

‘There are other casualty lists as well as those of war’: attempts to reduce infant mortality

A new Notification of Births Act was introduced in 1915. 'Every birth... must be reported to the local Medical Officer of Health within 36 hours after it occurred. The particulars were to be filled in by the father of the child, or in his absence by those actually in attendance at time of the birth, within six hours after the birth... The object of these regulations is to endeavour to reduce infantile mortality.'

West Lothian Courier 17 Sep 1915, p2

Recent statistics by the Local Government Board on infant deaths in England and Wales 'revealed a state of affairs that was amazing and deplorable'. The *Linlithgow Gazette's* editorial hopes that Scottish figures will not be so bad. 'In this department, as in very many others, the war has shaken up the old conceptions and driven us out of certain complacent ruts'. The recent Notification of Births Act requires prompt notification of births so that infants can be supervised. Health visitors being appointed by the local authorities 'with a view to assisting mothers of the poorer classes, who through ignorance or other reasons are unable to do the best that can be done for the health of their infants.' An appointment of this kind have been made by Linlithgow Town Council. 'We understand a number of local ladies who are interested in the subject of the care of infant life have agreed to assist in the work of visiting... **There are other casualty lists as well as those of war...** and up till now very little heed has been given to them... Thousands of infant lives are lost every year that could have been saved to the country... **We want to see the British Empire populated and controlled by our own race,** and not left for the crafty exploitations of unscrupulous enemies.'

Linlithgow Gazette 14 Jan 16, p2

Linlithgow Town Council agrees to establish an infant health centre in Linlithgow. The District Nursing Association agrees to allow the district nurse to act as official health visitor in the burgh for the purpose of the above act, and Dr Robb has drawn up a list of duties to be performed by the visitor. The nurse is to get an honorarium of £10 per year.

Armadale Town Council discusses a circular from the Convention of the Royal Burghs of Scotland dealing with the second report on infantile mortality in Scotland, in which **Armadale is third highest on the list of infantile mortality, 'having 184 deaths for 1,000 births...** The circular was handed to the public health convener (Mr Brown) along with another on the dangers of whooping cough to consider and report.'

Linlithgow Gazette 11 Feb 16 p4.

Armadale Town Council decides to appoint a district nurse, who would look after child welfare from birth to five years. After reaching the age of five, the child came under the care of the education authorities. Half the cost of the nurse would be paid by the Local Government Board, and the other half from the rates. Dr Anderson explained that an ordinary nurse would not do; they must have a health visitor, the same as in all the big cities. They also discuss getting a district nurse - a young, strong woman. Dr Anderson partly blames infant mortality, the ignorance among young mothers of feeding and cleanliness. His father, Dr Anderson (Sr) had paid £5 out of his own pocket for the Armadale district nurse formerly, and he was prepared to do the same.

Linlithgow Gazette 26 Jan 17, p3

Mrs Gillespie of Longcroft, president of the Linlithgow Infant Welfare Centre committee, welcomes mothers and babies to a tea-party on Saturday afternoon in Longcroft Hall. Two women receive prizes as mothers of the bonniest babies.

Linlithgow Gazette 30 Mar 17, p2

Armadales agrees to employ a district nurse (sometimes also referred to as a sick nurse.) The Town Council cannot legally employ her, so public subscriptions are needed - a penny off wages of the public works, the first year, then a ha'penny thereafter, financial assistance from Mr Wood of Wallhouse, the Goth and the Co-op Society. 'A great many married young, and came into families, with insufficient knowledge, and a qualified nurse would be of great service to such mothers. The war had brought new truths to them, and every effort must be made to reduce the waste of lives, and by employing a qualified nurse, they would be able to do so to a great extent, while at a future date they might take up the wider scheme of child welfare by engaging a public health visitor.'

The Sanitary Inspector says **'Had there been as high a death-rate amongst the lambs in the country as there had been amongst children under one years, a Royal Commission would have been appointed long ago to inquire into the cause.'**

Linlithgow Gazette 20 Apr 17, p3

Armadales District Nursing Association applied for a nurse to the Queen's Jubilee Nursing Association, but owing to the national circumstances there is none available at the moment.

Linlithgow Gazette 25 May 17, p3

A duty is placed upon Town Councils of 'providing milk to expectant mothers and children under five years of age.'

Linlithgow Gazette 8 Jun 17, p2

A two-day travelling Child Welfare exhibition is to be held in the Masonic Hall, Linlithgow.

'There will be a number of useful demonstrations under the headings of "food values", "housewifery", and "thrift" and "war-time dishes", and it is hoped there will be large gatherings.'

