

BOOK REVIEW

A History of Nursing by Louise Wyatt

Paperback, 96 pages
Amberley Books
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In her new book, Louise Wyatt sets out to explore the history of nursing, which she does in four chapters that chart the chronological rise of the nurse from Antiquity through Early Middle Ages and Late Middle Ages to Modern Nursing and Training from 1400 Onwards. Two further chapters look at Nursing Specialisms and Lesser Known Nurses and their Legacies.

The chapter on modern nursing omits an earlier pioneer Elizabeth Fry and her domiciliary training Institution of Nursing Sisters, founded in 1840. Florence Nightingale's secular school was unusual in that it was not under the direct control of any hospital and not based on contracts with outside groups. The independence of Nightingale's school at St Thomas's Hospital was gained through endowments, which gave it both status and autonomy. Hence, it is so often erroneously regarded as the first real school of nursing.

Whilst the chapter on nursing specialisms includes three specialties, namely district nursing, wet nursing and midwifery, others are ignored: in particular, mental health, the armed forces and voluntary organisations. The lesser-known nurses include six nurses from the UK, New Zealand and North America and their contributions to the profession. However, Mary Seacole is not mentioned; although not a "trained" nurse she did nurse and care for many of the British soldiers in the Crimea and was universally admired and adored by them.

The book dips into selective areas but, sadly, is imbalanced and incomplete. It fails to take the reader further than the early 20th century and thus omits significant landmarks such as the Nurses Registration Act 1919, the founding of the NHS in 1948, the impact of the Salmon Report 1967, and Project 2000 and nursing regulations. These measures have arguably had as significant an impact on nursing today as did Nightingale, whose life is described in the last six pages of the book.

A History of Nursing is an easy read for anyone who wishes to know the background of nursing by following the transformation from a religious or lay-person, who is willing to nurse the sick but has no formal training, to the trained professional we see today. The book is well illustrated with images from the online Wellcome Collection but leaves one wanting more in-depth analysis and information. Unfortunately, there is no index.

Sue Weir
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