

primary care research into psychiatric epidemiology is not acknowledged, which is surprising given that this contributed in part to the new assessment of psychiatric morbidity described in the volume. These are, however, very minor quibbles in what is an extremely thoughtful and impressive piece of work.

Rhodri Hayward,
University of Exeter

Jérôme Pedroletti, *La formation des infirmiers en psychiatrie: histoire de l'École Cantonale Vaudoise d'Infirmières et d'Infirmiers en Psychiatrie, 1961–1996 (ECVIP)*, Bibliothèque d'Histoire de la Médecine et de la Santé, Geneva, Georg Editeur, 2004, pp. viii, 232, €24.00 (paperback 2-8257-0884-4).

The introduction to this book indicates that it is not quite the work of an historian. This is true. Nevertheless, the author has produced a history of a subject barely explored by historians, at least French speaking ones—nurses and their training—and this is its first merit. Pedroletti, a nurse himself, has had access to many archives, which made it possible for him to embark on an historical investigation. The result is a book which contrasts sharply with those mostly based on published testimonies. This is its second merit.

The study relates the history of a Swiss cantonal nursing school near Lausanne. It investigates how training for psychiatric nurses was thought through and subsequently managed. The school was founded in 1961. From the start, debates revolved around the question of a specially designed curriculum for psychiatric nurses as opposed to a common syllabus for all nurses. These debates caused some discord and the institution experienced three major crises in 1967, 1978, 1991, each leading to the resignation of the director and failing to produce any permanent solution. The reader gets the feeling of an institution constantly questioning and not immune to commotion within psychiatry itself. The author concentrates on the conflicts inside

the school, but it is not clear whether these are conflicts of personalities or diverging conceptions of what a nurse should be.

The author claims that working on this subject involves going back to the conception of the organization of care in hospitals and the definition of psychiatry. Indeed, the backdrop of the debates around the psychiatric nurse is the larger debate on the specificity of psychiatry within medicine and therefore the specificity of psychiatric cures in comparison to other types of cure. In other words, the discussions on the relationship between the mental and the moral form the setting for the discussions concerning the need for psychiatric nurses.

Pedroletti has done his work thoroughly. Although at least partly involved in this history, he has abstained from any comment too closely linked to his own professional experience. The interest and the benefit of this study lie in the author's good knowledge of scientific material and his use of largely unpublished documents. However, he does not always make the best use of these, and facts are delivered without the analysis which would enlighten the reader. Nevertheless, a chronology and a sociological presentation of the nursing profession usefully complete the book, thus offering an exhaustive illustration of the Swiss situation. The author's approach can be explained by his desire to differentiate the role of the historian from that of the practitioner. Who could see anything wrong with such careful forethought?

Jean-Christophe Coffin,
Université René Descartes, Paris

David F Smith and H Lesley Diack with T Hugh Pennington and Elizabeth M Russell, *Food poisoning, policy and politics: corned beef and typhoid in Britain in the 1960s*, Woodbridge, Boydell Press, 2005, pp. xiv, 334, illus., £50.00, \$90.00 (hardback 1-84383-138-4).

This handsome book—admirably including bottom-of-the-page footnotes rather than chapter endnotes—is the major published outcome of a Wellcome Trust-funded project on the Aberdeen

typhoid outbreak of 1964. This last significant typhoid episode to date in Britain was caused by an ineffectively sealed can of corned beef from Rosario in Argentina, contaminated by the sewage-ridden river water in which it was cooled. In an Aberdeen supermarket the Rosario corned beef passed through a slicer and so infected many other cooked meats. More than 500 people were diagnosed with typhoid, although only three elderly or already very sick patients died. In examining the antecedents and immediate origins of this episode, along with the outbreak itself and some of its consequences, this book makes an important contribution to debates about evolving approaches to food safety. The method involves a close reading of policy on corned beef and other cooked meats in the 1960s, with meticulous archival work in the PRO and the National Archives of Scotland leavened intermittently by oral testimonies of civil servants, medical practitioners, traders, journalists and patients.

Various issues and interests are outlined, each contributing to the Aberdeen outbreak: professional rivalries between veterinary inspectors and medical practitioners; government departmental rivalries, principally between MAFF and the Ministry of Health; territorial differences between Whitehall ministries and the Scottish Office; privileging of commercial and economic imperatives over safety concerns, particularly the importance of maintaining supply at stable prices, and the worry that British manufacturing exports could be lost if additional controls on South American meat imports were adopted. The principal follies identified are the secrecy of policy making, and the extremely slow and partial response to three smaller typhoid outbreaks in 1963, affecting Harlow, South Shields and Bedford, which clearly highlighted the dangerous use of contaminated water in the cooling of canned Argentine meat. Regulatory shortcomings are additionally explained by the “atomic meat” factor, with civil servants protecting the public integrity of the government’s large stockpile of corned beef kept in the event of nuclear warfare. This was being released onto the market in rolling

instalments as it aged, so civil servants were also protecting the government’s commercial interest when downplaying its tangible connections with the plants implicated in the 1963 and 1964 outbreaks. Meanwhile civil servants in all departments, including the Scottish Office, deflected criticism of central government by encouraging the scapegoating of the Aberdeen medical authorities, and especially the medical officer of health, Ian MacQueen, whose conduct was criticized—unfairly, it is convincingly argued here—by the Milne inquiry that investigated the episode.

There are perhaps three ways in which the book’s analysis might have been developed. First, typhoid and the 1960s might have been positioned more strongly within the longer history of regulatory prevarication over food, with the submission to business interests and privileging of supply and price questions over safety and quality, a well established feature of the approach of MAFF, the Ministry of Health and even the short-lived Ministry of Food in the 1940s and 1950s. Second, the focus on the permanent governors, the civil servants, tends to obscure changing political priorities. In the conclusion, the propinquity of the Aberdeen outbreak to the 1964 election is noted. Given the parallels with the 1996 Lanarkshire *E. coli* tragedy, more might have been made of a fading Tory regime confronting a major social and political problem, harried by a Labour opposition that gained electoral capital but may have exaggerated the crisis in doing so. Third, the oral reminiscences could have been used more extensively, allowing a stronger juxtaposition of the outbreak’s dramatic social and human dimensions with the low-key official manipulation of its origins and meaning. Yet overall this thoroughly researched and carefully written book helpfully extends our understanding of food policy, and raises the historical profile of an episode that remains a strong feature of the collective memory of north-east Scotland.

Jim Phillips,
University of Glasgow