Linlithgow Gazette 13 Jul 17, p2

'In this country there is a rooted dislike of everything that savours of bureaucratic control and State interference, but have had to learn the lesson, especially during the war, that State effort is essential in affairs of supreme national concern. And there is nothing more important than the safeguarding of child life. A county scheme of maternity service designed to safeguard infant life has been drawn up by Dr Robb, medical officer of health, for the consideration of the County Council. The medical officer has acted under the directions of the Local Government Board in formulating his scheme, so that there is a movement being made by the authorities to cope with the subject, although it is belated.' The war and the loss of young men has made the country look at the waste of infant life as well. As the Marchioness of Linlithgow says at the opening of the Maternity display in Linlithgow: 'Admittedly, housing reform is at the bottom of this problem.'

Linlithgow Gazette 20 Jul 17, p2

At the opening of the exhibition, the Provost of Linlithgow says that 'during the last eighteen months an infant centre which had been established in the town had been performing work, which, although quiet and unostentatious, was very satisfactory and successful.... The principal object aimed at in the establishment of infant centres was that of teaching mothers to take greater care of their own health and instructing young women in their future duties of motherhood.' ... 'There was just a danger, however, that the very fact of [women's] entrance into

the industrial arena might cause some of the women to be disinclined for the humdrum duties of the household and of motherhood, and the daughters of the nation must be reminded... that there was no higher and holier calling for women than that of raising strong, healthy children for the next generation.... **The wastage of manhood was appalling, and it was only by the saving and careful nurturing of young life that the nation could be restored to the fit condition in which it stood prior to the war....** The country had become accustomed to national control, and in the important sphere of child welfare, it was essential that the State should safeguard young life and interpose if need be between the incompetent or intemperate mother and the child.'

Linlithgow Gazette 20 Jul 17, p2

'Orders have been issued empowering local authorities to supply milk to children and milk and food to expectant and nursing mothers at cost price in ordinary cases, and free or less than cost price in cases in which the women supplied cannot afford to pay the cost price. Certificates authorising applicants to obtain food and milk will be granted by medical officers of health, working in co-operation with the local authority.'

West Lothian Courier 1 Mar 18, p3

'The Child Welfare Centre established in Linlithgow is doing good work, and the Local Government Board have now proposed that the scheme should be further developed by the establishment of a regular centre where the welfare of the young will be specially attended to by the local medical practitioners. Meantime the appointment of the district nurse as a health visitor has been officially sanctioned. **The care of young life is a problem of the first importance, to which the war has drawn attention.**'

Linlithgow Gazette 5 Apr 18, p2

Armadale Town Council hears that 'during the months of March and April 1918, the number of infant deaths was 19. Overcrowding was largely to blame for this high death-rate, according the medial officer. If they had a system of child welfare [Provost Greig] though this might have been avoided. It was said to see so many children taken away without them doing something to save them. He did not think it was a time to defer a child welfare scheme, in face of what was taking place. Mr Brown said he understood there was an epidemic of measles and whooping-cough and that within the past few weeks, many deaths among children had taken place.'

Linlithgow Gazette 10 May 18, p4.

Armadale Town Council hears a very clear explanation from Dr Watt of the Local Government Board, of what are their responsibilities in child welfare, and what work a child welfare nurse in the town would do. Armadale had an annual birth rate of 150, and had 750 children under the age of five. 'Provost Greig indicated that Armadale Town Council would, at an early date, draft a scheme for the appointing of a public health visitor, which would deal with cases of expectant mothers and children up to at least the age of 5 years.'

Linlithgow Gazette 30 Aug 18, p3

Sheriff Maconochie at the opening of the Children's League of Pity sale in the Masonic Hall, Linlithgow: 'They must all realise, however, that the war had rendered very much more difficult the lives of children, because the father was away from home, while the mother was exposed to the temptations and hardships of living alone, and that had largely increased the number of cases the society had to investigate. Love of humanity, Mr Maconochie continued, and anxiety to take care of those who could not take care of themselves, appealed to them all in time of peace, but in that time of war, there was, if he might call it so, a more selfish motive impelling them to help the society as much as ever they could, and that was **the enormous gaps made in the ranks of**

young men in their country which rendered it of urgent necessity to the state that the lives of every child, male and female should be safeguarded, so that they could fill up those gaps.'

Linlithgow Gazette 20 Sep 18, p2

In a speech, Lloyd George declares that 'you cannot run an A 1 nation with a C 3 population', and that 'if the population of this country had been in the state of health and vigour that they ought to have been in, the British Army would have been a million men stronger.' '**...since the war started in August 1914, Scotland has lost by death over 128,000 babies**, of whom 48,000 were under one year, and more than 80,000 under five years.... Faced by these facts, a much too great infantile mortality and the existence of a much too large proportion of the C 3 type of men, we are faced with the necessity for dealing with the health of the nation in the most thorough manner, not the least important aspect being the housing problem.'

Linlithgow Gazette 29 Sep 18, p2.

Registrar's figure for three months to 30 June 1918: Infantile mortality rate in West Lothian was 87 per 1,000 births, but when broken down it was 109 for Bathgate district, and 31 for Linlithgow district. 'Deaths totalled 302, of which 53 were children under one year of age, and 48 were persons over 65.'

West Lothian Courier 27 Sep 18, p2