

ILLUSTRATIONS FROM THE WELLCOME INSTITUTE LIBRARY

THE NATIONAL BIRTHDAY TRUST FUND RECORDS IN THE CONTEMPORARY MEDICAL ARCHIVES CENTRE

by

P. A. BAKER *

The National Birthday Trust Fund¹ was founded in 1928. Its object was to raise money to supplement midwives' fees and to make donations to hospitals for the training of midwives and the improvement of maternity services.² The committee, chaired by Ina, Lady George Cholmondeley, included representatives from "co-operating" hospitals, which in return for financial support (not levied after 1933), were given priority in the allocation of funds. These donations to hospitals continued until the mid-1930s.

The name "The National Birthday (Trust) Fund for Maternity Services", derives from the original intention to raise money through a shilling fund³ with donors subscribing a shilling on their birthdays. The Royal Family as well as shops, theatres, and newspapers were all approached for birthday collections and a letter in Lady George Cholmondeley's hand asked for birthday subscriptions to raise 42 million shillings.⁴ Several moves were made to change the name. At the first minuted meeting, Colonel Simpson, a representative from the General Lying-in Hospital, objected to the name "on account of the existence of a League of a somewhat similar name, connected with Waifs and Strays".⁵ A resolution, passed at the AGM in 1943, to change the name to "The National Maternity Services Trust", was disallowed by the Charity Commissioners. In the 1950s, with the foundation of the National Childbirth Trust (originally the Natural Childbirth Association), the confusion of names engendered some solicitors' correspondence.⁶

Improvement in maternity services focused principally on the provision of pain relief for mothers in childbirth. Mrs Stanley Baldwin, who became actively involved with the

*P. A. Baker, MA, Dip.Arch.Admin., Archivist, Fawcett Library, City of London Polytechnic, Old Castle Street, London E1 7NT.

¹ It became a trust in April 1930. Copy of that trust deed (CMAC/SA/NBT/E.2).

² An account of the Trust's history was given by Dame Josephine Barnes in the sixth Dame Juliet Rhys-Williams' Memorial Lecture, 'Happier birthdays', *Midwives Chronicle and Nursing Notes*, December 1970 (SA/NBT/B.5/8).

³ Constitution passed at inaugural meeting, 12 November 1928 (SA/NBT/A.1/1).

⁴ (SA/NBT/G.6/1/1).

⁵ Executive Committee, 23 April 1928 (SA/NBT/A.1/1).

⁶ (SA/NBT/E.5/4) See also other correspondence (SA/NBT/F.9/9).

Fund from January 1929, ran its Anaesthetics Appeal Fund, which was used to give grants to hospitals for anaesthetics and financing anaesthetist posts. Pain relief in childbirth was not at the time considered a priority by the medical profession. Lady George Cholmondeley, reporting on the Anaesthetics Appeal Fund in November 1929, stated that when it was first discussed in 1927, "most of the Hospitals were opposed to the use of anaesthetics, chiefly owing to the fact that they considered beds and other vital necessities were required before anaesthetics and opinion as to the advisability of using chloroform was divided among the doctors".⁷

The principle that analgesia should be available in all cases led the fund to withhold a grant from the East End Hospital (despite it being a co-operating hospital) because the Medical Officer "only approved of giving anaesthetics in difficult and abnormal cases of labour."⁸ Mrs Baldwin suggested in February 1929 that the objective of the organization should be clarified by adding to the title, "and for Promoting the Use of Anaesthetics in Childbirth" but this was rejected as the executive committee felt that any change of name should shorten rather than lengthen it.⁹ The distribution of anaesthetics to hospitals did not, however, benefit that majority of women who had their babies at home, and one of the early proposals by Juliet, Lady Rhys-Williams, (whose name appears in the minutes from January 1930) was for an investigation into analgesia which could be administered by midwives without the presence of a medical practitioner. Chloroform capsules had been used in trials at Queen Charlotte's and, after a favourable report¹⁰ on the capsules by Louis Carnac Rivett of Queen Charlotte's Hospital in an address to the Royal Society of Medicine, in June 1932, the NBTF offered to distribute three months' supply free to hospitals and general practitioners. A medical committee was set up to organize the distribution of the capsules and receive reports from the hospitals; a newly qualified anaesthetist was employed to visit institutions to demonstrate the use of the capsules.¹¹

