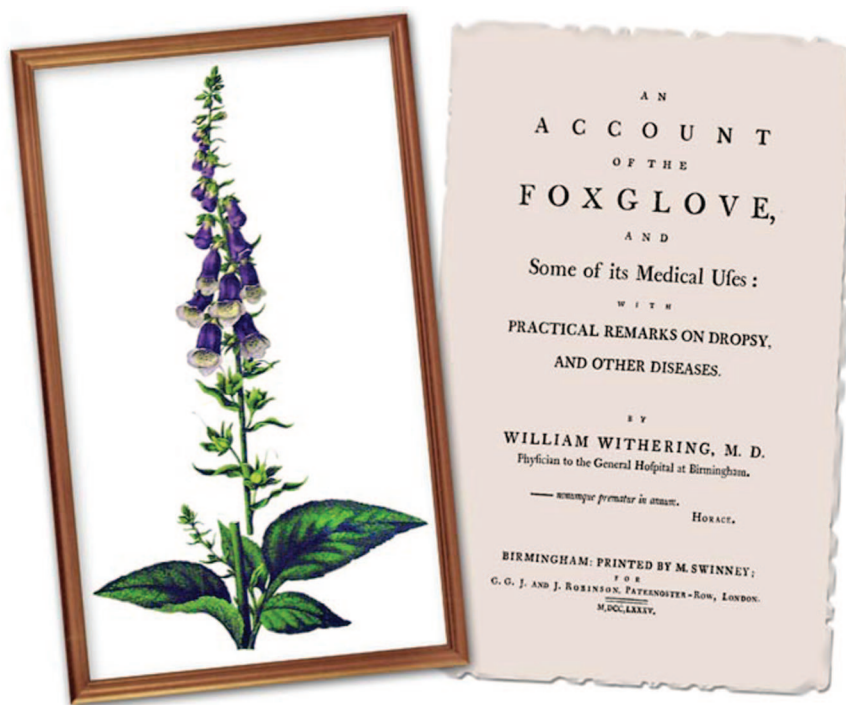


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■ ANESTHESIOLOGY REFLECTIONS

Withering and the Foxglove



An Edinburgh-trained physician, William Withering (1741-1799) had observed successful treatment of congestive heart failure ("dropsy") by a lady herbalist from his native region of Shropshire, England. After isolating foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*) as the active ingredient in her 20-herb infusion, Withering spent nine years defining the correct dosage of powdered foxglove that would "scatter dropsy" without digitoxic side effects like headache and nausea. Withering's research was nearly lost to the world when pirates pursued his ship back from Portugal during convalescence for "consumption." The year 1785 saw his election as Fellow of the Royal Society and the publication of his classic *An Account of the Foxglove* . . . (depicted above alongside its foldout engraving, courtesy of the Wood Library-Museum). As tuberculosis sapped the strength of foxglove's champion, a visiting punster and well-wisher quipped, "The flower of English physicians is indeed withering." (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists, Inc. This image appears in color in the *Anesthesiology Reflections* online collection available at www.anesthesiology.org.)

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