



Mothers, midwives and medical men

A history of maternity care

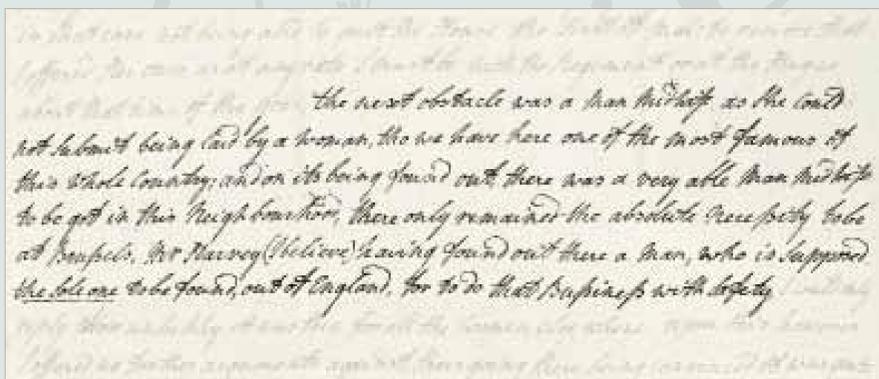
MOTHERS & MIDWIVES

Childbirth is a universal experience. Records of the work of maternity services and midwives provide detailed and personal stories of life and death, charting changing patterns of care and revealing the work of women and the families they cared for. This exhibition highlights the range of material which can be drawn upon to explore this most fundamental of human events.

Before the twentieth century, pregnancy and birth were primarily domestic rather than medical issues. Women gave birth at home with other women for company, one of whom might be a midwife. Many midwives learned their craft through informal apprenticeship to a more experienced practitioner. When men made an appearance in the lying-in room in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it was because the lives of mother, baby or both were considered to be in danger. By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was fashionable for wealthy women to have a doctor in attendance at birth even if the situation was uncomplicated. In the twentieth century, birth moved from home to hospital, and was increasingly seen as a medical event.



Detail from the Wollaton Antiphonal showing nativity scene with midwife handing the baby Jesus to his mother Mary; c.1430 MS 250 f.34r



Extract discussing male midwife from a letter written by Rudolf Bentinck to W.H.C. Cavendish-Bentinck, 3rd Duke of Portland; 4 Oct 1778 Pw F 1110

Mothers and Midwives draws on a research project by Dr Tania McIntosh, from the University of Nottingham's School of Nursing, Midwifery and Physiotherapy, which used oral history to explore the work of midwives in the twentieth century. Changing patterns of maternity are further illustrated through material from the collections in the University's Manuscripts and Special Collections. The story is extended to consider the history of infant mortality and infant care in the region, based on the work of Dr Denise Amos.

The display has been curated by Tania McIntosh with the support of Denise Amos, and staff in Manuscripts and Special Collections. They are grateful to Julia Allison, Cathy Ashwin, Maria Pearson, Jeanne Belben and Helen Salisbury for their generous support for this exhibition.



Group of women lace drawers working from home. Knotted Alley, Narrow Marsh, Nottingham; c.1890 NTGM 010225
Courtesy of Nottingham Local Studies Library and www.picturethepast.org.uk

