

The crest of Thomas Greenhill, surgeon : an heraldic tribute to human fecundity / by S.D. Clippingdale.

Contributors

Clippingdale, Samuel Dodd, -1925.
Royal College of Surgeons of England

Publication/Creation

London : Adlard and Son, impr, 1914.

Persistent URL

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/dcq6twtp>

Provider

Royal College of Surgeons

License and attribution

This material has been provided by This material has been provided by The Royal College of Surgeons of England. The original may be consulted at The Royal College of Surgeons of England. where the originals may be consulted. Conditions of use: it is possible this item is protected by copyright and/or related rights. You are free to use this item in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s).

**wellcome
collection**

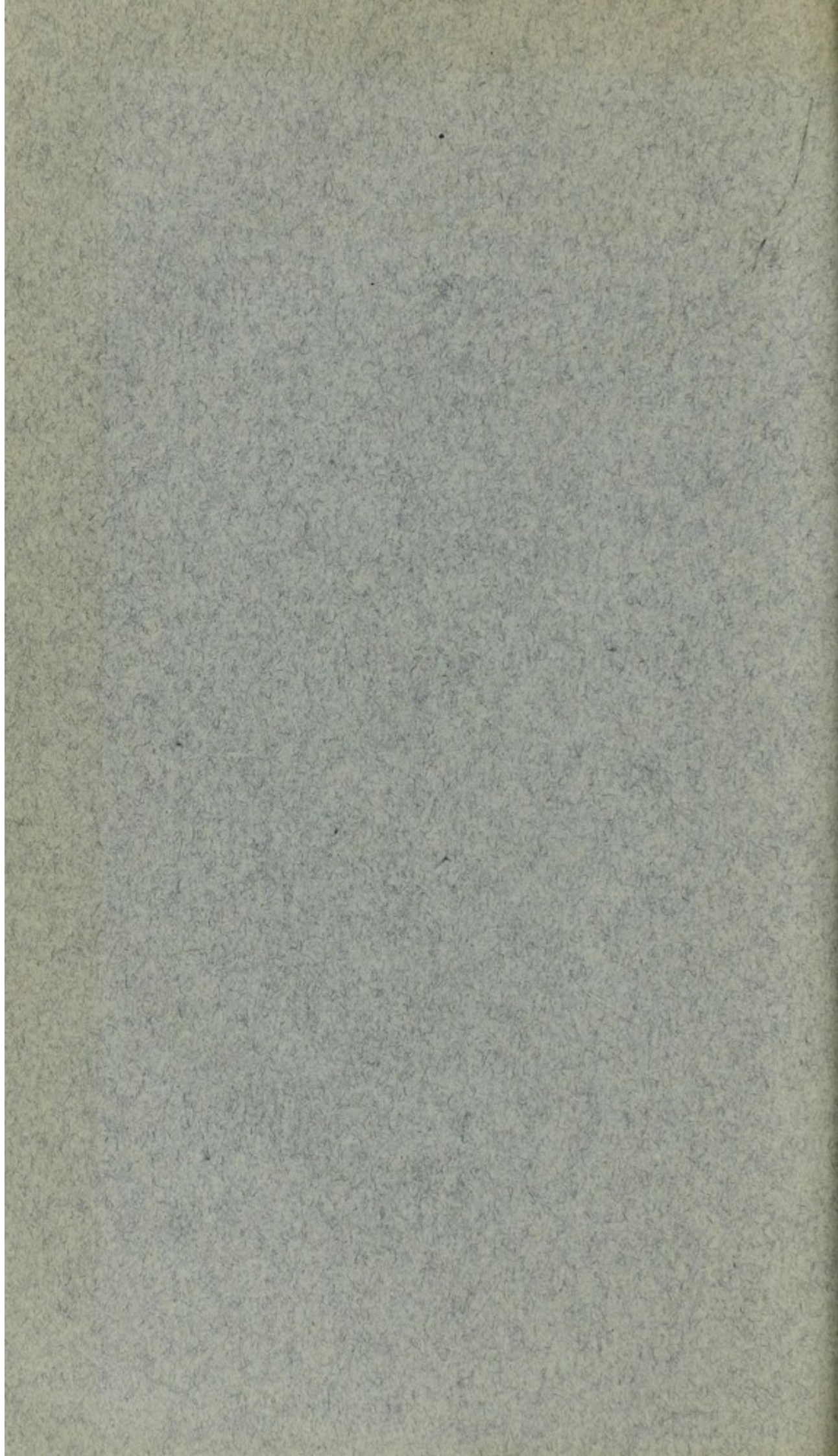
Wellcome Collection
183 Euston Road
London NW1 2BE UK
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722
E library@wellcomecollection.org
<https://wellcomecollection.org>

4

13

Clippingdale





November 5. 1914.

36, HOLLAND PARK AVENUE, W.

TELEPHONE 3521 PARK.

Dear Mr. Plan.

I dare say you, occasionally,
find to-gether Pamphlets for the
College Library.

