



The History of Emergency Services in the UK

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The three main services: Fire, Police, and Ambulance are constantly evolving in the goal to achieve the best life saving services throughout the nation, and work tirelessly every day to save

the lives of those in need.

One would suppose that the Ambulance service would be the oldest of the three, however, it might surprise some to read that it is actually the youngest of the services.

— Fire

The fire & rescue service, out of the main three, is surprisingly the oldest, tracing its roots back to the 19th century with the HM Coastguard.

Before the 1820s, firefighting was the responsibility of parish volunteers and private insurance companies – who would only fight the fire if said residence was privately insured, which started soon after the Great Fire of London in 1666.

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After another Great Fire, this time in Edinburgh, James Braidwood (who is known as the first 'Master of Engines') brought into existence the UK's first municipal fire service in 1824. Braidwood later went on to become the superintendent of the London Fire Engine Establishment (LFEE), which put an end to private insurer firefighters and brought together 10 independent brigades in 1833.

After Braidwood's death in 1861, when a wall collapsed on him at the Tooley Street Fire, the British Government took the decision to create the Metropolitan Fire Brigade in 1866, which was a publicly funded service, and the Fire & Rescue Service that is currently still being used was born.

— Police

Law enforcement dates back to the Middle Ages, however the first modern police force in the world was not established until the 18th century.

The UK police force, much like the Fire brigade, was mostly the responsibility of volunteers before the later 19th century. Following a concept by Sir Robert Peel, Home Secretary at the time, later to become Prime Minister, where he proposed the establishment of a professional policing service, the Metropolitan Police Service was established in 1829. This was in dire need of establishment as, at the time, London had a population of almost 1 ½ million people but was only police by 450 volunteer constables and 4,500 night watchmen.

Throughout the years, legislation has been introduced to shape the police service to the modern one we see today, and, since the 1940s, all police forces in the UK have been merged and modernised.

— Ambulance

The ambulance service might have been the most recent in the three main emergency services within the UK, but the history of the ambulance itself dates back to 900AD, wherein a hammock was used to transport patients to medical care using two horses. WWI saw the use of motorised medical transport, until the vehicles evolved into

the modern-day ambulances which are currently in use.

Patient transport has been around for centuries, but the modern ambulance service that is in use today was not established until the later 19th century.

Prior to the implementation of a national ambulance service, it was left up to the firefighters and police to transport patients to hospital, which obviously had its issues. To exacerbate the need for an ambulance service, first aid training was only made mandatory to firefighters and police in 1925.

Due to the dire need for an additional emergency service to be added, the ambulance service was introduced to the UK in 1948, backed by the government decision to provide free care to all patients in need.

— 999

The 999-emergency telephone number was introduced in 1937 after 5 women died in a house fire in 1935. The service was decided upon due to the neighbour of the women not being able to get through to the fire brigade because the line was busy.

Due to necessary demand, the emergency services throughout Britain combined to form the 999 and 111 service.

The automation of the telephone service was introduced in 1976 which allowed the 999 service to become fully fledged nationwide, and in 1986, the service could be operated by mobile phones.

— Emergency Services

The near constant demand for emergency services has led to amazing innovations and advancements in technology and will only continue to rapidly advance.

The advancement of these emergency services will not only help the responsibilities of those who pledge their lives to save others will get easier, but more lives will be saved in a shorter period of time.