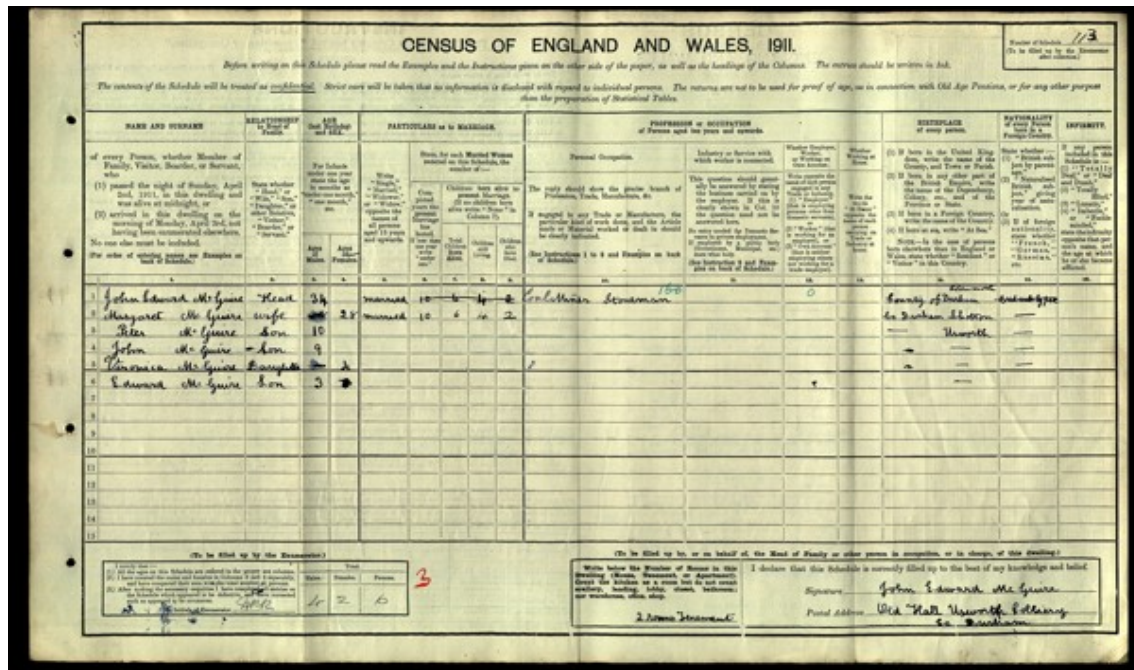


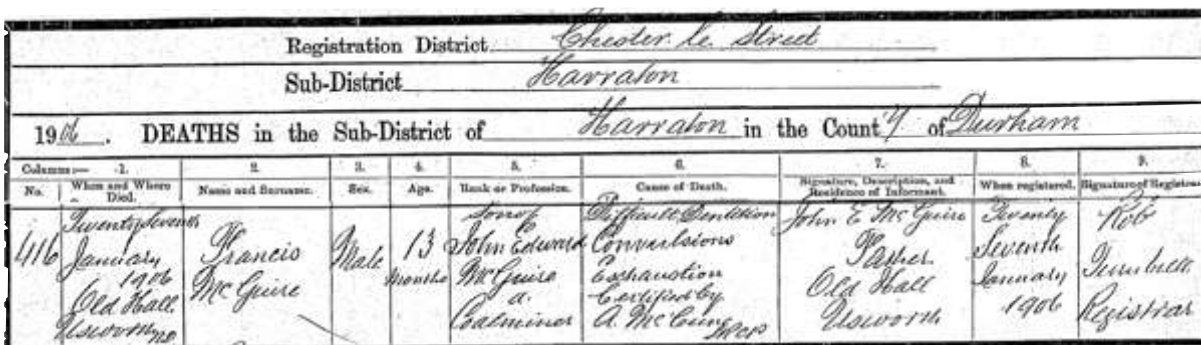
INFANT DEATHS FROM TEETHING – KILLER CURES

One of the things that never fails to bring a lump to my throat is finding from census details and birth records the numbers of children my forbears had who died in infancy. The 1911 census asked the controversial questions about how many children live and dead were 'born alive to the present marriage' and it is often tragic reading. By 1911 my Great-grandparents had had six children. Four were alive and 2 had died.



