



Death in the household: A history of postmortems in domestic spaces

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Summary:

In 1882 the *Students' Journal and Hospital Gazette* reported with distaste that a postmortem had recently been performed in London 'in a room where five persons lived, ate, and slept'. Such events, though rather unusual in London, were common in areas without easy access to a mortuary, or in cases where there was suspicion surrounding the circumstances of death. Pathological manuals in the 19th and early 20th century often contained advice for practitioners on how to conduct a postmortem within the home. In this paper, Dr Jennifer Wallis explores how postmortems were conducted in non-medical spaces, touching on improvisation by practitioners, the material culture of the postmortem, and how such procedures impacted on relationships between medical professionals and the public.

About the speaker

Dr Jennifer Wallis is a Medical Humanities Teaching Fellow and Lecturer in the History of Science and Medicine at Imperial College London. Before this she taught at Queen Mary University of London and undertook postdoctoral research on the 'Diseases of Modern Life' project at the University of Oxford. She has particular interest in the history of psychiatry, with publications including *Investigating the Body in the Victorian Asylum: Doctors, Patients, and Practices* (2017) and *Sources in the History of Psychiatry, from 1800 to the Present* (2022). Her current research explores the history of post-mortem practice in Britain.