

**BABY FARMING  
THE CARE OF ILLEGITIMATE CHILDREN IN ENGLAND, 1860–1943**

by  
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## **ABSTRACT**

“Baby Farming” is the first study to evaluate fully what baby farming was, how it was battled, and why it finally disappeared. Historians commonly characterize baby farming as a form of infanticide-for-hire that flourished briefly in urban England in the 1860s and 1870s. This study insists that to grasp the historical significance of baby farming, it must be considered more broadly, as Victorians characterized it. “Baby Farming” begins by exploring the social and legal environment of the mid-Victorian period into which illegitimate children were born. At a time when neither the government nor private philanthropists provided adequately for the children of impoverished unmarried women, baby farming evolved as an uncoordinated but functional range of strategies for coping with and capitalizing on the existence of unwanted infants. The first chapter locates the origins of the campaign against baby farming in the medical profession’s attempts to understand and prevent infanticide. The next chapter analyzes the case of Margaret Waters, who became an archetypal criminal baby farmer, and demonstrates the injustice of judging a baby farmer by the effects of her actions. Subsequent chapters juxtapose a discussion of the infant life protection movement’s battle to place all foster and adoptive mothers under official supervision with an exploration of who baby farmers were, how they fit into their communities, and what role they played in English society.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

BL	British Library, London
<i>BMJ</i>	<i>British Medical Journal</i>
CALPIW	Committee for Amending the Law in Points Wherein it is Injurious to Women
CG	<i>Child's Guardian</i>
ILPS	Infant Life Protection Society
LCC	London County Council
LGB	Local Government Board
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
MBW	Metropolitan Board of Works
NAS	National Adoption Society
NCAA	National Children Adoption Association
NCUMB	National Council for the Unmarried Mother and Her Child
NSPCC	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
NSWS	National Society for Women's Suffrage
PCC	Public Control Committee, London County Council
PCD	Public Control Department, London County Council
PHC	Public Health Committee, London County Council
PHD	Public Health Department, London County Council
PLUA	Poor Law Unions Association
PRO	Public Record Office, London

*RSCHLILP* *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Infant Life Protection Bill and the Safety of Nurse Children Bill, 1896*

*RSCILP* *Report from the Select Committee on Infant Life Protection, 1908*

*RSCILPB* *Report from the Select Committee on the Infant Life Protection Bill, 1890*

*RSCPIL* *Report from the Select Committee on Protection of Infant Life, 1871*

SCPIL Select Committee on Protection of Infant Life

*WSJ* *Women's Suffrage Journal*