

# **‘Some unusual sources for the history of medicine in the National Archives of Ireland’**

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The purpose of this paper is to highlight the content of a selection of more unusual sources held in the National Archives which one might not necessarily consider consulting for medical research.

The term ‘medical’ is used here in its broadest sense and some references, especially in correspondence, are non-specific. Other references are to what might be termed nowadays ‘old wives’ cures’. All the collections are of interest to researchers and reflect the preoccupations and concerns of those who created and retained these collections. Further information on many of these collections will be found on the website of the National Archives under the ‘Search the Archives’ menu at <<http://www.nationalarchives.ie>>.

Most of the records are specific items contained in larger collections that have come from private donations and many, but not all, come from the collections of landed families. For the purposes of clarity, the records will be divided into the following five categories:

- 1) Medical sources held in private hands or collected by private individuals
- 2) Private donations of personal collections with medical relevance
- 3) Private collections, generally acquired through the original family. This is a listing of recipe books which includes recipes for cures of medical ailments
- 4) Private correspondence which mentions health matters
- 5) Medical sources previously held by a public body

Some collections have been used more than once to highlight different aspects and areas of medical interest in that collection.

**1) Medical sources held in private hands or collected by private individuals**

**Example 1**

Papers relating to county Dublin (NAI, 999/258). This collection was donated by a private individual who had purchased it at auction.

14 October 1908–22 September 1909

Minutes of proceedings of Balrothery Rural District Council, county Dublin. Separate minutes were kept for miscellaneous matters, financial matters, proceedings under the Public Health Acts, proceedings under the Labourers Acts and proceedings under the Burial Grounds (Ireland) Act, 1856.

**Examples 2a and 2b**

Papers relating to county Dublin (NAI, 999/661). This collection was donated by a local society but it is unclear how that society acquired it.

1937–1961

Register of interments for Tulla burial ground, Lehaunstown (parish of Tully, barony of Rathdown, county Dublin)

Undated

Dublin Board of Public Health

Notice to Caretakers of Burial Grounds

Two copies

**Example 3**

Papers relating to county Dublin (NAI, 99/33). This collection was donated by a private individual but it is unclear how the donor acquired it.

Minute Books for Monkstown Hospital, Monkstown, county Dublin

1. 18 March 1970–17 December 1980  
Monthly meetings
2. 17 October 1973–22 December 1980  
Quarterly and annual general meetings
3. 28 January 1981–18 December 1985  
Executive Committee and Quarterly Board meetings

**Example 4**

Papers relating to county Kilkenny (NAI, 999/479). The collection was donated by a private individual but it is unclear how the donor acquired it. It consists of photocopies rather than original items.

1. 1852–1898  
Minute Book of Callan Dispensary
2. 1899–1915  
Medical Officer's statistical return, Callan
3. 1907–1918  
Medical Officer's statistical return, Callan

**Example 5**

Papers relating to county Kilkenny (NAI, 999/665). This collection was donated by a private individual but it is unclear how the donor acquired it.

1. July 1872–January 1893  
Medical Officer's Report Book  
Callan Union, Callan Dispensary District
2. December 1899–April 1915  
Medical Officer's Return Book  
Callan Union, Callan Dispensary District
3. March 1907–September 1918  
Medical Officer's Return Book (Forms L)  
Callan Union, Callan Dispensary District
4. December 1888–February 1889  
Towns Improvement (Ireland) Act  
Rates levied in Callan

**Example 6**

Papers relating to county Wexford (NAI, 2001/13). This collection was donated by a private individual but it is unclear how the donor acquired it.

- 1767–1920  
Documents relating to the families of Byrne of Byrne's Hill, Dublin and Rosemount, county Wexford and the related families of Rossiter and Place

1. Poor Law Commission  
Abstracts of the accounts of the New Ross Union  
Half year ended 25 March 1867
2. Poor Law Commission  
Abstracts of the accounts of the New Ross Union  
Half year ended 29 September 1867

### **Example 7**

Papers relating to county Wicklow (NAI, 1188). This collection was donated by a private individual but it is unclear how the donor acquired it. It covers medical correspondence, medical relief, notification of tuberculosis, vaccinations as well as printed forms and publications. Due to the confidential nature of its content, it is closed for research.

