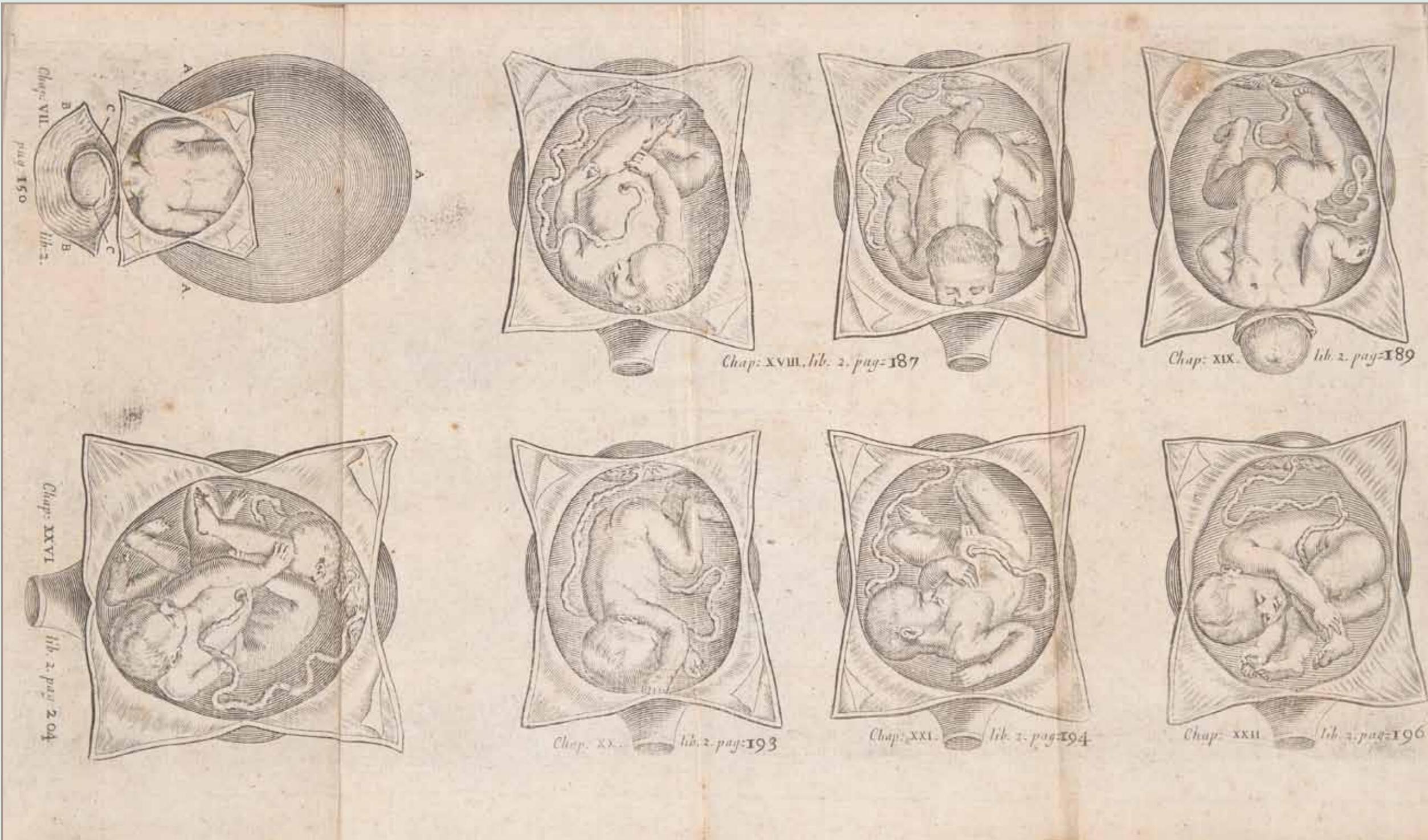




Not just women's work? 'Man-midwifery' and the science of obstetrics



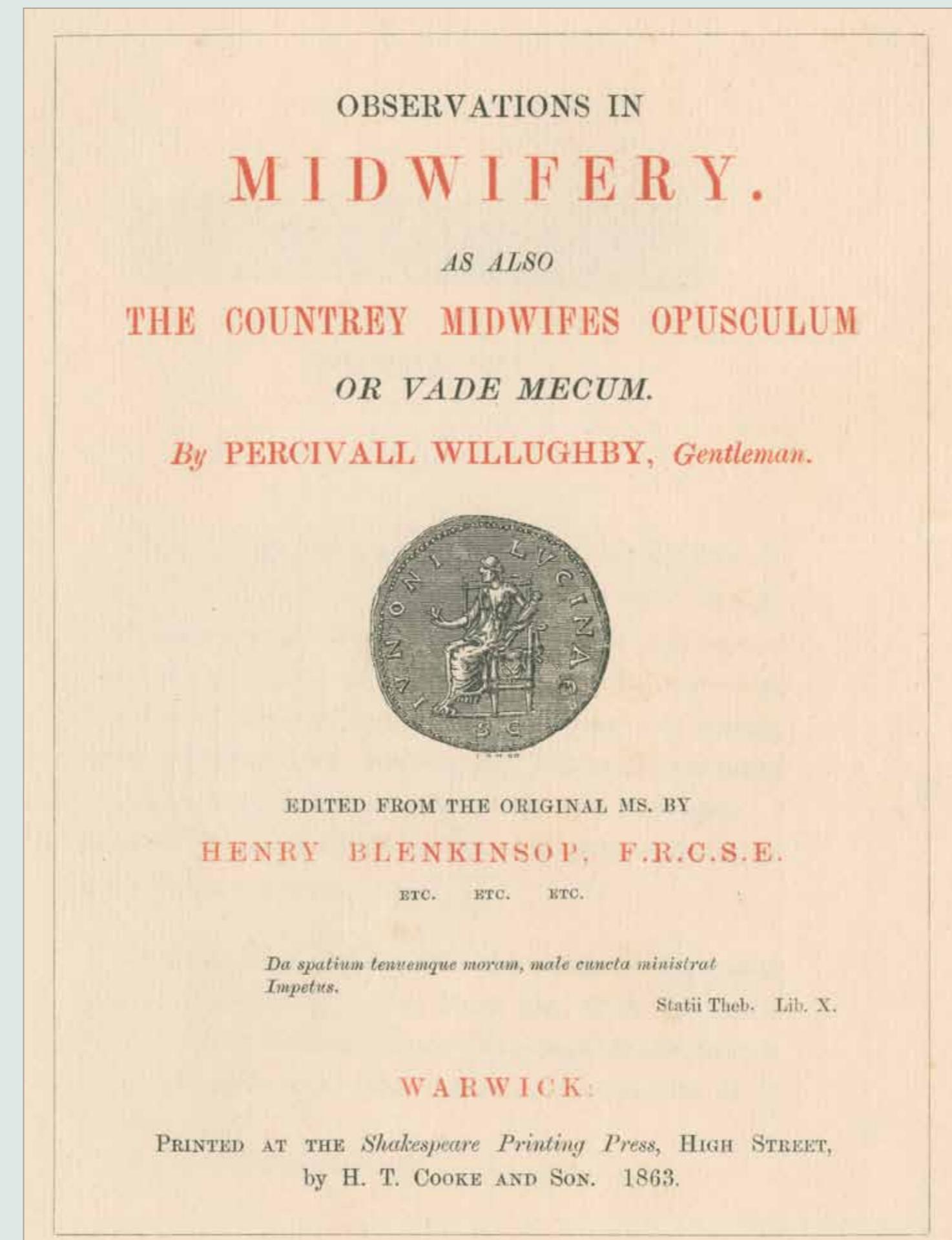
Woodcut illustrations from F. Mauriceau *The Diseases of women with child and in child-bed* (1727)
Med Rare Bks WQ160.MAU



