

Recipes and Paper Knowledge

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Amongst the vast archive of estate and personal papers deposited by the Fortescue family of Castle Hill to the Devon Heritage Centre is a folder filled with loose paper slips.¹ Varied in size and shape, they document a lively exchange of recipe knowledge between Margaret Boscawen, her daughter Bridget Fortescue and their extensive circle of family, kin and friends at the turn of the eighteenth century, and reflect recurring health concerns affecting the family and their attempts to reach out for cures and therapies.² Together with the family's numerous bound recipe books, these circa 150 loose slips formed a complex paper archive of recipe knowledge.³ As historians have noted, collections of culinary, medical and craft recipes can reveal sickness experiences, everyday knowledge practices, social alliances, global trade networks and much more.⁴ While bound notebooks of recipes have received considerable attention, less has been paid to recipes written on loose slips of paper. As such, the slips in the Fortescue papers offer an opportunity for exploration and invite complex readings about ideas of ephemerality and durability.

Some of the loose slips in the Fortescue family papers are folio-sized and had clearly been folded, sealed and sent as letters with the recipe (and perhaps some accompanying text) written on one side and the recipient's name and address and remnants of a wax seal on the other side. Other slips are long and thin, clearly torn from a larger piece of paper, perhaps a letter. Most common though, are small slips of paper with a recipe written on one side and the title of the recipe on the other with no additional identifying or contextualising information. At first sight, it

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¹ The Fortescue Family of Castle Hill made multiple deposits to the Devon Heritage Centre. The loose slips discussed in this article were part of the first deposit which included other correspondence, recipe books and estate papers: Devon Heritage Centre, 1262M/0/FC/8.

² For an overview of the Boscawen/Fortescue family's household medical activities, see Anne Stobart, *Household Medicine in Seventeenth-Century England* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016).

³ Devon Heritage Centre, 1262M/0/FC/6-8. I am grateful to Anne Stobart for introducing me to the Fortescue archive. For more information on the Boscawen/Fortescue family, see Anne Stobart, *Household Medicine in Seventeenth-Century England* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016).

⁴ There is a rich literature on historical recipe studies. Here, I offer a few examples, largely focused on the English context: Michelle DiMeo and Sara Pennell, eds., *Reading and Writing Recipe Books, 1550-1800* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2013); Wendy Wall, *Recipes for Thought: Knowledge and Taste in the Early Modern English Kitchen*, Material Texts (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Elaine Leong, *Recipes and Everyday Knowledge: Medicine, Science and the Household in Early Modern England* (University Of Chicago Press, 2018).

is tempting to view these slips as ephemeral objects. After all, small bits of paper can be easily lost and there is some evidence that recipes written on paper slips, particularly trustworthy and/or valued ones, were often copied into recipe books.⁵ However, on examination, it is clear that the status of such paper slips, as material and epistemic objects, is fluid and changing.

[place figures 1 a and 1b here]

A case in point is the series of four paper slips recording remedies for rickets. One of the slips is part of a letter dated February 26th 1695 from Fortescue's aunt offering recipes and a plea for help in recovering a loan of 35 pounds from 'cousin Thomas Clinton'. As in so many other cases, the offer of recipe knowledge was in response to specific, often fleeting circumstances and entangled with other social interactions. These are the stuff of the everyday and evoke the ephemeral nature of recipe exchange. Another slip offers a set of three recipes titled 'The Broth', 'The diet Drink' and 'The Oyntment', with 'for ye ricketes L Norcott' written on the top right-hand corner. The inscription and wax seal on the reverse side of the paper indicate that the recipe was sent via post to Bridget Fortescue. [figure 1] Aside from the address, a later hand (likely Fortescue's) wrote 'my Lady Norcotts Receipt for ye Ricketts' on the top right hand-corner. In fact, almost all the slips have the recipe title and name of the donor written on the reverse side of the paper. For example, the next slip has "The Lady Bamphylds general course for the Ricketts" inscribed on one side and three recipes on the other. This kind of careful endorsement and information categorisation suggests that the survival of these slips was not by chance, rather they were part of a complex system of paper tools designed to sort and store recipe knowledge, much like those used by early modern scholars such as Ulisse Aldrovandi or Conrad Gessner.⁶ As with other similar paper-based information management systems, the loose slip format enabled the family to build a flexible archive which was at once ephemeral and durable.

[place figures 2 a and b here]

The final tiny paper slip in the series reinforces this idea. It has only an untitled recipe written on one side of the paper with the endorsement "Diet Drinke for the children yt hath the Ricketts

⁵ While we have little information about how and where these particular slips were kept at Castle Hill, there is evidence that other families kept similar items in wooden chests: Leong, *Recipes and Everyday Knowledge*, chapter 5.

⁶ On paper slips, see, for example: John Considine, "Cutting and Pasting Slips: Early Modern Compilation and Information Management," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 45, no. 3 (September 1, 2015): 487–504; Isabelle Charmantier and Stefan Müller-Wille, "Carl Linnaeus's Botanical Paper Slips (1767–1773)," *Intellectual History Review* 24, no. 2 (2014): 215–38; Fabian Kraemer and Helmut Zedelmaier, "Instruments of Invention in Renaissance Europe: The Cases of Conrad Gesner and Ulisse Aldrovandi," *Intellectual History Review* 24, no. 3 (2014): 321–41. On the idea of paper technologies, see: Anke te Heesen, "The Notebook: A Paper-Technology," in *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, ed. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2005), 582–89. For recent a general overview of gender and paper practices, see: Carla Bittel, Elaine Leong, and Christine von Oertzen, eds., *Working with Paper: Gendered Practices in the History of Knowledge* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019).

this reset I find in my mothers large boke” inscribed on the reverse. [figure 2] The same recipe can be found in the family’s bound notebook where it is part of a series of cures comprising of a plaister, a drink, an ointment and a syrup, all gathered under the title “A present Remedy for the Ricketts a Recaite which is very Exceelent Cozen Barretts Recaite”. The presence of the same recipe across the loose paper archive and the bound notebook suggests a dynamic and changing connection between the two parts of Fortescue family’s collection. Other similar examples can be found within the archive, indicating that recipe knowledge was compared, tested and transferred across the notebooks and loose slips and the epistemic status of each recipe continually negotiated as the family sifted through, assessed and reassessed the know-how. In recent years scholars have shed light on similar knowledge management practices used by learned men, archival examples such as the Boscawen/Fortescue papers extend existing studies to include new actors and knowledge fields.⁷ Alongside paper evidence such as the salvaged documents in book bindings described by Megan Hefferman in this volume, they push us to reimagine past worlds of paper and reconsider notions of ephemerality and durability in knowledge practices.

⁷ See, for example, Ann Blair, *Too Much To Know. Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010); Alberto Cevoloni, ed., *Forgetting Machines: Knowledge Management Evolution in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016); Ann Blair et al. eds., *Information: A Historical Companion* (Princeton: Princeton Univers. Press, 2021).

