

Report on the British Society for the History of Radiology Annual lecture 'The Society of Radiographers – A Century of History 1920-2020'

Report by Dr Arpan K Banerjee Past Chair British Society for the History of Radiology

The venue of this year's British Society for the History of Radiology annual guest lecture on the 10 Feb 2020 was again the magnificent Governor's Hall at St Thomas's Hospital, London. The lecture was meant to be a double act by two distinguished members of the radiography profession but as Audrey Paterson was unfortunately unable to attend Richard Price delivered the presentation.

The proposal for a society for radiographers goes back to 1918 when Albert Forder from King's College Hospital and Cyrus Winch from St Thomas's Hospital started making the first moves to form a society for radiographers. In the early days of radiology and radiography the professions were not strictly regulated as now and anyone from any background was able to set up the apparatus to take radiographs. The Institute of Electrical engineers approved the formation of a society of radiographic operators and Dr Hernamon Johnson wrote an article in 1919 in the Archives of Radiology and Electrotherapy proposing that this society would organise and educate the various classes of lay helpers.

Sir Robert Knox the eminent radiologist at King's College Hospital and Sir Archibald Reid from St Thomas's Hospital lent support to the creation of the new Society of radiographers on 6 Aug 1920 with a council meeting held on the 18 Oct in 1 Albermarle Street and Sir Archibald Reid was installed as President for 3 years. Initially 40 members were admitted without examination. In the early days there was no distinction between diagnostic and therapy radiographers. Soon examinations were introduced. Controversy about whether non medical radiographers should be allowed to report began to rage and initially it was felt that 15 years experience should allow the radiographer to provide reports although the period between 1924 and 1988 was one during which it was felt that the radiographers should not be allowed to interpret the images produced.

1926 saw the first radiographer President Harry Ede. The audience then heard about the contributions of Dr George Kaye FRS (Editor of the journal Radiography 1935-1941) as well as the legendary Mrs Kitty Clark (first female President of the SOR 1935-37)whose famous book on radiographic positioning is now in its 14th edition.

In the 1960's the society acquired new headquarters in 14 Upper Wimpole Street. It was a decade of poor working conditions and the Limbert injustice case of wrongful sacking of a radiographer was covered.

The struggles to improve the status and working conditions of the profession

throughout the 60's and 70's were alluded to including the conflicts with Barbara Castle in the 70's . The replacements of the diploma qualifications the HDCR with an eventual graduate profession in the 21st century and the improvements in the career structures and new roles with reporting radiographers in today's NHS were described along with the struggles along the way.

Many in the audience had lived through the changes and it is probably true to say the progress of the radiography profession was interlinked with the changes in the NHS in general since its foundation in 1948. The relentless march of radiological progress also necessitated increased staffing which because it was not always available necessitated new working patterns and certain blurring of the professional boundaries in hospitals.

The audience were given an excellent overview of the history of the radiography profession and the political changes which were occurring in the NHS throughout this period.