

# Safe at work?

## Ramazzini *versus* the attack on health and safety

By **Dave Putson**

With an introduction by **Mark Serwotka**

'This is an important time to write the history of health and safety in the UK, given the near derision that the term now evokes in the media and from the Government. What Dave Putson demonstrates in writing this book is that health and safety, far from being the product of a more litigious society or the political agenda of overbearing bureaucrats, is rooted in human need, protecting people.

This book describes how, over the last 300 years, an evolving body of surveys, research, legal challenges and often tragic experiences led to an emergence of, at first, quite limited protections. Some of these histories will be familiar to the reader, like the match girls and 'phossy jaw', but others, like the seminal legal case of Priestley vs Fowler, are not. What the varied and fascinating histories indicate is that health and safety evolved to improve not only the workplace, but also our homes, our communities, our roads, our waterways, and public and environmental health ...

Today, there are desperate attempts to reverse those gains. Our Prime Minister echoes the worst of the 19th century's irresponsible industrialists when he says health and safety is an 'albatross around the neck of British businesses'. The burden to take reasonable and practical steps to ensure workers can come home at night is what Cameron objects to when he says he wants to "kill off the health and safety culture for good". Despite this supposedly rampant culture, the HSE records that around 175 people died in 2011/12 from injuries sustained at work while, according to the Hazards campaign, up to 50,000 die each year from work-related illnesses, including 6,000 from occupational cancers.

**Mark Serwotka, General Secretary of the Public and Commercial Services Union, from his introduction**

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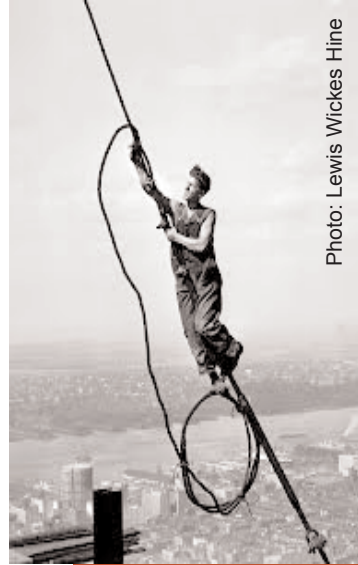


Photo: Lewis Wickes Hine



Bernadino Ramazzini's pioneering work, *Opera Omnia*, first published in 1700, examines many diseases related to particular trades in renaissance Italy.

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**Dave Putson is a union health and safety representative in the London Courts.**

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