

BOOK REVIEW

The NHS: Britain's National Health Service 1948-2020

by Susan Cohen

Paperback, 63 pages (also available as e-book)

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Susan Cohen is a social historian who has already written *The Midwife*, *The District Nurse* and *Medical Services in the First World War* for Shire. She has now written an attractive, easily read, glossy and well-illustrated short history of the National Health Service for the general public.

The first chapter gives a succinct account of public health care before the NHS, followed by *The New Dawn* which details the public's enthusiasm for the service and the government's realisation of the rising costs that they had not envisaged. The third chapter deals with the developments and administrative reorganisations enacted between 1970 and 2000, and the last brings the reader up to date with the twenty-first century. The final illustration is of staff 'clapping for carers' outside the Nightingale Hospital in April 2020.

The text is clear, the illustrations well-chosen and at the back there is useful information about where to obtain further information in books, websites and places to visit. It sits comfortably within the Shire stable.

However, there are different ways of writing about the health service. If it had been written by a hospital consultant, it might have emphasised their frustration with professional administrators, the introduction of shifts and the death of the 'Firm'. If it had been written by a patient, the emphasis might have been on the general practitioners' abrogation of twenty-four-hour availability; both of these leading to fragmentation of personal continuity of care.

A text full of facts is likely to have a few errors. The Nightingale School of Nursing, founded in 1860, was not part of the new St Thomas's Hospital in Lambeth which did not leave its temporary accommodation in Surrey Gardens until 1871 and the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine closed in 1999, to be replaced by the Wellcome Collection.

I would recommend this book for anyone wanting a brief overview of the history of the NHS, understanding that such a short text must be selective in what is included. A medical historian knowing something of the story may miss contextualisation and would find fuller texts elsewhere.

John M T Ford
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