At the same time portable gas and air machines were being developed. The NBTF was associated with the early trials of the Minnitt machine¹² and financed a survey by the British College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists into analgesics suitable for use by midwives, which in 1936 reported in favour of gas and air machines.¹³ Later adaptations to gas and air machines and the development of an inhaler using trilene (trichloroethylene) were funded by the NBTF and in the late 1950s Dr J. E. Elam, with a grant from the NBTF, developed a nitrous oxide and oxygen machine named after Lucy Baldwin.¹⁴

The Trust also organized the distribution of gas and air machines. After the BCOG survey, machines were donated to the participating institutions and from 1937 machines

⁷ Executive Committee, 28 November 1929 (SA/NBT/A.1/1).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 27 January 1931.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 14 February 1929.

¹⁰ In a report to the next AGM of the Fund, Mr Rivett concluded: "This is a completely safe and foolproof method of relieving the intense pains of childbirth, and one which is easily learnt at a very short course of instruction." General Committee, 27 February 1933 (SA/NBT/A.1/2).

¹¹ (SA/NBT/H.1).

¹² At Liverpool Maternity Hospital, 1934 (SA/NBT/H.2/1). An example of this apparatus found with the archives has been given to the Wellcome Galleries, Science Museum.

¹³ British College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, *Investigations into the use of analgesics suitable for administration by midwives*, 1936 (SA/NBT/H.4/1/1).

¹⁴ (SA/NBT/H.2/8).

The National Birthday Trust Fund

were sent to hospitals free and at a nominal charge (£5) to district nursing associations. The records include reports on their use.¹⁵ This was financed by Robert McDougall, who had originally responded to a radio appeal by Mrs Baldwin in 1935, and donated shares to establish a fund in memory of his mother, Elizabeth, to be used for the distribution of gas and air machines.

After the introduction of the National Health Service, the NBTf concentrated on research into new techniques of obstetric analgesia. Between 1953 and 1956 Dr Hilda Roberts ran a research unit at Hammersmith Hospital supported by a scholarship from the NBTf, and produced several reports on the effects of analgesia for midwives.¹⁶ The files of the Technical Advisory Committee include grant applications for orthodox medical research and correspondence with proponents of more idiosyncratic methods of pain relief.

The pre-war records of the NBTf illustrate many efforts to raise funds. The shilling fund was never relied on as the only source of donations and does not seem to have generated much income; the practice of reminding subscribers about their birthday contributions was abandoned in 1939.

Many women with influential connections were associated with the Trust in the 1930s and some ambitious fund-raising events were organized. Mrs Baldwin made two radio appeals (in 1929 and 1935) and hosted entertainments at 10 Downing Street. There are records of theatre and cinema gala performances, often attended by members of the Royal Family. In 1934 and 1935, *Elijah* was staged at the Royal Albert Hall in conjunction with St Dunstan's¹⁷ and in 1930 an air pageant was organized at the Hanworth Flying Club.¹⁸ The director of the club was on the committee, and support was given by the Air Ministry. Foreign flying clubs were invited to send teams and an air race around London was on the programme. Unfortunately no Royal guest could be found; among those approached was the Prince of Wales but "there was an understanding that the Royal Princes should not interest themselves in maternity work".¹⁹ Despite publicity efforts, which included poster displays by wives of local MPs and the use of sandwich boards, the indifferent weather meant attendance was low and results disappointing.

