

# R E P O R T

FROM THE

SELECT COMMITTEE

ON

## MIDWIVES' REGISTRATION;

WITH THE

PROCEEDINGS OF THE COMMITTEE.

Ordered, by The House of Commons, to be Printed,  
8 August 1893.

LONDON:

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BY EYRE AND SPOTTISWOODE,  
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HODGES, FIGGIS, & Co., LIMITED, 104, GRAFTON STREET, DUBLIN.

367

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AND

## MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

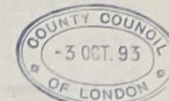
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367.



## MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

Friday, 30th June 1893.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Mr. Albert Bright.  
Dr. Farquharson.  
Mr. Fell Pease.

Mr. Priestley.  
Mr. Arthur Williams.

Mr. HENRY FELL PEASE, in the Chair.

Mr. ATHELSTAN BRAXTON HICKS, called in; and Examined.

Chairman.

Chairman—continued.

1. You are, I believe, Coroner for the South-Western district of the County of London?—  
Yes, and for the Kingston district of the County of Surrey.

2. You are aware what the subject of this inquiry is?—Yes.

3. We want to know whether from your experience you find any evil resulting from the practice of unauthorised midwives, and we shall be glad to have any further information on the subject you can give us?—I may say that my practical experience as a Coroner is that there certainly is a great danger in having people who are not properly qualified, not having any knowledge of the work, in practising as midwives indiscriminately. To give you an example is the best way of illustrating the matter; a person is known in the neighbourhood as a kindly sort of old motherly person, and people in an emergency come to her, and ask her to attend Mrs. So-and-so, who is, or is going to be, in labour. She goes in; she does her best, which is very bad very often; she either takes upon herself to send to the doctor or not, and after she has done a certain number of cases she is known in the neighbourhood as a midwife, and so she makes a sort of profession or business of acting in this way without having any other qualification than what she may have picked up from seeing a certain number of deliveries of children.

4. And she has not sufficient education to know when to send for a doctor?—She is without any knowledge I may say honestly.

5. Not even practical knowledge enough to know when to send for the doctor?—Not even practical knowledge enough to know when to send for the doctor. To give you an example. I had a breach presentation case in which the mother or the child died, I forget which; one of 0.139.

these women undertook herself, although she might have sent for a doctor, to try and deliver that child, and I think it was three hours in delivery—and then I think she pulled it out by the arm, or one of the limbs.

6. And the mother died?—I think the mother died, or at any rate, the child died; but it was a question how far the midwife was criminal in the way she acted; I had to consider that naturally. The jury found that she acted through ignorance in doing her best; a very poor consolation for the friends, and the mother too.

7. Do you think that if midwives were registered it would be a check upon that kind of thing?—I think registration would imply responsibility.

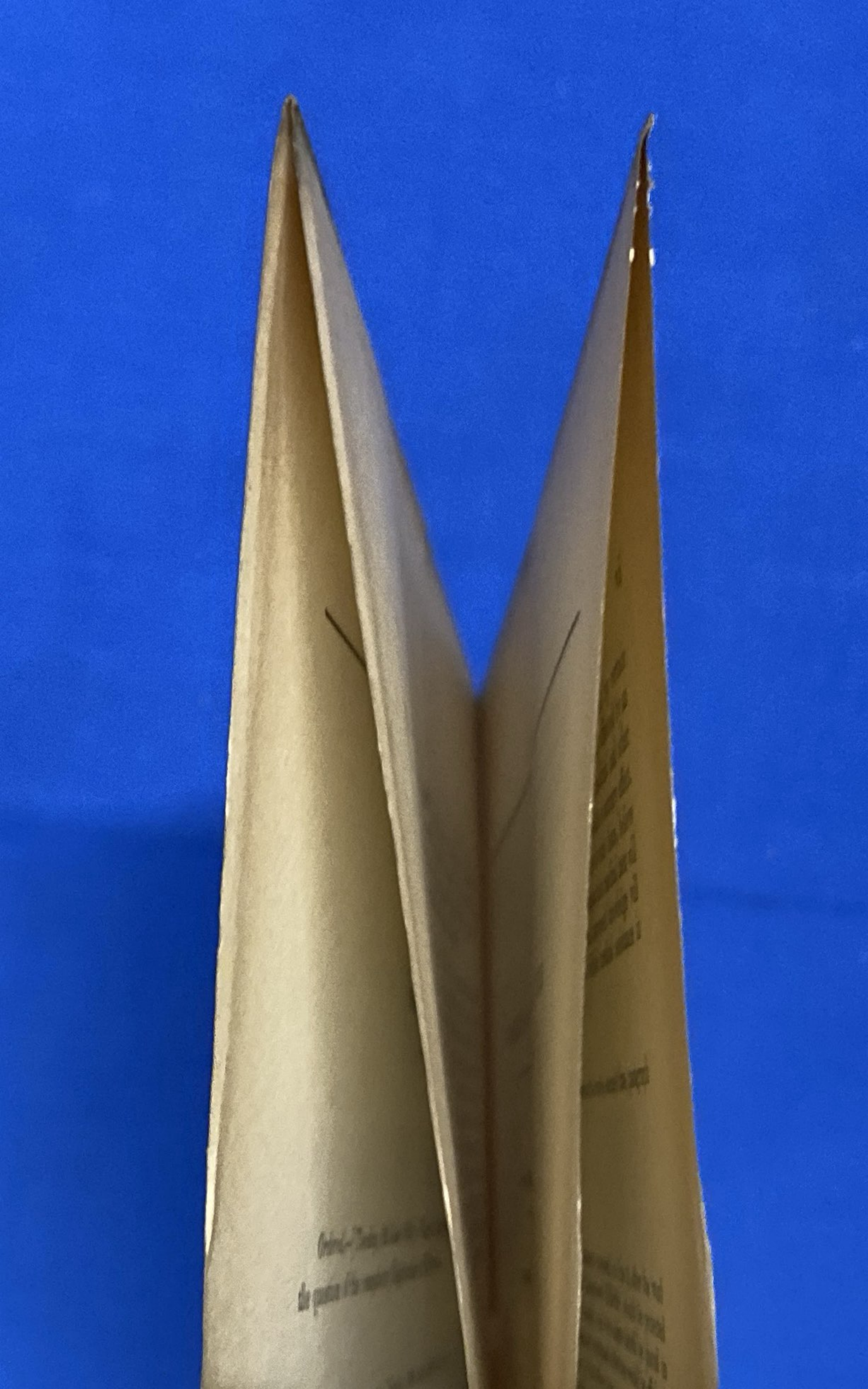
Dr. Farquharson.

