

“Hatched and Matched”

The afternoon began with Elaine telling us about her grandmother who trained as a nurse and then a midwife in the late 1800s. Her midwifery training was undertaken at St Bartholomews in Smithfield, London. We were shown a lovely framed photograph of her and her beautiful velvet bonnet. Moving to Kidderminster on her marriage, as a midwife, Frances was responsible for a certain catchment area, but then with no phone or car, residents when they needed her services would just knock on her door, she would pick up her medical bag and off she would go on her bicycle. If needed during the night, pebbles would be thrown at her window to wake her.

Despite Frances having 4 children in 4 years carried on with her very demanding job. At times it was a huge struggle as she was the breadwinner, her husband was incapacitated. Eventually Frances left the post of district midwife and worked as Senior Nursing Officer at the old hospital in Sutton rd.

Elaine's talk about her grandmother reminded us all of the early episodes of Call the Midwife.

Liz followed, with her talk about the social history of District Nurses and Midwives. Organised district nursing began in 1859 by Liverpool Philanthropist William Rathbone. He employed a nurse to visit the city's poorest areas to bring health care to those who had no means to pay for care. With the help from Florence Nightingale and others, the Liverpool model of health care was taken up by other towns, all funded by rich local benefactors, this happened in the Worcester area. District nurses now manage care within the community visiting house bound patients providing advice and medical care.

Midwifery services carried on from Elaine's grandmother days to being a very efficient service in the 20thC. By the time of the late 1960s they were already recognised as highly trained and specialised professionals in obstetrics. Following many years of mothers having their babies at home, The Peel report in 1976 stated that provision should be made for all women to give birth in hospital. But this gave would be mothers the idea that it was dangerous to have babies at home and it led to a shakeup in the type of midwifery services being offered.

More births in hospital, less midwives to do community visiting, not much continuity in having a named midwife, is how the service is perceived today.

The second part of the afternoon produced many memories, some sad, some happy. Some of our members were certainly bonnie babies and looked like little angels before they went to school.

Some of the most exciting photos were of a member who was so good looking and glamorous we thought he was a film star!

We looked at the different styles and fabrics of wedding dresses that members had bought, unfortunately none of us were slim enough to try them on!

We looked at the changing styles of bouquets and wedding cakes on the photographs. Most of the members' marriages had taken place between 1962 and 1972, but we had some of our parents wedding photographs which had taken place during the war years.

It was interesting to see that not many of the childrens' or wedding photos were in colour, how times have changed, now all pictures are instant and in colour. Such a lovely afternoon, with much amusement.



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Leonard Chettle Nuneaton.



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