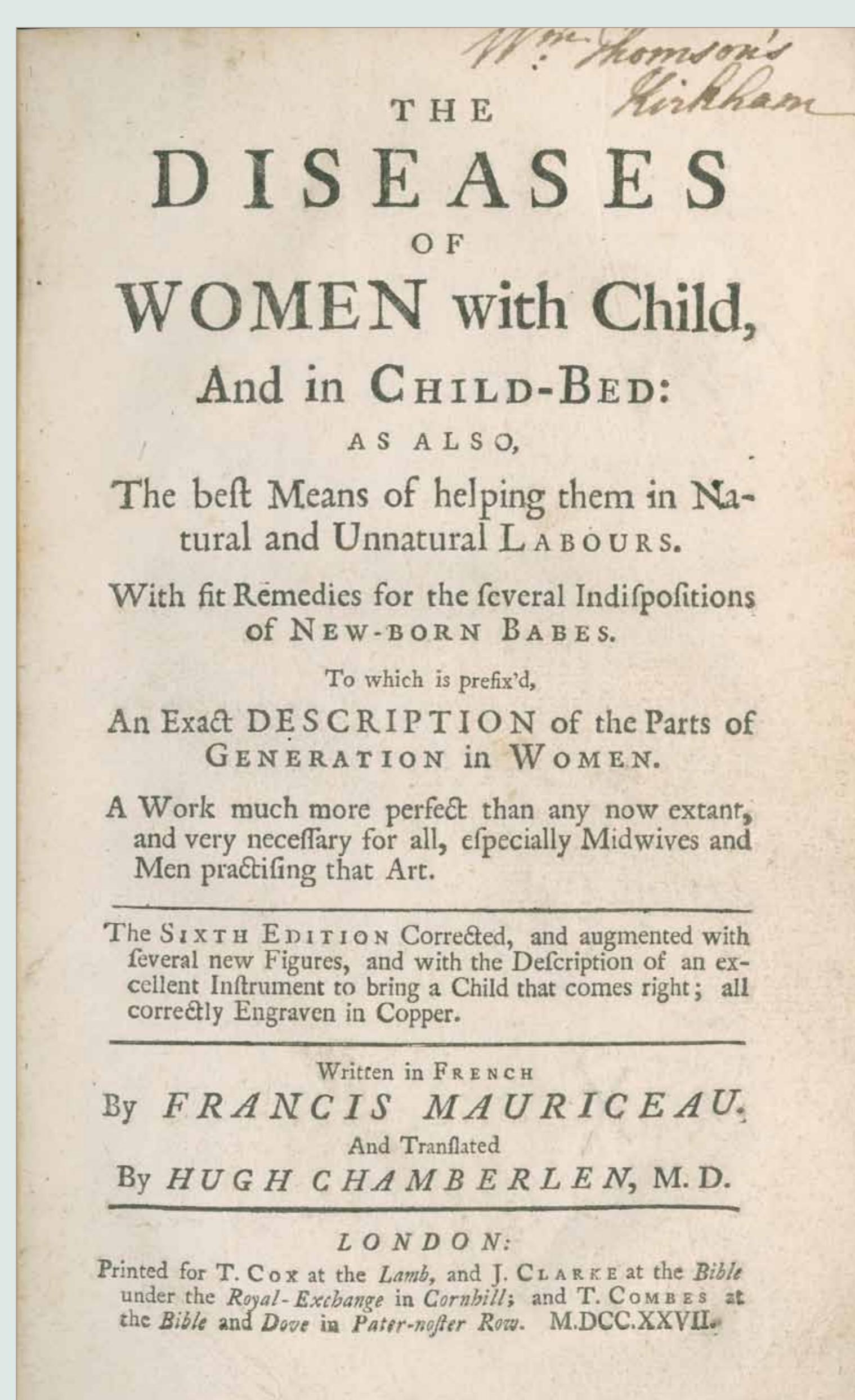
Frontispiece from Percival Willoughby's *Observations in midwifery*; edited from the original MS by Henry Blenkinsop (Warwick 1863) Mi LP 79/1

Midwife' is an Old English word meaning 'with woman'. It is not clear exactly why men moved into the birthing chamber but 'man-midwives' were increasingly in practice by the seventeenth century. They began to write and circulate texts describing the best way to manage complicated labours and births, and to develop instruments, including forceps, with which to deliver babies.

One of the earliest English man-midwives to write about his work was Percival Willoughby (1596-1685), the grandson of Francis Willoughby who built Wollaton Hall in Nottinghamshire. Percival Willoughby established an extensive midwifery practice in Derby and the surrounding area between 1631 and 1672. He left notes from 150 of his cases, cautioning against the indiscriminate use of instruments. His Latin records were not published until they appeared as *Observations on Midwifery* in 1863. His contemporary, François Mauriceau (1637-1709) achieved greater fame and influence through English translations of his work.

