 miles north of Jerusalem.

Considered the economic and cultural capital of Palestine, Nablus is home to one of the largest Palestinian universities, Al Najah University. Of its 150,000 inhabitants about a quarter are refugees residing in surrounding villages and refugee camps.

Nablus' location makes it readily accessible from six governates; Tubas, Jenin, Tulkaram, Qalqilya, Salfit and Jericho. Consequently, the new hospital's total reach will exceed **1.2 million people.**

The selected premises (950 sq meters) is on the 5th floor of a 12-story building, which houses other medical centers such as Cardiology and Nephrology units.

With building work due to commence in January 2024, it is envisaged that Nablus will welcome its first patients by July 2024.

To further expand our ophthalmic reach in this region we are also planning a dedicated, Nablus-based outreach mobile service. Our well-trained clinical staff will travel daily from the Nablus Hospital to the refugee camps and other isolated communities in the northern districts, helping to overcome both physical and financial barriers to treatment.





SJEHG's main hospital at Jerusalem

**W**ith the humanitarian crisis in Gaza deteriorating by the day, SJEHG has launched an emergency campaign to provide critical assistance to those most impacted by the war.

As a charity that has worked in the region for over 140 years, we know only too well how much our expert eye care services will be needed once hostilities have ceased.

In Gaza, over 700,000 people are reported to have been displaced to the south of the enclave, and these include our staff on the ground who themselves face danger on a daily basis.

For now, our hospital in Gaza remains closed but we are already drawing up plans to mobilise resources as soon as it is safe to do so.

This is likely to involve:

- Delivering mobile outreach services including trauma screening, and providing treatment for those with urgent eye conditions
- Setting up temporary safe, sterilised spaces to deliver these services
- Cooperating with local hospitals with surgical facilities
- Undertaking necessary repairs at our own hospital
- Employing more nurses and surgeons to cope with increased demand

However, as Dr Ma'ali explains in his opening feature, the problems are not limited to Gaza. Although existing services in East Jerusalem and the West Bank continue to operate, they do

so in a restricted environment where freedom of movement has been severely curtailed.

Once again, therefore, SJEHG continues to demonstrate its adaptability during times of profound challenge.

Our hospital at Kufor Aqab was opened during the Covid-19 pandemic to serve the densely populated and underserved community of East Jerusalem's northernmost Palestinian neighbourhood. Under the current restrictions, this clinic plays an increasingly central role in providing essential services to those unable to reach our main hospital in East Jerusalem.

We have also launched a Paediatric Vision Screening programme in Jerusalem and the West Bank. The programme, which brings vital services to the people, aims to detect early signs of visual impairment, and has so far screened around 2,000 children. Without such screening – and treatment – a child may be disadvantaged with impaired vision which cannot be corrected later in life (so-called 'amblyopia').

Despite the severe challenges described above, our Jerusalem hospital has returned to 65% capacity. With dedication and professionalism, our staff have continued to provide services despite encountering movement restrictions and other hurdles on a daily basis.

As the **ONLY** referral provider of care to UNRWA and the main referral provider to the Palestinian Ministry for Health, **our response is critical.**



## Emergency Appeal

So, in the West Bank, we will:

- Set up a new day-care centre in Nablus, enhancing access to specialist eye-care services
- Establish a dedicated mobile Nablus-based outreach service to carry out primary eye-care services
- Invest in new staff and more specialist equipment at Kufor Aqab
- Expand the services available at the Hebron clinic, currently serving a population of 690,000 people in the West Bank

**But we can't do it alone.** All of this can only be achieved with your continued support for our shared vision to provide ophthalmic care in this region. With your commitment we shall work tirelessly to deliver on this emergency action.

We shall also continue to tackle the root causes of visual impairment and blindness in the region. In recent years we have taken the lead in ophthalmic education, research, and innovation and aim to establish an innovation and research department in East Jerusalem. Our genetic research has been published and continues to flourish, and in 2024 we are running the second of our St John Masterclass series – the single largest international meeting of its kind - in London, this time on Artificial Intelligence and Eye.

We know first-hand the transformative power of saving a person's sight. In enabling access to education and other opportunities, patients are given a higher quality of life and protected from social isolation and dependency, which brings wider prosperity and stability to the region.

