Objectives

To promote interest in, and awareness of accident prevention among employers, employees, the self employed and the public within the group area, and to maintain the interest of the members in the study, application and improvement of accident prevention methods, occupational health and environmental protection.

To foster and to develop the spirit of co-operation between employer, employee and the self employed regarding health, safety and environmental issues and to encourage the establishment of active and efficient safety management in member's activities, as well as the continuing professional development of individual safety practitioners.

To afford facilities for the pooling and dissemination of knowledge, for the study of the appropriate statutory requirements, for the reading of papers and the promotion of lectures and discussions and for such other activities as may tend to further the general objectives of the group.

Membership

Membership of the group shall be open to all industries and commercial organisations, the self employed and other interested organisations and persons within the area covered by the group.

Welcome

Herefordshire Health & Safety Group 50th Anniversary Celebrations

A warm welcome to everyone connected with the Herefordshire Health & Safety Group. This booklet has been compiled as part of our 50th birthday celebrations, commemorating the formation of the Group in 1968.

Within the booklet you will see a record of the Groups’ progress over the last 50 years with special emphasis on initiatives by local industry and commerce, as well as the contributions made by our Group. We thank our friends Mike, Jazz and Josh at the University of Portsmouth for all their hard work and creativity in producing this booklet.

Finally we look forward to your continued support in making our Group the success it has become - enjoy the read and keep safe!!
I was not Herefordshire born but was brought to live in the County in the spring of 1949 when I was just 6 weeks old. From my earliest childhood memories I can recall that it was a very different place from what it is today. In fact, my father, a doctor in a single-handed rural practice for nearly 30 years, used to say that in the first fifteen years or so following the Second World War, life in Herefordshire had changed very little from the nineteen thirties. With the coming of the 1960s however the prospect of change was in the air. Modernisation was appearing in many walks of life and people’s aspirations were changing, not least in the world of work.

It was at the end of this decade, in 1968 (a momentous year in world events), that the Herefordshire Health and Safety Group was born, founded by people who understood that ‘industrial safety’ had to move with the times. They saw that those whose jobs involved helping to prevent accidents and occupational ill health had to band together to help one another and to spread the message that saving life and limb was not just good for workers, it was good for business too.

(If you think safety’s expensive, try having an accident!)
The fact that, in the fifty years since its founding, the Group has survived and has grown in strength and expanded, is testimony not just to the dedication of successive generations of volunteers who have picked up the baton from their predecessors; it proves two things: firstly, continuing acceptance of the fundamental importance of getting safety and health precautions right in the workplace; and secondly (despite the growth of modern communications), the enduring importance of people getting together locally to exchange information and ideas and to reach out to others. Some of the topics which the Herefordshire Group continues to focus on - such as machinery guarding, fire safety, safety with hand tools and so on – are the same issues that it had to deal with when it started out. But the world of occupational health and safety has expanded enormously. Today it encompasses every employment sector and not just accident prevention and protection of workers’ health from things like exposure to harmful substances or noise and vibration - but issues like safer driving for work, violence and assaults, stress, mental health and general well-being.

In the end, getting together at the County level to help local businesses get their health and safety right really does save lives, reduce injuries and safeguard health. They may not know it themselves - and we shall never know who they are - but there are certainly many men and women alive and well today in Herefordshire who otherwise would have been harmed while at work but for the diligent efforts of the health and safety community in the County.

I feel privileged to be able to help the Group as their President. Despite its being portrayed by some as a joke subject, we’ve actually come a long way in health and safety. Yet sadly, as too many tragedies in the workplace continue to demonstrate, there’s a lot more life-saving still to do. I call on everyone in Herefordshire who shares this conviction to help the Group in its vital work over the next fifty years.

Roger Bibbings
MBE BA CFIOSH

3rd November 2017
Setting the Scene

1968: the year of international student protest, Martin Luther King Junior’s assassination, the final steam-hauled passenger trains in Britain – and the establishment of the Herefordshire Health and Safety Group.

Overview

For 50 years the Group has been contributing to improving health, safety and the environment, in Herefordshire and nationally. Britain and the county have changed dramatically in this time, and we see these shifts in society and economy being played out in the Group’s history and activities. Over the years, the Group has reflected the key health and safety concerns of the area and the nation, following the big trends and issues but dealing with them at a local level, relevant to organisations and people. So, we see the big changes like the 1974 Health and Safety at Work Act, the shifting occupational structure in the British economy and the increasing prominence of health and psychosocial issues – and plenty of others – all filtered through Herefordshire’s experiences.
Initially established as the ‘Herefordshire Industrial Accident Prevention Group’, the Group’s title reflected the then-dominant idea that both industry and accidents were the core focus of activity – something seen in the other such groups found across the UK. The 1974 change to ‘Hereford & District Accident Prevention Group’, dropping the ‘industrial’, paid attention to the wider changes in society, as it acknowledged the Group’s remit beyond traditional understandings of industrial work. At the same time it also followed the changes in local government structure, as Herefordshire lost county status; the Group tied its identity to the city of Hereford and surrounding areas, as had been the intention when the Group was established.
Only two years passed before the Group’s name was changed once again: to the ‘Hereford & District Occupational Health and Safety Group’. This 1976 alteration responded to the new world of health and safety that emerged out of the 1972 Robens Report and 1974 Health and Safety at Work Act. It marked a shift in attention from industrial accident prevention to a wider remit that gave occupational health issues formal and prominent recognition and really put the phrase ‘health and safety’ on the radar.

