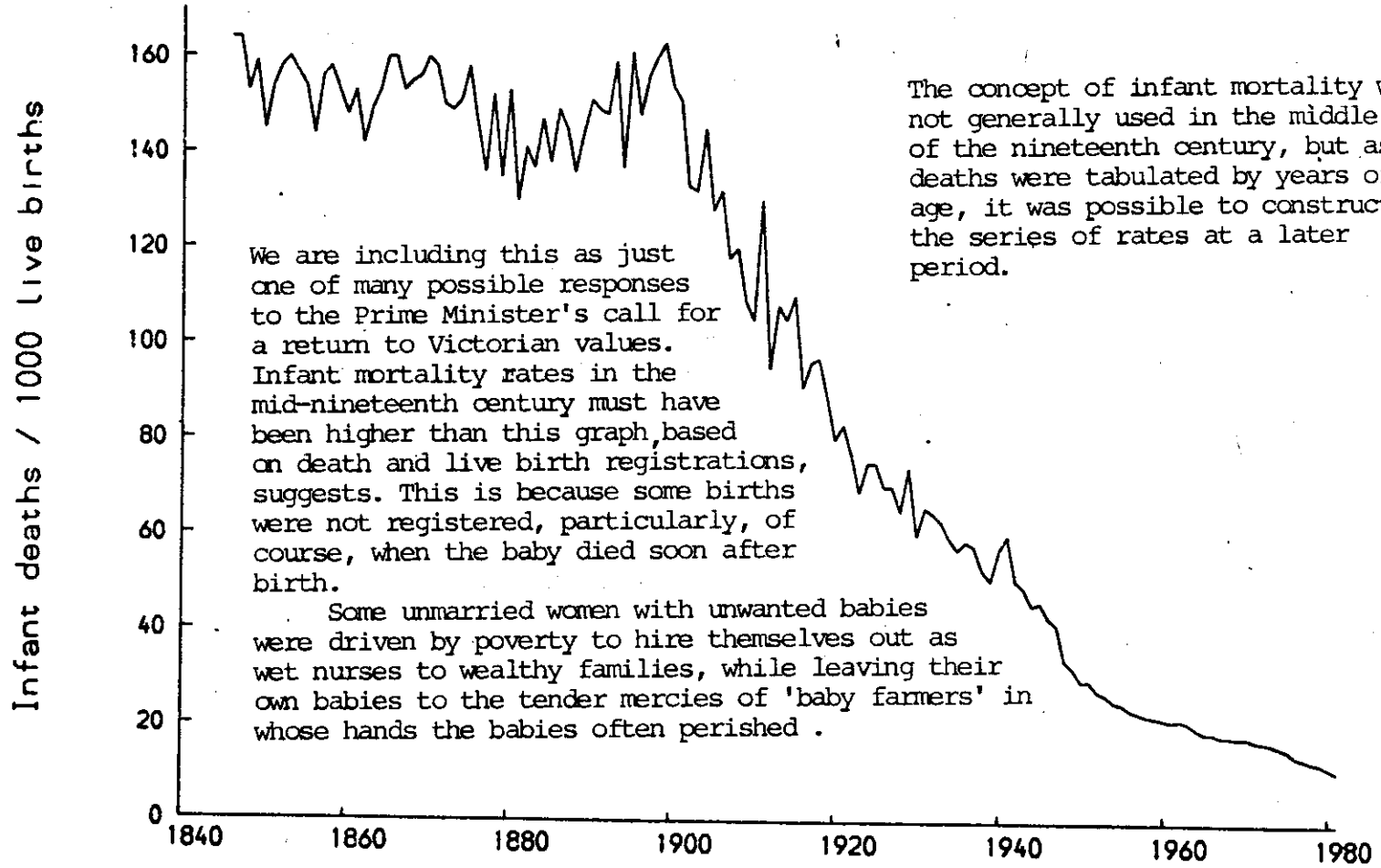
Return to Victorian Values?

Infant mortality 1846-1981
England and Wales



The concept of infant mortality was not generally used in the middle of the nineteenth century, but as deaths were tabulated by years of age, it was possible to construct the series of rates at a later period.

We are including this as just one of many possible responses to the Prime Minister's call for a return to Victorian values. Infant mortality rates in the mid-nineteenth century must have been higher than this graph, based on death and live birth registrations, suggests. This is because some births were not registered, particularly, of course, when the baby died soon after birth.

Some unmarried women with unwanted babies were driven by poverty to hire themselves out as wet nurses to wealthy families, while leaving their own babies to the tender mercies of 'baby farmers' in whose hands the babies often perished .