

## Household Medicine in Seventeenth-century England

by Anne Stobart

Bloomsbury Academic 978 1 4725 8034 4  
£19.99

The seventeenth century was a seminal period in the development of Western medicine as the traditional humoral approach gave way to the anatomy and physiology we know today. William Harvey published his study on the circulation of the blood in 1628, completely refuting Galen's model of two one-way systems while Jan van Helmont's *Ortus Medicinae* of 1648 challenged the idea that internal heat was responsible for digestion with the discovery of stomach acid. By 1653 Culpeper's description of fennel recorded that few who cooked it with fish still knew that this was supposed to "consume phlegmatic humours". At the same time the New World was providing new medicinal plants – such as Jesuit's bark (*Cinchona* spp.), sarsaparilla (*Smilax ornata*), and china root (*S. china*) – transforming treatments.

Anne Stobart's detailed analysis of household papers from this period provides an insight into this changing world. Friends and families swapped instructions on how to prepare newcomers, such as chocolate. Their household accounts record purchases of exotic spices as well as more traditional remedies, such as plantain and betony. They bought roses and sugar to make conserves, hartshorn for jellies and numerous ready-made potions from the local apothecary, some containing the newly-arrived *Smilax* spp. They also made regular payments to the herb women who provided native herbs – sometimes in enormous quantities: such as the "one thousand of clove gillyflowers (*Dianthus* spp.)", bought in 1680 for two shillings. Presumably these were used to make scented waters in an age when foul smells were believed to be the cause of many diseases.

While collections of recipes are always interesting, Anne Stobart notes that many receipt books show little sign of wear from regular use and it is the household accounts and letters that provide vital information about preferred therapeutics. As well as herbs, household medicine included an assortment of minerals – such as sulphur, calamine (zinc carbonate or silicate), white lead, and verdigris (copper acetate) used for skin and eye conditions – as well as various animal products: from eggs and honey to the less savory deer antler, sheep dung or ox gall.

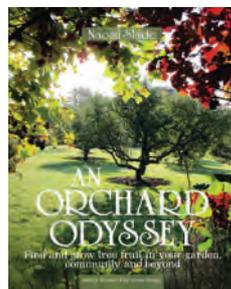
Humoral beliefs lingered on with an emphasis on purging, while both drinks and foods were sometimes described as hot, warm, cool, moist, or dry; remedies for combatting the melancholic humour (black bile), for example, containing such herbs as St John's wort and

senna, were also exchanged between families.

The book is based on Anne Stobart's research for her doctoral thesis, which analysed surviving records in archives in south-west England, now augmented with data from elsewhere in the country. She tells us that it has involved examining 6,513 medicinal recipes and 1,354 medically-related entries in household accounts. It is divided into three main sections: "Information", focusing on how news of illness and suggested diets or remedies were exchanged between families and friends; "Resources", about the herbs used and preparations produced; and "Practice", covering the therapeutic approach.

Inevitably the book reflects the household medicine of affluent people who left written records, while many of the oral traditions of folk medicine are now lost to us. It is, however, a fascinating book and one that will appeal to anyone with an interest in the history of herbal medicine.

Penelope Ody



## An Orchard Odyssey

By Naomi Slade

Green Books 978 0 8574 326 5 £24.99

Naomi Slade is delighted by orchards and her enthusiasm for fruit-growing whether in a community orchard or in a small garden sings out on every page of her book in praise of orchards. Fruit growing is fundamental and for herb gardeners it is second nature. Think of all those wonderful combinations of herbs and fruit in desserts, preserves and vinegars, to single out a few.

Naomi Slade takes readers on a journey through history and landscape explaining how important orchards and fruit-growing is. She highlights early on in the book the way many traditional orchards were destroyed and lost either through neglect or age.

The early chapters set the scene around the world, and helps identify where some local traditional orchards may once have been. Several chapters end with profiles of fruit pioneers or heroes, including orchard expert and writer Joan Morgan.

Naomi Slade offers fresh thoughts on growing fruit in the smaller gardens of many modern grow your own gardeners and suggests that the way forward may be for community orchards. She provides planting advice, cultivation and maintenance techniques, and then launches into ways to use and preserve the fruits of your fruit-growing. She also offers her own experience as the creator of a successful micro-enterprise producing and selling boutique, single variety apple juice in the local community and beyond.

There is an excellent resource section at the end of the book. Here you will find specialist nurseries and organisations, as well as a listing of where, around the world, you can enjoy fruit orchards, walled gardens with good fruit, and specialist fruit trails. It is, as the title suggests, an endless journey with helpful nuggets of information and anecdotes that mark the way.

Barbara Segall



## Herbarium

By Caz Hildebrand

Thames & Hudson 978 0 50051 893 9 £16.95

Caz Hildebrand is an award-winning designer of the best-selling cookbooks that you probably have on your bookshelves, including those written by Sam and Sam Clark of Moro, Martin Morales of Ceviche and Claudia Roden. She is also the creator of the branding for many restaurants including Yotam Ottolenghi's *Nopi*. In *Herbarium* she has created a distinct brand and style for a compendium of a hundred herbs.

Each entry with its specially commissioned illustration provides anecdotes and history as well as basic growing advice and ways to use the herb. The layout allows for just a page of text alongside the illustrations, so the herbs are not covered in sufficient depth. The device of using sidebar chunks of text does go some way to offer more information. What is on offer, though, with some listings in the last section of the book, would whet my appetite for more if I were a beginner herb enthusiast.

There is a good select bibliography and it is comforting to know that the author credits Jekka and Hannah McVicar in her acknowledgements.

The publishers have taken the branding idea a stage further and have produced wrapping paper, notelets and a boxed set of herb cards as gift products. These are available from most book shops.

Barbara Segall

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