Medical records of the Annamoe Dispensary, county Wicklow (1894–1969)

### **Example 8**

(NAI, 2002/74). This collection was donated by a private individual but it is unclear how the donor acquired it.

Comhairle Sláinte  
Health Hints in the Home

With covering letter from Seán McEntee, Aire Sláinte (undated)

The Health Hints series cover the following: 1. Diphtheria immunisation; 2. Mumps; 3. Flies – the assassins of the home; 4. Sore Throat; 5. Cough in children; 6. Whooping cough; 7. Your children's teeth; 8. Worms in children; 9. Measles.

## **2) Private donations of personal collections with medical relevance**

The items in this category are personal to the family and have a broadly medical connection. Two examples are considered here.

### **Example 1**

(NAI, 2001/83/6). This collection was donated by a member of the family.

Papers of Monsignor EF O'Doherty (1918–1998)  
Late Professor of Logic and Psychology in UCD

In the section devoted to printed publications are found books, articles in journals and papers delivered at international conferences devoted to subject including: *Mental Health and World Citizenship* (1948); 'Psychopathology and mystical phenomena' (1951); 'Emotionally and socially handicapped children and youth, their need for special education' (1974); *The Natural Phenomena of Mental Suffering* (undated) and *Psychological Problems in an Ageing Population* (undated).

### **Example 2**

(NAI, 1190/9). This collection was donated by a member of the family.

Correspondence received by Agnes and John Sweetman,  
47 Merrion Square, Dublin and Drumbaragh, Kells, county Meath  
(1793–1795); (1858–1936)

Amongst the loose correspondence sent to Agnes Sweetman generally from members of her extended family, are miscellaneous pamphlets and booklets including the annual reports for the National Maternity Hospital, for the years 1923 and 1925.

### **3) Private collections – generally acquired through the original family**

This category deals with recipe books which include recipes for cures of medical ailments.

#### **Example 1**

(NAI, 1204/3). The collection was donated by a private individual but it is unclear how the donor acquired it.

Business and personal papers of the family of Byrne of Byrnes Hill, Dublin and Rosemount, New Ross, Wexford and of related families – Place and Rossiter  
(1773–1920s)

Amongst the loose correspondence are receipts and recipes. These cover the period of the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Receipts and recipes are preserved together in this collection.

#### **Example 2**

(NAI, 999/90). This collection was donated by a private individual but it is unclear how the donor acquired it. It is a photocopy of an original source and contains recipes and cures, many taken from the *Dublin Gazette*.

'James Morison's Receipt Book. Copied in Philadelphia, the 1<sup>st</sup> day of June 1775'.

### **Example 3**

(NAI, 1190/6/6: 1190/9/17).

The collection was donated by a member of the family.

Correspondence received by Agnes and John Sweetman,  
47 Merrion Square, Dublin and Drumbaragh, Kells, county Meath.  
(1793–1795) (1858–1936)

Amongst the loose correspondence sent to Agnes Sweetman generally from her extended family, are medical prescriptions, miscellaneous pamphlets and various notebooks, including a recipe book for throat gargle and eye ointment.

### **Example 4**

(NAI, M 6231). It is not known how this document was acquired.

Recipe book of Diana Wray Twigg, wife of the Archdeacon of Limerick, from the early 18<sup>th</sup> century which includes recipes for:

A very good drink for a cough  
For jaundice in children  
A bath for the gravill  
To make gargle for rickets  
To recover weakness  
Powder for convulsion fits  
For the bloody flux  
An infallible cure for a vomiting and looseness  
A salve for old sores of ulcers  
Recipe against a consumption  
A good drink in a burning fever  
The ingredients of the purging ale  
For a sore throat or quincy  
To make the snailwater for the consumption or cough of the lungs  
To make water to clear the skin  
An excellent medicine for a stitch  
For the scurvy  
For the green sickness  
For the ricketts  
For diet drink  
For the stone or gravill

### Example 5

(NAI, 1096 and 1140). These collections were donated by members of the family.