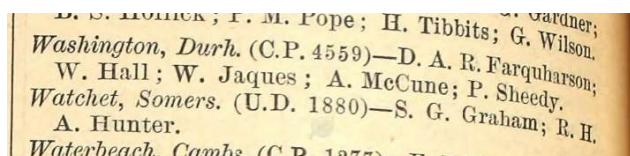
Scarcely any family at that time escaped this awful blight upon their lives. A survey of the first few roads in the 1911 census for Usworth Enumeration District 18, where my great grandparents lived, found 165 families had between them produced 977 children, out of which 275 had died – 28% of them. This grief had come to over two thirds of the families in Railway Terrace, Penshaw View, Office Cottages, Poplar Cottage, Richardson, Wood and House Terraces, The Square and Old Row.

I rarely order the death certificate for an infant but in the case of their child, Francis McGuire, I did because I was trying to ascertain how long my great grandparents had lived in Little Usworth Old Hall.



When I received the certificate I was amazed to find the cause of death was 'Difficult Dentition' – teething problems in other words. Followed by 'Convulsions and Exhaustion'.

The whole description brings pictures of terror to me. Francis was 13 months old and died at home in the two rooms they had at Old Hall – or Little Usworth Manor which served as a tenement dwelling for several families. His family must have found the whole thing terrifying and disturbing. I can imagine the crying and fitting baby eventually sinking into exhaustion. Would the family even be able to afford a doctor to see him? I note that the death was certified by Dr. A. McClune- Dr. Alexander McClune- a Scottish doctor who had worked in Washington for some time. He is listed with Dr. Daniel Farquharson, Dr. W. Hall and Dr. P Sheedy in the 1906 Medical Directory.



I wanted to know a bit more about how teething problems could cause death. I had never heard of such a thing. Teething can be a painful time but it is an ordinary rite of passage for most babies. I owe much of what I found to some dedicated research which has gone before.

In her marvellous blog¹ Jane Roberts tells us that when she was researching such a case in her own family she found this interesting information. In the 33rd Annual Report of the Registrar General covering the 1870 statistics- the year of the death she was researching- in the West Riding of Yorkshire 232 female deaths and 287 male deaths were attributed to teething. In total 4,183 deaths registered in England had teething as the cause.

It was a strongly held view at that time that teething was an extremely vulnerable time and a dangerous process. According to the 35th Annual Report of the Registrar General, reviewing at 1872 statistics: "*Teething is one of the first marked steps in development after birth, and by inducing convulsions and other irritative reflex diseases, it is chargeable with a certain number of deaths*".

What the medical profession had done was to observe the fact that a number of symptoms and afflictions such as convulsions, diarrhoea, bronchitis, croup, vomiting, neck abscesses, insanity and meningitis, commonly killed children at just the phase when they were teething. They therefore blamed the teething as a time fraught with risk and likely to bring on these symptoms and illnesses.

In addition the treatments thought necessary to relieve or assist the perceived danger of teething were just as likely themselves to lead to death. Some of the treatments were dangerous. Some involved lancing the gum, thought to aid the emergence of the tooth. The obvious dangers included pain, shock and infection. Applying leeches to gums was also held

¹ <https://pasttopresentgenealogy.co.uk/2017/01/18/a-short-life-remembered-death-by-dentition/>


to be efficacious. Parents were told to rub chicken grease or fresh hog's lard lightly and frequently over infant's gums. A somewhat less palatable alternative was to use hare's brains for the same purpose. The need to gnaw on things for relief led to some very unsuitable items being introduced into the mouth. A child might be given a dry bread crust, a lump of sugar wrapped in cloth, liquorice sticks dipped in honey, carrot sticks or wax candles.

Concoctions advertised in the newspapers could contain opium, cocaine, mercury, morphine and alcohol in quantities dangerous to young bodies. Scott's Emulsion was advertised extensively in the Newcastle papers in the year Francis died. I wonder if his mother Margaret tried it. It seems relatively less harmful than some of the remedies than had gone before. What is interesting is that the numbers of deaths registered as being caused by teething was going down year on year at this stage and it appears to indicate a slightly old fashioned and not very knowledgeable approach to diagnosis. Hardly surprising if the doctors working in this mining community were not of the top quality.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 26, 1906.

