

# **WOMEN AS MOTHERS IN PRE-INDUSTRIAL ENGLAND**

---

Essays in memory of Dorothy McLaren

Edited by  
Valerie Fildes

ROUTLEDGE LIBRARY EDITIONS:  
WOMEN'S HISTORY



# **WOMEN AS MOTHERS IN PRE-INDUSTRIAL ENGLAND**

Essays in memory of Dorothy McLaren

Edited by  
**VALERIE FILDES**

Volume 1 /

 **Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group  
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published in 1990

This edition first published in 2013

by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada

by Routledge

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

First issued in paperback 2014

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor and Francis Group, an informa company*

© 1990 Valerie Fildes

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

*Trademark notice:* Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-0-415-63337-6 (Volume 17)

ISBN: 978-0-415-75252-7 (pbk)

#### **Publisher's Note**

The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original copies may be apparent.

#### **Disclaimer**

The publisher has made every effort to trace copyright holders and would welcome correspondence from those they have been unable to trace.

ROUTLEDGE LIBRARY EDITIONS:  
WOMEN'S HISTORY

---

WOMEN AS MOTHERS IN  
PRE-INDUSTRIAL ENGLAND

---

# WOMEN AS MOTHERS IN PRE-INDUSTRIAL ENGLAND

*ESSAYS IN MEMORY OF DOROTHY McLAREN*

Edited by Valerie Fildes



**ROUTLEDGE**

**London and New York**

## Contributors

**Patricia Crawford** is Associate Professor of History at the University of Western Australia, where she teaches women's history. Her publications include several pioneering studies of women in seventeenth-century England and she is the author of *Denzil Holles 1598–1680* (Whitfield Prize, 1980) and editor of *Exploring Women's Past* (Sydney, 1984). She is currently writing a book on women in seventeenth-century England.

**Valerie Fildes** trained and worked as a nurse before obtaining a first degree and Ph.D. in Human Biology at the University of Surrey. She has carried out research on infant care and paediatrics prior to 1800 at the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine and is the author of *Breasts, Bottles and Babies: A History of Infant Feeding* (Edinburgh, 1986) and *Wet Nursing. A History from Antiquity to the Present* (Oxford, 1988). She is currently researching infant feeding practices in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries at the ESRC Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure.

**Fiona Newall** studied Geography at Clare College, Cambridge, and carried out the research for her Ph.D. at the ESRC Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure. She is currently a research fellow at the Social Policy Research Unit, University of York.

**Linda Pollock** has been a Wellcome fellow, and research fellow and college lecturer in history at Churchill College, Cambridge. She is the author of *Forgotten Children. Parent-child Relations*

### Contributors

1500–1900 (Cambridge, 1983), *A Lasting Relationship. Parents and Children Over Three Centuries*, (London, 1987), and the forthcoming *The Meditations and Medical Practices of Lady Grace Mildmay* (1989). She has completed the research for a two-volume work on family relationships among the propertied ranks of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century society, and is currently teaching history at Tulane University, New Orleans.

**Mary Prior** was born in China, educated in New Zealand, and came to England in 1959. After the death of her husband she became a mature student and was awarded a D.Phil. from the University of Oxford. She has worked part-time for the Open University and the Oxford University Department of External Studies. She is the author of *Fisher Row: Oxford Fishermen, Bargemen and Canal Boatmen 1500–1900* (Oxford, 1982) and editor of *Women in English Society 1500–1800* (London, 1985).

**Robert Schnucker** obtained degrees from Northeast Missouri State University, Dubuque Theological Seminary, and the University of Iowa. He teaches at Northeast Missouri State University and is currently director of the Thomas Jefferson University Press and edits several scholarly journals. He is the author of numerous articles and works on social history and history of education.

**Adrian Wilson** studied preclinical medicine at the University of Adelaide, where he was awarded a research degree in medical science, and researched the history of childbirth for a history D.Phil. at the University of Sussex. His forthcoming book *A Safe Deliverance* embodies this research and also some years of post-doctoral study and teaching in the Wellcome Unit for the History of Medicine, Cambridge. He has worked on the history of gender, medicine, and science in early-modern England and, with T. G. Ashplant, on historical epistemology. He is currently a research fellow in the Department of Social History, University of Leicester.