- |           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1096/3    | Family and estate papers of the Cliffe / Vigors families, Burgage, Old Leighlin, county Carlow.<br>17 <sup>th</sup> –20 <sup>th</sup> centuries<br>'Household' items, 1735–1887 material including the following: |
| 3 xxvii/  | Undated<br>Recipe for curing illness of 'Burn'd Holes'                                                                                                                                                            |
| 3 xxviii/ | Undated<br>Recipe 'to cure the cancer in the mouth'                                                                                                                                                               |
| 23/       | Undated<br>Book of recipes, household hints, cure etc which includes 'Remarks on cholera, its symptoms, cures' etc                                                                                                |
| 25/       | Undated<br>Book of recipes, hints, cures, etc                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 1096/15   | Private, genealogical and military papers of Colonel Philip Doyne Vigors<br>1826–1979<br>Including the papers of the Reverend Thomas Mercer Vigors (1775–1850), containing the following items:                   |
| 4 vi/     | Undated<br>Recipe for wound stone water                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 4 vii/    | Undated<br>Treatments for cholera                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 1140/3/   | Genealogy and family matters                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 18/       | Undated<br>Recipe book, which includes cures, household hints etc                                                                                                                                                 |

#### **4) Correspondence which mentions health matters**

The items listed here are largely ephemeral and contain nothing of major medical importance. However, what the content does show is the concern of correspondents about matters relation to heath, and, in the case of the Pembroke Estate paper evidence, additional social concerns.

##### **Example 1**

(NAI, 1177/1/4). This collection was donated by the family solicitor and includes the following:

Family papers relating to the Colclough family, Tintern, county Wexford including correspondence, deeds etc  
1722–1827

Legal cases and Chancery proceedings

Correspondence relating to the Grogan Minors and their inheritance. Includes correspondence between Caesar Colclough and Mrs Elizabeth Grogan from the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Contains enquiries and comments, makes references to the health of her boys, her recent ill-health and the rent due on the Leeson Street house, the health of her dear boys to be laid before the master in the chancery proceedings and her ability at the moment to transact her own business (1816 and undated).

##### **Example 2**

(NAI, 2001/108/3/9). This collection was donated by a member of the family.

Personal and family papers of HC Gregory, solicitor and Land Commissioner, Callan, county Kilkenny (c.1792–c.1973)

Correspondence of Mrs Alicia Fanny Gregory, making enquiries about the state of her health (1891)

##### **Example 3**

(NAI, 999/633/22). This collection was donated by a private individual but it is unclear how the donor acquired it.

Relating to the Obins family Portadown, county Down with comments on the ill-health of Miss Obins and a possible will (1813)

#### **Example 4**

(NAI, 999/782/1). This collection was donated by a British county record office.

Correspondence from (Reverend) Henry Palmer, Vicar's Hill, Cahir, county Tipperary to the Reverend James Burrowes, Kilanley Glebe, Ballina, county Mayo  
14 December 1818–14 December 1841

The collection relates to family concerns, money matters, property, even rabbit warren troubles, health and sea-bathing, education of children, including the following items:

5 May 1823 – Letter relating to the benefits of Mallow water  
26 February 1827 – Letter relating to a remedy for gout  
1 September 1836 – Letter relating to a son to be an apothecary  
18 December 1838 – Letter relating to valuation of the rabbit warren

#### **Example 5**

(NAI, 999/392/5). This collection was donated by the British Records Association, London.

Papers relating to the Quin family, Dublin City and including the correspondence of Theo Garencieries to Dr Henry Quin and John Ryder to the Reverend Thomas Quin

22/	22 August 1748, York Letter concerning the treatment of a patient
42/	17 June 1812, Youghal Letter concerning health of Mrs Ryder
43/	1 July 1812, Youghal Letter concerning health of Mrs Ryder and the state of Parliament

#### **Example 6**

(NAI, 2003/73). This collection was donated by a member of the family.

