



Pumphandle Lecture 2009

"When nature turns cook: an epidemiological feast"

David Heymann

Tuesday 8th September – 5.15 pm

John Snow Hall, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine



David Heymann is currently Chair of the Health Protection Agency and Head of the Global Health Security Programme at Chatham House in London. Trained initially in the USA, he has worked for more than 35 years in public health, including 25 years on various assignments with the US Centres for Disease Control, mostly in Africa and India, followed by 10 years with WHO, where he was Executive Director of the Communicable Diseases Cluster and, most recently, Assistant Director General for Health Security. He is the Editor of the latest (19th) edition of the Control of Communicable Diseases Manual, a joint publication by the American Public Health Association and WHO.

Rumour has it that Dr Heymann will use the lecture to review some of the major epidemics and incidents with which he has been involved over his career, and to reflect upon their lessons for public health today.

Note that this will be the first Pumphandle Lecture to be held in the new, and appropriately named, John Snow Hall. The Lecture will be followed by the Society's Annual General Meeting, to be held at the John Snow Public House (at the corner of Broadwick and Cambridge Streets, in Soho), to which all are invited....

The Lecture will be recorded and placed on the Society's website, alongside any PowerPoint presentation.



Patrick Wall with the pump

Pumphandle Lecture 2008

"Food Safety – Media based or risk based controls"

Last year's thought provoking lecture from Patrick Wall, Associate Professor of Public Health in Dublin (and a founder member of the Society), defined the modern dilemma regarding whether public health decisions are led by evidence – or the media, driven in turn by politics, consumer anxiety, trade concerns and tourism.

With his experience as Chair of the European Food Safety Authority (FSA) and the Irish FSA he discussed stringent – and expensive - controls regarding possible carcinogens in pesticides and other low risks. A major 'switch' towards increasing controls based on flimsy evidence was driven by concerns about UK BSE (Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy) and beef in the mid 1990s: later in the decade, dioxin-contaminated animal feed in Belgium led to a US ban on food lines from the entire European Union and fall of the Belgian government – although research indicated no adverse human effects. Controlling the Foot and Mouth Disease crisis in the UK, 2001, cost £11 billion; while in 2005 a technical breach in the quality of chilli from India, with negligible health risk, greatly damaged the large Indian spice trade. Lessons from these incidents include the role of bad management, rather than bad

luck, as a cause of outbreaks as well as food scares – and the need to consider controls operating in poor countries, where more and more food is sourced, with associated problems related to climate-related water scarcity, such as use of polluted water in irrigation. The growing importance of forensic microbiology and chemistry allows prompt detection of possible contamination – but also encourages early and disproportionate media coverage. Weighing benefits versus risks remains a large challenge for public health, particularly with the impact of the global financial crisis on research – and Dr John Snow would not be surprised to know that, despite all the controls, 'traceability', or tracing the origin of a contamination, still requires great epidemiological skill. A recording of Professor Wall's lecture is available on the Society's website, along with the slides.

Networking at the pub

Members will be aware of the Society's constitutional encouragement to visit the John Snow Pub on Broadwick Street on any visit to London. The Pub's new manager, Guy Burkett, welcomes members.

As a consequence of the Society's growth, one often meets other members from around the world on a visit to the Pub. One way to make such contacts is by asking for the current guestbook (normally kept behind the flap in the ground floor bar). If it is not there, it is most likely with a member, probably in the upstairs bar. You are encouraged to seek them out and make enjoyable contacts with colleagues from somewhere surprising

Facsimile photocopies of old guestbooks are kept in a cabinet provided by the Society, in the upstairs bar. Should members wish to browse these old books, they should request the key from the manager, Guy Burkett, or from whomever is behind the bar. Once again we note with sadness the disappearance of the first guestbooks, covering the 1960s and 1970s – should anyone learn of their whereabouts, please encourage their return to the Society and Pub.



Guy Burkett, new Manager of the John Snow Public House in Soho, welcomes Society members

US high school student wins national competition with project on Dr John Snow

Laura Ball, a high-school student at the University School of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA, contacted the Society in March for help with a research paper on Dr John Snow for the US National History Day Competition.

The competition has run for over 30 years and is organised by the American Historical Association: the theme this year was the Individual in History, judged in June 2009. (<http://www.nationalhistoryday.org/2009Winners.htm>). Over half a million high school and university students competed for the various categories: Laura won first prize in the Senior Paper category with her entry: '*Cholera and the pump on Broad St: The Life and Legacy of John Snow*'. It's a great account of the outbreak: we'll seek permission to link it to our website and meanwhile members who wish to read it should contact the Society. Congratulations to Laura and to her supervisors Chuck Taft and Benjamin Zarwell: we hope to see them some time in London and to welcome them as members of the JSS.



Laura Ball, winner of a gold medal for a paper on John Snow

Name of the first victim of the 1854 cholera outbreak

Genealogical research has identified the baby who was the index case in the outbreak of cholera in Soho, 1854 as Frances Lewis.

