

## Women in Travail: childbirth and midwifery 1600-1950 Dr Janet Few



<http://thehistoryinterpreter.com>



@JanetFew.bsky.social

Midwives were licensed by the church from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. The licences were issued by the ecclesiastical courts and any surviving records would be in archives that hold diocesan records, normally the county archives.

The 1902 Midwives Act created the Central Midwives Board, to regulate practice and oversee training; their records are at The National Archives. Further regulation restricted the activities of 'bona fide' midwives. From 1910, they could only assist at a birth if they were accompanied by a certified midwife or a doctor. Subsequent legislation between the wars continued to tighten the regulations, in order to ensure that those practicing as midwives were suitably trained and qualified.

The Midwives Roll for 1904-1959 is available on Ancestry. There may also be registers in local archives.

### ***Further Reading***

Martine Bailey, 'A Charmed Life: childbirth and superstition' in *Historia* (2021)

[www.historiamag.com/a-charmed-life-childbirth-and-superstition/](http://www.historiamag.com/a-charmed-life-childbirth-and-superstition/)

Elma Brenner, 'The Medieval Childbirth Guide: 6 tips for pregnant mothers in the Middle Ages' in *History Extra* (2021) [www.historyextra.com/period/medieval/middle-ages-childbirth-dangers-mothers-midwives-how-did-medieval-women-give-birth/](http://www.historyextra.com/period/medieval/middle-ages-childbirth-dangers-mothers-midwives-how-did-medieval-women-give-birth/)

Jenny Carter and Therese Duriez, *With Child: birth through the ages* (Mainstream 1983)

Tina Cassidy, *Birth: a history* (Chatto and Windus 2007) (A history of childbirth practices in America)

Geoffrey Chamberlain, 'British maternal mortality in the 19th and early 20th centuries' in *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 99.11 (November 2006): 559-563

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC1633559/>

Marilyn Clay, *An Interesting Condition: pregnancy and childbirth during the Regency*

[www.elenagreene.com/regencycb.html](http://www.elenagreene.com/regencycb.html)

A. I. Coffin, *A Treatise on Midwifery and the Disease of Women and Children* (London 1866)

Jessica Cox, *Confinement: the hidden history of maternal bodies in nineteenth century Britain* (The History Press 2023)

David Cressey, *Birth, Marriage, And Death: ritual, religion, and the life-cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999)

Nicholas Culpeper, *A Directory for Midwives: or a guide for women in their conception, suckling and bearing their children* (Peter Cote 1651)

Dorothy Evenden, *The Midwives of Seventeenth Century London* (Cambridge University Press 2008)

Sarah Fox, *Giving Birth in Eighteenth Century England* (University of London Press 2022)

<https://uolpress.co.uk/book/giving-birth-in-eighteenth-century-england/>

Sarah Fox and Margaret Brazier, 'The Regulation of Midwives in England c.1500-1902' in *Medical Law International* Vol 20.4 (2020) <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0968533220976174>

Henry Davidson Fry, *Maternity* (New York & Washington: Neale 1907)

Jacques Gelis, *History of Childbirth, Fertility, Pregnancy and birth in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Polity 1996)

Elena Greene, *An Interesting Condition: pregnancy and childbirth during the Regency*

[www.elenagreen.com/regencycb.html](http://www.elenagreen.com/regencycb.html)

Christina Hardyment, *Dream Babies: childcare from Locke to Spock* (London: Jonathan Cape 1983)

Elaine Hobby [ed.], Jane Sharp, *The Midwives' Book or, the whole art of midwifery discovered* (Oxford University Press 1999) first published in 1671

Hilary Marland, *The Art of Midwifery: early modern midwives in Europe* (London: Routledge 1994)

Maternal Mortality in Childbirth Statistics [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1633559/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1633559/)

Alice Reid, *How Dangerous was Childbirth in the Past*

[www.campop.geog.cam.ac.uk/blog/2024/09/19/childbirth-in-the-past/](http://www.campop.geog.cam.ac.uk/blog/2024/09/19/childbirth-in-the-past/)

Louis A. Spaeth, *Coming Motherhood: practical suggestions relating to maternity and the care of infants and children* (Philadelphia: Peter Reilly 1907) first published in 1863

Tania Staras, 'A Brief History of District Midwifery' in *AIMS Journal* Vol 34 no. 3 (2022)

[www.aims.org.uk/journal/item/history-district-midwifery](http://www.aims.org.uk/journal/item/history-district-midwifery)

Ian Thomas [ed.], Nicholas Culpeper, *Book of Birth; a seventeenth century guide to having lusty children* (London: Webb and Bower 1985) first published in 1651

B. M. Willmott Dobbie, 'An Attempt to Estimate the True Rate of Maternal Mortality, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Century' in *Medical History* 1982.26: 79.

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC1139114/?page=1>