Baby Graves: Infant Mortality in Merthyr Tydfil 1865-1908.

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

.................................

(Your name)
Abstract

The thesis examines the problem of infant mortality in Merthyr Tydfil 1865-1908. In particular it investigates why Merthyr Tydfil, an iron, steel and coal producing town in south Wales, experienced high infant mortality rates throughout the nineteenth century which rose by the end of the century despite sixty years of public health reforms. The historiography of infant mortality in nineteenth-century Britain includes few Welsh studies although the south Wales Coalfield played an important part in industrial and demographic change in Britain during the second half of the nineteenth century. The thesis argues that conditions of industrial development shaped the social, economic and public health experience in Merthyr, ensnaring its citizens in social disadvantage, reflected in the largely unacknowledged human toll among mothers and babies in that process.

The thesis analyses the causes of over 17,000 infant deaths in Merthyr Tydfil from the primary evidence of an unusually complete series of Medical Officer of Health Reports to identify the principal attributed causes of infant death and explain their social origins and context. The thesis examines the work of Dr. Thomas Jones Dyke, MOH from 1865-1900, who was the author of most of these reports, and assesses his career in public health, but suggests that there were limits to his capacity to address the problem of infant mortality. The analysis showed convulsions, tuberculosis, measles and whooping cough, lung diseases, diarrhoea, nutritional causes of death and infant deaths from antenatal causes of maternal origin to be those which drove up infant mortality rates in Merthyr from the 1880s. From 1902 antenatal causes of infant death, independent of the sanitary environment, and directly linked to the health of mothers, were the only ones still rising.

Public health reforms were unable to address the social factors which engendered poverty and ill-health. Large families dependent mainly on male breadwinners had little margin of economic safety. Industrial conflicts in Merthyr revealed the inability of the Poor Law to address the problems of mass destitution in an urban setting. Women experienced few employment opportunities, married early and undertook heavy domestic labour reflected in early death rates for women and high perinatal infant death rates due to the poor health and socio-economic status of mothers. The training of midwives from 1902, with the potential to save many infant lives and to advocate for working-class mothers, failed to do so in Merthyr by 1908.
Although specifically addressing the issues of infant mortality in nineteenth-century Britain, the issues raised are of contemporary relevance since infant deaths reflect many social dynamics of inequality through which infant lives are inevitably sacrificed.
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAM</td>
<td>Amalgamated Association of Miners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMA</td>
<td>British Medical Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMJ</td>
<td><em>British Medical Journal</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMB</td>
<td>Central Midwives Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIC</td>
<td>Dowlais Iron Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSIMR</td>
<td>Disease Specific Infant Mortality Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GBH</td>
<td>General Board of Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCC</td>
<td>Glamorgan County Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRO</td>
<td>Glamorgan Record Office, Cardiff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGB</td>
<td>Local Government Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMR</td>
<td>Infant Mortality Rate per 1000 live/registered births.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOH</td>
<td>Medical Officer of Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAPSS</td>
<td>National Association for the Promotion of Social Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOS</td>
<td>Not Otherwise Specified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MTBG</td>
<td>Merthyr Tydfil Board of Guardians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MTLBH</td>
<td>Merthyr Tydfil Local Board of Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MTU</td>
<td>Merthyr Tydfil Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MTUDC</td>
<td>Merthyr Tydfil Urban District Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>Public Record Office, Kew, London</td>
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