

ROUTLEDGE FOCUS

PIONEERS IN PUBLIC HEALTH

Lessons from History

Edited by
Jill Stewart

Supported by

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Environmental Health



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FOCUS



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Pioneers in Public Health

The public health movement involved numerous individuals who made the case for change and put new practices into place. However despite a growing interest in how we understand history to inform current evidence-based practice, there is no book focusing on our progressive pioneers in public health and environmental health.

This book seeks to fill that gap. It examines carefully selected public and environmental health pioneers who made a real difference to the UK's health, some with international influence. Many of these pioneers were criticised in their life-times, yet they had the strength of character to know what they were doing was fundamentally right and persevered, often against many odds. The book includes chapters on:

- Thomas Fresh
- John Snow
- Duncan of Liverpool
- Margaret McMillan
- George Cadbury
- Christopher Addison
- Margery Spring Rice and others.

This book will help readers place pioneers in a wider context and to make more sense of their academic and practitioner work today; how evidence (and what was historically understood by it) underpins modern day practice; and how these visionary pioneers developed their ideas into practice, some not fully appreciated until after their own deaths. *Pioneers in Public Health* sets the tone for a renewed focus on research into evidence-based public and environmental health, which has become the subject of growing international interest in recent years.

Jill Stewart worked as an Environmental Health Officer specialising in private sector housing for several years before becoming a lecturer in London universities teaching housing, public health, environmental health and social work at undergraduate and post-graduate levels. She is a Corporate Member of the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, a Fellow of both the Royal Society for the Promotion of Health and the Royal Geographical Society and an Associate Member of the Chartered Institute of Housing.

Routledge Focus on Environmental Health

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Pioneers in Public Health: Lessons from History, edited by Jill Stewart

For Bill Carey

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Series preface

This new series, Routledge Focus on Environmental Health, aims to explore environmental health topics in more detail than would be found in the usual environmental health texts. We also want to encourage readers to submit proposals so that we are responsive to the needs of environmental and public health practitioners and provide opportunities for first-time authors. This is a dynamic series, which aims to provide a forum for new ideas and debate on current environmental health topics. This is a new and exciting development for environmental and public health practitioners, particularly for new professionals. So if you have any ideas for monographs in the series please do not be afraid to submit them to me as series editor via the e-mail address below.

I have always encouraged new authors and for environmental health practitioners to “get published”. All too often the work of EHPs goes unrecorded and unremarked and now with the demise of the *Journal of Environmental Health Research*, I am really pleased to have this opportunity to provide another route for practitioners to change this.

This initiative follows on from the publication of the 21st edition of *Clay's Handbook of Environmental Health* in July 2016, but that is largely a technical work and first point of reference. It is not intended that this series takes a wholly “technical” approach but will provide an opportunity to consider areas of practice in a different way, for example looking at the social and political aspects of environmental health in addition to a more discursive approach on specialist areas.

Also we recognise that “environmental health” can be taken to mean different things in different countries around the world. I know that *Clay's* no doubt has chapters that might not be relevant to some international practitioners; nevertheless, environmental health practitioners are part of the public health workforce in any country. So, this series will enable a wider range of practitioners and others with a professional interest to access information and also to write about issues relevant to them. Books in the series have a

relatively short production time so that the information will also be more immediate than in a standard textbook or reference work.

We are working to have forthcoming monographs to cover such areas as Housing and Health, Air Pollution and Health, Potable Water, EHPs and Health and Wellbeing Boards, Ports and Borders and Public Health. That does not mean we have no need of further suggestions; quite the contrary, so I hope readers with ideas for a monograph will get in touch via *Ed.Needle@tandf.co.uk*

Stephen Battersby MBE PhD, FCIEH, FRSPH
Series Editor

Preface

Public health pioneers: lessons from history

This first in the series of “Routledge Focus on Environmental Health” is also slightly different from what will be its successors in that it looks backwards rather than at current issues. However, the contributors have drawn lessons for current practise from their work. It explores the contribution of public health pioneers to the development of public and environmental health practise. It is sometimes helpful to pause and gain a historical perspective so that we have a better understanding of how problems have been tackled in the past and to learn lessons from our predecessors – and hopefully avoid repeating mistakes.

