

nism, professional interests and the increasing intrusion of the State in this field.

One of the achievements of this particular history is the extent to which Linda Bryder is able to manage the complexity of the historical processes, giving both a sense of the contribution of those individuals who were influential in its history, as well as the cross-currents of the key institutional and social influences on its development. One aspect of this, which I found particularly fascinating, was the penetration of 'race values'. The preservation of infant life was not just based on the concern for the welfare of children. It was also intimately connected to a moral sense of nationhood—as it was evolving in the late imperial era. At stake was a British way of life. It is not surprising, consequently, that Plunket had a history of exclusion of Maori and Pacific migrants. Maori care remained segregated within the Native health service and, later, the development of public health nursing programs. This remained the case for most of the history of the Plunket Society, despite many internal debates about, initially, the needs of urban Maori. It is a striking paradox that the welfare revolution, in which New Zealand and Australia were global pioneers, was so influenced by such racialised and racist imperatives.

The Plunket Society did not take significant steps to shed this racially exclusive image until the late 1970s when it also evolved a focus on some of the issues more familiar to those working in contemporary children's services, such as child abuse, SIDS or cot death, accidents, immunisation, and new forms of child advocacy. This transition reflected some of the professional development in paediatrics and, in particular, the emergence of a greater community focus in the discipline. While the Plunket Society today no longer plays the role it once did, this history provides a fresh insight into the development of the welfare State, health care and children's services. It breaks new ground in exploring the relationship between the voluntary sector and the State. For those with an interest in these fields, it is a must read.

Ian Anderson
University of Melbourne

Life and Death in the Age of Sail: The Passage to Australia. By Robin Haines (UNSW Press, Sydney, 2003, hb, ISBN 0-86840-549-3).

THE SUBJECT OF TRANSOCEANIC POPULATION MOVEMENTS MIGHT PUT ONE in mind of the slave trade of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Several million captured Africans were confined to berths five

feet long by sixteen inches wide in vessels that smelled so appallingly that they had to be anchored several miles from their destinations in the Americas, and the slaves rowed to shore a dozen or so at a time. *Life and Death in the Age of Sail* provides a counterpoint to this terrible history in showing how extraordinarily effective the combined forces of government and medical officers were in reducing mortality upon the government-chartered ships that carried immigrants to Australia during the 1800s. Mortality and brutality were not unknown on these vessels. But, in so many ways, they were models of good hygiene and effective health regulation.

The sea journey to Australian shores was by no means hazard free. Quite apart from seasickness, psychological distress and the overbearing heat of the tropics, close confinement combined with the difficulty of always maintaining strict hygiene procedures meant that neonates and infants were highly susceptible to fatal illness. Bouts of diarrhoea, measles, scarlet fever and marasmus destroyed thousands of young lives. Two-thirds of the deaths on emigrant ships during the 1800s were of children aged three and under. With due ceremony, their bodies were dropped into the deep from the surgeon's cabin window.

Yet, in this fine book Robin Haines looks beyond the mythology of coffin ships and maritime squalor. She reveals that from the 1830s onwards ship-board surgeons and the government's Emigration Commission achieved something truly impressive. They oversaw a decline in the mortality rate on Australia-bound vessels, something that British towns and cities would fail to achieve until the close of the nineteenth-century. The mortality transition of the late Victorian period, when the classic diseases of filth and overcrowding finally fell into abeyance, occurred on ships bound for the antipodes decades earlier than on land. While back in Britain government and ratepayers stubbornly resisted calls for large-scale sanitary reform, pejoratively dubbing the sanitarians the 'clean party' and the leading English sanitarian Edwin Chadwick a 'Prussian', aboard Australia-bound ships prodigious efforts were made to prevent the outbreak of disease.

Needless to say, there was more to this endeavour than altruism. Deaths on board represented a loss of manpower to the colonies and a waste of money to the British government. They were also liable to generate bad press at home and in Australia. Largely for these reasons, a raft of precautions were taken to promote the health of immigrants. And they quite clearly worked. Drawing on the surgeons' logs, in addition to other documents and reports, Haines describes the exacting medical regimes under which passengers lived. Routine fumigation, disinfecting, whitewashing and deck scrubbing helped stave off disease. Passengers were also encouraged to keep clean, active and occupied. And, save for occasional lapses, serious efforts were made to serve meals

that would shore up the weakest constitutions. Accordingly, many poor immigrants rhapsodised in letters home about the quality of the diet, with hard ship's tack often generously supplemented with salted pork, plum pudding and fresh meat from animals slaughtered en route. Indeed, many passengers claimed that they had never been healthier than on their arrival in Australia.

