William Smellie Encyclopedia Article

William Smellie

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Contents

William Smellie Encyclopedia Article.....1

Contents.....2

William Smellie.....3

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1697-1763

Scottish obstetrician who made fundamental advances toward understanding the anatomy and mechanics of safe birth. Despite the opposition of female midwives, he successfully taught obstetrics for over 20 years in his own home. He invented several varieties of obstetrical forceps and developed maneuvers for breech birth and version. His accurate descriptions and scrupulous judgments formed the basis of his two masterworks, *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Midwifery* (1752-1764) and its accompanying atlas, *A Sett* [sic] *of Anatomical Tables* (1754).