

I have been collecting books and finding articles on the web on the art, literature and folklore of Herbals. Here is information about three of them, one very old, one modern, and one Northumbrian. I hope you find them as interesting as I did. I will include others in successive newsletters.



The Lacnunga (Remedies) a 10th-century herbal.

This is a collection of nearly two hundred herbs used by the Anglo-Saxons and kept now at the British Library. One of its contents is the Nine Herb Charm. Anglo-Saxons believed disease was spread by toxins blowing in the winds. Songs, salt, water, and herbs were trusted means of protection from the flying venom. The Lacnunga names nine sacred plants and a chant in their praise. The nine herbs are Mucgwyrt (Mugwort), Attorlaoe (Betony) Stune (Lamb's cress), Wegbrade (Plantain), Maegoe (Chamomile), Stioe (Nettle), Wergula (Crab-apple), Fille (Thyme) and Finule (Fennel). At the end of the charm, prose instructions are given to take the above mentioned herbs, crush them to dust, and to mix with old soap and apple juice. Further instructions are given to make a paste from water and ashes, boil fennel into the paste, bathe it with beaten egg – both before and after the prepared salve is applied. Further, the charm directs the reader to sing the charm three times over each of the herbs as well as the apple before they are prepared, into the mouth of the wounded, both the ears, and over the wound itself prior to the application of the salve. It is supposed that stylized physical gestures would have accompanied the chanting of the charm and preparation of the portion.

*These nine attack against nine venoms.
A worm came creeping and tore asunder a man.
Then took Woden nine magick twigs and smote the serpent
That he in in nine pieces dispersed.
Now these nine herbs have power
Against nine magick outcasts,
Against nine venoms, against nine flying things,
Against the loathed things that over land rove.*

Life with Herbs, Anita Romer 2014

Anita tells the stories behind 50 medicinal plants and includes entertaining anecdotes, fascinating historical details and a few 'old wives tales' e.g Yarrow – the importance of yarrow from early times is indicated by the discovery of a 50,000 year old Neanderthal holding the plant in his hand together with other herbs. Its name of 'millefolium' stands for 'a thousand leaves' as the leaf is cut into many segments. In ancient folklore, yarrow was dedicated to the 'Evil one' so inherited the nicknames of 'Devils Nettle', 'Devil's Plaything' and 'Band Man's Plaything'. Some believed that by burning yarrow on the eve of St. John's Day, they would be protected from evil. The druids used the stems to assist in forecasting the weather. As the yarrow burned, young girls sang 'Good morning, good morning, good yarrow, and thrice good morning to thee'. Other names for it are Bloodwort, and Stauchweed which refer to its ability to stop bleeding. Achilles, Greek hero of the Trojan war, used it to heal his soldier's wounds. It is said that he learned the remedy from his mentor, Chiron the Centaur.



I have also come across a book entitled 'Remembered remedies of Northumberland' by Anne Larvin.

This book, published in 1988, contains the collected memories of Northumberland WIs. It is based on both oral and written reminiscences from the members, as well as printed and handwritten books that members have in their possession. It includes chapters on Women and Health, Women at War, Food as medicine, Remembered remedies, the Still Room and List of Remedies and Treatment. Unfortunately it may still be under copyright and not to be produced by others without permission.

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