The final name change was in 1986, to the current title, ‘Herefordshire Health & Safety Group.’ This reversion to the county title (though formally Herefordshire didn’t revert to county status until 1998) and dropping of the ‘occupational’ aspect sent a message about the wide remit of health and safety issues covered by the Group and its relevance to all.
Changing Fortunes

The Group has seen highs and lows over the years – including of membership. Growing well from its foundation in the late 1960s it hit its first peak in the mid-1970s, before falling off in the 1980s as the economic and social structure of Herefordshire and England changed.

A concerted membership drive in the 1990s boosted numbers to new highs, including in the 2000s to well over 100 members. With the economic crash of 2008, membership was once again challenged, as firms closed or faced difficult choices about where to invest resources.

Reading through the Group’s records it’s possible to get a sense of what has been done since 1968 and the peaks and troughs of activities and membership. These records are, sadly, incomplete, with a significant gap in the 1980s (reflecting, perhaps, a low point in Group membership). But from what remains it is possible to see some of the similarities across half a century: including how the Group has communicated with its members; the topics covered; the constant drive to spread health and safety messages and increase membership; and the voluntary commitment of Group members – particularly Committee members – in the name of the local good.
And yet the past 50 years have, of course, been a period of great change, so there are key differences between activities and approaches in 1968 and 2018: particularly the rise of public health and safety issues; the changing focus of occupational health and safety which itself reflected the decline of some workplaces and rise of others and alterations in the gender balance of the workforce; the influence of Europe; and public debates about health and safety.

This short booklet tells the Group’s story, marking its first 50 years and looking forward to the next 50.
the first fifty years
Before the Group

The Group is excited by its past and its future, and invites you to join the journey.

It wasn’t always obvious that accidents might, or should, be prevented. For much of the nineteenth century people lacked understanding about accident causation or weren’t interested in spending time and money on the area – particularly workplace accidents. The growth of trades unions and concern about the humanitarian issues posed by some accidents slowly made British society aware of the problems, and attitudes began to change. One approach was the creation of voluntary groups dedicated to preventing deaths and injuries caused by accidents.

In Britain such efforts stretch back to the 1910s. Accident prevention groups started in some industries in the 1910s, with city- or region-specific groups starting in the 1920s, aiming to cover all workplaces and employers in a particular area. They were all dependent on the goodwill of their participants, and often on the encouragement of employers. Indeed, such a group started in Hereford City in 1934, although little is known about it, suggesting it didn’t last long or leave much of a record. There was also a national movement, which resulted in the formation of the organisation that became the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents.

By the 1960s, there were well-established safety groups and organisations in the major manufacturing areas and cities, reflecting the focus at this time on accidents in more traditional heavy industries which were still the mainstay of the British economy: engineering, shipbuilding, steel-making and the like. In comparison, the Herefordshire economy was rather less dependent upon these areas, even with the state-encouraged expansion of industry in the region after the Second World War. The county was still relatively rural, with some light industry and what would now be known as SMEs – small to medium sized enterprises. Nevertheless, this didn’t mean safety issues were any the less pressing: if an accident at work happened, it was still an accident with an impact on the individual, their workplace and colleagues, their family and friends, and the wider
community. It didn’t matter if it was in a coal mine, on
a farm, or in an office.

At the same time, nearly one-third of the workforce sat
outside a formal regulatory framework of law and state
inspectors. Where it did exist, most law was concerned
with the traditional heavy industries, and focused on
‘nuts and bolts’ matters: the detailed specifications
about machine guards, physical conditions in factories,
lighting levels and so on. There was a confusing mass
of rules and regulations, slow to be changed in light
of new conditions. They were overseen by the Factory
Inspectorate, and concentrated very much on safety
rather than health.

Things started changing in the 1960s, as accidents
at work increased and the Factory Acts were seen
as increasingly unresponsive to modern conditions.
Trades unions and Factory Inspectors started calling for
changes, including more voluntary safety committees
and groups. New processes – including those involving
chemicals – emerged which meant risks were no longer
confined within the factory walls and public safety was
threatened. Public disasters like the Aberfan tragedy of
1966 raised the profile of health and safety.
Nationally in 1968 there were 312,430 accidents at work in manufacturing, services and industries covered by the Factory Inspectorate – and this excludes agriculture and railway workers. Herefordshire came under the Worcester Division of the Midlands (Birmingham) District, which as a whole had 1,746 accidents; this was a rate of about 37 accidents per 1,000 employees. Whilst low compared to Birmingham city, this was still felt to be too high. Drawing on the national trends already noted, and seeing the Worcester Accident Prevention Group established in 1967, in January 1968 a number of concerned individuals and organisations met to discuss establishing a similar body in Herefordshire. On 7 February 1968, at the Green Dragon Hotel in Hereford, the Herefordshire Industrial Accident Prevention Group was formally created.

Establishing the Group

1968 -1969

TW Beech & Son
HP Bulmer
Hereford Technical College
Herefordshire Group Training Scheme
Royal Army Ordnance Corps (Moreton-on-Lugg)
Perryhill Precision Company
Painter Brothers

Founder

Members
The representatives of these organisations were those men – and they were all men at this point – who were in some way connected to safety matters: whether it be officially as part of their jobs as safety officers or training officers, or through production implications, as personnel officers and works managers. They looked to other groups, including RoSPA, the Birmingham and District Industrial Safety Group and the Worcester Group, borrowing wholesale from the Worcester Group the first constitution – much of which remains at the heart of the present-day constitution.

