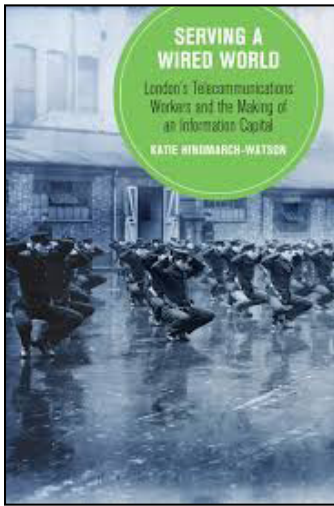


**Katie Hindmarch-Watson.** *Serving a Wired World: London's Telecommunications Workers and the Making of an Information Capital.* Oakland: University of California Press, 2020. 288p. Hardcover, \$29.95 (ISBN 978-0-5203-4473-0).



*Serving a Wired World: London's Telecommunications Workers and the Making of an Information Capital* is a scholarly work, rather than one on professional practice. Library professionals have a vast range of reading available to us as information stewards and conduits in the 21st century, and we serve ourselves by including historical scholarship in the bounty of ideas we consider. This is especially true when a scholarly work provides a window into past information workers' regulated and agentive roles in the communications systems they were charged to operate. Here, cultural historian Katie Hindmarch-Watson explores how embodied labor and categories of gender informed the nascent telecommunications industry in 19th-century London and via networks across Britain. How were these telecommunications workforces feminized and controlled through administrative processes and how did some groups push against

these constraints? If these questions resonate for you, read on.

Information workers of today can find value in the book's historical context and insights into information workers of the past. *Serving a Wired World* explores how telegraph and telephone systems created opportunities for working women, men, and boys, even as administrators worked to control their workforce and shape how it was perceived by the British public. Hindmarch-Watson argues that administrative control was focused on building public reliance and trust in these new communications networks, particularly as they were tied to trust in the state as essential means of government operations.

Hindmarch-Watson begins by contextualizing the use and expectations of these burgeoning telecommunications systems across the metropolis. Telegraphic and, later, telephonic systems were built on existing networks, most especially that of Britain's postal system. Affluent users of telegraphy expected discretion and privacy in their communications, akin to what they expected from the post. Telegraph operators and messengers were trained to be efficient and invisible as they mediated these networks of correspondence. Administrators used policies and practices that amounted to what Hindmarch-Watson calls a "weaponizing of respectability" as telegraph workers sought to prove the intellectual and economic value of their labor. Interestingly, Hindmarch-Watson shows how, as telephone systems emerged, the established telegraph became the method the public associated with discretion and assurances of privacy.

Central to Hindmarch-Watson's argument is the role gender divisions played in administrative decision making. Telegraph operators—especially women—and administrators were often at odds in their perceptions of the nature of operator labor: Were telegraph operators speedy hands or thoughtful connectors? By categorizing telegraph women as physical laborers, administrators were able to keep salaries low. Gender divides meant that male workers had paths forward to supervision and higher rank in ways that their female colleagues did not. Fomenting these divisions helped administrators to limit unionization efforts and the number of permanent, pensioned state positions. Likewise, administrators attempted repeatedly to halt telegraph messenger boys' rises through the ranks into a unionized adult male

workforce. This gender divide continued in telephone operations, turning attention from the speedy hands to the tactful voices of the predominantly female operators.

Sexual exploits and misconduct emerge in Hindmarch-Watson's chapters on telegraph boy messengers. London's telegraph boys were ubiquitous and anonymous, both seen and unseen, as they delivered messages across the metropolis. Sexual scandals involving telegraph boys and established men across the capital led administrators to tighten controls and expectations for these young workers. Their dress and comportment were topics of great concern and reform for administrators, who attempted to mold them through fitness regimes. Indeed, administrators controlled their paths to permanent government positions as adults by requiring military service along the way. These boys in uniform represented the telecommunications systems for which they worked and sexual scandals fed into administrative anxieties about respectability, of the workers and of the system itself.

Just as telecommunications infrastructures were symbols of empire, so too were they targets for rebellion. In the epilogue, Hindmarch-Watson provides examples of how breaking telecommunications circuits and attempts to wrest control of central offices were tactics employed by groups such as suffragists, Irish nationalists, and labor organizers. Telecommunications infrastructures supported London's growth and the activities of the British Empire itself in broadening communications networks and controls. They also enabled communications between rebel groups and proved ready targets for disruption. Hindmarch-Watson shares evidence of telecommunications workers both fomenting and undermining these defiant acts.

*Serving a Wired World* juxtaposes in colorful ways the varied tensions of the period: between administrators and workers, privacy and mediation, female and male employees, good boys and bad ones, order and rebellion. How did people of the era perceive new technologies like telegraphy? How did this new system make space for a workforce that included not only men, but women and boys in its ranks? How did administrators take advantage of a feminized workforce, positioning some laborers against others and keeping salaries in check? Hindmarch-Watson takes us on a tour of these entangled questions in the context of 19th-century London telecommunications. Today's information workers may recognize some of these tensions, particularly in how library labor is both integral and invisibilized in library operations and how administrative decisions inform public discourse on the labor of information. —Shannon K. Supple, *Smith College*

**Meggan Press.** *Get the Job: Academic Library Hiring for the New Librarian.* Chicago, IL: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2020. 158p. Paper, \$44.00 (ISBN 978-0-8389-4840-8).



In *Get the Job: Academic Library Hiring for the New Librarian*, Meggan Press, the Undergraduate Education Librarian at Indiana University–Bloomington, has prepared a guidebook to the hiring process of the “strange and wonderful beast” (1) called academia. This slim volume covers everything from tips for deciding whether graduate school in library science is right for you to dealing with imposter syndrome as a new academic librarian. In between, Press, part Dante’s Virgil and part Emily Post, both demystifies the peculiar traditions and rules that govern the academic job search and instructs readers in the etiquette that the system expects.

The book’s chapters fall naturally into four sections (though