work, social, and pathological histories of the populations studied. This book is one such large scale essay bringing together census and cancer registry data.

The format is that of a PhD thesis only perfunctorily, if at all, disguised in literary form. It is dense with data on standardised incidence ratios, the chosen tool of expression of risk, and is a conventional analysis of these.

The main thrust of the work is, as has been stated, to obviate or minimise bias and to disentangle occupational and social class effects. The work has been diligently conducted and thus makes a helpful contribution to the narrowing of the wide bands of uncertainty concerning the attribution of cancer risk to occupation and a wider range of social factors. Derived as it is from the excellent Finnish census and registry records, it creates an interesting and reliable reference source.

It is not a book for anything other than the most unusual taste in light reading, indeed any attempt at a "straight through" read is liable to lead to data indigestion. However, the text makes a useful starting or reference point for those interested in occupational morbidity generally as well as for hypothesis development and for those with interests in specific occupations or cancers. Similarly, it offers an easy approach to occupational risk for those interested in social risk factors to whom occupation may be a difficult and tire-some confounder. In those contexts, the book is a nicely presented and useable addition to the bookshelf.

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This volume on reproductive biology is derived from conference proceedings dating back to 1992 and at which the reviewer was present.

The outcome, as published, reflects all the blessings and all the shortcomings of inviting unforeseen submissions from a wide range of the authors. Some offerings are perfunctory, some profound; some are cautious and reasoned, others are somewhat eccentric. There are therefore gems and pebbles in this collection of papers.

Reproductive toxicology and reproductive epidemiology have promised to burst upon the environmental and occupational scene for more than a decade. There is now some evidence that they may finally do so. If they do then it will be with a complexity whose potential is far greater than carcinogenesis because of the much wider range of interactions and end points available for study.

In this context, the book is the most up to date compendium of current research pre-occupations in the field. Those who wish to acquire this information and a sale must be few. Those who might want to dip into to get an insight into various facets are likely to be many.

One for the library rather than the bookshelf.

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Often, books produced by a lengthy list of authors (17 in this case) result in no more than many highly individual contributions, connected only by a common general theme. This book is an exception: it is a well written review of current knowledge regarding the effects of alcohol drinking and public health policies on alcohol. The first part of the book reviews international trends in alcohol consumption and drinking patterns, the risk to an individual from drinking alcohol, and finally the level of alcohol consumption at a population level and the risk of alcohol related problems. It provides an in-depth review which will be useful to epidemiologists and other health professionals with an interest in this area. The second part of the book addresses the efficacy of various policy options such as taxation on alcohol, controlling access to alcohol, or prevention of alcohol drinking in specific situations (for example, when intending to drive). Finally, the authors examine the effect of attempting to change attitudes on drinking behavior in "The various themes of the book are coherently brought together in the final chapter of the book which looks at how scientific knowledge can contribute to public policy in this area. The second section will be particularly valuable to health policy makers as well as public health medicine specialists involved in research in this area. The authors are to be congratulated for bringing together so concisely and informatively current scientific knowledge regarding alcohol consumption and alcohol policy.


This is one of a series of "contributions to epidemiology and biostatistics" whose subtitle "a survey of 109 000 cancer cases amongst Finns of working age" nicely encapsulates the burden of the contents.

Researchers familiar with UK decennial supplement of occupational mortality often forget the uniqueness of these data which have been produced uninterruptedly since the middle of the 19th century. It is only relatively recently that other nations have developed similar statistical records and among those of the highest quality are those now kept in Finland.

The systematic interrogation of these records has led to the gradual realisation that data derived from information captured by way of death certificates will result in considerable bias which limits the quality of inferences which may be drawn. This bias derives from the description of occupations, the lack of quantification of exposure and the accuracy of cause of death data. The most serious confounder is social class. The other traditional routes to the evaluation of risk in occupation have been cohort and case control studies, which of course have been highly focused on specific factors and do not provide the overview previously referred to.

Over the past 20 years a series of studies has attempted to bridge the gap between the two approaches. To a greater or lesser extent they have attempted to overcome the effects of bias and confounding by capturing more accurate data at more relevant points in the
Alcohol policy and the public good

Gary J Macfarlane

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doi: 10.1136/jech.50.1.111-c

Updated information and services can be found at:
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