Within two months of the Group’s creation, the Head of RoSPA’s Industrial Safety Division had been in touch as he was ‘anxious to maintain a close and friendly relationship with the Ind Safety Groups throughout the country’ as ‘the Groups possess a tremendous potential for preventing accidents with their great store of practical experience and technical knowledge, and I am sure that this can be of immense value to the accident prevention movement as a whole’. The Group agreed to affiliate to RoSPA in March 1968.

At this time the Group had close links with the Fire Brigade, and the first activity was a visit to Hereford Fire Station in March 1968. Indeed, the fire station became the base for the Group’s meetings, held every month apart from January. Topics proposed for the first run of sessions included manual handling (including a demonstration and film), eye safety (part of national eye safety week, with a talk, demonstration and manufacturers’ display), accident prevention in small factories, the psychologist’s viewpoint of accident prevention (a joint meeting with Institute of Supervisory Management), industrial safety and young people (talk held in Leominster), and accident prevention in shops and offices.

Trying to encourage membership was a major focus of attention. From a membership of 28 in 1968, the Group expanded to 40 in 1969. And this despite the complaint ‘from a Mr Sykes of Saunders Valve. He complained that he had received no literature from the Group. The Secretary reported that Saunders Valve had not joined the Group and, therefore, was not on the circulation list.’ When this was reported back, Saunders Valve rectified it by paying two years’ membership!

The Group cast its net widely at this time, agreeing in June 1968 that ‘selected farmers’ would be suitable for membership – though sadly no details were given of the criteria against which farmers would qualify! Between April and June 1968 Group members gave talks about industrial safety to senior schools in the area, including showing a film and leading discussion around the ‘Accident prevention code for
young workers in the engineering industry'. An average of 90 students attended each talk, which was seen as a success, and the contact with schools maintained in 1969 and rolled out to include works visits.

The seminars and talks continued into the 1969-70 season, with the Committee agreeing the programme should be ‘formulated in such a way that it appealed to the supervisory level of industry’. Accordingly, the theme, ‘The Supervisor and Safety’, covered legal aspects, companies’ approaches to fire prevention, a visit to the Cadbury’s site at Marlbrook to consider safety and automated processes, PPE, industrial hygiene, noise, and trade unions and industrial safety. One of the interesting points about these topics is that many of them were quite progressive, covering topics that wouldn’t become mainstream for some time.

Reflecting the Group’s stated aim of encouraging the pooling and dissemination of knowledge, when one speaker at the 1969 AGM noted ‘the lack of good safety posters’, it was decided that Group members would pass posters on to the Secretary to distribute to interested members. Interestingly for the 1970s, a safety poster competition for school leavers was suggested.
The 1970s witnessed some seismic changes in the health and safety landscape of the UK. Unacceptably large numbers of people were still being killed or injured at work – over 236,000 in 1974. The old regime was felt to be so flawed that it was, effectively, done away with, and the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 passed, creating the Health and Safety Executive and creating general duties of care – to workers and the public – rather than imposing precise regulations. It introduced formal processes for managing health and safety at work, although the radical changes meant there was a rather slower take-up in companies (especially smaller firms) than might have been expected, as it took time to understand the new system. A subsidiary set of regulations introduced in 1977 brought trade union representatives into health and safety machinery on a formal basis. The dangers of asbestos were publicly discussed, and the 1974 Flixborough explosion dramatically demonstrated the devastating potential of industrial disaster.
Against this background, the Herefordshire Group continued its work, dealing with the changes and new topics as they occurred, while trying to combat some of the ‘apathy’ which Lord Robens had encountered in his report that produced the 1974 Act.

The basic set of activities established in the 1960s continued: talks to members, working with organisations beyond the county (including a joint meeting in April 1970 with the Worcester Group, and a number of talks from Factory Inspectors), and talks in schools. Liaison with RoSPA continued, including over a TV commercial aired around the time of the May 1970 AGM, ‘in which accident hazards appear to have [been] encouraged’, and about which it was decided to write to RoSPA to notify.

However, there were also more expansive efforts, trying to involve the wider community beyond ‘just’ local businesses. In 1970 the Group organised a competition for secondary school children to design a safety poster, ‘in order to stimulate an interest in Accident Prevention.’ The theme suggested was ‘Don’t let it happen to you Dad’ (which of course speaks to the assumptions of the time about the male breadwinner?). The entrants had their work exhibited at Hereford Fire Station in September and October 1970. The first prize was a bicycle, and 250 copies of the winning design were printed; overall the Group judged the competition ‘proved a success, not only because it was the first such event by any Industrial Group, but it aroused much interest from a wide range of the community.’ Disappointingly, details of the winner or a copy of their poster don’t appear to have survived.

Despite the success, the event wasn’t repeated, and for the next few years business was confined to the regular series of talks, hosted by member firms, and school visits. Talk topics covered included staples such as eye protection, fire safety, manufacturing topics relevant to the area (such as safety and hygiene in food processing), electrical dangers, safety training, the economics of accidents, and manual handling. Occasionally talks touched upon less commonly considered, but no less relevant, areas, such as agricultural hazards or safety committees. There was even a ‘brains trust on safety’ in the 1972-73 season, with representatives of the Factory Inspectorate, Fire Brigade and gas and electricity boards. School visits were made ‘with the object of informing School leavers of the basics of safety.’

