

Child Mortality in Gloucester

*'We have lost the joy of the household,
and the solace of our old age'*



The burial register of St Mary De Crypt sadly documents the precarious nature of life before effective medicines, immunisations and good sanitation. Children were particularly vulnerable to infectious diseases and it is estimated that in the 19th century as many as 1 in 5 children died before their second birthday.

Thomas Clark was a successful baker and maltster operating in Southgate Street and at Blackfriars. His wife Mary died in 1802 just a year after they married and two days after delivering a son who himself survived less than a year. A second marriage produced four more children but twin sons, Henry and William, died aged three and nine. The surviving son, Samuel, was disabled and suffered with poor health dying suddenly at thirty-two years old.

Without common medicines like aspirin and paracetamol to control fevers and anti-biotics to fight infection there was little parents could do when their child became ill and the attention of a doctor was reserved for the few that had the means to pay. Diseases such as scarlet fever, measles, whooping cough, diphtheria and tuberculosis ravaged communities and often left surviving children weakened and vulnerable.



May Helen Dean No. 1290.	H. May de Crypt.	Dec 18.	2 1/2 1/2	de Crypt.
Rebecca Victoria Dean No. 1291.	H. May de Crypt.	Dec 18.	3 1/2 1/2	de Crypt.

Henry Dancer, landlord of the Berkeley Inn on Southgate Street, and his wife Sophia grieved the loss of their six-month-old daughter in 1837. In 1841 they had to endure the loss of two more children within four days of each other, their youngest and eldest daughters, aged just seventeen months and three and a half years old.

Home and work accidents

Accidents involving children were commonplace before an awareness of what we now call health and safety. In the home candles, cooking pots and open fires caused many babies and children to be burned, often resulting in death due to secondary infection. City streets were often chaotic with few 'rules of the road' making them hazardous for pedestrians and the scene of many injuries.

The numerous children who worked from a young age were exposed to the industrial environments of factories and warehouses, with their open, moving machinery, chokingly dirty air and hazardous materials. They worked long hours, often with little sunlight, exercise or rest.

BURIALS in the Parish of <i>St. Mary de Crypt</i> in the County of <i>City of Gloucester</i> in the Year One Thousand Eight Hundred and <i>Sixteen</i>				
Name.	Abode.	When buried.	Age.	By whom the Ceremony was performed.
<i>Richard Wood Mann</i> No. 134.	<i>St. Mary de Crypt</i>	<i>15 August</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>Year Charles Talbot Clerk.</i>
<i>James Lewis</i> No. 135.	<i>St. Catharine</i>	<i>18 August</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>J. Baylis Rector.</i>
<i>Charlotte Mann</i> No. 136.	<i>St. Mary de Crypt</i>	<i>1 September</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>J. Baylis</i>
<i>Mary Ann Pemble</i> No. 137.	<i>St. Mary de Crypt</i>	<i>10 September</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>J. Baylis Rector.</i>

The ever-present spectre of early death and the many tragic family losses did not make the Georgians and Victorians immune to grief. They had to be stoical but they expressed their grief through a culture of mourning and remembrance, rooted in faith and hope.



In the Victorian era the post-mortem photo came into fashion. It was often the only chance to have a photo of the entire family together. The deceased was often shown standing, a contraption of adjustable rods and grips allowing a corpse to be positioned upright, and make-up was applied to make the deceased more life-like. Children were often depicted with a favourite toy or in the arms of a surviving parent or sibling.