Papers relating to Daniel Webb Webber (1757–1847), QC and MP for Armagh City, 1816–1818, and Reverend Thomas Kelly (1769–1855), Kellyville, Athy, county Kildare (1799–1855)

2003/73/1 Correspondence of Daniel Webb Webber

- 12 Undated (1804?), Youghal  
E Brick to Counsellor D Webber, Holles Street  
Letter concerning recipient's health and the state of his family
- 17 17 May 1821, Christ Church  
JA Cramer  
Letter relating to progress of recipient's son, his career at Westminster with Dr Page, his present ill-health and decision to cease mathematics
- 22 23 August 18(18), St James' Street  
Letter relating to W Downes to Daniel Webb Webber, Leckfield, Collooney  
Concerning writer's health, drought in the country
- 53 2 August 1839, Bath  
Letter from Webber to Trulock, Skreen, Dromore West.  
Regarding an impending visit to Skreen, county Sligo, ill-health of Tom Webber
- 2003/73/3 Webber Family  
Letters of the Kellys and Webbers and Tighes from 1790
- 8 21 June 1849, Kellyville, Stradbally  
Thos Kelly to 'Dear Friend'  
Concerning recipient's health and with religious comments  
Faint
- 9 12 August 1850, Kellyville, Stradbally  
Thos Kelly to 'Dear Friend'  
Regarding recipient's health and with religious comments  
Part scratched out  
Annotated by Barbara Donaldson
- 11 23 July 1851, Kellyville, Stradbally  
Thos Kelly to 'Dear Friend'  
Concerning health of the body and soul  
Part scratched out
- 12 12 June 1852, Pembroke Place  
Thomas Kelly to Miss Oliver  
Regarding health of recipient's aunt in body and soul  
Annotated by B(arbara) D(onaldson)
- 19 Undated

[Reverend Thomas. Webber] to his wife [Frances, daughter  
of Reverend Thomas Kelly]  
Mrs Webber, 40 Upper Mount Street, Dublin  
Concerning recipient's health and the work of the parish

**Example 7**

(NAI, 1075). This collection was donated through an Irish county museum.

Correspondence, mostly to William Monsell MP, Tervoe, county Limerick,  
(1817–1899)

14/1 [William Hale John Charles] Limerick to Monsell

28 February 1873, Carlton Club  
Enquiring whether it is true that Lord Southwell was cured by the  
waters of Lourdes

27/32 Miscellaneous correspondence to Monsell

[pre-1874] 1 Bryanstown Square W, London  
[Thomas Viscount] Southwell  
Private  
Concerning his illness and cure at Lourdes and his dedication there  
of the Chapel of St Peter

**Example 8**

(NAI, 97/23). This collection was donated by a member of the family.

Correspondence from RH D'Olier, Ballymore Eustace, [county Kildare] to  
his brother NO D'Olier, Bagot Street / Ely Place, Dublin (1822–1835)

- v 24 February 1829  
Regarding family astrology
- vii 25 August 1839  
Regarding a Dublin oculist  
Incomplete
- ix 1 November 1830, Ballymore Eustace  
Regarding administration of digitalis to writer's wife and blood-  
letting
- x 1 November 1830, Ballymore Eustace  
Astrological result for writer's wife

xi 11 February 1831  
Regarding basis for an astrological table

**Example 9**

(NAI, 97/46/1: 97/46/2). This collection was donated by the family estate agent.

Estate papers of the Pembroke Estate, Ireland including correspondence, deeds and maps (1639–1900)

- 2/5 30 June 1743–13 November 1751, Dublin  
Richard Mathew to the Right Honourable The Lord Viscount Fitzwilliam  
Correspondence
- 2/5/45 30 July 1747  
'The People of Dublin have taken the Whim of Bathing, in the Sea, and Irishtown is Crowded with Lodgers'
- 2/5/46 27 August 1747  
Regarding sea bathing at Irishtown
- 2/7 9 July 1752–13 April 1763 (1772)  
William Fitzwilliam, Dublin to his brother the Right Honourable Viscount Fitzwilliam, Jermyn Street, St James  
Correspondence
- 2/7/15 22 May 1753, Dublin  
Regarding writer's wife's third miscarriage and the need for saltwater bathing
- 2/7/18 16 June 1753, Dublin  
Writer's wife bathing at the black rock
- 2/7/19 21 July 1753, Dublin  
Writer's exile to Dublin 'I am out of sight, banished amongst the lowest of mankind, the Spot on earth for wickedness most resembling Hell; visit of a friend from England "to be cured by the Water of St Johns Well"'.  
"
- 2/7/22 23 August 1753  
Regarding bathing group of Mrs Fitzwilliam and Lady Gormanstown; writer's social and financial position in Dublin