The theme of the 1973-74 visits was “think safe” and aimed at encouraging a safety attitude of mind, with a total of 10 schools visited.

Keen interest was paid in the Robens Report and the subsequent legislation, with a number of talks outlining progress and then implications of various aspects of the 1974 Act. The November 1974 talk ‘Safety and the Law’, given by a former Factory Inspector, reminded members that the new law reflected how ‘external influences and effects had become increasingly apparent’ and that small businesses, technical colleges and the self-employed were all subject to the Act’s provisions. Uncertainty around the seemingly vague nature of the new law – notably the relative lack of precise details and specifications – was addressed in this talk: ‘The ramifications of the new Act were very wide and there was a great need for objective standards (not just opinions).’ Group members seem to have appreciated this focus on the new law, as it was noted that ‘a lively question time followed the talk’.

Despite the activity of the early 1970s, encouraging engagement with health and safety issues was proving increasingly difficult. The 1973-74 programme of events had an average attendance of 21 people, and the April 1974 AGM noted that ‘although some of the failure to support meetings might be attributable to the fuel emergency and three day working situation, the Chairman felt that members could have made more effort to support the Group’. Priorities for the coming year were identified: ‘If the Group was to achieve its objectives a higher level of attendance, involvement and participation was required from members particularly at management level.’ Part of this, it was decided, included the need to spread membership to a wider range of industries, including agriculture. Difficulties persisted. In March 1975 poor
The annual programme of talks and visits to members’ premises continued, becoming rather more varied in their subject matter, going beyond the usual topics like fire safety to include occupational health, the managerial role in health and safety, drugs and their effects (including the intriguing ‘paraphernalia show’), sub-contracting and environmental impacts of waste and effluent disposal.

Safety committees featured a number of times, in light of the 1977 Regulations: the 1977 talk included a trades union representative as speaker, and the 1978 talk ‘Safety Representatives and Safety Committees – a year on’ featuring a very lively exchange of views, sadly unrecorded.

Ron Aston, a past President of the Group, joined the Committee in 1977 and recalled that at this time people wanted to know more because of the 1974 Act, so they ran sessions to cater for this demand.

Another response to a Group session was recorded in 1978, when accompanying a talk on construction hazards, the film ‘Eyes Down’ was screened. It was quite gorey [sic] and illustrated what not to do on a construction site. During the screening of this film one member of the audience was somewhat overcome by the scenes depicted on the screen.’

Periodically there were other initiatives beyond the talks. In March 1975 the Group held its meeting at Hereford Town Hall, coupling it with an exhibition on safety in industry, home and leisure. The talk, ‘How safe are you?’, was intended for ‘all members of the public’, offering them the chance ‘to gain information on all aspects of safety, at home, at work, and on the roads’. This included a panel to answer questions.

Also in 1975 the Group explored offering prizes to young people achieving the silver Duke of Edinburgh’s Award, as it included content on industrial safety.

Ron Aston recalled how the Group got involved with the Herefordshire Child Accident Prevention Unit. The intention – as with earlier attempts to engage with children at school – was both to raise the profile of the Group (by making it about more than ‘just’ industrial safety) and to educate children about accidents, on the basis that if it was done young enough it would have a lasting impact. This also had another, perhaps unexpected, impact: in 1978 Health Education Officer with Hereford Health District Beryl Burgoyne joined the Committee. As the minutes from April 1978 record: ‘It is interesting to note that for the first time since the formation of the Group in 1968 a member of the fair sex has volunteered for committee work.’ The changing gender balance in the economy and increasing prominence of women in public life was reflected in the Group too. Overall, the Group approached the 1980s in a relatively stable position – but Britain was changing fast.

attendance at meetings was again a concern to the Committee: ‘When one thinks back to some six or seven years ago, when this group was first formed by local employers, and today we look round at the people who attend our functions, a person cannot help asking the question what has happened to the originators and their employees of six or seven years ago, because nowadays they are so obviously conspicuous by their absence from the meetings.’ Group membership plateaued at this time, hovering around the mid 40s.
The 1980s were hard years for many in Britain: be they workers in the declining traditional industries, trades unionists under attack from Margaret Thatcher’s Conservatives, or the Herefordshire Group trying to maintain its presence in an increasingly difficult environment. The changing nature of the economy – including recession and economic retrenchment – meant for many health and safety took a lower profile. Conservative hostility to regulation also meant the HSE was a target, and health and safety in general started to be seen as a legitimate topic of derision. The introduction of the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations, ‘tolerability of risk’ methodology and a series of high profile disasters (including Piper Alpha in 1988) raised public awareness of health and safety.

Against this backdrop, the Group experienced lean times. Membership sank into the 30s and then by 1989 the low 20s. The Group was kept alive by stalwarts on the Committee, and the presence of women on the Committee and in the Group became less remarkable – to the extent that in 1986 it was decided that: ‘a suitable tie pin or dress pin with the Group’s logo to be obtained for lady members’. Whilst the Group may have been more active than the remaining record shows, as the archive is incomplete on the 1980s in particular, there is a frustratingly little detail on activities and events. It is clear that the Group maintained its links beyond the county – for example, in the mid-1980s being
represented on the Hereford & Worcester Child Accident Prevention Group, and on RoSPA’s Occupational Health and Safety Groups Advisory Council. The core tactic, however, remained seminars for Group members, and whatever the challenges the Group faced, it always managed to put on a programme of talks.

