

History of the Association

History of the 'Safety First' movement, the inauguration and history of SOHSA

A history of the **Sheffield Occupational Health and Safety Association** - including a history of the **British Industrial 'Safety First' Association**, the **Sheffield Area Committee**, the **National 'Safety First' Association** and the **Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents**.

The British Industrial "Safety First" association was formed in 1917, and its membership in 1922 comprised 14 member firms in Sheffield, 70 in London and 17 in Birmingham. The Honary Secretary of the Association was Sir Herbert Blain CBE who was the Assistant Managing Director of the London Underground Railway and the London General Omnibus Group.

Sheffield held its' inaugural meeting on 23 January 1922 in the Norris Deakin Buildings, Kings Street, where 14 company representatives attended, and became the first area in the country to have its' own safety group, known as the Sheffield Area Committee of the British Industrial 'Safety First' Association. London, Birmingham and Manchester soon followed Sheffield's lead to launch their own area committee associations.

The second meeting of the Sheffield Area Committee was held in the evening of 22 February 1922, with 55 representatives from 12 companies, 9 trade unions and HM Superintending Inspector of Factories, Mr J Law.

In March 1922 Sir Herbert Blain CBE came to Sheffield to speak about the aims and objectives of the Industrial 'Safety First' association and the advantages to be derived therefrom. He gave a most interesting address and in closing said he did not mind the smallness of the attendance, as it was *"far better to have an attendance of 40 who do things, rather than 500 who promptly forgot all about it"*.

Sir Herbert Blain CBE resigned as Honary Secretary in January 1923 and his successor was Col. J. A. A. Pickard who became General Secretary. Col. Pickard attended the Sheffield Area Committee on the 13 June 1923 at 7:30pm and was hlad to meet the Sheffield members of the association, and in his three months so far with the association he had come to the conclusion: *"That the 'personal touch' was the backbone of the movement. In Sheffield they had a real live committee, the members of which were willing to give the movement every help they could"*.

In 1924 the 'Safety First' Association was amalgamated with the London Safety Council and various other Safety First movements covering Street and Home accidents, and changed its' name to The **National 'Safety First' Association**.

The willingness of the Sheffield Committee and its' members continued throughout the years, and after World War II in 1948 with Jack Atherton of Thomas Firth & Sons Ltd as Honary Secretary, who incidentally had been a member of the association since its' inauguration, the very active committee produced the **Slingers Handbook** and **Crane Signalling Chart**. Both of these documents became the standard for slinging throughout the world and continue to do so to this day.

By this time the National 'Safety First' Association had become the **"Royal Sociery for the Prevention of Accidents"** (RoSPA), and the Sheffield Committee changed its' name to the **"Sheffield Area Safety Group of RoSPA"**.

In 1949 the Sheffield Area Safety Group of Rospa organised the **first ever 'Safety Week'** the theme of which was called "**Good Housekeeping Week**" and the membership which numbered more than 300 small and large firms rallied in support of the Safety Week and set about cleaning out all the nooks and corners of their workshops in which scrap and other saleable materials had been accumulating since the war days. The net result of the exercise proved to be the most successful, not only from the safety standpoint, but also for the fact that the companies had been able to turn into cash much of the materials which had been recovered.

The great success of this 'Safety Week' was such that RoSPA took up the idea and the "**National Safety Week**" was born. It was after this that Jack Atherton, whose company by now had changed its' name to "Firth Brown Ltd", unfortunately passed away.

In 1950 (**NAME**) joined Davy-United, who were represented at the inaugural meeting by Sydney Smith who became Chief Cashier at the Darnall Works. In 1952 (NAME) became Honary Assistant Secretary of the Association and in 1954 became Honary Secretary. At this point the group organised one and two-day **conferences** and **exhibitions** on Health, Safety and Allied subjects as well as courses for *Power Press Toolsetters* and *Abrasive Wheel Mounters*. In addition the group also arranged for speakers to present papers on health and safety topics, and particularly the **Health and Safety at Work Act 1974** and the relevant statutory provisions made under it.

In 1976 the groups' title was changed to the "**Sheffield Occupational Health and Safety Association**", as it remains today, to more accurately reflect its' widening sphere of interest in the present day.

Interesting Resources

- [Original Inaugural Minutes of the Association - 23rd January 1922](#)
- [Alan Butler Obituary - by Tony Corfield](#)
- [Joyrce Rudrum Obituary - by Philip Marsh with contributions from members of SOHSA.](#)
- [SOHSA Association History Section](#)

Further Information

We are always looking to expand our history section to include further interesting information about the birth of SOHSA and the national safety groups movement.

If you would like to submit an article for inclusion, or can provide any additional resources - such as past photographs, videos or local information, please do not hesitate to [contact the executive committee](#).

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