



Women and Childbirth in the Twentieth Century

Susan Williams, A. Susan Williams

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For the first time this work offers an in-depth analysis of many previously neglected aspects of a fundamental area of women's lives. Based on unpublished archival material and oral testimonies, the book traces the development of maternity services and attitudes towards pregnancy and childbirth in the twentieth century. Its particular focus is the work of the National Birthday Trust Fund. In 1928 nearly one in 200 women died in childbirth in Britain every year. That same year the National Birthday Trust Fund was founded by women at the highest level of Britain's social and political elite to launch a 'real crusade to solve the problems of maternal mortality'. One of the founders, Lucy Baldwin, the wife of the Conservative prime minister, described giving birth at that time as 'going into battle - she never knows, and the doctor never knows, whether she will come out of it alive or not'. Among the achievements of the trust were the 1936 Midwives Act, which established for the first time a national service of salaried midwives, and pioneering work in pain relief in childbirth and nutrition during pregnancy.

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