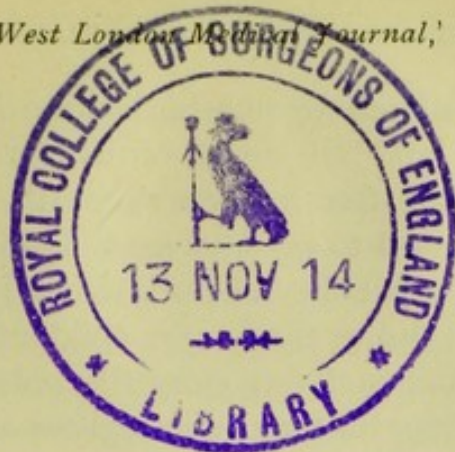
I send you the enclosed as
a bare chance that you may
think it worth inclusion in
our next volume.

Yours truly,

S. D. Chittenden, Jr.

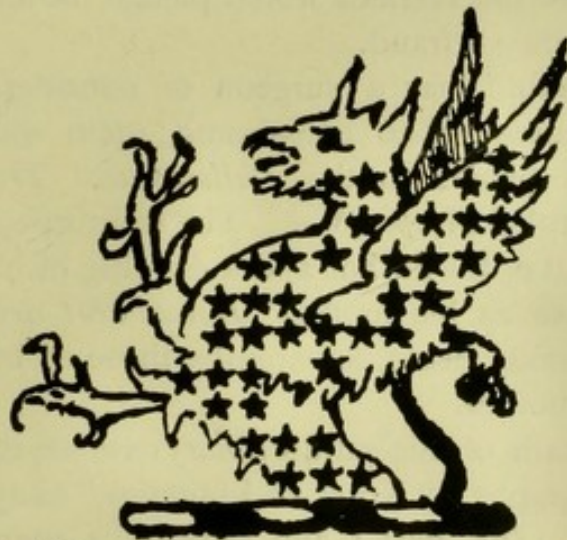
50 HOLLAND PARK AVENUE, W.

NEW YORK, N. Y.



**THE CREST OF THOMAS GREENHILL, SURGEON.
AN HERALDIC TRIBUTE TO HUMAN FECUNDITY.**

By S. D. CLIPPINGDALE, M.D., F.R.C.S.



"A demi-griffin gules charged with thirty-nine mullets, or."

IN the year 1698, Thomas Greenhill, surgeon, of Harrow-on-the-Hill, petitioned Heralds' College, that he, being the thirty-ninth child of the same father and mother, might have added to his armorial bearings some mark indicating an event so extraordinary. The petition was granted, and, his crest being a demi-griffin, he was told he might powder it with thirty-nine "mulletts," *i. e.* five-pointed stars. The griffin is red "gules" and the "mulletts" gold "or."

Thomas Greenhill was the son of William Greenhill, a councillor-at-law and secretary to General Monck. His mother, the bearer of this large family, was a Miss Elizabeth White, of London, and among that lady's descendants is Sir Thomas Woolaston White, Baronet, who, at his country seat near Worksop, possesses a portrait of his prolific ancestress, to which is attached the following note by a clergyman, the Rev. Richard Ashby :

“She had 39 children by one husband. They were all born alive and baptised and all single births save one. The last child, who was born after his father’s death, was a chirurgion. . . . She was heard to say by a credible woman with whom I was well acquainted, that she believed, if her husband had lived, she would have had two or three more children.”

As to the credibility of this story the only positive proof is, unfortunately, wanting, for the parish register of Abbot’s Langley, where these children are said to have been born, is, for the period concerned, mutilated. It seems to be unlikely, however, that Thomas Greenhill would take the trouble and incur the expense of getting an armorial augmentation without good cause, nor does it seem likely that the Heralds would pledge the authority of their college to perpetuate a fraud.

Thomas Greenhill was a surgeon of considerable note and devoted much attention to embalming, upon which subject he contributed two papers to the *Philosophical Transactions* and wrote a work entitled Νεκροκηδεια. The frontispiece of this work contains a portrait of the author and a drawing of his unique crest.

Greenhill chose as his motto, “*Honos alit artes.*” The arts favoured by Honour being, apparently, those of begetting babies and embalming bodies.

[For fuller details of this extraordinary case see the “Dictionary of National Biography,” “Notes and Queries,” 1805, vol. i, *Gentleman’s Magazine*, 1805, Part I, and Burke’s “General Armoury.”]

ANALOGOUS CASES.

The case of Mr. Greenhill, unusual as it is, appears to be not altogether without precedent. If a search of universal medical literature were made probably many similar cases would be found; for limiting the search to the back numbers of the *Lancet* the three following instances of extraordinary fecundity are met with:

(1) The wife, aged 43, of a Spanish surgeon was confined thirteen times, each time with triplets; that is, thirty-nine children in all (*Lancet*, 1863, vol. ii, p. 416).

(2) A Russian peasant, who married twice, had by his first wife fifty-seven children. These arrived by plural births as follows: twins, ten times; triplets, seven times; quadruplets, four times. By his second wife he had fifteen children, so that by his two wives he had no fewer than seventy-two children. This case was

taken from the Russian official report (*Lancet*, 1857, vol. ii, p. 259).

(3) What the *Lancet* calls a "well authenticated case" was that of a Scottish weaver, whose wife bore her husband, by several plural births, sixty-two children, all of whom lived to be baptised (*Lancet*, 1863, vol. ii, p. 27). This case is also referred to in Brand's "Antiquities of Newcastle-upon-Tyne," to which town some of the children emigrated. Brand states that the well-to-do neighbours of this family relieved the parents of many of their children, one gentleman, a baronet, adopting no fewer than fourteen of the sons.

Faint, illegible text at the top of the page, possibly bleed-through from the reverse side.