

Comment

## David D. Davis's Obstetric Textbook and Atlas<sup>1</sup>

David Daniel Davis (1777–1841) graduated MD, from Glasgow University in 1801. Davis practiced medicine as a general physician in Sheffield. In 1811 he was awarded the Fellowship of the Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh. Davis then moved to London where he was befriended by Dr Thomas Denman (1733–1815), a doyen of British obstetrics.<sup>2</sup> Two years later Davis became a licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians, London. In December 1813 he became a candidate and was elected to the office of physician-accoucher at the Queen Charlotte Lying-in Hospital; he resigned a few years later, after an outbreak of puerperal fever. Davis practiced as an accoucher in other London hospitals, as well as conducting lectures in midwifery and the diseases of women and children, for students and practitioners. In 1827 Davis was elected to the chair of midwifery at University College Hospital, London.

Davis was the physician-accoucher in attendance to the Duchess of Kent, when she gave birth to a daughter – the future Queen Victoria. Unlike his contemporaries, Davis advocated a more active intervention in childbirth. This was before the development of chloroform and asepsis, and 'he gave his pupils very strong injunctions, of a precautionary nature, in regard to change of dress, & c and he struck off from his practical midwifery list, for a season, any pupil who had been in attendance upon a case of puerperal fever.'<sup>3</sup>

Davis favoured the use of forceps in obstetrics and worked to improve the design of instruments to assist childbirth, as a way to protect both the mother and the child. To this end Davis produced five patterns of forceps. The death of his own first child in infancy from extensive injuries inflicted by instrumentation during birth,<sup>4</sup> may have been the reason he became interested in the design of these instruments.

Davis discovered the pathology of the phlegmasia dolens, and its dependence on phlebitis.

Davis was a prolific writer on the subject of obstetrics and his classes for students and practitioners were so well attended that the venues had to be changed to accommodate the large number of students. To illustrate his teaching Davis used cases from his own experience. The review of this textbook in the *Lancet* in 1836 states:

'The distinguishing merit of this work consists in the comprehensive view which is taken of the whole subject of midwifery.'<sup>5</sup>

The detailed lithographic prints (Figs 1–3) depicted in the book, were drawn by Mr W. Fairland.

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### References

- 1 Davis DD. *The principles and practice of obstetric medicine in a series of systematic dissertations on the diseases of women and children*, Volume 1–3. London: Taylor and Walton; 1836.
- 2 Forster FM, David D. Davis' obstetric atlas in Tasmania in 1846 Edmund Bowden's gift to Robert Officer. *Aust NZ J Obstet Gynaecol.* 1983; 23: 88–92.
- 3 Hall Davis J. Memoir of the late Professor Davis. *Lancet.* 1846; 1: 599–601.
- 4 Anonymous. Davis's obstetric medicine. *Lancet.* 1836; 1: 339–340.
- 5 Jones GR. David Daniel Davis, M.D., F.R.C.P. (1777–1841). *Carmarthen Antiq.* 1972; 8: 91–100.