**When we say, saving sight,  
changing lives, we mean it.**

**DONATE TO  
OUR EMERGENCY  
APPEAL TODAY.**

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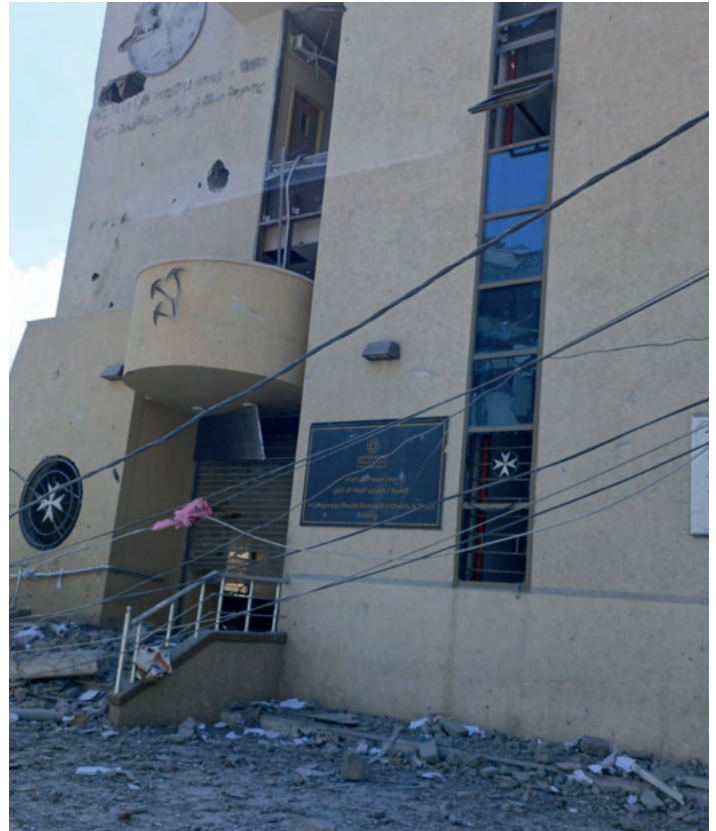


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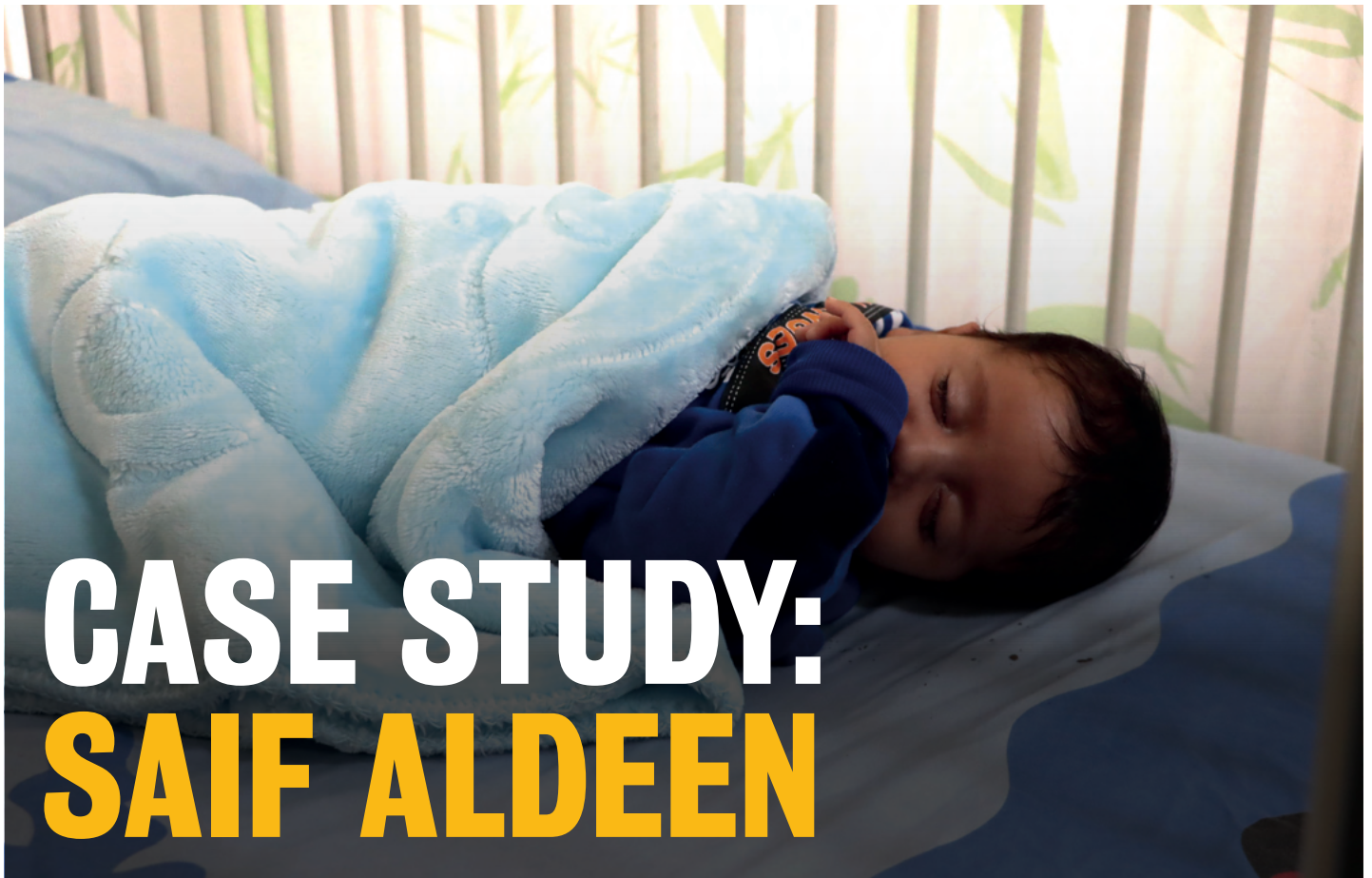
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*The interior showing collateral damage at SJEHG's Gaza Hospital*



