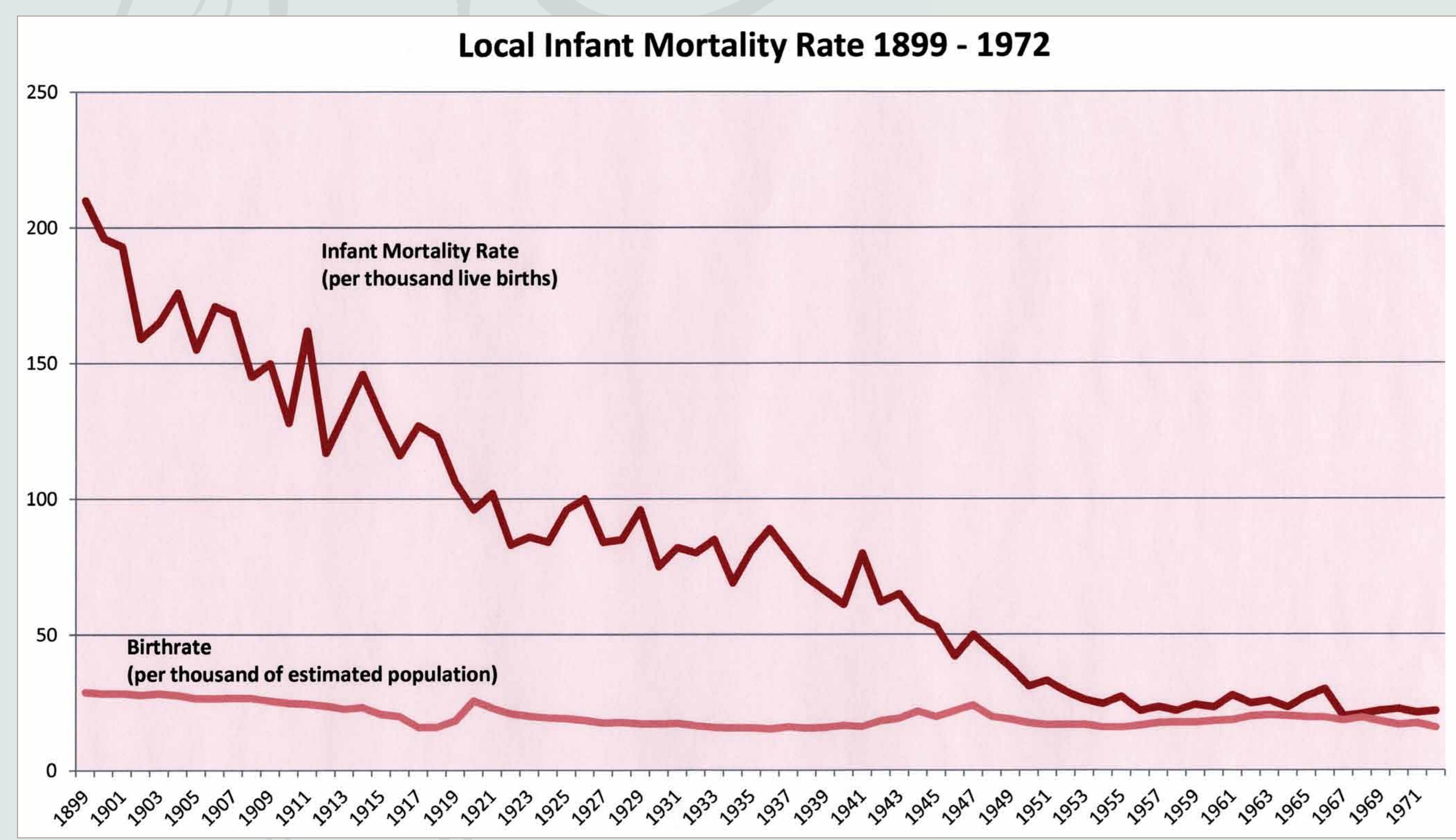




Saving infant life

Infant mortality in the East Midlands

By the end of the nineteenth century the general death rate across the population had begun to show a significant decrease. Closer scrutiny, however, showed that the rate of infant mortality was still unacceptably high. Concern grew when figures revealed that instead of a decrease, the numbers of infant deaths actually increased towards the end of the century. In some areas 150 infants out of a 1000 died before their first birthday.



Graph showing infant mortality for Nottingham, Derby and Leicester, 1899 – 1972

There were many different opinions to explain this high rate of infant deaths. Factors such as the role of the mother, illegitimacy, and poverty and environmental conditions including housing and overcrowding, sewage removal and clean water, were all put forward as reasons. Research today shows that all of these factors contributed to the loss of young life.

