Research Bibliography
SOURCES ON THE STUDY OF THE HEALING CULTURES IN IRELAND AND THE BRITISH ISLES

Stephany Hoffelt | BA HAS | January 19, 2017
# Contents

- Introduction ........................................................................................................................................................................................ 3
- General Reference ............................................................................................................................................................................ 5
- Prehistory ............................................................................................................................................................................................ 5
- Women and Healing ........................................................................................................................................................................ 7
- Digital Receipt Book Collections ................................................................................................................................................. 8
- Irish Reference ................................................................................................................................................................................... 8
- Scottish Reference ........................................................................................................................................................................... 17
- Anglo Saxon Reference ................................................................................................................................................................. 20
- Cornish and Welsh Reference ....................................................................................................................................................... 21
- British Reference (and those broadly pertaining to the UK) ........................................................................................ 21
- Contact Information: .................................................................................................................................................................... 23
- Cover Illustration ............................................................................................................................................................................. 23
Introduction

As some advice to the beginning researcher, it is useful to embrace the following understanding of the pluralistic nature of health care practices in any given society. Anthropologist, Arthur Kleinman first defined a society’s health care system as being comprised of the popular, folk, and professional sectors\(^1\)- a model which has been useful to me in studying the history of botanical therapeutics and guides my research.

Popular health care refers to self-care, or familial care, practices informed by popular knowledge. Often knowledge of this nature is passed along by word-of-mouth - frequently as home remedies that are passed down through the generations or through community skill-sharing networks. In its strictest sense, the term does not apply to any particular type of remedy. It also is not limited to addressing illness. Self-care in the form of diet, hygiene and simple protective measures are aspects of the popular health care culture. Regardless of what you may be told, self-medication is not a thing of the past; it was simply co-opted by the pharmaceutical companies. People stopped self-medicating with the old home remedies and started buying over-the-counter replacements. We take aspirin and Tylenol instead of decoctions. We stopped making ointments and turned to Vick’s Vaporub, Ben Gay, and more recently --essential oils. Grandma’s marshmallow syrups were replaced -first by patent medicines and then by Robitussin.

The folk health care sector is comprised of the traditional healing specialists of a community. Historically, these healers included lay midwives, fairy doctors, *bean feasa*, and “cunning folk” with far more in their repertoire than the therapeutic delivery of plant medicine. Folk healers often work from a framework influenced by indigenous cultural ideas about the spirit world influencing health. Folk health care specialists are not exclusive to a particular spiritual practice. In many early Gaelic communities, monks and then later nuns and priests were called on as folk healers when it was thought an illness was caused by the supernatural-what anthropologists sometimes term a “naturalistic” cause.

Modernly, the professional healthcare sector is comprised of academically trained providers such as MD’s, naturopathic physicians and yes, clinical herbalists. In the past professional status may have involved academic training or apprenticeship. Many historic figures modern herbal educators bring up when discussing the history of herbal medicine, such as Hippocrates, Dioscorides and Gerard, were physicians or academic elites and as such members of a professional healthcare sector. It is interesting to note that when the term herbalist first surfaced in the late 1500’s it was often an additional title assumed by a physician who had written an herbal.

This topic is often written about by people outside the field of anthropology who may not use the same language I use, so I like to include this explanation to explain that you may see various healing systems at work in any given culture.

If one wishes to truly grasp the intricacies of the healing culture within a society, it is useful to have a thorough understanding of that society. Learn as much as you can about the history, folklore and folkways of a culture including traditional foods, songs and dances. Context is everything. To that end, I offer this list of resources to those interested in healing in Ireland and the British Isles, which is the
focus of my ethnomedicinal studies. I wanted to discover the richness of my ancestral healing culture rather than appropriating another.

It has not always been easy to decide which sources to use, and some of you may find my collection lacking. A concern is that some prominent researchers in the past were given to sensationalism. (A particularly sensible pagan colleague of mine once acknowledged a holy trinity of authors whose works would be delightful, if they were true. And of course Christian researchers were no better.) Their poetic works included a lamentable, and inventive, focus on primarily the supernatural practices of folk-healers’ to the exclusion of other things going on in the societies they studied. Some were outright fictions which have been adopted as truth.

Consequently, I have chosen to omit works which I found to cite them too many times. That isn't to say that I don’t read them, but I do so critically and am always going back to confirm primary sources. And though I acknowledge cherry picking out the likes of Graves, critical thinking is a necessary research skill and should be employed liberally when reading historical texts. If I have included something I consider to subject to debate, such as the “Irish-ness” of K’Eogh’s herbal, I provide a counterpoint source, so that you are able to use your own discernment.

Sometimes something is included because it is unique. The Hill Herbal, for example, is not the best or most comprehensive herbal but it was intended for family use in 1755 and provides a snapshot of the period by including “directions for the gathering and preserving roots, herbs, flowers, and seeds; the various methods of preserving these simples for present use.”

