



New seminars

All seminars start at 5.30 pm
Drug and Alcohol Research
(funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation)
Tues 23 March 2004, LG80, Bennett Room. *Dave Leon, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine*. 'Shocks to the system: Russian mortality since the mid-1980s, alcohol and vulnerability'.

Tues 30 March, LG81, Lucas Room. *Nigel South, Essex University*. 'Breaking the Cycle? Schemes to assist offenders with mental health and substance abuse problems'.

History in Public Health

(funded by the Wellcome Trust). Thurs 25 March, 2004, Room 5, Keppel Street. *Dr Virginia Smith, LSHTM*. 'The structures of hygiene from prehistory to the present'.

Health of towns conference - Martin Gorsky tells us more

A one-day conference focusing on public health in British cities between 1844 and 2004 will be held at the School on 12 November.

Healthy Towns, Healthy Cities was inspired by an observation by a public health academic that the historical community had failed to mark the 150th anniversary of the Health of Towns Association.

Formed in 1844 in the wake of Chadwick's seminal *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population*, the Association was a key advocate of environmental public health interventions in Victorian Britain. This event will reflect on the town as locus of public health initiatives in the sanitation era and bring historical perspectives to bear on the present, now that the city is enjoying a revived role in promoting the 'new public health'.

We will look at the classic phase of urban sanitary reform which followed the mid-century Public Health Acts. We are interested in work that reappraises Chadwick's role, and studies of pioneer Medical Officers of Health and their efforts to drive down mortality rates in their cities. Moving into the first half of the 20th Century, we want to consider both the zenith of municipal medicine and the implications for health of the town planning movement, and to conclude with an appraisal of the 'Healthy Cities' initiative, begun in 1986 to implement the goals of WHO's 'Health for All 2000' programme.

New management committee member

Welcome to P. Wenzel Geissler, a social anthropologist and Africanist trained in Copenhagen and Cambridge whose interest is parasitological and medical research from an anthropological perspective.

Read the Smog Conference Witness Seminar transcript

The transcript of the Witness Seminar from last year's highly successful conference on the Great Smog of 1952 is now on our website, together with a review of the conference and pictures of the Smog event, and the conference itself.

www.lshtm.ac.uk/history/bigsmoke.html

New proposals

Centre associates have numerous interesting research proposals in the pipeline.

Richard Coker is hoping to look into the oral history of tuberculosis in Russia. Anne-Marie Rafferty is planning a study of colonial nursing, while Pauline Allen is aiming to carry out research into the 'new localism' in health.

David Bradley, who was involved in a 30-year study of water use in Africa which ran between 1967 and 1997, is applying for funding for a study of the history of small water bodies such as springs, where people have traditionally drawn water. He hopes to focus on the gender issues raised (only women were allowed to carry water on their heads!) and the other cultural implications.

Centre for History in Public Health: Launch Lecture

The Centre of History in Public Health was formally launched on 27th November 2003 with a lecture by Dr Simon Szreter of the University of Cambridge, entitled 'Public health and security in an age of globalising economic growth: the awkward lessons of history'. The lecture was held in the Manson Theatre and was well-attended, both by colleagues from within the School and by visitors from other history departments within the University of London. A large complement of historians of medicine and public health was present, from institutions as diverse as the Science Museum, the Cabinet Office and the Wellcome Centres for the History of Medicine at UCL and at the University of Oxford.

Dr Szreter proposed that there have been several earlier phases of globalisation in world history, including the colonial encounters of the early modern era and the massive expansion of world trade consequent upon industrialisation. He raised the question of what could be learnt from these earlier experiences about the implications of globalisation for world health. Was the effect broadly positive, with growth in trade and productivity enhancing individual wealth and thus well-being? Or was it broadly negative, as urbanisation and greater mobility increased exposure to epidemic disease? Dr Szreter argued forcefully that the evidence favoured the latter scenario, and the message of his lecture was that only the countervailing forces of government and civil society could avert the deleterious health consequences of globalisation today.

His thesis was developed through a detailed exposition of the British case, which traced the development of a social welfare infrastructure that contributed to rising life expectation. He noted the beneficial impact of the poor laws in the 17th and 18th centuries, which he viewed as a key factor underpinning the productivity gains in the agricultural sector, which in turn provided the basis for Britain's early industrial take-off. Turning to the 19th century, he rehearsed his well-known attack on the McKeown thesis, which argues that improved nutritional status explains the greater part of the mortality decline from the last quarter of the century. Dr Szreter's account foregrounds instead the role of public health reform. He stressed that this was not simply the result of initiatives by 'great' individuals such as Chadwick and Snow but was brought about by the committed work of local government officials and public health doctors, who were responding to popular support for social action emanating from voluntary associations such as trade unions, friendly societies and campaigning groups. Democracy and a thriving civil society were therefore crucial to public health improvement.

An interesting discussion followed the lecture. Commentators probed the argument, raising such issues as whether generalisation from the British case was sustainable, and whether the thesis could be reconciled with evidence of health improvements achieved by authoritarian regimes. After some stimulating interchanges the lecture ended and was followed by a reception.

Martin Gorsky

How are we funded and managed?

Funding comes from the Wellcome Trust, the Economic and Social Research Council, the Nuffield Trust, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Unilever Centre. We also run funded seminars, conferences and workshops.

A Management committee meets twice a year, supported by monthly meetings of a strategic group incorporating active researchers. There is a wider group for affiliated staff.

The next meeting of the Management Committee will be on Wednesday 9 June at 2 pm, in the Lucas Room, LG81. A second meeting for supporters of the Centre, with opportunities to give feedback and suggestions, will take place later in the year.

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us at
[www.lshtm.ac.uk/
history](http://www.lshtm.ac.uk/history)**