Other schemes included the sales of stamps and flags for Mothering Sunday and a "snowball" scheme²⁰ run by Mrs Baldwin. Chains of subscriptions were to be started using booklets of donation slips. One suggestion was to write to all who subscribed to the 1929 radio appeal, and at one point members of the committee were asked to write to telephone subscribers, divided among them by letters of the alphabet. John Galsworthy, A. A. Milne, and other famous people were approached to begin chains.

Despite some failures, donations and fundraising built up the capital fund and the Anaesthetics Appeal Fund to £16,500 by November 1932 and enabled the Fund to initiate several experiments and projects from the early 1930s.

¹⁵ (SA/NBT/H.2/2 –H.2/5).

¹⁶ (SA/NBT/H.5/4).

¹⁷ (SA/NBT/G.20).

¹⁸ (SA/NBT/G.13).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, committee minutes, 16 May 1930.

²⁰ (SA/NBT/G.9).

Aerial Meet and Rally

TO HELP THE NATIONAL BIRTHDAY TRUST FUND (FOR THE EXTENSION OF MATERNITY SERVICES), INCLUDING MR STANLEY BALDWIN'S APPEAL FOR ANÆSTHETICS.

HANWORTH PARK

July 19th 30

TICKETS & 1/10 (ENCLOSURE) AND AGENCIES AND ORGANISING SECRETARY.
5/- 2/6 & 1/- CARS **2/6** | 67, ST. STEPHEN'S HOUSE, WESTMINSTER, S.W.1.

BUS ROUTES 90, 117, 120 - UNDERGROUND TO MOUNSLOW WEST. - SOUTHERN RAILWAY FROM WATERLOO OR RICHMOND, TO FELTHAM.

SPECIAL ATTRACTIONS

Grand Parade and Fly Past - - Aerobatic Displays
How not to Fly - - Passenger Flights
Race: Hanworth—Reading→Hanworth
Parachute Descent

Photo: Wellcome Institute Library, London.

Figure: Programme for aerial rally, Hanworth Flying Club, 19 July 1930. (SA/NBT/G.13)



Photo: Wellcome Institute Library, London.

Plate 1: Midwife with an early portable gas and air apparatus, distributed by the NBTf, strapped to her bicycle, 1936. (SA/NBT/H.3/2/2).



Photo: Wellcome Institute Library, London.

Plate 2: Midwife and patient demonstrating the use of the “trilene” inhaler, 1955. (SA/NBT/H.3/11).