These efforts paid handsome dividends. Between 1848 and 1885, as many as 98 per cent of assisted immigrants reached Australian shores alive, a figure that rose to 99 per cent after the 1860s. As Haines justly comments, this was a 'superlative achievement in the age of sail'. But, just as with the mortality transition on land, the declining death rate had virtually everything to do with improved hygiene and nutrition and virtually nothing to do with the contents of the surgeon's pharmacopoeia. The keys to ensuring the safe arrival of immigrants to Australian shores were rigorous housekeeping and strict management.

But surgeons saw their brief as encompassing more than hygiene and rations. Nineteenth-century notions of disease causation often conflated morality and health: cleanliness was said to be next to godliness. And premature death was widely regarded as the wages of sin, a punishment for those who, through weakness of character or bad living, deviated from the laws of life. Hence the ships' surgeons saw it as part of their duty to safeguard the morals of their wards. Crowded emigrant ships afforded little privacy and so senior crew members could assume a paternalistic authority, looking out for the moral and bodily welfare of passengers while severely punishing transgressions.

Thus, single women were prohibited from talking with sailors and, if bed-ridden with sickness, not allowed to accept visits from male relatives except in the company of a doctor or matron. The kinds of penalties imposed on the immigrants ranged from withholding wine, in the case of those who failed to appear at Divine service or were late in rising, to being chained to the mast for prolonged periods with only liquids for sustenance. In many cases, passengers themselves helped to maintain codes of acceptable behaviour, in one instance ensuring that a wife beater was strapped to the main mast for two nights. And surgeons placed considerable reliance on volunteer helpers: constables and matrons who assisted them in their daily duties and helped preserve order among the passengers.

Haines' descriptions of the mortality profiles, medical precautions and the exercise of authority aboard emigrant ships are mostly intended to set the scene for this book's primary aim: to make audible the experiences of some of the passengers who made the decision to emigrate to Australia. About half-way through, the book becomes much more qualitative in approach, drawing on letters and diaries to reconstruct the experiences of individual passengers from different decades of the

century. Haines tells these personal stories with a keen eye for detail. Quoting extensively from original sources, she provides a clear sense of the contrasting outlooks of different passengers, from a volunteer constable thrilled by the generous diet and relishing his new-found status, to a morally severe Scots Presbyterian casting disapproving glances at the moral lassitude of his fellow emigrants. Haines also describes some of the scandals that horrified, titillated and distracted passengers; perhaps most tragically, the case of one young unmarried woman who gave birth on the journey south and, spurned by her outraged family, followed her new-born to the grave not long after giving birth.

There are also, of course, the familiar strains of passengers prostrate with sea sickness, terrified at violent seas, bored and frustrated in the later stages of the passage, but always managing to follow the rituals of hygiene and to care for sick spouses, parents, siblings and children. But one is particularly struck by how quickly passengers recreated a semblance of the world they had left behind—with concerts, dances and schools rapidly springing up—and at how fast attentions became fastened on the habits and shortcomings of their fellow passengers. Although the book's narrative is, above all else, concerned with sickness and death, it does an excellent job of recreating these daily activities and the preoccupations of those on board.

Wherever possible, Haines also describes the fate of the immigrants who arrived in Australia, their struggles to adapt to a new climate, culture and way of life. Many corresponded regularly with those back home, sometimes imploring their friends and relatives to join them. Others were less than reliable correspondents. One young woman from a village outside the English city of Winchester got caught up in Victoria's gold fever and did not write home until she had been in Australia for three years.

These human stories are evocative and extremely well recounted. They contrast, quite sharply, with the more quantitative opening sections. But the book certainly benefits from having the personal accounts of individual travellers placed in a broader historical and epidemiological context: the two approaches are complementary. The overall result is a powerful, authoritative, superbly researched and highly readable work that will be valued by anyone with an interest in the European peopling of Australia.

John C. Waller
University of Melbourne