Obviously, weekly minutes present a continuous account of the institution (allowing, that is, for varying degrees of conscientiousness of Secretaries) and give convenient signposts for a researcher to follow when using other sources. Yet they are inevitably concerned with domestic details, not only discipline and scandal but also finance and diet. The occasional reference to dismissals and reprimands may make a good read but to be meaningful it has to be at the least cross-referenced to deciennal periods in proportion to the number of nurses employed.

Job descriptions and rules can be put to better use than mere illustrations or cross-comparisons with modern times. Hawker has made a tentative step to showing how rules indicate staff-patient relationships.(6) Maggs takes such domestic material further in his paper 'The Hospital, the Firm and the Nurse'.(7) He stresses the financial organisation of non-endowed hospitals, showing the importance of cost-effectiveness in terms of laundry, cheap beef tea and staff ratios. Costs per bed and bed-occupancy rates were crucial, he argues, in re-assuring both the public and the subscribers that the hospital was efficient. Donations could be manipulated within the accounts thus reducing current income and showing the hospital in continual crisis as a stimulus to fund-raising. This type of approach signifies a new dimension to a reading of hospital histories and especially to nurse historians. Nursing historians may particularly find interest in his argument that the treasurers' initial hostility to increased costs of reformed nursing diminished when they realised that improved staffing ratios gave trained nurses 'time' - freed by an increase in trainees - that could be 'sold' to private establishments.

The other chief source for many local histories is local newspapers which might be expected to provide corroborative data to the minute books and annual reports. However, instead of corroboration there is a suspicion of reciprocation. Press releases and leaks are not a recent phenomenon. It is not unknown to find newspaper reports of annual meetings posted in minute books. Minutes refer to letters in the newspaper as an argument for future courses of action, although the press report often coincides with the aim of one of the factions on the committee. Late eighteenth and nineteenth century newspapers tended to be either Tory, Whig or Radical. Many towns possessed a paper for all three groups. Yet hospital histories never refer to the political hue of the newspapers consulted. Anning appears to rely entirely on the Leeds Intelligencer, a Tory newspaper, never mentioning the equally influential Whig-Liberal Mercury.(8) Did Anning only use the Intelligencer or did the Mercury studiously avoid coverage of the infirmary? If the latter, what were the reasons? In Nottingham, for example during the nineteenth century coverage is greater in the Whig-Liberal newspapers.(9) Were the reforming doctors more likely to receive a sympathetic hearing or were these papers running an anti-Tory campaign?

Local party politics are neglected in most hospital histories but this is a promising area for study. In Leicester the Whig gentry came together to smash the unbroken Tory monopoly of charities by establishing the Infirmary.(10) They received ample support from bourgeois Whig subscribers who grasped the opportunity of gaining valuable influence in the town. However, the Tories fought back. One of their supporters became Chairman, whilst their two MPs gave substantial financial support. Leicester was not untypical; it was only different in the extreme of corruption in the Tory dominated unreformed corporations.(11)