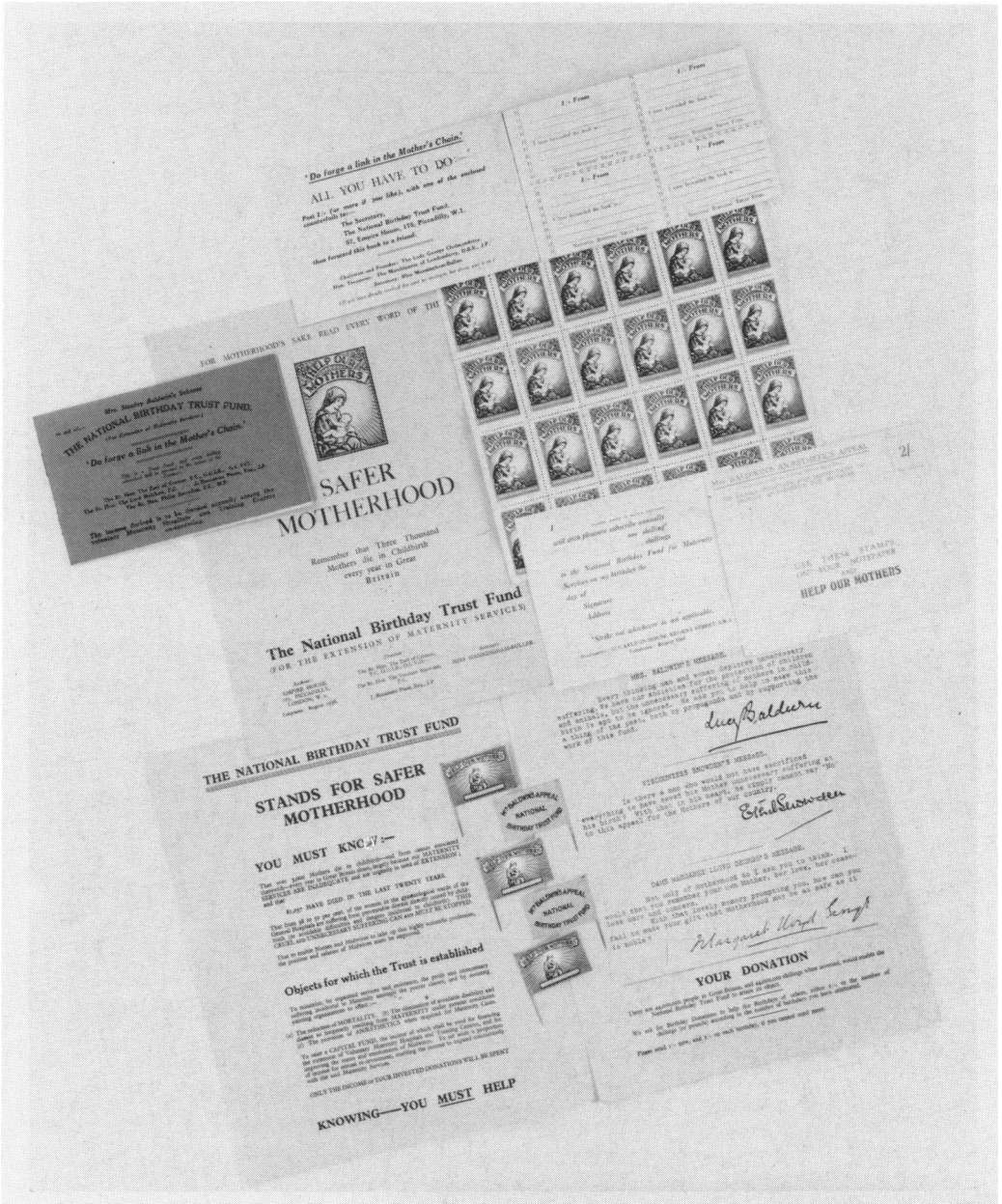


Photo: Wellcome Institute Library, London.

Plate 3: Collection of fund-raising documents from the 1930s including stamps and flags for the Mother's Day appeal, birthday subscription forms, and a booklet for Mrs Baldwin's "mother's chain" donations. (SA/NBT/G.4/1; G.6/1/1; G.6/4; G.9).

The National Birthday Trust Fund

After the war the NBTF's role as a fund-raising body diminished. The income from investments was used to finance several medical research projects through its Technical Advisory Committee but the Fund is best known for its work on major medical surveys and government reports on maternity services. It contributed to the Survey of Childbearing carried out in 1946 by the Population Investigation Committee with the RCOG and from this study arose several surveys initiated and conducted by the NBTF. The archives include the records of the Fatigue Survey of 1950–1 and the Prematurity Survey a year later under Dr F. W. Martin.

An abortive attempt in 1954 to set up a comparative study of home and hospital births paved the way for the Perinatal Mortality Survey, in which all births in one week in March 1958 were recorded, including details of the mother's medical and social condition and the circumstances of the birth. This huge undertaking, under Professor Neville Butler, took more than three years of planning and resulted in two major reports²¹ and numerous follow-up studies. A pathology exhibit and analysis was also produced by Dr Claireaux.²² Full details of the planning and organization of this survey and its follow-up research (as well as that of the British Births Survey of 1970) are among the records at the Contemporary Medical Archives Centre.²³

