note general architectural developments: hospitals bear a clear resemblance to rural mills or urban prisons. A striking photograph of the interior of the Liverpool Nurses Home, complete with prison-style landings, points up this comparison.(20) It is a pity that the texts often excuse the design on the grounds of security for nurses against intruders, suggesting that such buildings indicate the great value (sic) placed on nurses.

Photographs of wards at Christmastime are easy to explain but their usefulness is arguable. They are so uniform, partially explained by the common pavilion design, the mid-ward pose of the nurses, the vision of the lens and the range of flash. But why and how were the shots of patients - with no nurses in attendance - taken? Also how are the photographs of individual nurses in the 1870s, both young and old, in old-and-new style uniform explained? Are the ones shown rare finds or were many available?

In short, illustrations should be subjected to as rigorous a source analysis as written text and deserve much more comment than reference to minutiae of uniform, lighting, heating and floral arrangement!

How useful then are hospital histories? At the most simplistic level they identify possible repositories of primary source data. At the same level they act as a useful corrective to national studies. Yet these studies often replicate at local level the national generalisations of nursing history both pre-and-post 1860. A reading of a number makes clear that some change in nursing was beginning to take place in the 1840s and 1850s and that the publicity accorded Nightingale was merely a catalyst. From 1860-1890 most voluntary hospitals were adopting the characteristics of her system, even some of the smaller like Truro which pre-date some of the London hospitals.(21) Unfortunately some of the most recent histories by rigorous theming and synthesis in the interest of condensation and readability are in danger of forcing some of the material into a pre-conceived mould.(22) This trend is dangerous and stultifying. If the sources indicate a possible deviation from the orthodox, this could be more rewarding and illuminating. For example, a long delay in introducing Nightingale-style reform might pose interesting questions and present a profitable avenue of study and future research.

Where do nurse-historians who have essayed this genre since 1970 stand? In the following I refer to five recent authors: one history is of an eighteenth century voluntary foundation, and the others cover a nineteenth century provincial voluntary hospital, a poor law hospital, district nursing in a large provincial town and a late nineteenth century group of hospitals.(23)

Dorothy Watson, who spent twenty-one years in Southampton - eleven as matron - wrote the history of Royal South Hants Hospital as a result of a rebuilding programme which prompted her desire to record the institution before it was irrevocably changed. The Royal South Hants started with 40 beds, the impetus being a fire which led to a local wish to make permanent the emergency hospital provision. As the town's population swelled and the docks grew, the hospital developed into one of the largest in Southern England.

Her book's theming, particularly the second half, is extremely haphazard with plaques and centenary accounts, and one photograph of a so-called Victorian ward is inadequately dated. However, some aspects of this institution's