

# History Centre Newsletter

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## **Leading lights in public health remember radical era of 1980s and 1990s**

The transcript from a fascinating Witness Seminar recalling one of the most historically important periods in public health has been made public for the first time.

Key figures from within the medical and public health community came together at The Wellcome Trust, Gibbs Building, 215 Euston Road, London on 12 October 2004 to discuss public health in the 1980s and 1990s. The period followed the reorganisation of the NHS in 1974, which led to a period of demoralisation and loss of community roots for public health doctors in the UK. In the decades that followed, however, public health revived, and a new sense of radicalism and energy emerged.

The speakers recall how an army of new health promotion officers formed a 'subversive new paradigm' which threatened the previously elite and exclusive public health establishment. They also remember how heroin and HIV/AIDS, which became key issues at the time, both presented new opportunities to put public health on the map.

The seminar is one of a series funded by the Wellcome Trust. These seminars bring together clinicians, scientists, historians and

others interested in contemporary medical history and encourage joint working, as well as the creation of archival sources for present and future use. The History of Twentieth Century Medicine Group, which was set up by the Wellcome Trust in 1990, has held over 40 Witness Seminars, on topics ranging from the history of smoking and health, the first heart transplant in the UK, genetic testing, the 1967 foot and mouth disease outbreak and anti-psychiatry and care in the community.

The participants in this Witness Seminar, which was co-organised and Chaired by Professor Virginia Berridge, Head of the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine's Centre for the History of Public Health, included landmark figures such as Sir Donald Acheson, the author of the 1988 Acheson Report which contributed to the revival in public health, who recalls the 'wonderfully stimulating' experience of being Chief Medical Officer at the time, and Professors Klim McPherson, leader of the multidisciplinary public health movement, and John Ashton, who was closely involved in the Healthy Cities Movement which spread across Europe and was stimulated by World Health Organization.

Other speakers include Dr Jeff French, who summarises the spirit of the times, when he recalls how the new health promotion officers began to form a 'subversive new paradigm', which led to resentment among the public health establishment. 'From a practitioner perspective', he says, 'the 1980s and 1990s were a liberating and exciting time when the health promotion paradigm with its focus on empowerment and personal development began to challenge the dominant public health approach characterized by a patronising and patriarchal medical establishment.

'Rather than being based on a detached descriptive mindset characterized by epidemiology, health promotion and the many hundreds of health promotion officers, who were recruited at the time, were action-oriented. Health promotion officers quickly began to dominate both the intellectual literature of that time and were increasingly gaining a reputation for being the people who really made things happen'.

Professor Nick Black, another participant, recalls how his decision to go into health services was

influenced by a desire to take on the clinicians and the large hospitals, who he saw as holding all the power, and free resources up for the wider public health agenda.

Sir Ian Chalmers remembers the period as 'an immensely exciting time. Iconoclasm was in, with Cochrane, McKeown and Illich as its basis. There was the Radical Statistics Health Group, of which I was one of the founder members'. He explains how the 1970s informed the views of the generation who became active in public health in the next two decades, with organisations such as the Society for Social Medicine having a huge influence on how people thought, bringing greater open-mindedness to public health, and fostering approaches such as evidence-based medicine and multidisciplinary public health.

The full transcript of the Witness Seminar is freely available online following the links to Publications at <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/histmed>. Hard copies at £6/\$10 plus postage can be ordered from: [www.bertrams.com](http://www.bertrams.com); [www.gardners.com](http://www.gardners.com); [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk); [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

## **Forthcoming Events**

### ***Workshops***

Wednesday 10 May, 2006, 2.00-5.00 pm

#### **Maternal health in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: international perspectives**

Speakers include Dominique Behague, Linda Bryder, Ornella Moscucci, Katerinie Storeng, Signild Vallgarda

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This afternoon workshop will explore initiatives and policies aimed at improving mothers' health from the early 1900s onwards. With contributions from historians and public health practitioners, it will seek to bring an international perspective on the development of health and welfare provisions for mothers during the 20<sup>th</sup> C.

The emergence of an international maternal and infant welfare movement in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> C was prompted by anxieties about high maternal and infant mortality rates, and about falling marital fertility in most Western countries. In some countries these concerns were heightened by major conflicts such as the Boer War and the First World War. The loss of male lives focused the attention on the need to boost fertility and preserve infant life,

bringing women's childbearing and childrearing role into sharp relief.

Maternal and child welfare has also been a field in which women have played a prominent function as activists. Using maternalist ideologies and policies, female reformers have exerted a powerful influence in defining the needs of mothers and in designing institutions and programmes to address them. By extolling women's capacity to mother and the social and moral value of motherhood, they have also transformed women's primary private responsibility into public policy. The workshop will explore some of the issues which women, feminists especially, have taken up in their attempt to legitimate women's public relationships to politics and the state, highlighting the curious alliances this has generated.

#### ***Centre for History in Public Health Seminar programme funded by the Wellcome Trust***

Friday, 7<sup>th</sup> April      12.45 pm – 2.00 pm Room LG81 (Lucas room), Keppel Street Building

#### **Worrying about the water: sprawl, public health and environmentalism in post-WWII Long Island**

Professor Chris Sellers (Stony Brook University, USA)

Thursday 4 May 12.45 pm – 2.00 pm Room 4, Keppel Street building  
**The destruction of daylight: sun, smoke and health in Britain and the United States, 1880-1940**

Dr Stephen Mosely (Leeds Metropolitan University, School of Cultural Studies)

Thursday 18 May 12.45 pm – 2.00 pm Bennett Room (LG80), Keppel Street Building

**How is social inequality problematised in public health programmes?**

Signild Vallgarda (University of Copenhagen)

Thursday 25 May 2006 - Bennett Room (LG80), Keppel Street Building.