# Abbreviations

Add.	Additional
<i>Am. Hist. Rev.</i>	<i>American Historical Review</i>
<i>Am. J. Dis. Child.</i>	<i>American Journal for the Diseases of Children</i>
<i>Ann. Démog. Hist.</i>	<i>Annales de Démographie Historique</i>
<i>Annales ESC</i>	<i>Annales d'Economies, Sociétés et Civilisations</i>
<i>Archaeol. Cant.</i>	<i>Archaeologia Cantiana</i>
<i>Bapt. Quart.</i>	<i>Baptist Quarterly</i>
<i>Berks Old &amp; New</i>	<i>Berkshire Old and New</i>
BI	Borthwick Institute
BL	British Library
BodL	Bodleian Library
<i>Bull. Hist. Med.</i>	<i>Bulletin of the History of Medicine</i>
<i>Bull. Soc. Soc. Hist. Med.</i>	<i>Bulletin of the Society for the Social History of Medicine</i>
CCCC	Corpus Christi College, Cambridge
CCRO	Chester City Record Office
<i>Child &amp; Fam.</i>	<i>Child and Family</i>
<i>Compar. Civil. Rev.</i>	<i>Comparative Civilisations Review</i>
<i>Compar. Stud. Soc. Hist.</i>	<i>Comparative Studies in Society and History</i>
<i>Cont. &amp; Change</i>	<i>Continuity and Change</i>
<i>Crim. Just. Hist.</i>	<i>Criminal Justice History</i>
CUL	Cambridge University Library
DNB	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
DRO	Devon Record Office
<i>Dugdale Soc. Occ. Pap.</i>	<i>Dugdale Society Occasional Papers</i>



## Abbreviations

DWL	Dr Williams Library
<i>Econ. Hist. Rev.</i>	<i>Economic History Review</i>
<i>Eighteenth Cent. Stud.</i>	<i>Eighteenth Century Studies</i>
ERO	Essex Record Office
<i>Fem. Stud.</i>	<i>Feminist Studies</i>
GL	Guildhall Library
<i>Glasg. Med. J.</i>	<i>Glasgow Medical Journal</i>
GLRO	Greater London Record Office
<i>Herts Count.</i>	<i>Hertfordshire Countryside</i>
<i>Hist. &amp; Theory</i>	<i>History and Theory</i>
<i>Hist. Childh. Quart.</i>	<i>History of Childhood Quarterly</i>
<i>Hist. Educ.</i>	<i>History of Education</i>
<i>Hist. J.</i>	<i>Historical Journal</i>
<i>Hist. Meth.</i>	<i>Historical Methods</i>
<i>Hist. Nurs. Grp Roy. Coll.</i>	<i>History of Nursing Group, Royal</i>
<i>Nurs. Bull.</i>	<i>College of Nursing Bulletin</i>
<i>Hist. Today</i>	<i>History Today</i>
<i>Hist. Workshop J.</i>	<i>History Workshop Journal</i>
HL	Huntington Library
HRO	Hertfordshire Record Office
<i>Hum. Biol.</i>	<i>Human Biology</i>
<i>Int. J. Wom. Stud.</i>	<i>International Journal of Women's</i>
	<i>Studies</i>
<i>J. Biosoc. Sci.</i>	<i>Journal of Biosocial Science</i>
<i>J. Fam. Hist.</i>	<i>Journal of Family History</i>
<i>J. Hist. Ideas</i>	<i>Journal of the History of Ideas</i>
<i>J. Hist. Med</i>	<i>Journal of the History of Medicine</i>
	<i>and Allied Sciences</i>
<i>J. Interdisc. Hist.</i>	<i>Journal of Interdisciplinary History</i>
<i>J. Med. Ren. Stud.</i>	<i>Journal of Medieval and Renaissance</i>
	<i>Studies</i>
<i>J. Psychohist.</i>	<i>Journal of Psychohistory</i>
<i>J. Relig. Hist.</i>	<i>Journal of Religious History</i>
JRL	John Rylands Library
<i>J. Roy. Soc. Med.</i>	<i>Journal of the Royal Society of</i>
	<i>Medicine</i>
<i>J. Sex Res.</i>	<i>Journal of Sex Research</i>
<i>J. Soc. Arch.</i>	<i>Journal of the Society of Archivists</i>
<i>J. Soc. Hist.</i>	<i>Journal of Social History</i>
KAO	Kent Archive Office
<i>Kroeber Anthropol. Soc. Pap.</i>	<i>Kroeber Anthropological Society</i>
	<i>Papers</i>