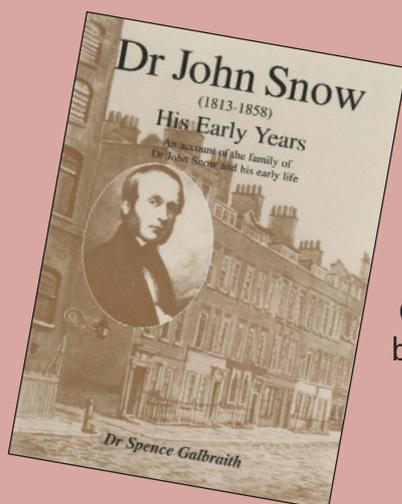
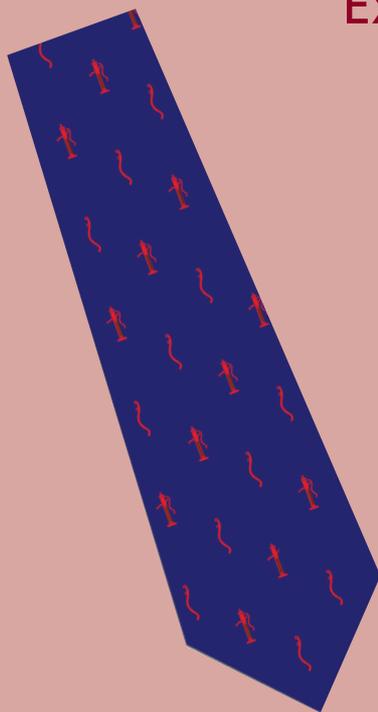
Until now this child has only been known as 'Baby Lewis'. Dave Boylan, a librarian and genealogist in Worcester, Massachusetts, USA researched census, birth and death registration data for 1854 to uncover the name. Frances was aged 5 months when she died on 2nd September 1854 from "exhaustion after an attack of diarrhoea four days previous to death": later this was recognised to have been due to cholera. The family lived at 40 Broad St, and suspected contamination of the water in the pump adjacent to their lodgings was an important part of the evidence collected by Dr Henry Whitehead and used by Dr John Snow in his conclusion that cholera was waterborne. Frances's father, Thomas Lewis, a police constable, died from cholera on 19 September, after an illness starting on 8 September: the date that the pump handle had been removed at Dr Snow's request. In a house without sanitation, this second case in the house could have led to further contamination of the pump water and many more cholera cases. His wife Sarah Lewis and a daughter, Anne, survived the epidemic and were recorded as still living at the address in 1861. Dave Boylan's research is now on the web:

http://historicalvoices.org/pbuilder/pbfiles/Project80/Scheme498/johnsnow-a0a1f7-a_11479.pdf

New Secretary General for the Nordic JSS

'John Snow Scandinavia', now known as the Nordic John Snow Society, is an enthusiastic branch of the JSS. Founded by Christen Raestad in the early years of the JSS, the Nordic branch of our society includes members in Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands. It gives an annual John Snow Pumphandle award: appropriately this year the award was given to Christen Raestad in recognition of his work in the water industry – and for his great support for the memory and work of Dr John Snow. He has now passed 'the pump' to Asle Aasen, senior water and sanitation engineer in Bergen, Norway. We welcome Asle and also send thanks to Christen for his invaluable contribution to the JSS over the years. Scandinavian members and others may wish to note that April 2010 is the 150th anniversary of the Norwegian Law for Public Health (1860): it will be commemorated by a conference in Drammen, the city where the first Norwegian victim of cholera was recorded on 16th September 1832.

Exclusive to JSS Members



The ever popular silk ties are still available to members for £16 (£12 if collected in person). The Society also offers silver pump motif lapel pins, mugs and the book "John Snow: His Early Years" by Dr Spence Galbraith. Discount is available for bulk purchases.



Please contact johnsnowsociety@rsph.org.uk for more details.

Reminder: Please inform the Society if your email address changes, so that we can keep in touch

John Snow Committee

Nominations sought from enthusiasts

According to our constitution, the Society's policies are set by a Steering Committee, and proposals are placed before the Annual General Meeting, which takes place at the Pub, following the annual Pumphandle Lecture.

Current Committee members are: Prof Paul Fine (Hon. Pumphandle President), Dr Ros Stanwell Smith (Hon. Pumphandle Secretary), Prof Sandy Cairncross, Dr Mary O'Mahony, Prof Jimmy Whitworth, Dr Dilys Morgan, Dr John Watson, Dr Adrian Padfield. Members are appointed for three years, terms are staggered, and at least two current members step down each year (PF and MO in 2009). Members standing down may put themselves forward for re-election.

Nominations are invited for membership on the Committee. Only Society members in good standing (with an intact mug*) are eligible. Nominations from young enthusiasts are encouraged. A valid nomination will consist of a statement of no more than 54 words by the nominee, indicating eagerness to serve and vision for the Society. Nominations received by the Society's secretariat (lhay@rsph.org.uk) by 5th September will be eligible for vote at the AGM.

* Members are reminded that broken mugs (and hence membership standing), and lost membership cards, may be replaced at a cost of £5 and £2 respectively (plus postage).

Conference

Water Challenges - Past, Present and Future

Tuesday 3rd November 2009
28 Portland Place, London W1B 1DE

Provision of sufficient quantities of safe drinking water is key in ensuring a high standard of public health. Climatic and environmental changes, together with population growth, are affecting the provision of drinking water in many countries, including the United Kingdom. This brings challenges to the water industry and public health practitioners. This one day conference brings together experts from the Drinking Water Inspectorate, the Health Protection Agency, the WHO and DEFRA to review and discuss these challenges and their effect on the availability of water at current levels of consumption. It will focus on water resources in the UK, water-borne disease, rainwater harvesting, grey water reuse and sewage effluent recycling.

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The newsletter of the John Snow Society