

History of Medicine in the Workplace

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The choice of suitable themes was one of the decisions that arose once it was agreed to stage the 2021 BSHM Congress in Sheffield. A theme related to Sheffield's enduring heritage as a manufacturing centre and the history of occupational medicine in industry seemed like a good starting point. However, two factors prompted widening the scope of this theme. BSHM Congresses carry wide appeal outside the host city and occupational diseases are not limited to industry alone. Hence the theme of 'Medicine in the Workplace' evolved.

The success of the Congress was due in no small part to the keynote presentations and to the wide range of papers devoted to this theme. Topics covered included diseases and accidents among those engaged in the silver, cutlery and steel industries, coal mining, the military, shipping and the Post Office together with novel developments in physiotherapy for workers and the social and political circumstances in nineteenth century industrial Sheffield.

The three papers included in this volume of *Topics in the History of Medicine (THoM)* are based on presentations given at the Congress. The paper on Grinders' asthma describes how epidemiological studies carried out in nineteenth-century Sheffield revealed the appalling early death rate among the grinders. These outstanding studies also defined those groups of grinders who were at greatest risk. It also led to the introduction of preventative measures and to a campaign to reduce the age at which boys started work in this industry.

The growth of friendly societies was a response to the need to provide medical care for workers and their families in nineteenth-century Britain. The paper on this topic examines the tensions that resulted in the relationship between the societies and the medical profession. The impact this had in the identification of the doctor as an employee rather than as an independent practitioner had long-lasting effects in the development of the Welfare State.

Noise was one of the many occupational hazards among those employed in industrial centres including Sheffield. The paper on the historical aspects of noise-induced hearing loss shows how this has been a much-neglected malady. It was revealing to learn that preventive measures were introduced as late as the 1960s and that legislation and standards for litigation followed even later.

It remains for me to commend all three papers, to thank the authors and the editorial team for their diligence in bringing these important papers to publication and to wish *THoM* continued success.

Keywords

History of medicine, workplace, Sheffield, Grinders' asthma, friendly societies, hearing loss

Biographical Details

Mike Collins is Past President of the BSHM.

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