WHEN LITTLE TEETH ARE COMING

The pains and perils of teething-time are unknown in nurseries where SCOTT'S EMULSION of cod liver oil and hypophosphites of lime and soda is used. Purest Norwegian cod liver oil broken up into tiny globules (i.e. emulsified) by the perfected Scott process cannot upset the stomachs and Scott's is so nice that your baby will take it readily—you will not have to force it down the little throat. Also, the lime in Scott's provides the necessary material (so often wanting) for straight, strong, white teeth. The nourishment in Scott's makes teething babies rosy and chubby and so strong that teething-time need not be feared. Scott's and Scott's alone assure good, long, restful nights.



¶ 3, Seymour Terrace, Amsley, 4th May, 1905. "As soon as my little boy began teething he fell away and got very flabby and irritable. He also had a nasty cough which kept him awake at night. We gave him Scott's Emulsion. Now he is cutting his teeth very easily and has grown into a particularly fine child for his age." E. M. Cox. ¶ If you would like your baby to try SCOTT'S, send for a free sample bottle and coloured picture book "The Good-Time Garden" (enclosing 4d. for postage and mentioning this paper.) SCOTT & BOWNE, Ltd., 10-11, STONECUTTER STREET, LONDON, E.C.

REST FOR MOTHER

The Evidence from 199
Dunstable Rd., Luton, Oct. 19, 1905.



"As a baby our little girl was very delicate. With the approach of teething she had frequent convulsive attacks which left her well-nigh lifeless; we were repeatedly told that we should never rear her. After trying other and useless things we gave Scott's Emulsion and the result is now a strong and healthy child. We feel very strongly that what she is to-day is due, under God, to Scott's Emulsion. She frequently asked for more than her dose."

J. R. Barker.

IRENE STELLA BARKER

Newcastle Chronicle 1906

I checked what was happening about teething deaths when Francis died in 1906.

The table below from the Registrar General's Report for 1906 shows the death rates by age group for males that year across the whole English and Welsh Population. Francis was 13 months. So death rates per thousand 0-5 year old males was 49.3! Truly astounding. For females it was 41.2 per 1000.

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TABLE 18.—ENGLAND AND WALES.—Death-rates per 1000 living, at Twelve Groups of Ages, and General Death-rates corrected for Age-constitution in Registration Counties, 1906.—Males.

REGISTRATION COUNTY.	ALL AGES †	0—	5—	10—	15—	20—	25—	35—	45—	55—	65—	75—	85 & upwards
ENGLAND AND WALES	16·4	49·3	3·4	2·0	3·0	3·9	5·6	9·5	16·8	33·2	68·7	136·9	319·5
I.—LONDON.													
London.. .. .	17·6	53·3	3·6	2·0	3·1	3·6	5·5	10·8	19·2	35·4	73·3	140·6	344·4
II.—SOUTH EASTERN.													

In Durham the rate was 61.7 for males and 50.9 for females in this age group.

The following table shows the reduction in teething as a cause of death from 4,219 in 1887 to 2,175 in 1906. As a cause of death per million living, teething had gone down from 152 in 1887 to 63 in 1906. Death from all other causes increased; possibly because teething was not now being blamed as a general killer and diagnosis had improved. Francis was still the victim of something which was widely blamed for infant death however.

Premature Birth	14088	14003	14439	15208	16451	16077	17363	15837	17508	17184	17779	18032	18540	18479	18563	18969	19181	19527	19521	19961
Congenital Hydrocephalus	3330	3349	3390	3383	3511	3660	3723	3785	3730	3710	3793	3760	3883	3992	4078	3990	4134	4114	4402	4563
Other Congenital Defects	43	88	51	83	50	73	126	130	184	179	168	162	333	440	600	651	649	772	709	680
Injury at Birth	797	825	743	737	822	839	860	869	1079	1235	1073	1147	1190	1225	1184	1375	1312	1327	1444	1458
Want of Breast Milk	397	361	369	332	360	273	347	331	354	395	329	318	332	459	545	574	717	694	663	761
Teething	4219	4225	4366	4543	4661	4242	4057	3593	4199	3721	3728	3542	3396	3011	3265	3298	3265	2973	2343	2175

Other Registrar General reports from these years show that infant deaths were consistently higher in coal producing counties.