The decade started off with reasonable attendance at events – numbers in the 30s and even 40s were recorded, with a high of 73 people turning out in 1981 to hear the Chair of the Health and Safety Commission, Bill Simpson, talk on ‘Health and Safety in the Future’. Much of the early programme was still focusing on the practicalities of the 1974 Act. In April 1981 the Group Chairman noted that their objectives had been to increase publicity for the Group (a recurring theme) and to encourage greater attendance from both management and safety representatives.

Topics covered during the 1980s showed more of a balance across sectors and areas, reflecting the ways in which (light) industrial and manufacturing roles were losing ground to office and service based jobs. Health matters were also increasingly common. And topics well beyond traditional workplace safety started appearing more frequently – such as child accident prevention, food hygiene, garden and DIY safety, environmental health, safety in sport and leisure, defensive driving and home security. In addition, the 1989-90 programme was dedicated to COSHH. Of course, more traditional topics remained, including safe use of fork lift trucks, agricultural safety, safety signs (following new regulations in 1985), chemical handling, fire safety and noise.

The surviving Committee minutes from this period show that by the late 1980s the Group was taking active steps to recruit more members. The August 1989 meeting records that ‘a lengthy discussion took place on various methods for publicising the Group’s activities’, agreeing to explore the local BBC radio station, local press and associations for support. The search for members and a more prominent position in Herefordshire was to shape the Group’s direction for the 1990s.
The 1990s saw a continuation of some of the wider trends seen in the 1980s. This included a growing hostility from the state towards health and safety (particularly where regulation was concerned) and an increasingly important role for Europe. The European influence was seen in the implementation of the 1992 ‘Six Pack’ of regulations, key legislation which extended the remit of health and safety in new directions, including display screen equipment. This recognised the rise and rise of service- and office-based employment, occurring as the British economy changed and older forms of industry and manufacturing continued to decline.

The 1990s opened amidst economic downturn; yet despite this and low membership numbers, the Group retained ‘a positive attitude, even in the very difficult time in the recession throughout industry.’ Attendance at events was increasing, and even if during the 1991-92 programme of talks ‘unfortunately, two speakers failed to turn up’, the resourceful Committee had a solution: ‘we had to draw on two of our Committee Members at the last minute to stand in.’
Committee meetings during the 1990s continued to consider how the Group’s visibility and image might be improved, regularly returning to the matter. In June 1994 a note was added alongside the planned AGM and quiz: ‘Content OK – Jazz up?!’ And in his opening remarks to the 1995 AGM, Chair of the Committee Fred Parkin noted some of the issues faced by health and safety professionals and groups: ‘Health and safety has a high profile after a major accident occurs – regrettably a low profile at other times. There is still a need for greater awareness of hazards in the workplace and a reduction in the risks being taken by many people at work. This is where a group such as ours can play a vital part by providing a forum for discussion and a means of keeping up to date with changes in legislation and methods of accident prevention.’ These had been aims of the Group since its foundation, and remained no less important in the 1990s.

Under Fred Parkin’s leadership the Group undertook a big membership drive, successfully increasing numbers from 25 in 1990 to 51 in 1995 (the year Hereford United joined). The rise was discussed by the Committee in the mid-1990s, seeing the change as resulting from a more professional approach to the organisation and operation of the Group. This included a much more proactive approach to publicity and working with the press: press releases about important topics and events were prepared and sent out and active attempts were made to reach new audiences.

The Group’s core activity remained the annual programme of seminars. The topics covered varied over the years, but included PPE, workplace health provision, safe driving, portable appliance testing, manual handling, first aid, young people at work and the intriguingly named ‘HSE and do’. Average attendance at these sessions hovered around the mid-20s for much of the period, rather lower than might have been hoped, but still a significant investment for those who were present.

In addition to the evening meetings, day-long seminars became a feature of the Group’s programme, involving many outside speakers from a variety of organisations and demonstrating the Group’s growing reputation and success. Given the country’s economic make up, the target audience of 1994’s ‘You can do it’ day seminar was small business. It focused on something that was of pressing interest to many organisations: the impact of the EU’s 1992 ‘Six Pack’ regulations, with sessions on risk assessment, COSHH and safety management. This carried on the 1993-94 programme’s emphasis on meetings themed around managing health and safety with emphasis on more a practicable approach and hands on experience’. The 1996 day seminar tried to turn conventional thinking about the costs of implementing good health and safety on its head, under the title ‘Profit from Health and Safety’. Its emphasis was again on the practical, including presentations on putting risk assessments into practice, managing asbestos and ‘health and safety jargon? Unravelling the mysteries’ (given by an HSE Inspector), all followed up with a question and answer session.

Innovation continued, to try to engage people in health and safety issues. In 1996 the Group co-organised a forklift truck safety competition, challenging drivers to complete a set range of tasks, demonstrating their skills and picking up the fewest penalty points for hazardous practice. With a first prize of £100 – and of course the kudos – the event ‘proved a success with good television and media coverage on the day’. It also had the advantage of raising several hundred pounds for St Michael’s Hospice – another way in which the Group has been firmly rooted in the county.

