

Aiding Upright Births throughout History
Newark February 2020



On 28th February 2020 delegates from around the country attended a symposium entitled *Aiding Upright Births throughout History*. Central to the theme for the day was the birth chair and the role these chairs have played in childbirth. The event was jointly sponsored by The National Civil War Centre, Loughborough University and De Partu, and was hosted within the interesting environment of the National Civil War Centre in Newark. Delegates included archivists, historians, academics, midwives and a museum volunteer and mother of a midwife who had originally booked for her daughter to attend the event but, when she found that she was unable to do so, decided to come herself. Sara Read's (Loughborough University) paper, "She Should Walk Easily in her Chamber", illustrated the developments and adaptations made to birth chairs and the way in which the birth chair was used in the 17th century. Sara Fox (university of Manchester) brought us into the 18th century with her paper "Groaning, Grunting and Grumbling", outlining how women's experiences of giving birth were perceived during this period. Continuing with the theme of birth positions, Janette Allotey's (De Partu) paper, "Modern to Postmodern Birthing Positions ... from Upright to 'Stranded Beetle' Position and Back Again", prompted discussion within the group on both the historical and also some of the more modern of these developments which have occurred within their personal and work experience. Catie Gill (Loughborough University) provided a very interesting insight into editing Wikipedia entries, with an invitation to review and make suggestions on how the entry "Birthing Chair" might be edited to reflect what had been presented within the historical papers and the expertise of members of the group in general. The final paper by Terri Coates (Clinical Advisor for the BBC's "Call the Midwife" series) took us 'behind the scenes' to reveal some — but not too many — secrets of how that popular programme has attempted to accurately represent childbirth through the period of history it covers.

Delegates then went into the museum gallery to view, among other items, an authentic continental birthing chair from the 17th century (a photograph of the exhibit was posted on this site by Janette Allotey earlier) and the cradle (above).

A very enjoyable symposium! Thank you to our excellent hosts at the National Civil War Museum for their warm hospitality and generous supply of refreshments and biscuits, including those made to a 17th-century recipe by Sara Read.

Margaret Lynch

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