In the 1907 report of the Medical Officer of Health for Chester le Street Rural District Council, John Taylor, he makes a strong case for the appointment of health visitors as required by the new Notification of Births Act 1907. This was to have an excellent effect on the chronic infant mortality crisis. He mentions the drastic increases in population in the previous year including one of the greatest increases in Usworth. The birth rate for the District of Chester -le-Street was 34.75 per 1000 population compared with 34.8 for the county and considerably more than the England and Wales rate of 26.3. In Usworth itself the rate was 40.76.

The general death rate was 16.44 per 1000 compared with 17.0 per 1000 for the county and 15.0 for England and Wales.

John Taylor reports the infant (under one year of age) death rate as 148.3 per thousand born, a reduction from 1905 when it was 179.4. In what seems a rather frustrated tone, he puts the reduction down to climatic changes rather than the improvements in sanitary and housing conditions he is recommending in his reports year after year. He compares the average infant death rate unfavourably with Durham County as a whole (136.0) and England and Wales (118.0).

However in 1906 Usworth township had one of the lowest rates at 90.0 with Pelton having the highest at 201.0 per 1000. He compares death rates between legitimate and illegitimate babies citing the rate for illegitimate babies as a devastating 267.4 per 1000. It's interesting to note this lower than England average death rate for Usworth infants. It would be interesting to follow through to understand why. Taylor reports that the birth rate for Usworth for the year was one of the highest at 40.76 per 100 population compared to a Chester Le Street average of 34.75. Since the greatest killer was premature birth one would expect the higher the birth rate the higher the infant mortality. The relatively small numbers could be responsible for great variations in rates from one area to the next and one year to the next.

His observations on deaths from premature birth are horrifying. He remarks on the '*decided tendency to lessen child production*' which he has noted is evidenced by numerous advertisements in newspapers for products which he calls '*infanticidal poisons*'. These are basically abortion inducing products which will lead to many adult as well as child deaths. Premature deaths in Chester le Street in 1907 accounted for 14 % of all those who died under one year of age compared to 19.6 % in the previous year (1906). In the Registrar Generals' report the number 18,219 is cited as the number who died from premature birth for the year a shockingly high rate of 19.85%. Apart from the charge of ingesting abortion inducing 'medicines', and according to this report, indulging in excessive alcohol, we must imagine the state of frailty many women's bodies must have been in after excessive child bearing often under terrible environmental circumstances to produce such a devastating rate of premature births. Taylor's main objection to the use of such substances shows something of the awful views of the day on women's 'duty' to bear children. He expresses his concern for the possible effect of rendering a woman '*unable to carry on the most important function nature intended her to do, viz., the reproduction of her species*'. One of the saddest of the entries in the 1911 census was the case of the Rundle family in Old Row who had had 16 children of whom 13 had died.

Taylor has a low opinion of the effects of the poor housing on the infant mortality rate saying that:

'Whilst old houses are injurious, it must not be forgotten that many of the new houses now erected are much more injurious to the infant. Many of our new houses are really unsuitable for comfort, and injurious to health. The rooms are little better than box rooms, probably there is no fireplace, and frequently the only trifle of fresh air is that got through a badly fitting door or window-sash'

He remarks on a low incidence of Enteric (typhoid) Fever for 1907, the disease which four years later was to take Francis's father at the age of 36.

He specifically remarks on the many insanitary houses still in the township of Usworth. In later reports he singles out Little Usworth Old Hall, rejoicing in the gradual closing down of the tenements there. My great grandparents were to be the last people living there before it was demolished completely.

Unfortunately Taylor does not tell us anything specific about teething deaths. But I note that it continued to be entered as a cause of death on Medical certificates long after 1906 when Francis died.

In this certificate of 1916 teething is the first listed cause for a 5 month old baby.

Certified Copy of an Entry of
Pursuant to the Births and Deaths Registration Act 1856 to 1874.

Registration District of CHESTER-LE-STREET.