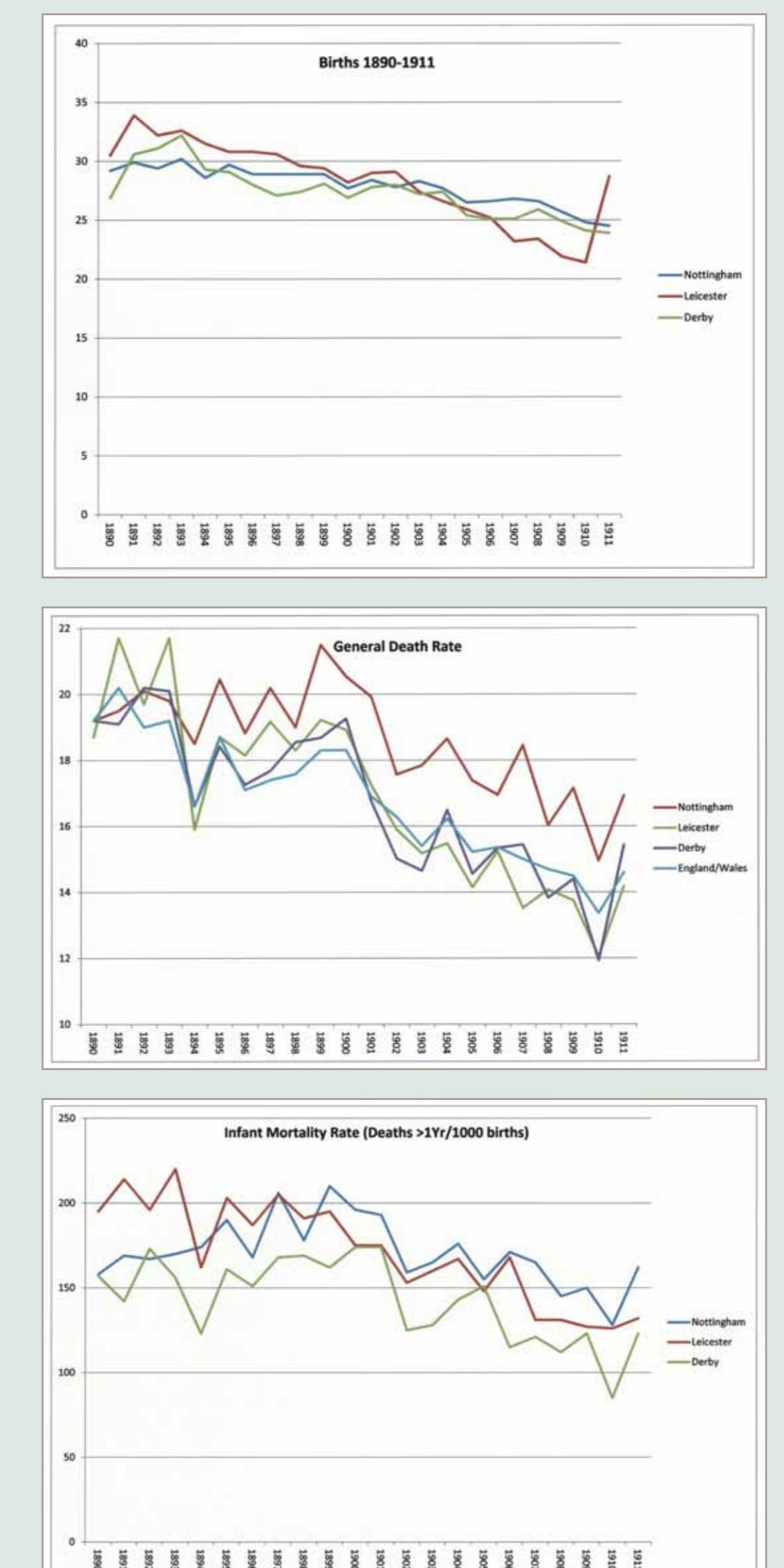
2. Of Food and Feeding.

Ever keep in mind, that it is generally right to be sparing in the quantity of food; for over-feeding, as well as feeding improperly, are highly injurious.

A child in health will require only breast milk for the first four months, unless there is not a sufficiently early provision made by the breast of the mother for this purpose; then the child must have something given it, as near in composition as possible to the mother's milk, and we can scarcely recommend any thing better than a mixture of cow's milk, water, and loaf sugar, in the proportion of two-thirds milk, one-third water, and a very small quantity of loaf sugar. For the first month nothing but this should be given, and very little, if any thing, else for the second month; afterwards, it may stand in need of a small cup of beef tea and crumb of bread daily. At the end of four months, it should be fed twice a day, once with bread and milk, or biscuit powder and milk, and once with light broth and bread, arrow root, or rice. At eight or nine months, it should be fed three times in twenty-four hours; and then more solid food should be likewise given daily, as a bread or rice pudding, or a boiled egg. For an infant taken early from the breast, the diet should principally consist of cow's milk warmed and poured on bread, first soaked in water, and of light broth with bread. If the child has a purging, the milk should be boiled.