*The exterior showing collateral damage at SJEHG's Gaza Hospital*



# CASE STUDY: SAIF ALDEEN

Saif Aldeen Abu Khamies - born on 17th August 2023 - on a bed in SJEHG main hospital in Jerusalem. ©SJEHG/Ammoon Alsheikh

*“Awareness can save sight; this is why I tell my baby Saif Aldeen’s story.”*

**F**or Amal Abu Khamis, the outbreak of hostilities in Gaza cast a shadow over the prospects of her three-month-old son’s sight-saving treatment.

“When Saif was born everyone marveled at his blue eyes. We were overjoyed to have a healthy, beautiful baby,” says Amal, from Jenin, a city in the north of the West Bank.

Things took an unexpected turn when Saif was just 20 days old, and he contracted the flu. His parents took him to a pediatrician, who upon examination, detected abnormalities in his eyes and urged the family to seek urgent specialized eye care.

In response, the family reached out to SJEHG staff at the group’s Anabta clinic in the northern West Bank, about 25 miles to the south of Jenin.

During an emergency clinic, doctors diagnosed Saif with high intraocular pressure in the eye, a condition called Congenital Glaucoma. Left untreated, the condition could cause irreversible blindness.

“We were devastated, and even blamed ourselves for not knowing what was wrong. But the doctors at SJEHG explained that Glaucoma is known as the silent thief of sight”, Amal explained.

The clinic in Anabta referred Saif to the group’s main hospital in Jerusalem, where staff facilitated the family’s entry permits to receive treatment.

Saif underwent an examination under anesthesia, followed by his initial surgery to relieve the pressure in his left eye on October 3rd, 2023.

Despite a promising start to his treatment, the outbreak of hostilities on October 7th posed a formidable obstacle in disrupting travel in the West

Bank and preventing Saif and his family from reaching Jerusalem for further treatment.

Recognising the urgency, SJEHG took proactive measures, and in collaboration with the civil administration, facilitated the family’s travel to Jerusalem to ensure the continuation of Saif’s treatment.

Speaking on the eve of Saif’s second surgery, Amal specifically thanked SJEHG staff for their efforts to ensure the continuation of her son’s treatment.

“We are so grateful to the pediatrician who first diagnosed Saif, and to SJEHG for saving his sight. Without the hospital’s assistance, we’re not sure we could have afforded the treatment.

“I believe greater awareness of eye problems is needed, and that’s why I’m sharing my son’s story with you.”

This success story is made possible by funding from the Qatari Government through Qatar Fund for Development enabling SJEHG to treat Saif and many others facing similar challenges.

# OBITUARIES

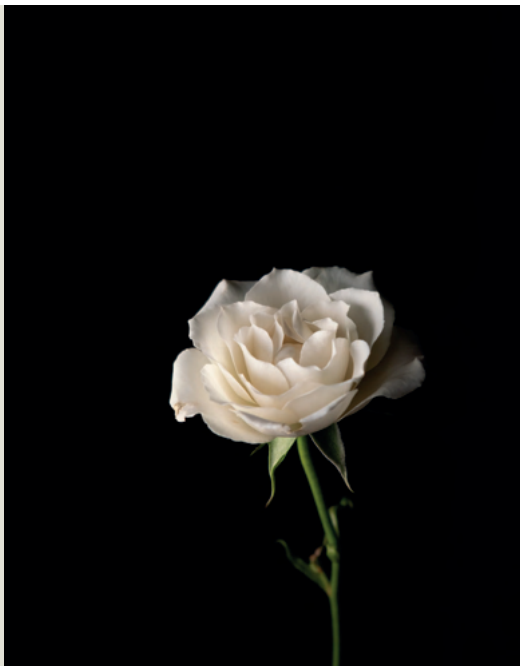


**Ursula, the Dowager Lady Westbury,  
CBE GCStJ JP**

**1924 – 2023**

Ursula passed away on the 25th of November. She was a remarkable woman, and the essence of her life was St John. God Bless Her.

