

Book Reviews

As Durbach turns out to thank this reviewer with typical generosity, he “hereby declares” that he deliberately skipped her Acknowledgements until after completing his review, for fear of meeting too many friends beforehand.

Logie Barrow,
University of Bremen

Raj Bhopal and John Last (eds), *Public health: past, present and future: celebrating academic public health in Edinburgh, 1902–2002*, London, The Nuffield Trust, 2004, pp. xxi, 213, £25 (paperback 0-11-703264-6).

One of the best things about this post-conference publication is a fascinating overview of the next epidemiological transition in the Asia Pacific. What, you may ask, has that got to do with academic public health in Edinburgh? Not a lot, and neither has the bulk of this book. My hackles first rose when reading in the Preface that no other British university can match Edinburgh’s claim to have founded academic public health. In fact Liverpool created a professorship in public health in 1897—a year before Edinburgh—and earlier post-graduate courses had been established by both Dublin and Cambridge. Although this is a personal whinge, it highlights one of the main weaknesses of the book: its attempt at history is vague, muddled and at times plain wrong. This is not helped by delegating the section on ‘The Past’ to non-historians. There is a sketchy chapter on general ‘Landmarks in the history of public health’; ‘Some historical notes on health and public health in Edinburgh’ and ‘Edinburgh’s contribution to public health’. No one appears to have given any thought to how these would fit together, so they read like verbatim conference presentations, where the speakers have subjected the audience to a sequence of repetitious anecdotes. They are all keen on “gardyloos” but not so keen on analysing (or even describing) how academic public health in Edinburgh has developed with reference to the local or national changes in

scientific knowledge, or socio-economic structures. There are already comprehensive accounts of the work of the nineteenth century MOH Henry Littlejohn, his successors, and the development of health in Edinburgh. These disparate hagiographical reminiscences add nothing new.

The section entitled ‘The Present’ actually contains reviews of late-twentieth-century developments. Anthony Hedley (Professor of Community Medicine in Hong Kong) presumably features because he at one time worked in Edinburgh, which is fortunate for this volume. His chapter on emerging problems such as SARS and tobacco control in the Asia Pacific is well written and useful. Yet, we are then thrown back again to Littlejohn (and an erroneous claim that he carried out the first epidemiological survey of a city in Britain), and further regurgitations of the history of diseases such as smallpox. There is actually very little about the contributions of Edinburgh academics, if that is what this volume sets out to achieve. Much more could have been said about people like Mary Fulton, who pioneered research on coronary heart disease and lead poisoning in children. Sheila Bird’s chapter is a welcome relief, and an example of how oral history can illuminate the interface of academic and practical public health. Her account of the development of the CD4 database during Edinburgh’s HIV crisis in the 1990s is what I had hoped to find in a volume with such an enticing title. She provides an excellent case study in the politics of epidemiology. Helen Zealley’s autobiographical approach to Scotland’s post-devolution struggle to produce joined-up public health policy is also worthwhile.

This volume, produced to celebrate the centenary of academic public health in Edinburgh, unfortunately obscures some of the most interesting aspects of its development in a mire of second-rate historical anecdotes. Despite the claims of Bhopal and others that twenty-first-century public health is now truly inter-disciplinary, it sadly illustrates the pitfalls of failing to engage with historians in a meaningful way.

Let's hope that this lesson is learnt in time for the bicentenary.

Sally Sheard,
University of Liverpool

Lynn McDonald (ed.), *Florence Nightingale on public health care*, vol. 6, *Collected works of Florence Nightingale*, Waterloo, ON, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2004, pp. xiii, 701, US\$95.00 (hardback 0-88920-446-2).

Lynn McDonald and her collaborators have taken on a mammoth task: that of collating and organizing "all the available surviving writing of Florence Nightingale". The work is a remarkable collective effort. The sixteen-volume series, *The collected works of Florence Nightingale*, is now almost half complete, with volumes on *Life and family* (2001), *Spiritual journey* (2001), *Theology* (2002), *Mysticism and eastern religions* (2003), *Society and politics* (2003), and *European travels* (2004) already published, in addition to *Public health care* (2004). The result is an intriguing insight into both the internal world of Florence Nightingale, and the priorities of McDonald as editor.

Nightingale's religious "calling" has long been a subject of debate for historians of her life and work. In stressing the spiritual drive behind Nightingale's work, McDonald's approach is in line with that of both one of the earliest writers on the subject (Strachey, *Eminent Victorians*, 1918) and one of the latest (Dossey, *Florence Nightingale, mystic, visionary, healer*, 1999). Other recent writers have been more likely to emphasize Nightingale's family life, or the secular nature of her work (Woodham-Smith, *Florence Nightingale*, 1950; Smith, *Florence Nightingale: reputation and power*, 1982; Baly, *Florence Nightingale and the nursing legacy*, 1997). McDonald appears, in this volume, to take it for granted that religious calling was the foundation for Nightingale's endeavours, including her work in the field of public health. References to this calling and to the spiritual and religious nature of Nightingale's efforts appear repeatedly throughout the editorial sections of the volume, lending the work a unique flavour. In

this sense, the book is as much a reflection on the devout, but sometimes confused and conflicting religious currents in Victorian philanthropic thinking as on ideas about public health.

McDonald has chosen a range of texts to illustrate Nightingale's perspectives on and input into Victorian "sanitary reform" efforts. Three main areas are emphasized: firstly, the importance of Nightingale's *Notes on nursing for the labouring classes*, as both an expression of her philosophy on nursing, and a direct attempt to promote reform by enhancing popular knowledge; secondly, the efforts of Nightingale and her contemporaries to reform nursing in the workhouse infirmaries; and thirdly, Nightingale's perspectives on the nature of public health considered in broad terms and related to rural health, the colonies, and perceptions of contagion and germ theory.

Perhaps one of the most valuable elements within this volume is the detailed critical edition of Nightingale's *Notes on nursing for the labouring classes*. McDonald traces the provenance of this work in some detail, relating it, both in timing and in content, to the earlier and better-known edition: *Notes on nursing: what it is and what it is not* (January 1860) and the slightly later and improved version of May 1860. *Notes on nursing for the labouring classes* was published in April 1861, and intended for popular use. It was, indeed, referred to by Harriet Martineau as "your cheap *Notes on Nursing*" (p. 19). It was slightly revised and reprinted in 1868, with a further revision being proposed in 1875. McDonald presents us with a critical edition with bracketed additions from all four other versions. The result is a strange composite text which, whilst extremely difficult to read, serves as a valuable resource for scholars, illustrating, as it does, the very precise nature of the various alterations and amendments.

The second major contribution made by this volume to Nightingale studies is the presentation of a vast body of material on the reform of workhouse infirmaries. In this respect, the volume demonstrates how Nightingale's perspectives incorporated nurse training as part of a much broader approach. McDonald focuses considerable attention on the Liverpool