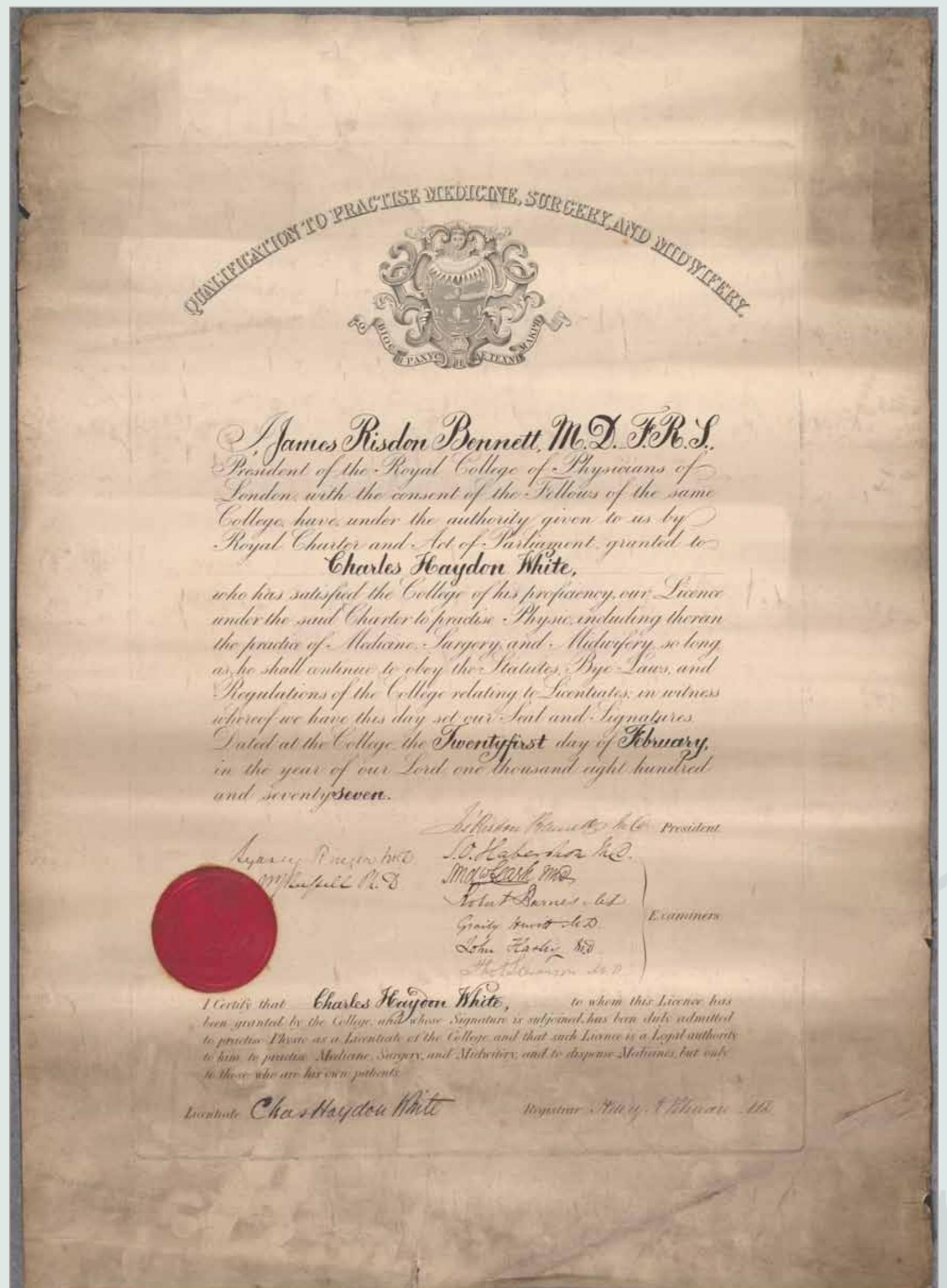


Title-page from Percival Willoughby's *Observations in midwifery*; edited from the original MS by Henry Blenkinsop (Warwick 1863) Mi LP 79/1



Title-page from F. Mauriceau *The Diseases of women with child and in child-bed* (1727) Med Rare Bks WQ160.MAU