**The 'Unfortunate Experiment' at National Women's Hospital**

Linda Bryder (University of Auckland)

### ***Public Health History Walks***

'A few centuries round the block' and 'Soho and Snow' were both very popular walks. Both were oversubscribed. We will be arranging more walks soon so look out for new dates on the Centre for History in Public Health website

<http://www.lshtm.ac.uk/history>

### **Map project news – from Martin Gorsky**

LSHTM Archivist & Records Manager Victoria Killick has recently completed a project to preserve, conserve and increase accessibility to the School's collection of maps. The inspiration for this came from Chris Grundy, who recently launched the Centre for Spatial Analysis in Public Health, and has been delving into the School's archives to discover how earlier generations of scientists used cartography in their work. A very rich assortment of maps was discovered, which were in a poor state of repair. A grant was obtained from the Wellcome Trust Research Resources in Medical History to preserve, conserve and catalogue these valuable documents.

Over 500 maps have now been listed on the archive catalogue, and these listings will be accessible to researchers via the online database from spring 2006. A new plan cabinet was purchased for the secure storage of the maps, and all have been enclosed within polyester pockets for preservation. 137 maps from the collection which were considered especially valuable, for example because they were hand drawn, have been digitised to a high quality by scanning. This will not only increase access to the map collection and contribute to preservation by ensuring that the originals will not need to be handled frequently, but will also permit their use for GIS purposes.



and medicine. The study commenced in February 2006 funded by the Alcohol Education Research Council for one year. The award was granted to Professor Virginia Berridge and Dr Betsy Thom of Middlesex University with Rachel Herring as named researcher. Rachel Herring joined the Centre in February, her previous work includes a study of alcohol related attendances at A&E departments and a study of young men's drinking both carried out in conjunction with Dr Thom.

## **Marketing public health**

Virginia Berridge recently took part in a New Statesman /Pfizer sponsored debate on marketing public health, held at City Hall. Sam Everington an East End GP was in the chair. The debate addressed 5 key questions. What campaigns have been successful and unsuccessful? What have been the key ingredients to success or failure. What skills in marketing terms could be put to good effect in the future? What are the roles and responsibilities of government, doctors and business? And finally, if there were no restrictions, what one issue would you most like to see taken up?

Virginia brought some of the history of mass media approaches in the discussion and criticised those who unthinkingly focussed on women as the main focus for public health initiatives. She drew attention to the different locations for health education-mass media or local

initiative, central or local government, and how these had been reflected in issues like the HIV/AIDS campaigns of the 1980s. Participants in the debate included Tessa Jowell, the Culture Media and Sport Minister and Deidre Hutton of the Food Standards Authority.

The New Statesman published the debate as a special supplement which is available online at

<http://www.newstatesman.co.uk-pdf-marketingpublichealthsupp.pdf.url>

## **History and policy: a dynamic duo?**

The Centre is a partner in the History and Policy network which links us together with the Centre for Contemporary History in Senate House and the History and Policy website at the University of Cambridge.

The network has recently appointed a policy officer who will be based in Senate House and whose job will be to bring the insights of history more closely into policy making circles. As part of the work Virginia Berridge is conducting a pilot exercise looking at the attitudes to and use made of history by those in policy advisory positions in the health field. This is being carried out through a small number of interviews with health 'experts', some of them on the staff of the School. The final report will set out some of the key issues for impact so far as health is concerned.

## European Association for the History of Health and Medicine.

The biennial conference of this Association, of which Virginia Berridge is currently president, will be organised by the Centre in London in September 2007. The theme is Environment, health, medicine and history. Sub themes include:

- environmental history and health history
- environment and gender
- comparing rural and urban history and the environment
- the environment and urban history
- the environment, public and private space
- the environment and the individual in health
- the environment and public health
- the environment and climate
- environmental and health activism
- the environment and health services
- the environment, nature and health
- art, health and the environment
- the environment and the ancients-air, water and places.
- the environment and the nature-culture discussion
- the environment and occupational health

Further details, including a call for abstracts, will be available shortly.

## Visitors to the Centre.

The centre will have two overseas visitors during May. Dr. Lynda Bryder from the University of Auckland will be here along with Dr. Signild Vallgarda of the University of Copenhagen.

Linda Bryder's work on TB and its history is well known and she is currently working on a history of the Auckland women's hospital. Signild Vallgarda's work is on maternal and child health and on inequalities in health. Both will be giving presentations while in the School.

In November we will be pleased to welcome Professor Dorothy Porter from UCSF who will be giving our annual public health lecture. Her current research is on the rise of obesity as a public health issue.

## New publication

The work of the Wellcome Trust 'Science speaks to Policy' programme which formed the foundation of the Centre's enhancement award has just been published in an edited collection. Contributors are all current or past members of the History Centre at LSHTM.

V. Berridge (ed.) **Making Health Policy. Networks in Research and Policy after 1945.** (Amsterdam : Rodopi, 2005).

For further information at the Centre for the History of Public Health, please go to [www.lshtm.ac.uk/history](http://www.lshtm.ac.uk/history)