HISTORY SENIORS

G216 CHILDREN, HEALTH AND MORTALITY: THE FOUNDLING HOSPITAL IN 18TH CENTURY LONDON

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The Foundling Hospital was set up in 1739 in response to the great number of infants abandoned in London’s streets. Over the course of the next 40 years, well over 15000 children entered the hospital. The mortality rate, however, stood at around 70%, despite great concern from the Governors as to prevention and cure of disease.

I looked at the demographic patterns in this sheltered institution compared with those in the metropolis. Rather than waves of disease introduced by immigrants, I found a constant low level of disease punctuated by epidemics of typical childhood infections such as measles. The records also show an exceptionally high mortality rate in the first weeks of admission, probably due to poor maternal care or traumatic experience in utero.

The study brings out several important themes for an age rich in charitable enterprise: the high mortality of illegitimate and disadvantaged infants; the benefits of life in an institution sheltered from economic deprivation and disease epidemics; and the great efforts made by compassionate individuals to preserve the lives of abandoned children. Mortality may have been high, but commitment to health and life was beyond question.

G217 HOW LANGDON DOWN RECOGNISED THE SYNDROME

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John Langdon Down described the Mongolian group in his ethnic classification of the Residents in the Royal Earlswood Asylum in 1862. In 1876 he added a note on the oblique position of the eyes and the epicanthic folds. His son Reginald noted the single palmar crease in 1908. The facial characteristics were identified by clinical photography and 200 of his photographs have survived. He carried out 200 autopsies and retained skull vaults. He also measured skull diameters and palate dimensions. The Lancet initiated the use of Down’s Syndrome in 1961.