*Full obituary to follow in the next edition of the  
Jerusalem Scene*



**Gilbert Hinckley, OBE KStJ**

**Aged 86 years.**

Gilbert Clive Hinckley, OBE, passed peacefully at the age of 86 on October 27th. A loving father to Hannah and cherished Grandpa to George, Edward, and Violet, Gilbert leaves behind a legacy of profound service and dedication.

Gilbert served as the Chair of Council for Derbyshire from 1981 to 1996. He showed his commitment to the Order as a Member of Chapter General representing Derbyshire from 1996 to 1999, and as Priory Hospitaller from 1999 to 2008. Additionally, he served as a Priory Trustee from 2002 to 2008. Gilbert's devotion to the Order was evident in his progression from Officer in 1981 to Commander in 1985, ultimately becoming a Knight of Justice in 2007.

Beyond his exceptional contributions to the Order, Gilbert demonstrated his compassion and philanthropy through his remarkable fundraising efforts. Over six years, he raised more than £2.5 million for the Eye Hospital, showcasing his unwavering commitment to enhancing eye care services.



**St John's Hospital Jerusalem  
Prayer for Gaza and Israel**

Dear God,

We cry out to You on behalf of the people seriously affected by the conflict in Gaza and Israel. Our hearts break at the devastation and suffering that we see, and we know it breaks Yours too.

We ask that You stretch out Your mighty hand to bring an end to this war. We cry out for people who have been injured or traumatized, who have lost loved ones or their homes. Please provide everything they need and be their comfort, their hope, their healer, and their safe refuge.

We ask that you protect our hospitals and our doctors, nurses and administrative staff and grant wisdom to all in positions of leadership especially Sir Andrew Cash our Chair and Dr Ahmad Maali our Chief Executive Officer and Mr David Verity our Priory Hospitalier.

We pray for:

**Peace:** For an end to the violence. May world leaders with influence in the region make wise decisions that lead to lasting peace. Fill the hearts and minds of everyone suffering as a result of this conflict with Your peace.

**Safety:** Protect all civilians, especially the most vulnerable – children, older people, and people with disabilities especially those who are blind or partially sighted. Shield humanitarian workers providing assistance and medical supplies. Ensure safe access to food, water, sanitary items, medical supplies, fuel, and electricity.

**Strength:** Grant wisdom and strength to all this who lead the peoples as they guide their communities through fear and uncertainty. May all people and especially faith leaders across the region unite, connect, and show kindness.

**Hope:** Save those who are terrified, mourning, and suffering in Israel and Gaza from despair. Let hope prevail even amidst trauma and violence. Remind everyone that with You, all things are possible.

**Healing:** Heal the physical and emotional wounds of those traumatized or injured. Provide hospitals and medical workers with the resources and equipment they need to treat the sick and injured.

In Jesus' name, we pray.

Amen.



# MERCHANDISE

Shop now at [shop.stjohnseyehospital.org](http://shop.stjohnseyehospital.org) or use the order form on page 14.



**St John Eye Hospital Silk Tie**  
£25



**'A Beacon of Hope: 140 years of eye care in the Holy Land, 1882-2022' Paperback**  
£36



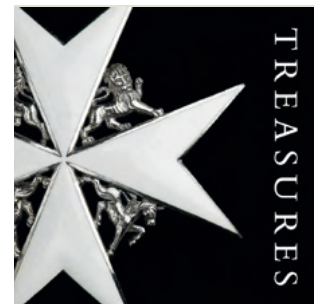
**SJEHG Pen**  
£5



**Swift Tree Cards (pack of 5, blank inside)**  
£3.50



**Cream Tote Bag**  
£3.50



**'Treasures' by Tom Foakes**  
£50



**Unisex SJEH Tshirt (White) S/M/L available**  
£15



**Unisex SJEH Tshirt (Gold) S/M/L available**  
£15



**Lapel Pin badge**  
£5

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SJEHG Silk Tie	£25		
'A Beacon of Hope: 140 years of eye care in the Holy Land: 1882 -2022' Paperback	£36		
SJEHG Pen	£5		
Swift Tree Cards (pack of 5, blank inside)	£5		
Cream Tote Bag	£3.50		
'Treasures' by Tom Foakes	£50		
Unisex SJEH Tshirt (White) S/M/L available	£15		
Unisex SJEH Tshirt (Gold) S/M/L available	£15		
Lapel Pin Badge	£5		
		Total	

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Please tick and complete your details if you do not want to receive future issues of Jerusalem Scene Thank You very much for your support

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St John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital Group

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I enclose my cheque/postal order payable to St John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital Group  
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**Signed**  **Date**

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You can change your mind at any time by contacting us on **0207 253 2582**

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