Finally, you may notice that this is a resource for people who prefer to use primary sources as much as possible. I mention a lot of old texts in this bibliography. When I first studied herbalism it was through an “apprenticeship” to an herbalist in a medieval re-enactment group, in which they take scholarship quite seriously. I was not allowed to use a book published after 1600 to document my research. I’ve since expanded my horizons, but I tend toward older sources, still. The upside of that is that many can be found for free, online. The Internet Archives and Google books are good starting points for searches. Enjoy!


Prehistory


Stephany Hoffelt


Stevens, Chris J., and Dorian Q. Fuller. “Did Neolithic Farming Fail? The Case for a Bronze Age...

Women and Healing
Bayer, Penny. “Lady Margaret Clifford’s Alchemical Receipt Book and the John Dee Circle.” Ambix 52, no. 3 (November 1, 2005): 271–84.
Green, Monica H. “Gendering the History of Women’s Healthcare.” Gender & History 20, no. 3 (November 1, 2008): 487–518.

Stephany Hoffelt | BA HAS | JANUARY 19, 2017
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**Digital Receipt Book Collections**

http://digital.nls.uk/recipes/browse/pageturner.cfm?id=102189623

Wellcome Library. “Collection of Domestic Recipe Manuscripts,”

University of Minnesota. “Medical Receipt Book Collection,”


Medieval Cookery. “Medieval Cookbook Collection English.”

**Irish Reference**


Ballard, Linda-May. “An Approach to Traditional Cures in Ulster.” *The Ulster Medical Journal* 78, no. 1


Croker, Thomas Crofton. The *Keen of the South of Ireland: As Illustrative of Irish Political and Domestic History, Manners, Music, and Superstitions*. Percy Society, 1844.


Stephany Hoffelt | BA HAS | JANUARY 19, 2017


Haddon, A. C. "A Batch of Irish Folk-Lore." Folklore 4, no. 3 (1893): 349–64.


Harris, K.M. ‘Charm for Epilepsy’, Ulster Folklife 7 (1961), 71.


K’Eogh, John. *Botanologia Universalis Hibernica: Or, a General Irish Herbal ... To Which Are Added, Two Short Treatises. One Concerning the Chalybeat, Waters, ... Another of the Prophylactic, Or, Hygiastic Part of Medicine, ... Authore Joh, K’Eogh, ... Cork, Ireland: George Harrison, 1735.


O’Curry, Eugene. *Lectures on the Manuscript Materials of Ancient Irish History: Delivered at the Catholic University of Ireland, During the Sessions of 1855 and 1856.* Dublin, Ireland: J. Duffy, 1861.


Robert O’Driscoll. New York: George Braziller Inc.

Roe, Helen M. “Tales, Customs and Beliefs from Laoighis.” *Béaloideas* 9, no. 1 (1939): 21–35.


Súilleabháin, Seán Ó. *Irish Folk Custom and Belief*. Published for the Cultural Relations Committee of Ireland at the Three Candles, 1967.


Scottish Reference

https://archive.org/stream/scotishsong00rugg#page/48/mode/2up.

https://archive.org/stream/scotishsong00rugg#page/48/mode/2up.


http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/1098.


Carmichael, Alexander, *Carmina Gadelica* (6 vols, Edinburgh, 1900–71). Carmichael’s work has come under fire for his ‘poetic license’ with which I agree. I tend to depend on those collected by Mackenzie and Macbain.

Cleland, Elizabeth. *A New and Easy Method of Cookery.* Edinburgh, Scotland: W. Gordon, C. Wright, S. Willison, J. Bruce, 1755.


Macbain, Alexander, ‘Highland superstition’, *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, xiv (1887–8),
232–72.
MacPhail, Malcolm. “Folklore from the Hebrides. III.” *Folklore* 9, no. 1 (1898): 84–93
Anglo Saxon Reference


Pollington, Stephen. *Leechcraft: Early English Charms, Plant Lore, and Healing*. Cambridgeshire,

Cornish and Welsh Reference

Davies, Owen, ‘Charmers and Charming in England and Wales from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Century’, Folklore 109 (1998), 41-52. Ethnographic review survey on charmers and charming, summarizes several hard-to-find local studies.

British Reference (and those broadly pertaining to the UK)


Markham, Gervase, ed. The English Housewife: Containing the Inward and Outward Virtues Which Ought to Be in a Complete Woman... London, England: Roger Jackson, 1615.


Contact Information:

Whatever your interest in reviewing this bibliography, it is my hope that this document has proved useful and perhaps saved you some time. This is the second version of this publication and undoubtedly there will be a third as I gather more research, daily. Until then please feel free to contact me at stephany@naturalsimple.org with any questions.

Cover Illustration.

Cover Photo is of the Darley Oak, Darleyford, Cornwall. This 1,000-year-old tree is reputed to have healing powers and the power to grant wishes. Its acorns were used as amulets by pregnant women for luck in childbirth. I picked this picture because it is not far from this home where my great-grandfather was born in Cornwall. The family still grows the broad beans in the garden and hopefully knows enough to use them to rid themselves of warts.