## Abbreviations

LAO	Lincolnshire Archive Office
<i>Law Hist. Rev.</i>	<i>Law and History Review</i>
LJRO	Lichfield Joint Record Office
<i>Loc. Popul. Stud.</i>	<i>Local Population Studies</i>
<i>Lond. Rev. Books</i>	<i>London Review of Books</i>
LPL	Lambeth Palace Library
LSG	Library of the Society of Genealogists
<i>Mat. Child. Hlth</i>	<i>Maternal and Child Health</i>
<i>Med. Hist.</i>	<i>Medical History</i>
<i>Mid. Chron.</i>	<i>Midwives' Chronicle</i>
<i>Mid. Hist.</i>	<i>Midland History</i>
<i>Mid. Hlth Vis. Comm. Nurs.</i>	<i>Midwife, Health Visitor and Community Nurse</i>
MUL	Manchester University Library
NLS	National Library of Scotland
<i>North. Hist.</i>	<i>Northern History</i>
<i>Nott. Med. Stud</i>	<i>Nottingham Medieval Studies</i>
NRO	Northampton Record Office
NUL	Nottingham University Library
<i>Nurs. Times</i>	<i>Nursing Times</i>
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
ORO	Oxford Record Office
<i>P &amp; P</i>	<i>Past and Present</i>
<i>Path. Ann.</i>	<i>Pathology Annual</i>
<i>Phil. Pub. Aff.</i>	<i>Philosophy and Public Affairs</i>
<i>Popul. Dev. Rev.</i>	<i>Population and Development Review</i>
<i>Popul. Stud.</i>	<i>Population Studies</i>
PRO	Public Record Office
<i>Scient. Am.</i>	<i>Scientific American</i>
SCL	Sheffield Central Library
<i>Scot. Hist. Soc. Miscel.</i>	<i>Scottish History Society Miscellany</i>
ScotRO	Scottish Record Office
<i>Sixteenth Cent. J.</i>	<i>Sixteenth Century Journal</i>
<i>Soc. Hist.</i>	<i>Social History</i>
<i>Soc. Rev.</i>	<i>Sociological Review</i>
SomRO	Somerset Record Office
StaRO	Stafford Record Office
<i>Stud. Church Hist.</i>	<i>Studies in Church History</i>
<i>Stud. Eighteenth-Cent. Cult.</i>	<i>Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture</i>
<i>Trans Camb. Bibliog. Soc.</i>	<i>Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society</i>

## *Abbreviations*

<i>Trans Hist. Soc. Lancs Chesh.</i>	<i>Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire</i>
<i>Trans Roy. Hist. Soc.</i>	<i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</i>
<i>Univ. Pittsburgh Law Rev.</i>	<i>University of Pittsburgh Law Review</i>
WCA	Westminster City Archives
WIL	Wellcome Institute Library
Wilts Rec. Soc.	Wiltshire Record Society
WRO	Warwick Record Office

## Dorothy McLaren

Dorothy McLaren left school at the age of 15 and it was not until her children were grown up that she entered academic life. After gaining a degree in history from the University of Reading she embarked on a study of 'Stuart Caversham: a Thames-side community in Oxfordshire during the seventeenth century', for which she was awarded a Ph.D. in 1975. It was during her research for this thesis that she first noted the differences in childbearing and lactation habits between wealthy and poor women in the community. Her interest in the reasons for these differences was to lead to her spending the last 10 years of her life in detailed research into the lives of women in seventeenth-century England, at first in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire and later in Somerset. By reconstituting small communities and using both historical and modern physiological evidence to explain her findings, she identified and explained the connection between breastfeeding, marital fertility, and child spacing in pre-industrial England.

That lactating women are less likely to conceive had been known for centuries. Both physicians and ordinary men and women were well aware of the connection between breastfeeding and fertility. During the twentieth century, however, this concept had received the attention of doctors and physiologists who demanded concrete proof. Thus, scientific opinion on the existence of this link fluctuated according to the current state of research. It is only in the last few years that the contraceptive effect of breastfeeding has been fully accepted. Just 6 years ago it was possible for an eminent medical scientist, when asked his opinion of the latest published evidence on lactation and fertility, to state that he did not believe it because

