

Thomas Robinson, Chemist, and Roberts, Jeffery and Co, Button and Toy Manufacturers, Snow Hill, Birmingham

The trade card in the lower compartment of the advertisement is for Roberts, Jeffery and Co, who manufactured buttons and toys in Snow Hill. A woman gazes at a monument to the firm, while packages and boxes containing silver and jewellery rest by her feet.

The engraving of Thomas Robinson's trade card describes him as a chemist, medical electrician and seller of patent medicines in Union Street. Asclepius, the Greek God of Medicine stands on the right. In the foreground and on the left of the card, are various items of electrical equipment. Electrical experiments were a major aspect of 18th century investigation and members of the Lunar Society in Birmingham conducted them. Two Italians, Luigi Galvani, and Alessandro Volta in the 1790s, pioneered investigation into electricity's capacity to stimulate the nervous system. Galvanism, the therapeutic use of electricity, is named after Galvani. Members of the Lunar Society, including Erasmus Darwin and Joseph Priestley conducted electrical investigations in Birmingham. Evidently, by 1808, Thomas Robinson was a practitioner of galvanism in the town. Mary Shelley, in the preface to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, refers to her knowledge of the electrical experiments of Erasmus Darwin as a stimulus behind her book. She writes: "Perhaps a corpse would be re-animated; galvanism had given token of such things: perhaps the component parts of a creature might be manufactured, brought together, and endued with vital warmth." Robinson may not have tried to revive a corpse, but his interest in galvanism reflected a growth in the knowledge and potential of electricity.