

Mills also gives due attention to collapsing roofs and faulty ladders, and shows how explosions attributable to coal dust and methane contributed to the dismal register of death. But the most compelling part of her argument revolves around ‘invisible’ occupational mortality, most of it attributable to long undifferentiated variants of lung disease. In the earlier nineteenth century, afflicted colliers and workers in the metalliferous sector had a life expectancy at birth comparable to slum-dwellers in Liverpool and Manchester. Half-a-century later, J.S. Haldane concluded that conditions in the Cornish mining industry had deteriorated rather than improved: approximately eight years’ exposure as a machinist in a still, in many respects, pre-industrial working environment would be likely to lead to a premature and horrifically painful death from lung disease (p. 205).

Over time, and intensively so between the 1840s and the early 1870s, the public visibility of large-scale disaster and the ‘immorality’ of near-naked workers labouring deep in the bowels of the earth, increased public and parliamentary concern. Owners, radicals believed, must be held either compulsorily, or – classic Victorian legislative evasion – ‘permissively’, to account. In telling pages, Mills describes how helter-skelter mid-century developments – between 1852 and 1854 no fewer than four select committees pondered the operation of the seminal government-backed inspectorial act of 1850 – began to turn the tide in favour of more effective regulation (pp. 99–126). But the metalliferous sector, which employed approximately fifty thousand workers as compared to nearly a quarter-of-a-million labourers in coal mines, lagged badly behind. Small-scale non-ferrous enterprises remained geographically isolated and failed to expand their scale of production. During the final thirty years of the nineteenth century, the sector stagnated in the face of foreign competition, and clung to anciently embedded payment systems based on sub-contracting. A form of pre-industrial individualism and

localism proved inimical to the introduction of tougher regulation.

In one sense, Mills’s monograph comprises two studies in one (note the plural in the title). Coal mining in Yorkshire and tin mining in Cornwall had about as much in common as chalk and cheese. Nevertheless, the two were repeatedly yoked together in later nineteenth-century administrative discourse and parliamentary debate, and numerous select committees, many of them packed with owners and share-holders deeply opposed to any erosion of permissiveness, sought to extend regulations from one sector to another.

Mills’s principal achievement is to have worked her way through a maze of technical, legal, legislative and administrative source material and bring order to chaos. Eschewing explanatory short-cuts, she has made sense of a forbiddingly complicated topic. Discussion of the now half-forgotten growth of government debate, and the role that MacDonagh ascribed – or failed to ascribe – to agency in his original schema becomes repetitious. Nevertheless, this is an impressive synthesis and it is likely to remain essential reading for specialists in the field for a long time to come.

One final point: either there has been a printing error or the author deliberately opted to omit any kind of acknowledgement to fellow historians and scholarly labourers at the coalface.

Bill Luckin,

University of Bolton

Sue Hawkins, *Nursing and Women’s Labour in the Nineteenth Century: The Quest for Independence* (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. xii + 228, £75.00, hardback, ISBN: 978-0-415-55169-4.

Nursing has attracted surprisingly few academic studies. In this pioneering empirical analysis rooted in nineteenth-century women’s employment, Sue Hawkins breaks new ground with her prosopographical approach.

Undaunted by the shortage of traditional sources, she set about building a database of nurses at St George's Hospital in London between 1850 and 1900. Nurse registers, wage books and minute books were scrutinised, together with the Census, *The Hospital and Nursing Record*, and Charles Booth's mid-1890s survey of matrons in the capital. The resulting data were then used to examine the composition of the nursing community at St George's and the social mobility of its members.

Dr Hawkins begins by situating her novel methodology within the historiography of nursing. Unapologetic about her status as a non-nurse, she argues that, for too long, both gender and labour historians left nursing history to 'enthusiastic amateurs' intent upon telling stories of 'heroic self-congratulation' (p. 1). Critical of such hagiography, Chapter One challenges the popular assumption that, thanks to Victorian reformers, 'working-class women had all but been excluded' (p. 32) from hospital nursing by 1900.

After reviewing nursing at St George's between 1733 (when the hospital was founded) and 1850, Chapter Two charts the subsequent characteristics of its nurses. Some movement towards the reformers' 'ideal' of younger, unmarried recruits from the higher social classes was revealed. Nevertheless, 'by the 1890s, with just under 40 per cent of its staff still originating from Classes III and below, it cannot be said that the hospital had become an exclusive bastion of middle-class nursing' (p. 56).

In Chapter Three, probationer schemes come under that spotlight. Detailing the input of doctors and hospital managers, Dr Hawkins shows how by 1900 – after lagging behind other London hospitals due to a matron unsympathetic to nurse education – St George's had finally established a training school. Retention is the subject of Chapter Four, which looks at the mechanisms used to attract potential recruits and 'to stop the revolving door through which nurses came and went at rapid rate' (p. 138). Better pay, improved accommodation, more generous

leave arrangements, and a reduction in domestic chores were among the strategies adopted by St George's to deflect the charge of 'White Slavery in Hospitals' made by the *Pall Mall Gazette*.

Chapter Five tackles the development of nursing as a career through a discussion of why nurses left the Hospital. After demolishing the myth that nursing was a marriage market, and assessing the significance of dismissal, ill health, and resignation, Dr Hawkins found that by the 1880s almost ninety per cent of the nurses whom she was able to trace had nursing jobs – whether in other medical institutions or in the community. These women, she elaborates in Chapter Six, were 'on a quest for independence, quite removed from the docile, saintly nurse of myth' (p. 171); they had taken 'a positive and informed decision' (p. 182) to enter the profession and make nursing their career.

The book is produced to a high standard. Each chapter is followed by a fascinating one-page pen portrait of a nurse whose life story Dr Hawkins has reconstructed. The absorption of such accounts (or extracts from them) into the text would have further animated the argument, which is well supported by graphs and occasional illustrations. For a research monograph, priced at £75, it is a pity that Routledge has opted for the Harvard system of referencing, which does not allow the author to do full justice to her primary and secondary materials. These quibbles aside, Sue Hawkins has produced an important addition to nursing history, which demonstrates persuasively the benefits of engaging with the broader historical context.

Anne Borsay,
Swansea University

Trevor Hamilton, *Immortal Longings: F.W.H. Myers and the Victorian Search for Life after Death* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2009), pp. 359, £19.95, hardback, ISBN: 9-781845-401238.