As the local and national society and economy were changing, so emerging topics became increasingly important. Whilst manual handling and matters related to physical dangers and accidents remained important, health became more significant. The 1995 ‘Good Health is Good Business’ day seminar covered topics including stress, musculoskeletal disorders, respiratory issues, and risks to pregnant workers. The 1998-99 programme was themed ‘health, safety and environment’, reflecting the understanding that these topics were all related. The Group also practised what it preached: at its 1998 Safety Training Day it didn’t just discuss healthy workplaces but served up ‘a specially-devised healthy menu’!
The significance of the Group locally was seen in an address given by the Chair of Herefordshire County Council about the importance of health and safety: the Group was ‘an asset to the county’. At the same time, the various ways in which accidents might affect people’s lives were noted, including the economic impact: ‘It is here that the Herefordshire Health and Safety Group plays an important part in the economic future of our county’.

It was not just at county level, however, that the Group played a part: there were wider connections. Chair of the Group Fred Parkin had been on the National Health and Safety Group Council, the predecessor of Safety Groups UK, since 1986, taking the role of vice-chair and treasurer in 1993. The programme for the Worcester health and safety group was circulated through the Herefordshire Group, although the proposed 1994 joint meeting was not held as ‘the topic was not of interest to the assembled group members.’

In addition, the Group ensured that national – and even international – issues were made real to people and businesses in Herefordshire. Long-serving Committee member Ron Aston recalled that the 1989 EU Framework Directive (which provided for a series of measures to encourage occupational health and safety) really brought home to employers the need to engage with health and safety in all aspects of their operations - making the work of organisations like the Group all the more pressing. This included making risk assessments a much more significant (if often misunderstood and unfairly disliked) part of managing health and safety. This was seen in the Group’s attention during the 1990s to risk assessments, a topic that started to appear regularly in the seminar programme, as did things like the EU working time regulations.

The 1990s ended with successes and milestones for the Group. Don Finch, one of the Group’s founding members reflected on the Group’s 30th anniversary: ‘little did we realise that our modest start would result in the thriving and successful safety group that it is today. I feel honoured to have been connected with those early beginnings.’ For
the first fifty years

the first time the Group marked European Week of Safety and Health – which produced an Alan Butler Award for the best programme of events. New organisations continued to join: having grown from 51 in 1995 to just short of 100, in 1999 a challenge was issued to reach 100. This was duly reached before the turn of the century, when Paragon Laundry of Ross-on-Wye joined. The re-establishment of Herefordshire as a unitary authority in April 1998 offered the potential for improved collaboration with local government agencies, something the Group explored with enthusiasm. All told, there was much to look forward to at the dawn of the new millennium.
The 2000s was an important decade for the Herefordshire Health and Safety Group, looking to build upon its success in the 1990s. Nationally the picture was mixed: as a topic ‘health and safety’ suffered from increasingly vehement attacks that undermined its status in the popular mind. From a serious (if under-appreciated) topic, it became a thing of ridicule, as unjust and frankly untrue stories were peddled – sometimes by the media, sometimes by politicians. The HSE and post-1974 system was strained, including by the decision in 2008 to merge the Health & Safety Commission with the HSE. At the same time, there were positives: the 2007 Corporate Manslaughter Act ensured that companies and their top management were forced to give health and safety issues their full attention.

The Group started the new millennium marking its success: as the HSE’s Regional Director noted in February 2000, ‘Networks which involve health and safety professionals in organisations are vital for sharing good practice, providing support, keeping up to date, and I am pleased that we have such a good group in Herefordshire.’ The majority of the Group’s members at this time were small businesses – 71 of the 100 members employed fewer than 100 people – and members were predominantly based in and around Hereford itself, with 69 organisations in the city and its surrounds.
Recruiting members has been a constant need, and something the Committee members have returned to time and again over the years. The 2008 AGM saw further discussion about increasing membership, with suggestions including sector based seminars aimed at construction, garages and retail (a sign of the changing times) and the further note ‘consider also: estate agents, doctors, vets, sports, banks’.

Continuing the proactive approach adopted in the 1990s, the value of publicity was recognised. The Group made a number of attempts to reach the widest possible audiences, including in October 2000 a broadcast on BBC Radio Hereford and Worcester about back pain at work. A number of other broadcasts followed in the coming years; press releases about important issues or events were made regularly; and the importance of establishing the Group’s website was agreed upon by the Committee. The local press featured updates on Group activities, including at the Group’s suggestion the Hereford Times’ Business Supplement of February 2004 focusing on health and safety.

The Group was willing to look at different options to publicise its existence and activities. In one 2008 discussion they considered some possible approaches:

‘Hello to local businesses, did you know the HH&SG exists and what the Group offers for a measly sum of £25 yearly membership?’

Has Health & Safety gone mad? Why not find out the sensible approach to Health & Safety through the HH&SG!

Health & Safety – the down-to-earth approach with the HH&SG.

Part of the debate was about encouraging members’ engagement: ‘Do we want to work on providing quality or on drawing in new members? If we go for quality we are unlikely to get enough income, however it is sad when members are only members to enable them to put a tick in a box on a questionnaire.’ These rather sad comments reflected some of the public challenges to the status of health and safety that were growing in strength at this time.
The Group had some success in attracting attention, including its biggest publicity coup: the presentation made to the England blind football team in 2003. Following the theft of the team’s footballs, the Group presented a cheque to the team during half-time in a Hereford United match that was being televised on Sky. The Group – and health and safety messages – received national attention as a result.

As well as publicity, the Group sought to make wider links, with other organisations. From 2000 it established a positive working relationship with the Fire Safety and Protection Group, a local fire prevention organisation. The Group’s seminars were promoted amongst the Gloucester equivalent group and in the local library, colleges and council offices ‘to help communicate activities to the community’.

