

The Harlow Industrial Health Times

A look back at history - 1955 - 1962

Stephen James Lake Taylor BSc MD; Hon LLD, MRCP, later FRCP and FRCGP was Labour MP for Barnet 1945 – 1950 and served as PPS to Herbert Morrison, Deputy Prime Minister and Lord President of the Council. He had two spells on the Board of Harlow Development Corporation, 1950 – 1964 & 1965 – 1967.



Figure 1 - Lord Stephen Taylor

He is credited with the idea of naming the pubs in Harlow after Butterflies and Moths. It is sad that this has been discontinued. He was made a life peer in 1958 and took the title of Lord Taylor of Harlow. Frederick Gibberd described him as a man of extraordinary complexity and an intellectual wit with a passionate interest in the welfare of the common man. As the Second World War drew to a close there were various thoughts and initiatives about the post war reconstruction programmes. The Abercrombie Report of 1944 recommended satellite towns around London, and Harlow later emerged as a result. In 1944 Stephen Taylor's book **BATTLE FOR HEALTH**, published by Jarrold & Son, concentrated on

health policies. He suggested that Group Practices – with 10 or 12 doctors could be the thing of the future. "Such an arrangement had been christened a health centre".

He was a member of the Nuffield Trust and got it interested in this idea. Through their support he realised his ambition to establish unique Health Centres in the New Town. When the first health service provision was being considered he persuaded Essex County Council and the then Area Health Authority that various professional services should be brought together under one roof in an integrated centre and combined with GP services. The first such centre, Nuffield House at



Figure 2 - Services at the Nuffield Centre

The Stow, has a plaque commemorating its origin. The Nuffield Trust went on to finance later centres at Sydenham House, Addison House, Keats House, Lister House and Osler house at Potter Street. Unfortunately the Trust ran out of money and Jenner House at Old Harlow was provided by Essex County Council and the Barbara Castle Centre at Sumners by Harlow District Council.

In December 1983 Harlow Council purchased the six original Health Centres for £370,000 and established the Health Centres Trust to manage them. A few months later work started at Sumners, at a cost of £352,000, to complete the new town provision.

The Nuffield Provincial Hospital Trust was also interested in Stephen Taylor's ideas for a new type of Industrial Health Service. It was noted that loss of working time in industry, as a result of inadequate care of minor injuries and accidents could be lessened with proper provision.

The Chief Inspector of Factories in a later, 1960 report detailed 675 deaths and 190,266 work related injuries in that year. The Harlow centre was pioneering a new and valued service to industry. It attracted visits from professionals throughout the UK and abroad and was widely copied. In the UK similar centres were soon established. In Dundee, Glasgow, Kingston-upon-Thames, Rochdale, Smethwick and West Bromwich. On 13th November 1961 the Minister of Labour, Mr J Hare MP visited Edinburgh House and, after lunch at the Churchgate Hotel, visited Harlow Labour Exchange.

The Trust encouraged the idea and its subsequent generosity made possible the creation of the Harlow Industrial Health Service at Edinburgh House, adjacent to Cawley Hatch on the eastern industrial estate. The centre opened

in 1955 and within a year had 60 affiliated companies with over 10,000 employees. It was financed by subscriptions from member companies and organisations. A second centre, Perry Watlington House was opened on 1st April 1960 to serve the western industrial estate at Pinnacles.

Edinburgh House was open 7.30am – 5.30pm on Monday – Friday, and 7.30am – 12.30pm on Saturday. Arrangements were made for out of hours emergencies. The Pinnacle's centre initially opened part-time but this increased to full time as membership increased.



Figure 3 - Edinburgh House

The Harlow Industrial Health service was established as a non-profit making Company and registered as a charity. Stephen Taylor became the first Medical Director and staff included nursing sisters with some of the town' GP's attending on a sessional basis.



Figure 4 - The Team in the Early Years

When a company applied to join the service a visit to their premises would be arranged. Usually "Sister" would meet with a management

representative and the person responsible for first-aid. An inspection would be made of the first-aid room and the equipment available.

They would discuss potential injury problems that might occur in that particular production environment.

Each new member was given a Factory First Aid Box with contents specified by a Ministry of Labour circular. The centre recommended a supplementary "Harlow" list.

In 1960 Lord Taylor wrote a handbook entitled FIRST AID IN THE FACTORY. It was a comprehensive guide on how to deal with minor and serious injuries, fractures and sprains, burns, scolds, heat and chemical injuries, gassing and artificial respiration.

Articles on the book appeared in the Daily Telegraph, Daily Mirror, Economist and New Scientist, and it was discussed on the BBC Today programme. A copy was given to each new applicant. The first edition of 5000 copies, published by Longmans, soon sold out and a similar number was produced in a second print, and it was reprinted many times. Later it was translated for various overseas editions.

In 1962 two local GP's made a 16mm colour film entitled " The GP in Industry – Harlow Pattern". Nursing staff made regular visits to member's premises to discuss any problems, to inspect first-aid rooms and to check that first-aid boxes were properly stocked. Edinburgh House was extended in 1962 and this facilitated the dermatological, orthopaedic, ophthalmic and physiotherapy clinics and First Aid lectures. It also offered X Ray facilities for hands, arms and feet.

A service of pre employment medicals for member companies and associates was developed. Staff also visited 21 contractors sites in the area. The service soon became aware of the complex problems it would to deal with. Basic services of First Aid Training, Influenza vaccinations, blood donor sessions, chiropody, physiotherapy and mass miniature Radiography were all available at the centre. Visits to local factories and premises continually gave new challenges in dealing with actual or potential injuries or hazards.

These included, amongst other areas:-

Taking air samples to see how far vapourised oil was being converted to higher polycyclic hydrocarbons with 3-4 benz – pyrene.

Both centres had ongoing programmes of first-aid training and refresher courses.

In May 1961 the Bishop of Chelmsford suggested that an Industrial Missioner might become involved with the centre. The Council of Management accepted the idea in principle but said it would not become part of the service. Local resident Judith Piepe was nominated to take up the post but moved from Harlow so the arrangement was not proceeded with.

In 1961 Lena Jeger MP visited Edinburgh House and wrote a feature for THE GUARDIAN on Health Services in Harlow. She was a close friend of Leah Manning who had been the local Labour MP from 1945 – 1950. In October, now Baroness Jeger, performed the

opening ceremony of the Leah Manning Centre in Harlow.



Figure 5 - Lena Jager MP

Each winter the service offered influenza vaccinations to all Member Companies and return statistics showed that very few people who were treated actually suffered the illness, whereas those who declined lost many working days due to 'flu.

By 1961 68 companies were members covering 10,277 employees. The same year Harlow Hospital opened and consultations produced useful mutual policies in dealing with accidents and emergencies.

In 1962 Stephen Taylor was given leave of absence to help the World Health Organisation with lectures on Industrial Medicine in Yugoslavia, the USSR, Finland, Sweden and Switzerland. He undertook similar tours in America and Canada.

It was apparently on one of the later trips that he visited the University of Newfoundland. In 1967 he became the President and Vice Chancellor of the University and was prime mover in establishing the University of Newfoundland Campus in the former Maltings building in Old Harlow. Students from Newfoundland would come on three months visits and be placed in local businesses or organisations. During my service with Harlow Council we had a number of guest students in the department.

Lord Taylor served as Medical Director of the service from 1955 – 1964. He was succeeded by Patricia Elliott. On retirement he moved to Clwyd, N. Wales and died there on 11th February 1988 aged 77.

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