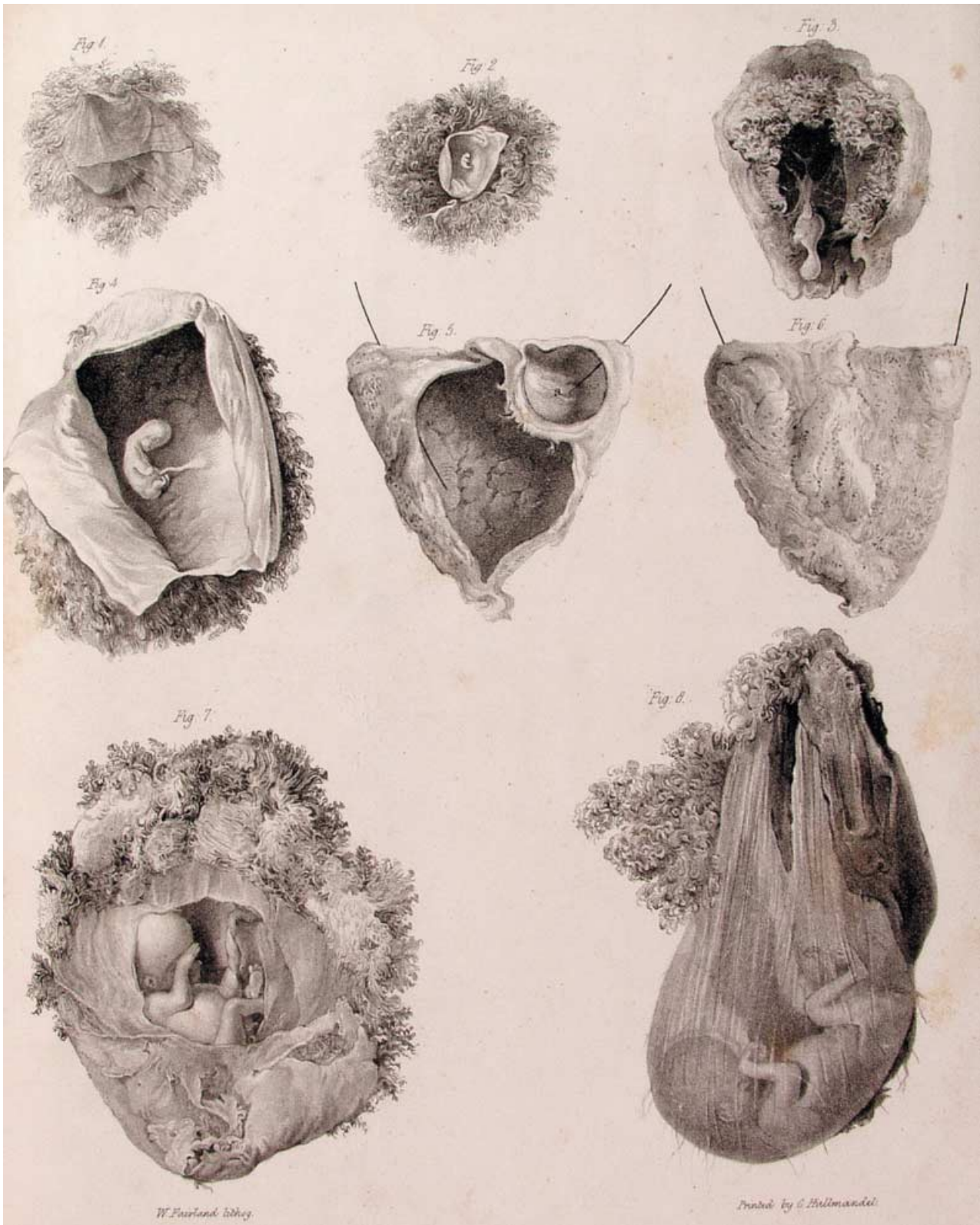


Figure 1 Eight pictures showing the development of the fetus, membranes and placenta during early gestation.

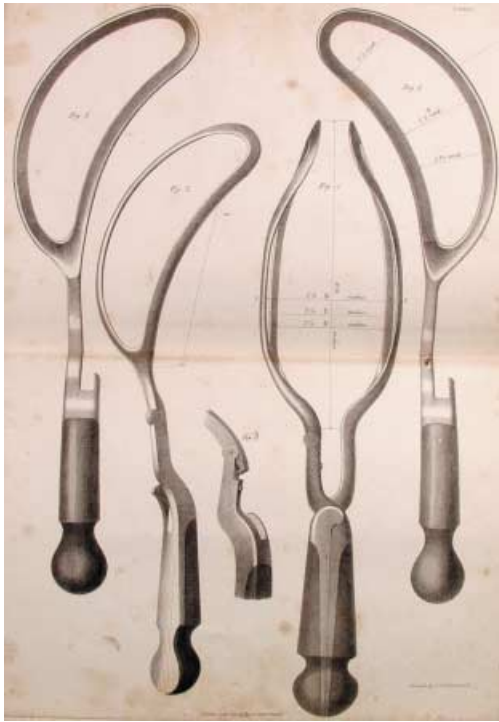


Figure 2 Illustrations of obstetric forceps.



Figure 3 Illustrates the application of forceps. The forceps depicted are like Levret's forceps.