The changing nature of work and exposure to dangers meant that the Group increasingly touched on wider issues: ‘It had been mentioned about the Group working more closely with Road Safety, to this end they are to be invited to attend our AGM and in turn a representative can be sent to attend theirs.’ And by the time of the 2008-09 programme, the Group was working alongside agencies such as RoSPA, the Environment Agency, the HSE, the Local Authority and the Highways Agency.

The Group thought critically about what it gained from involvement in national bodies like Safety Groups UK, noting benefits including the ‘forum to exchange ideas and information, to prevent the wheel from being reinvented tens of times’, and ‘representation for the smaller groups and organisations in the larger arena’. Links were made to European-level activities, including the Health and Safety Weeks. This was formed around seminars on Week themes, such as asbestos in 2003 or musculoskeletal disorders in 2007, further reflecting the widening agenda of health and safety coverage.

This increasing diversity of employment and risks was seen in the topics covered by the Group in the 2000s. Traditional topics like agricultural safety, safety management, manual handling or slips, trips and falls remained significant, but more recent
areas were more and more noticeable: from back pain and RSI, through ergonomics and workstation set up (including a leaflet produced with business sponsorship), to carbon management, Corporate Manslaughter, or risk assessment. During the 2009 Swine Flu pandemic, the Group considered the issue ‘with reference to the duty of care employers have towards the employees and the possibility of litigation’.

Where people worked was also reflected in the topics the Group identified as important, such as road and home safety. Indeed, who was now working in the County was also important: the working from home session in 2008 covered ‘peripheral’ workers, bringing in display screen equipment, childcare, taking breaks and lone working, with other sessions touching upon issues particular to contractors and migrant workers. The Group’s inclusive nature was seen in the way that in 2001 it involved blind students in two seminars, designed for managers to get them to consider all members of the community, so far as health and safety was concerned at least. As one of the students later said ‘Thank you for inviting me to take part in your seminar. It was a good opportunity for me to learn a lot about health and safety.’

The economic, political and social situation towards the end of the decade was difficult. The economic slump meant that firms that had previously been members were closing, and the Group’s membership figures were falling. The introduction to the 2008–09 programme of activities noted ‘We start this year wondering what the future might bring, we hear about the credit crunch and how businesses will need to be more vigilant, and all too often we see health and safety being put to the bottom of the pile as an unnecessary expense to the business.’ The Group valiantly argued that this was a false economy but still, at the 2009 AGM had to admit ‘It has been a testing year for the Committee and local businesses, with businesses unfortunately falling by the wayside, this has had an impact on our ability to provide our seminars and has effected many of us personally.’ At the same time, all was not lost: they went on to say ‘However, we have been able to provide our members and other local businesses the opportunity to gain low cost, high quality health and safety advice through our seminars’ and member numbers were stable overall, ‘which is very encouraging for the local community.’ There was still justifiable optimism as the 2010s opened.
The economic challenges that emerged in the late 2000s have continued, with increasing intensity, to the present. At the same time, the early 2010s saw a series of high profile state-led pushes to review and deregulate health and safety. This was a product of the growing hostility in some quarters to state-directed regulation of health and safety. These factors have meant that the Herefordshire Health and Safety Group has faced a challenging second decade of the 21st century – but the response has been to keep pushing its important messages.

By the 2010s the Group was a well-established part of Herefordshire and health and safety, and so had the benefit of being able to draw upon the precedents it had set in the preceding 40 years. The key activity has remained the regular seminar programme, informing participants about important issues and involving external expert bodies like the HSE and Environment Agency. Topics covered have shown the same diversity of issues that has come to the fore since the 1990s, including things such as health risks like legionella and asbestos, the management of waste, accident investigation, manual handling and consultation with employees.
The Group continued to raise awareness of accidents beyond traditional understandings of the workplace. Specific initiatives included a mock trial at Herefordshire Crown Court in 2015, focusing on an imagined case involving occupational road risks. This proved to be a success, as well as drawing attention to duties towards the public. Similarly, one of the seminars in 2016 explored accidents outside the workplace.

Ron Aston, past President of the Group, noted the focus in recent years had returned to thinking about involving schools and the wider public in health and safety messages. In October 2016, for example, the Group ran a day-long event at Herefordshire and Ludlow College, focusing on the safety of young people at work and in activities beyond, such as driving and outdoor pursuits.

Building on its past, the 2010s saw continued external recognition for the Group. It won a number of prestigious awards, including a Silver Alan Butler Award in 2013, from Safety Groups UK. The Alan Butler scheme is designed to recognise the work of local/regional safety groups, judged on criteria including their relationship with the wider community, the annual programme of activities and support for the HSE. The silver award was followed by a Gold in 2015 and again in 2016, on the basis that the Group was making excellent efforts as the point of contact for health and safety guidance in Herefordshire, including outreach work to take messages to different audiences.
I have had the privilege of having been a member of the Group since 1978, becoming secretary by default. The predecessor of my then-job was Secretary of the Group and my manager at the time said I should take on the role to keep up the link. During the time with the Group I have also been Vice-Chair, Chair and a committee member before becoming a Vice-Chair again.

In 1994 a then-member of the Group’s committee, Fred Parkin, also had the role of being our link to the National Health and Safety Groups Council (now Safety Groups UK). That year he wrote a report about what Safety Groups were doing in the UK in the 1990s. Here are some of the findings on the Group’s objectives at the time >
Promoting an interest in and an awareness of accident prevention and methods of improving occupational health.

