

Midwifery in Scotland: A History

Lindsay Reid

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Several years ago, I had the privilege of sharing a student office in the University of Glasgow with Lindsay Reid while she worked on the doctoral thesis that forms the basis of this book. Her passion and enthusiasm for her subject, so evident then, remain undiminished, and permeate a history that is not only painstakingly researched, but also extremely readable.

Midwifery in Scotland: A History traces the development of the profession, exploring the many twists, turns and obstacles on the road towards regulation, certification and professional autonomy for Scottish midwives. The text embraces a broad timeframe from the late nineteenth century to the present day, yet presents an impressively detailed analysis of archival sources, primarily the minutes of the Central Midwives Board for Scotland, which is enhanced by vivid oral testimonies from a number of current and former midwives. These combined methodological approaches work very successfully, revealing, for instance, the challenges of dealing with fleas, lice and acute poverty faced by pupil midwives who attended home births in the 1940s and '50s, and the often-strained relationship between midwives and general practitioners in the years following the creation of the NHS.

Another striking finding to emerge from the study is that the early twentieth-century legislative measures for the creation of trained, state-enrolled midwives to replace the 'howdies' who had traditionally assisted labouring women without formal training or qualifications, came as part of the government's response to global and national crises. For example, the passing of the 1915 Midwives (Scotland) Act, which provided for the certification and regulation of midwives throughout the country, was precipitated by the events of World War One and the conscription of doctors for military service, rather than by a concern to recognise the importance of the profession of midwifery. The book also emphasises that the evolution of midwives' professional practice is still in progress, with much remaining to be done to improve maternity care in Scotland today, and the current job market posing particular challenges for the recruitment, training and practice of midwives.

Thanks partly to the provision of a helpful glossary of terms and list of abbreviations, but mostly to the clear and accessible nature of the narrative, readers will require neither practical experience nor prior knowledge of midwifery to grasp the ideas and arguments expressed in the text. By turns moving, sobering, thought-provoking and inspiring, this book addresses a sizeable gap in the existing literature on the history of midwifery in Scotland, and will appeal to anyone with an interest in medical history, women's history, and social and cultural history. While it is impossible to do *Midwifery in Scotland* justice in these few paragraphs, this study is a considerable achievement, and ought to become essential reading for every Scottish student, teacher and practitioner of midwifery.

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