he had worked on it 20 years before and had found no evidence that breastfeeding suppressed fertility at that time. Not surprisingly, historians and historical demographers followed the views of the scientific community when trying to explain historical changes in fertility. Thus, when Dorothy first produced her interpretation of the effect of maternal breastfeeding and wet nursing on fertility and birth intervals, reactions from historians tended to be hostile, ranging from polite interest, through disbelief, to, in at least one instance, open attack after presenting a paper on the subject. However, time was to vindicate her theory. Growing scientific and demographic evidence resulted in the acceptance of the concept that natural, frequent breastfeeding does have a contraceptive effect, particularly in the first few months after birth. Dorothy's last published work, 'Marital fertility and lactation 1570-1720', not only provided impressive historical evidence of the important role of lactation in the lives of women in pre-industrial England, but also listed the developing beliefs of both scientists and historical demographers about the significance of lactation amenorrhoea. Today her pioneering work on the subject is fully accepted.

Shortly before her death in a car accident in 1985, Dorothy pinpointed another gap in the historiography of women in seventeenth-century England: their central and important role as mothers. She did not live to write the book she planned on English women as mothers in this period. It seemed fitting, therefore, that a volume in her memory should concentrate upon the subject area she had identified, and largely utilize the type of evidence she sought and employed to such good effect: the detailed personal and local records of English women and their families.

This book is dedicated with affection and respect to Dorothy McLaren, 1922-85.

### Publications of Dorothy McLaren

'The marriage act of 1653: its influence on the parish registers', *Popul. Stud.* 28 (1974), 319-27.

'Fertility, infant mortality and breast-feeding in the seventeenth century, *Bull. Soc. Soc. Hist. Med.*, 20 (1977), 12-15.

'Fertility, infant mortality and breastfeeding in the seventeenth century', *Med. Hist.*, 22 (1978) 378-96.

'Nature's contraceptive. Wet nursing and prolonged lactation: the case of Chesham, Buckinghamshire 1578-1601', *Med. Hist.*, 23 (1979), 426-41.

'The individualism of good mothering', *Bull. Soc. Soc. Hist. Med.*, 24 (1979) 36-8.

'Emmenologia: a curse or a blessing?', *Bull. Soc. Soc. Hist. Med.*, 25 (1979), 65-7.

'Disease and dirty water in West Somerset in the late nineteenth century', *Bull. Soc. Soc. Hist. Med.*, 35 (1984), 35-6.

'Marital fertility and lactation 1570-1720', in M. Prior (ed.), *Women in English Society 1500-1800* (London, 1985), 22-53.

# Contents

List of Tables	vii
List of Figures	viii
Notes on Contributors	ix
List of Abbreviations	xi
Dorothy McLaren	xv
Introduction	1
 1. The construction and experience of maternity in seventeenth-century England <i>Patricia Crawford</i>	 3
 2. Embarking on a rough passage: the experience of pregnancy in early-modern society <i>Linda A. Pollock</i>	 39
 3. The ceremony of childbirth and its interpretation <i>Adrian Wilson</i>	 68
 4. Puritan attitudes towards childhood discipline, 1560–1634 <i>Robert V. Schnucker</i>	 108
 5. Wet nursing and child care in Aldenham, Hertfordshire, 1595–1726: some evidence on the circumstances and effects of seventeenth-century child rearing practices <i>Fiona Newall</i>	 122

## Contents

6. Maternal feelings re-assessed: child abandonment and neglect in London and Westminster, 1550–1800	139
<i>Valerie Fildes</i>	
7. Conjugal love and the flight from marriage: poetry as a source for the history of women and the family	179
<i>Mary Prior</i>	
 Bibliography	 204
Index	220



# Tables

2.1 Examples of suspect miscarriage	58
4.1 Attitudes to childhood discipline, 1560–1634	109
5.1 Decadal totals of nurse child burials recorded in the Aldenham burial registers	125
5.2 Parity-specific mean birth intervals in years for Aldenham and for the three care groups	128
5.3 Gross infant and parental death rates for the three care groups	129
5.4 Estimated completed size of families in the three care groups	130
6.1 Foundling baptisms as a percentage of total baptisms in seven London parishes, 1590s–1750s	141
6.2 Decadal totals of baptisms in the London Bills of Mortality and estimated decadal totals of foundling baptisms, 1610s–1750s	143
6.3 Baptisms and burials of foundlings at the Temple, 1700–1799, showing underrecording of foundling baptisms	145
6.4 The age of foundlings when abandoned, 1550s–1790s	149
6.5 The sex of London foundlings, 1560s–1790s	150