



Domestic medicine research resources

Domestic medical recipe books

Domestic medicine (treatments and remedies prescribed and delivered in the past by people who were not formally qualified according to the educational systems of the time) is becoming an increasingly explored area in the history of medicine.

Integral to this research are domestic recipe manuscripts, created and used over a time period ranging from the 16th to 19th century. This was a period when medicine was in a state of flux, in the process of becoming professionalised. Formally qualified doctors were rare and expensive. Professional healthcare was beyond the means of most people.

Recipes or 'receipts' for food and drink were created as medical treatments as well as to satisfy hunger or thirst. Recipes were often used for both depending on the circumstances. The volumes containing these recipes are unique resources for research on the actual treatments and remedies which constituted most peoples' experiences of medicine.

These therapies were delivered by local 'healers' who had developed skills and experience in treating the sick. These skills would be passed on through families etc, as would the recipe books compiled by them. These people were usually women, often from prosperous local families with access to education. Often the books also contained treatments by formally qualified medical practitioners and remedies which came from published sources.

These manuscripts show the impact of food and diet on the history of health and medicine. They are becoming a popular resource for a diverse range of research topics, including food history, herbal practice, women as medical practitioners and how domestic medicine compared with established medical systems.

The Wellcome library, which has one of the largest collections of medical material in the world, has the largest collection of these manuscripts in the UK and has recently digitised many of the volumes.

<http://wellcomelibrary.org/collections/digital-collections/recipe-books/>

The Royal College of Physicians has over 40 of these rare manuscripts, many of them from the 17th century, and around 20 published versions.

Below is a brief list of the RCP manuscript recipe books:

MS262	Collection of medical receipts. 15th c
MS512	A collection of medical recipes, calendar, etc., in French. [1524]
MS658	Recipes in several Italian hands of the early sixteenth century, with Index in a later hand
MS411	A volume containing medical recipes, etc. 16th c

MS500	Receipt book on cookery, wines, cordials and medicine, with remedies for wounds, accidents, etc. 16th & 17th c.
MS88	Photocopy of memorandum book of Edward Alleyn 1594-1616
MS688	A book of surgerie and phisick of Mistress Honorie Henslow. 1601
MS654	Sarah Wiggess hir booke. Live Wel, dye never. Dye wel, live ever. 1616
MS447	Medical miscellany, including prescriptions, recipes; and copies of letters. c. 1630-40
MS499	Receipt book, mostly medical, with some cookery receipts. 1644 – 169
MS232	A Booke of Physicall Rec[eipts] Worth the Observing and Keeping: for Mrs Alice Corffilde, and at back 'Famous Receipts Worth Attending'. 1649
MS497	Remedies for the universall partes of the boddy. 1660
MS498	Medical receipts, written at South sea Castle, and probably taken from Barroughe's "Method of Physick. 1664-71
MS513	Collection of medical and culinary recipes etc. c.1667-71
MS534	The Lady Sedley, her Receipt book, 1686
MS251	Booke of receipts by Mary Goodson. 1687
MS503	Collection of medical receipts and prescriptions in late 17th hand. c. 1690
MS196	A loving Mite cast into the Treasury for the Chymicke and Spagyrick Art, or a plaine progresse therein chiefly collected and composed for the lovers and sonns of that Sacred Art. 17th c.
MS510	Receptes medicinales, ou empirique de A.P.P. etc. 17th c.
MS501	Book of medical recipes in various hands. 17th c.
MS502	Collection of medical receipts and prescriptions. 17th c.
MS188	A choyse of sundrye medicines. To be presented to the right noble Sir William Boulstrode, to rest by him, as a poor expression of the much affection and service due unto him. 17th c.
MS506-7	Collection of medical and culinary receipts in a 17 th c. hand.
MS504	Collection of medical receipts. c.1700-4

MS370	Medical notebook, with receipts etc. c.1719
MS508	Receipt book, with account of monies received. c1720-32
MS505	Collection of medical receipts in a 17th c. hand. 1739
MS511	Memorandums of different kinds and sorts. Culinary recipes and medical prescriptions. c1780-1803
MS250	Commonplace-book compiled by Widdows Golding, a Surgeon. 1786-8
MS509	Book of medical prescriptions and cookery recipes, in several different hands. 18th c.
MS193	Pharmacopoeia in the hand of D. Champion, consisting exclusively of medical receipts. 1816
MS231	Common-place book of medical and culinary receipts; songs, poems, essays etc. 19th c.

For further details about the published medical recipe books, see the RCP library catalogue at <http://rcp.soutron.net/Library/Catalogues/Search.aspx>