1916 Death in the Sub-District of HARRATON, in the County of DURHAM.

No.	When and Where Died.	Name and Surname.	Sex.	Age.	Rank or Profession.	Cause of Death.	Signature and Residence.
58	Unusually for the July 1916 22 Dods Buildings - Widdington A.D.	William Hedley Mason	Male	5 months	Son of Hedley Mason Private in Yorkshire Regiment C.A.	(1) Teething (2) Acute Bronchitis Complications Certified by R. Farquharson M.B.	Francis Clegg 14 Hesse St. Widdington

J. J. M. LAWSON, Registrar of Births and Deaths for the Sub-District of HARRATON, in the County of DURHAM,
Entry No. 28 in the Register Book of Deaths, for the said Sub-District, and that such Register Book is now legally in my custody.

Witness my Hand this.....24.....day of

The Statutory Fee payable for an ordinary certified copy of an entry in a Register of Births, Deaths or Marriages if taken at time of registration, are 2s. 6d. (including 1d. for the Stamp), or if taken at any time afterwards an additional fee of 1s. is chargeable for a search.

William Hedley Mason's death was certified by Dr. Farquharson. The Registrar General's report for 1916 showed how rates of teething deaths had declined from 97 per million in 1902 living (crude annual death rates) to 37.0 in 1916- though throughout this period the male rate was between 20% and 50% higher than the female rate. This has more to do with the change in medical knowledge than anything else. Continuing to put teething on a death certificate would possibly have been a sign of rather uninformed medical practice.

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TABLE 9.—ENGLAND AND WALES.—DEATHS FROM VARIOUS CAUSES AT ALL AGES,
1902-1916.—MALES, FEMALES, AND PERSONS—continued.
(List of Causes as in use prior to 1911.)

Causes of Death.	Sex.	1902	1903	1904	1905	1906	1907	1908	1909	1910	1911	1912	1913	1914	1915.*	1916.*
Teething	M	111	112	98	78	72	70	63	58	52	44	38	46	40	54	47
	F	84	85	79	60	55	51	50	42	38	30	30	36	33	30	29
	P	97	98	88	69	63	60	56	50	45	40	34	41	36	44	37

Only 15 years after Francis died – in 1921- the medical profession was challenging the ignorance which had prevailed for centuries over teething. Dr R C Clarke, Assistant Physician to the Bristol Royal Infirmary, wrote in a paper 'The Teething Myth' of the large number of 'weird' remedies and practices which had been used in the case of teething.

A large number of methods for softening the gum were devised, which varied from the simple process of rubbing the gums with butter or decorations of herbs to the more elaborate remedies, such as sucking pig's brains, the milk of a bitch, or blood from a freshly- killed cock's comb. Many weird ideas sprang up at this time, some of which survive to this day, a particularly pernicious one being that an ear should never be allowed to stop discharging till the last tooth is cut.

Clarke mentions the numerous implements people thought were needed to help nature break the gum, among them a wolf's tooth was at one time popular.

He says that in the middle of the 19th century half the infant mortality was attributed to teething. By 1918 he notes that the number attributed to teething had reduced to 1,011. Remember it had been 2,175 in 1906.

Clarke notes that teething is 'a very innocent and eminently useful diagnosis with which to appease an anxious mother.' He is here implying that many deaths came about because the actual cause was ignored while the mother was assured that it was a natural and inevitable process, and the baby would probably pull through.

He also observes that 'most babies will do better without the unprovoked assaults upon their insides in the form of teething powders.' The cures were more likely to cause harm than good.

It was noted of nineteenth century infant mortality that; '*Teething, a striking physiologic change occurring during a highly susceptible age range, fell suspect. It and "worms" (the majority of infants faced the challenge of parasitic infections as well) were blamed for many infant deaths.*' *The dangers of teething were much enhanced by the dangerous treatments often used by the medical profession themselves to relieve what they believed to be the symptoms of teething including gum lancing or scarification (superficial incisions productive of blood), let alone the highly dubious remedies heralded in the local papers.*

Thankfully by 1982 care have improved to the point where poor little Francis's cause of death was being called a 'medical nonentity'.

Rest In Peace

Francis McGuire born 28 November 1904 died 27 January 1906 – Little Usworth Old Hall.

William Hedley Mason born May 1916 died 25 July 1916 - 22 Todd's Buildings, Washington