After the first year, animal food in substance may be given twice a week to children. To those four or five years old,

Extract from Thomas J Graham, *Modern domestic medicine: a popular treatise* (1848)
Med Rare Bks WB120 GRA



Recent research has explained how specific improvements in different places helped to reduce their death rates. In Derby the introduction of Lady Health Visitors helped mothers to rear their children in a safer environment. In Leicester, an improvement in the method of sewage removal helped infants to survive.

Nottingham is probably the only Midlands local area where infant mortality fell in the early years of the twentieth century but it is difficult to explain satisfactorily why this was the case. The town continued to have some appalling housing conditions and an inadequate sewage removal system until forced into change in 1919. Although Health Visitors were employed, there is little or no evidence to demonstrate that they made a difference.

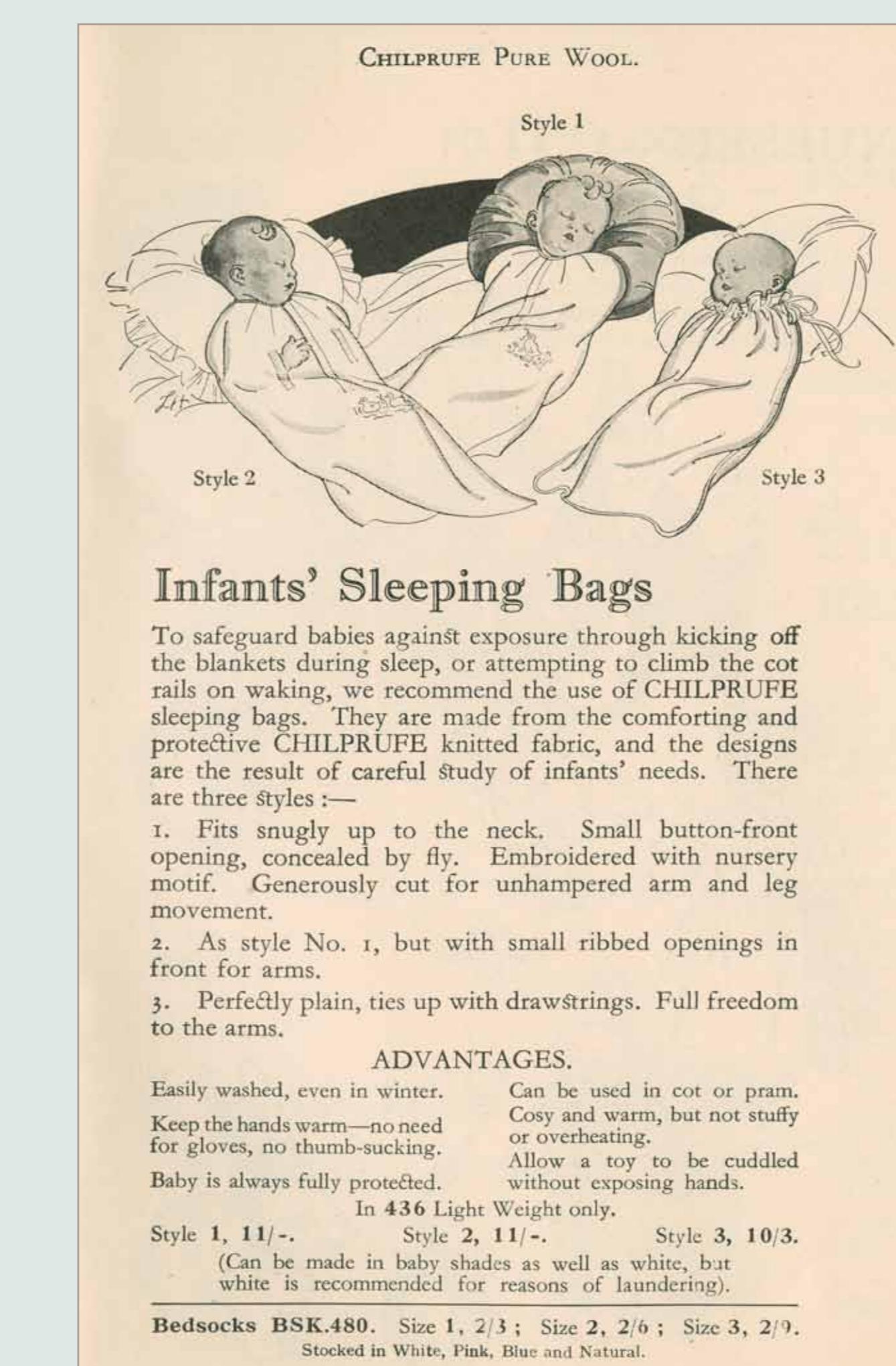


Illustration from Chilprufe catalogue showing appropriate warm clothing for infants
BCH 3/1/19



Photograph of some of the residents of Red Lion Street, 1919
NTGM 001893
Courtesy of Nottingham Local Studies Library and www.picturethepast.org.uk