Also included are the records of the Joint Council on Midwifery. This was established in October 1933 on the initiative of the NBTF, which provided the secretariat and premises. The Council's report on "the Desirability of Establishing a Salaried Service of Midwives", published in February 1935, provided the impetus for the Midwives Act of 1936, which established the midwife as a salaried officer and paved the way for allowing the midwife to administer analgesic drugs. The papers include copious notes and drafts for this report in the hand of Lady Rhys-Williams, the NBTF representative on this body and its secretary.²⁴

The JCM was also responsible for a remarkable survey of non-therapeutic abortions in the inter-war years. Reports on practice in other countries, and catalogues and samples of abortifacients were collected by a committee set up in October 1936. There are two maps plotting maternal deaths due to abortion and a complete set of survey questionnaires returned in August 1938. The questionnaires (approximately 3,300) were analysed extensively and the tabulations are held with the NBTF papers. A report on the results of the survey was sent to the Inter-Departmental Committee on Abortion in October 1938.

The JCM also administered (from 1937) a nutrition scheme, set up by the NBTF and organized by Lady Rhys-Williams in the Rhondda Valley from July 1933. Its original object was to improve maternity services by providing more clinics and training and inspection of midwives in the area. In 1935 the help was extended to include an experimental distribution of free food to the pregnant women attending the clinics and allocation of disinfectant and sterile dressings to the midwives. Part of

²¹ Neville R. Butler and Dennis G. Bonham, *Perinatal mortality*, The First Report of the 1958 British Perinatal Mortality Survey, Edinburgh, Livingstone, 1963. Neville R. Butler and Eva D. Alberman (eds.), *Perinatal problems*, The Second Report of the 1958 British Perinatal Mortality Survey, Edinburgh, Livingstone, 1969.

²² This is now at Queen Charlotte's Hospital.

²³ Statistical data are at the University of Bristol and computer records at the ESRC Databank.

²⁴ (SA/NBT/R.8).

the funding came from voluntary donations, including £2,500 from the Marquess of Bute. From March 1936 the Commissioner for Special Areas gave an annual grant and after the JCM took over its administration the scheme was extended to government-designated special areas in the North East of England and continued to the outbreak of war. There was discussion about extending the scheme to Scotland but this never materialized. The records include details of food distributed and reports on infant and maternal mortality rates. The project was not merely a philanthropic exercise but resulted in a full report in the *Lancet*.²⁵ (Reports on the earlier experiments by Lady Rhys-Williams herself were printed in *Public Health*.)²⁶

The records were given to the Contemporary Medical Archives Centre in 1987 and provide a full and fascinating account of an organization which has been influential in medical campaigns and research for over 50 years. The foregoing survey has been able only to highlight some of the collection. The completeness of the archive owes much to the work of Doreen V. Riddick, who was secretary from 1939 to 1972 and previously, as secretary to Lady Rhys-Williams, provided secretarial support to the work of the Joint Council on Midwifery.²⁷ The breadth and detail of the records make them a valuable source for research in many aspects of twentieth-century medical history. A detailed catalogue of the collection has been produced (and the Wellcome Institute gratefully acknowledges the NBTF's generosity and support for this) and may be consulted at the Contemporary Medical Archives Centre, Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, 183 Euston Road, London NW1 2BP, after completing a Reader's Application and Undertaking Form.

²⁵ Margaret I. Balfour, 'Supplementary feeding in pregnancy', *Lancet*, 1944, i: 208–11 (SA/NBT/T.17/3/1).

²⁶ Lady Williams, 'Results of experimental schemes for reducing the maternal death rate in the special areas of Glamorgan, Monmouthshire and Durham carried out by the National Birthday Trust Fund during 1934, 1935 and 1936', *Public Health*, April 1937 (SA/NBT/T.17/1/1).

²⁷ Speaking at the AGM, 10 December 1968, the chairman Walter Gilbey spoke of Miss Riddick as "the cornerstone on which the Birthday Trust is built" (SA/NBT/C.13/2).