- 2/8 22 August 1751–  
Bryan and Elizabeth Fagan, Ushers Quay to (the Right Honourable Richard Lord Viscount Fitzwilliam)  
Correspondence
- 2/8/50 26 November 1763  
Recipient's daughter having smallpox
- 2/8/75 15 November 1766, Dublin  
Regarding the death of Fitzwilliam's attorney (Bull) –  
'occassioned, as I hear by the drawing of one of his Teeth'
- 97/46/2 Leases
- 134 1 October 1835  
Lease for 7 years to Mary Behan for six Bathing Houses at  
Irishtown, county Dublin  
Rent £6.0.0.
- 318 23 September 1835  
Lease for 7 years to Rose Carpenter and 9 others 'the ten  
several Bathing Houses lately erected and built by the said  
Sidney Herbert on that part of the Strand sea shore Beach  
situate at Irishtown in the County of the City of Dublin, of  
lime and stone or Brick roofed and covered with Slates and  
now in perfect order and condition...'  
[Nos. 1–10]  
Rent £10.0.0 pa
- 330 14 January 1841  
Lease for 70 years to Richard Cranfield, Tritonville Baths,  
Sandymount, of ground on East side of Tritonville Road,  
Sandymount  
Rent £60.3.0 pa

## 5) Medical sources previously held by a public body

### Example 1

(NAI, 999/408). This collection was donated by the General Council of County Councils, 9 Parnell Square, Dublin 1.

- 7/ Tuberculosis Prevention (Ireland) Act, 1908  
8 Ed. 7. Ch. 56

- 11/ 1920  
Ministry of Health Act, 1919  
Report of the Irish Public Health Council on the public health and  
medical services in Ireland  
2 copies
- 13/ 1925  
Correspondence relating to the National Health Insurance  
Commission (Nos. 35–45)

### **Example 2**

(NAI, 999/674: 999/680). This collection was donated by the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI).

Annual Report of St Kevin's School, Glencree, Enniskerry, County  
Wicklow for the year 1905  
(Dublin, 1906)  
Damaged

Annual Report of St Kevin' s School, Glencree, Enniskerry, County  
Wicklow for the year 1906  
(Dublin, 1907)

### **Conclusion**

Other private collections that also concern aspects of medical history are the those created during the Great Famine of the 1840s and related subsequent emigration. For example, the records of the Ballinspittle Dispensary, county Cork (NAI, 1025/2) contain receipts for medicines received (from 1848), a rental of the dispensary (1847) and monies spent on the local fever hospital (1847). Elsewhere, the nutritional value (or otherwise) of recipes for bulk food and 'cheap food' during the greatest humanitarian disaster in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe found in private collection reference NAI, M3585–3500 makes for harrowing reading.

Finally, demonstrating that nothing really changes, this leaflet on the subject of children's teeth was issued by the Department of Health in the 1950s (NAI, 2002/74) and provided the following advice to parents:

'Your Children's Teeth

What to avoid

To-day, children are constantly eating softened, sweetened, refined, de-natured foods. No matter how pure such foods as confectionary, biscuits, cakes, jams, pastries, and sweets may be, they are bad for the teeth. These foods tend to form a sticky paste in the mouth which clings to tooth surfaces and provides a cover for the acid-forming process which starts

dental decay. If eating such foods is limited to meal-times, and the teeth get a chance to clean themselves in between, there is much less danger of decay. But the continuous eating of such foods *between meals* is sure to cause the teeth to decay.

REMEMBER – the health of your children’s teeth depends on your own choice between routine care, foolish indulgence, and damaging neglect.’

### ***Irish Archives***

This article is an online version of the article ‘Some unusual sources for the history of medicine in the National Archives of Ireland’ by Aideen Ireland. The complete printed version with illustrative examples of the document types mentioned appears in *Irish Archives*, the [Journal of the Irish Society for Archives](#), Winter 2008.