



Research Bibliography

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

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Contents

Introduction.....	3
General Reference	5
Prehistory	6
Women and Healing	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Digital Receipt Book Collections	8
Irish Reference.....	8
Scottish Reference.....	16
Anglo Saxon Reference	18
English, Cornish and Welsh Reference.....	19
Contact Information:	21
Cover Illustration.....	21

Introduction

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 anthropological studies.

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 sectors¹- 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 healthcare 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 outperformed-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. It is not limited to a particular spiritual practice. In many Gaelic communities, 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 individuals wghome 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 and was not used to define their practice.

This topic is often written about by people outside the field of anthropology who may not use the same

¹ Kleinman, Arthur. *Patients and Healers in the Context of Culture: An Exploration of the Borderland Between Anthropology, Medicine, and Psychiatry*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1981.

language I use above. I am often asked why I think this is important work? While working on my thesis I realized that at one time, before religion and capitalism interfered, these three sectors were able to work more cooperatively. Much of this research has been gathered in my efforts to understand what this cooperation looked like and how to make that work in a modern context. For example, how do we address the fact that some modern herbalists are working on turning the popular health care sector back to the plants while utilizing preparations previously employed by professionals, such as tinctures and percolations.

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 colleague of mine once acknowledged a holy trinity of authors whose works would be delightful, if they were true. I would add a few more to that list.) Their poetic works included a lamentable, and inventive, focus on primarily the supernatural practices of folk-healers' who were undoubtedly informed by the popular health culture of their time.

Consequently, I have chosen to omit particular researchers and works which I found to cite them too many times. Which 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 surgeon 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. 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!

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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. I am certain that I will note some glaring omissions and eventually publish a version 2.0. Until then please feel free to contact me at stephany@naturallysimple.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.