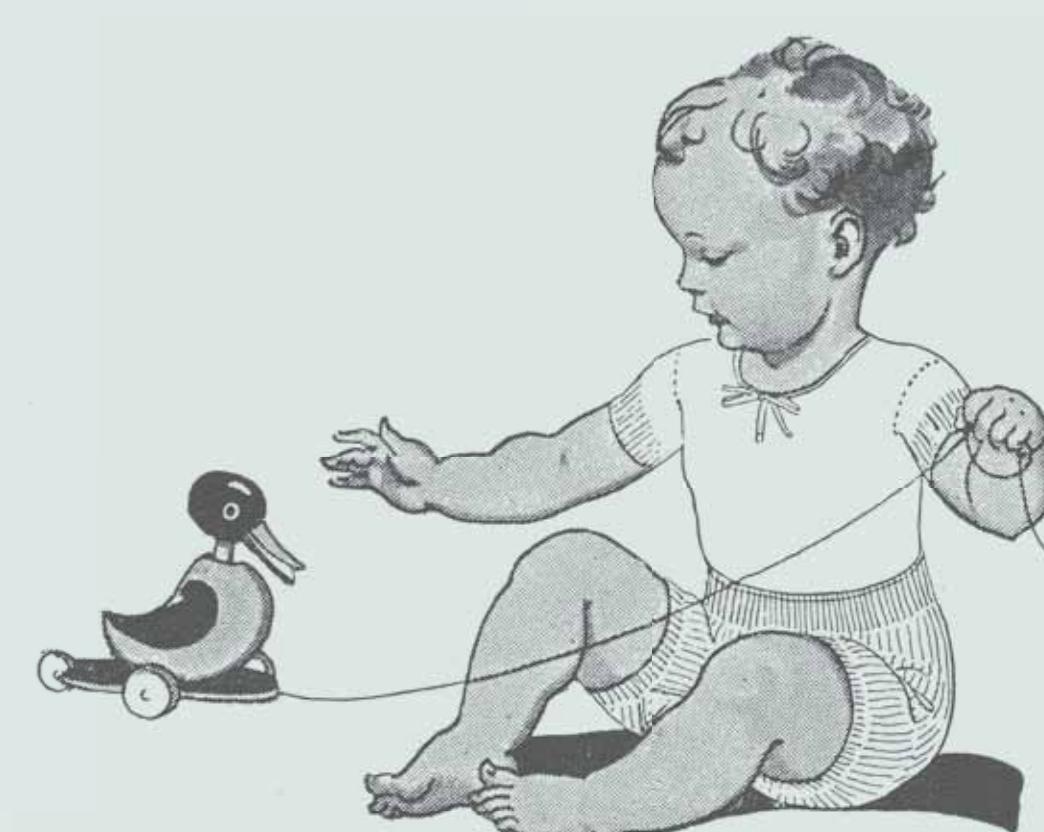
MOTHERS & MIDWIVES



Certificate for Charles Hayden White to practice medicine, surgery and midwifery, 1897 Uhg Ce 1/3

Dr Willoughby recorded his assistance at the labour of Mary Harley in 1668. He was able to turn the child in the womb and successfully delivered a baby girl (later Mary Bainbridge). From Percival Willoughby's *Observations in Midwifery* (Warwick, 1863) p82.

August the fourth 1668 Mrs Mary Harley of Walton in the wolds, being in labour, and having suffered three or foure dayes much affliction; her husband, with her desire, caused mee to bee sent for. The child came right, with the head pitched toward the bones. Shee had, severall times, strong forcing throwes, but they nothing availed. To move more strongly the expulsive faculty, I gave her severall doses of the midwife's powder, acuted with a larg quantity of Borax. But they nothing helped our desires, which made mee to suppose, That the child's head and body were too great for the passage. Shee was ancient, and I was greatly desirous to save the mother, with the child.



Such men were called to help at births only when complications arose. By the nineteenth century however, 'man-midwives' were increasingly present at routine deliveries.

Nevertheless, it was not until 1886 with the passing of the Medical Act, that doctors needed a qualification in midwifery as well as medicine and surgery before being allowed to work professionally. Midwifery became for most Victorian and early twentieth century doctors a regular element within a family practice, though attendance was generally limited to wealthier women, with poor women relying on their local midwife for care. It was not until the twentieth century that obstetrics began to develop as a distinct hospital based speciality.