Fostering and developing a spirit of cooperation between organisations at work.

Pooling limited resources to help individuals and smaller organisations to disseminate health, safety and wellbeing knowledge.

These are still the aims of most groups today, but now looking more at the wellbeing of staff as we have reduced accident rates.

With new technology and instant access to health, safety and wellbeing information is there a place for Safety Groups?

I think there is, it will be different in the future than what we are doing at present. When I was secretary in the early 90s I started electronic newsletters being sent out to members via email. However as technology moves ever onwards at a fast pace, groups will need to be more “Tech Aware” to keep up to date. This could be Webinars, Facebook, WhatsApp, Facetime or whatever communication systems the new technology brings. However I think the Group members still need the face to face, sometimes the hand-holding for the newer members, interaction around health, safety and welfare. So that like-minded people can get together to discuss, interact and sometimes confirm with others that they are doing the right things.

Is the future still bright for the Group? I think so, but we need the technologists and younger people to help us keep pace and find new ways to reach out to members and prospective members.

Phil Chandler
Vice-Chair
Presentation of the Gold Alan Butler Award 2016
(L-R) Dr Bob Rajan (HSE), Mike Burge, Ron Aston, Adrian Cale
receiving the certificate from Lord Jordan & Trevor Smith
## Key Officials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Chairman</th>
<th>President</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1968 - 1969</td>
<td>Don Finch</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969 - 1970</td>
<td>D Joyce</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970 - 1971</td>
<td>A Laflin &amp; W Hughes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971 - 1972</td>
<td>W Hughes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972 - 1973</td>
<td>A Pitt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973 - 1974</td>
<td>D Thomas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974 - 1975</td>
<td>D Thomas</td>
<td>B Nelson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975 - 1976</td>
<td>T Carr</td>
<td>I Balchin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976 - 1978</td>
<td>T Carr</td>
<td>A Daniels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978 - 1980</td>
<td>R Thomas</td>
<td>A Daniels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980 - 1981</td>
<td>H Williams</td>
<td>A Daniels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981 - 1982</td>
<td>Ron Aston</td>
<td>A Daniels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982 - 1987</td>
<td>Ron Aston</td>
<td>T Carr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988 - 1991</td>
<td>Ron Aston &amp; Sun Valley Poultry</td>
<td>T Carr &amp; MBE Inco Alloys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994 - 1996</td>
<td>F C Parkin &amp; HAWTEC</td>
<td>Ron Aston &amp; Sun Valley Poultry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005 - 2007</td>
<td>Phil Chandler</td>
<td>Ron Aston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007 - 2009</td>
<td>Emma Righton-Corrick</td>
<td>Ron Aston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009 - 2010</td>
<td>Emma Righton-Corrick</td>
<td>Ron Aston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010 - 2011</td>
<td>&amp; Dave Baldwin</td>
<td>Ron Aston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012 - 2014</td>
<td>Dave Baldwin &amp; Rob Arnold</td>
<td>Ron Aston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014 - 2015</td>
<td>Rob Arnold &amp; Roy Sevier</td>
<td>Roger Bibbings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015 - 2018</td>
<td>Phil Chandler &amp; Trevor Smith</td>
<td>Roger Bibbings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Current Committee**
- Roger Bibbings (President)
- Phil Chandler (Joint Vice-Chair)
- Trevor Smith (Joint Vice-Chair)
- Adrian Gale (Treasurer)
- Peter Smith (Secretary)
- Ron Aston
- Mike Burge
- Sara Wirbers
- Jean Muttitt

*the first fifty years*
Dr Mike Esbester is Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Portsmouth. His research focuses on the history of safety, accident prevention and risk in Britain from the 19th-21st centuries. He has been funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council of the UK and the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health, and has worked with a number of safety groups, including the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents and the British Safety Council. He is keen to engage with policy-makers and professional audiences, as understanding the past is key to understanding the present and shaping the future.

Josh Bassett is a final year History and Politics student at the University of Portsmouth, hoping to go on to work as a Journalist after graduation. He undertook a lot of the research underlying the booklet during his second year, as part of the ‘Learning from Experience’ unit. He had no idea health and safety could be so interesting!

Jasmine Olivia Kenney BA (Hons) is the Creative Lead at Cloud Ten Group and Creative Director of Jazzy Olive. A design guru with a 1st Class Honours Degree and oodles of experience. Self-published 4 books and received the School of Art & Design Visual Culture Award and People’s Choice Award in Ethical Design from the University of Portsmouth. An Adobe Certified Associate in Visual Communication Using Adobe Photoshop, with years of education and experience in Adobe Creative Cloud. She has a key interest in social, cultural and historical art & design and has become particularly interested in the history of the Herefordshire Health and Safety Group.

About
The booklet was put together by Josh Bassett, Dr Mike Esbester, and Jasmine O. Kenney, overseen by the 2017-18 Committee of the Herefordshire Health and Safety Group. Josh and Mike undertook the research and wrote the copy; Jasmine designed the booklet.

Acknowledgements
Mike and Josh gratefully acknowledge the support of the Herefordshire Health and Safety Group, in particular Ron Aston, Roger Bibbings, Adrian Gale, Peter Smith, Phil Chandler and Trevor Smith. Many of the Group’s files are found in the Herefordshire Archive and Records Centre, and their help is appreciated.

Copyright
This work remains the copyright of Mike Esbester and the Herefordshire Health and Safety Group. All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without express written permission.

Printed in England.
First Printing, 2018