8. Supposing that case had happened in the practice of a registered medical man, what line would have been taken legally?—He would probably have used the proper means to deliver the child.

9. Supposing he had delivered a woman in the same way, he would very likely have been had up for malpractice, would he not?—I should say so, after pulling the child out by the arm or one of the limbs. It was a breach presentation, and one or other of the limbs came out first, I forget which, but it is immaterial; the thing was improperly done, and the child's arm was somewhat lacerated in the pulling out. The child was suffocated no doubt in the womb because it was not delivered soon enough; but the pulling of it out showed that the woman was utterly unconscious of what she should do.

10. Do you think there are many people of that sort practising throughout the country now; Are they diminishing or increasing, do you think?—







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Your Committee  
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County Councils. The  
midwifery should be

In conclusion  
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great preponderance  
the authority of the  
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that medical men  
also that improve  
themselves more  
assistance in  
and substantial

Mr. Stephens  
Dr. Farquharson  
Mr. J. Albert  
Mr. Tatton Egerton

The Committee deliberated



[ 1 ]

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Chairman—continued.

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7 July 1893.]

Mrs. BEDINGFIELD.

[Continued.]

Mr. Stephens—continued.

was superior in qualification to any registered person; I am putting a hypothetical case of a very strong kind?—Yes, I would prevent their employing them; I would, most decidedly.

583. Well, that is quite new; because, in a case even of a certificate of death, anybody can give a certificate of death, really?—A midwife cannot.

584. Yes, she can?—Your registrar would not take it.

585. That is the registrar's fault?—He is not bound to take it. The registrar is not bound to take the midwife's certificate.

Mr. Albert Bright.

586. We have it in evidence that some registrars do take them?—They may do it, but they are not obliged to do it.

Dr. Farquharson.

587. They are put down as improperly registered, or as unregistered, deaths; they are not put down as registered deaths unless they are certified by a qualified medical practitioner, but certainly some of them are taken?—I have known them refused, and a coroner's inquest held.

Mr. Stephens.

588. They may ignorantly refuse to accept them, but it is impossible to secure that no one should die except in the presence of, or with some kind of knowledge of, a medical man; that cannot be secured by law?—Therefore inquests are held when there is a death without a medical man. I think I am correct. I have known several instances in my own practice where the baby has died before it has been possible to call in a medical man, and I have gone to the registrar to register the death, and he has refused to take my certificate.

Chairman.

589. We have had a good deal of evidence to the effect that registrars do take such certificates?—I can tell you one registrar, in the district in which Victoria Station stands (South Belgravia), who refused the midwife's certificate, and a coroner's inquest was held. I think you will find that I am right.

Mr. Stephens.

590. That would be right, no doubt, as to the action of the registrar, but really as to the intention of the law, that is another matter?—I think the registrar is not bound to take the midwife's certificate.

591. You are a trained midwife?—I am a trained midwife; of course I am.

592. And if a still-born case occurs in your

Mr. Stephens—continued.

practice?—"Still-born" is a different case altogether.

593. I do not mean that; that is a slip of the tongue; but if there is a death of a new-born child and you have been attending the woman, would not you know all about it?—Yes; I should know all about it.

594. Do you think, because the question of the certificate is a question of evidence, that you are the better witness, or a doctor whom you may call in from outside, who will depend upon the evidence you give him?—You mean a doctor who has not seen the child alive.

595. Yes?—A doctor who has not seen the child alive cannot give the certificate at all.

596. But he is going to give the certificate?—He does not do it; he cannot. There must be a coroner's inquest. If a new-born baby breathes, and dies without a qualified medical man having seen it, there must be a coroner's inquest.

597. You know, and can give all the evidence as to whether it did breathe or not?—They would not take it. Ask Mr. Bond, the surgeon here in Westminster. I was concerned in a case with him in which he was asked to give a certificate; he knew all the circumstances of the case, except that he had not actually seen the child breathe. He refused to give the certificate; they refused to take mine, and they had an inquest.

Chairman.

598. We had it from Mr. Braxton Hicks the other day that he does take such certificates generally?—Some of them do, but they are not bound to do it.

Mr. Stephens.

599. I think we have it in evidence that, in fact, they are bound to do it, but that they conceive that they are not bound to do it; that is to say, that the law is one thing and the practice which has arisen is another?—That may be; but I have made inquiry of a pretty good authority, and I have been most decidedly told that they are not bound to take the midwife's certificate. I had a case, only a short time ago, of a child which was suffocated; it was overlaid by the parents in the night. The child was two days old. They came to me (the child was dead). I sent for a doctor; he came down and looked at the child, but he could give no certificate, and an inquest had to be held.

Chairman.

600. Do you wish to give us any further information upon the subject?—I think that is all I have to say.