The pioneers are not all the most obvious candidates for a work such as this. There are several reasons for this. First the origin of this particular monograph was a proposed special edition of the *Journal of Environmental Health Research*, which is no longer published. The authors had been invited to write about a pioneer for whom they had high regard. Second, the more obvious and famous pioneers have been written about in many different places and probably need no fresh coverage. It is also important to learn from some of the less celebrated pioneers and their struggles to improve public and environmental health. All those who strive to improve public health stand on the shoulders of giants but there are more of these “giants” than we sometimes realise.

It is to be hoped that readers from the different strands of public health and all parts of the public health workforce will gain something from the contents.

Stephen Battersby MBE PhD FCIEH FRSPH

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health for permission to use the illustration of Edwin Chadwick

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1 Introduction

Jill Stewart

Chronologies of dates and events in history tell us only limited things of what happened in the past and can have little real meaning in our lives today. But history can be engaging; learning about not just what happened, but why it happened and what motivated people, can make history fascinating, lively and even fun. Bringing history, and its people, back to life makes it enticing and interesting through anecdotes, stories, pictures and film. It can shape what we think today.

This book tells stories of how some people in history, now long gone pioneers in public health, took forward their strong views, ideas and values and in so doing, took sometimes great personal risks which continue to make a difference to all of our lives today. They had little to work from; there is a sense that they had to start from (public health) scratch. Some here are selected as better-known and obvious pioneers whose names and dates will have featured in history books, but others will have not, and may have come under our authors' radars almost by chance, to now feature in this book.

What is immediately striking in reviewing many of these pioneers is their focus on what we would now call the Social Determinants of Health (Commission on Social Determinants of Health, 2008; Marmot et al., 2010) and these ideas and beliefs about how we could live healthier lives are far from new. In the modern day, we can reflect on what these pioneers archived and provided, and reinvigorate what they did in new forms. The social determinants of health are about conditions into which people are born, how they grow, work, live and age and how wider economic frameworks, politics and policies shape our development (Commission on Social Determinants of Health, 2008).

Others of our pioneers focused on mitigating the worst effects of polluted, contaminated environments and poor housing stock and sought to develop and deliver interventions that reduce risks to health. In fact, what emerges from many of the pioneers featured here is their contribution to

the role of the contemporary environmental health practitioner, now one of the key professionals delivering on front line public health practice across a range of fronts with a focus in the social determinants of health as well as interventions to mitigate negative environmental health stressors (Burke et al., 2002).

What we can see from this is the ongoing relevance of and standing of the contemporary Environmental Health Practitioner (EHP), previously known as Public Health Inspectors, Sanitary Inspectors or earlier still as Inspector of Nuisance. Some notable researchers of environmental health who have focused on early EHPs (Inspector of Nuisance, later Sanitary Inspectors) and statutory nuisance continue to provide remedy conditions prejudicial to health.

Hamlin (2013) consolidates Victorian notions of nuisances into neighbours' complaints; early development of what should not be acceptable by community standards (rotten meat, leaky cesspools, noxious trades, overcrowded housing); inspection of public services; and finally, infected persons whose liberty of movement was seen to threaten everyone. Nuisance legislation was seen to help relieve a range of environmental threats and at a very local level. What seemed to be important was character rather than technical ability. It was not until later on that Inspectors of Nuisance were able to develop their own professional organisation. They remained subordinate to Medical Officers of Health; but were very busy with very explicit local bye-laws and statutes in creating local government to help "shape views of local government as competent and responsive" (Hamlin, 2013, p. 379).

Crook also comments on this gradual change to local government functions and the development of the accountable, interventionist and surveillance state by the end of the Edwardian period and for our purposes here, the role of the by then Sanitary Inspector. Derived from Chadwick-initiated reforms, roles still varied from place to place, but continued to develop and evolve as scientific understanding grew, most notably with germ theory, possibly – it is argued – at the "expense of traditional sanitary concerns" (Crook, 2007, p. 377), or even simply applying common sense; but the culture remained more reactive than proactive within a liberal culture of governance allowing for public rights and freedoms, alongside social order and health. Crook argues that this led to tensions between political or ethical tasks for the Sanitary Inspector and for him, the role is more flexible, nuanced and informed by a range of issues. In summary, Crook (2007, p. 393), reflecting on the interventionist and surveillance roles of Sanitary Inspectors, asks:

Was it freedom from the tyranny of disease and discomfort, or freedom from the tyranny of government? Inspectors, naturally enough, were convinced it was the former.