

Documenting Period Brewing

What Digbie Never Told You

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The most common complaint I hear from brewers discussing their research and documentation is that there are so few sources available from within our period of study. Many brewers rely heavily on two principle sources: Cindy Renfrow's *A Sip Through Time*, and Digbie's *The Closet of the Eminently Learned Sir Kenelme Digbie Kt. Opened*. While these are both valid sources, they are in reality sources of the secondary nature... citing earlier works, but written outside of our period of study. To truly be able to document period brewing, one must have at their disposal at least a handful of primary sources.

While it was true a quarter century ago that primary sources for the brewing science were difficult to come by, it was simple urban legend as to why this was the case. For years, I had brewers in the SCA tell me that brewing was woman's work in the home, and that recipes or techniques were not written down because they were 'common knowledge'. I also had people tell me that brewing processes were 'guild secrets' and were therefore committed to memory rather than paper or parchment. While both assertions have some truth to them, they fall short of reality. In truth, there are many writings from brewers, maltsters, farmers/gardeners, and scientists regarding various aspects of brewing throughout ancient and medieval history if one knows where to look. Twenty-five years ago, access to these documents required one to travel to major libraries or even to other countries, and obtain special access permission. Even then, many of the holders of these resources required one to be a member of a particular academic or research community, and hands-on access was still frequently limited. With the advent of the worldwide web, many of those restricted sources are now available or coming available to the 'do it yourself' researcher. Photographs or PDFs of period documents are posted to the internet. Texts are transcribed from the original documents to plain text files. Documents in ancient or foreign languages are translated or transliterated into modern English. The key is in knowing what questions to ask and to whom.

Primary sources do not have to take the form of a period recipe or period 'how to' for brewing. In general, providing primary documentation is less about the finished product and more about the ingredients, the processes, and the purpose of that product. By stepping back and looking at brewing as a collection of parts rather than a whole form, we can imagine a whole new world of primary references.

Herbals: Often used in medicine as well as brewing (and some brewing was purposed for medicine), books on the properties of, uses for, and means of obtaining various herbs and spices become reliable sources for documenting the presence of those herbs and spices in a brewed product.

Physica: More or less ancient medical journals, these volumes give us a significant amount of primary information on the use of various plants, animals, or chemical compounds in various types of beverage primarily used for medicinal purposes.

Shipping Records / Bills of Lading: Several sources are available for obtaining collections of business records. By reading the shipping records for different companies, countries, or industries, we can justify not just the types of ingredients used in alcohol production, but get a rough idea of the ratios used.

Production / Sales Records: Similar to shipping records, even cottage industries in the Low Countries and the British Isles kept detailed records of production and sales for the purpose of justifying their tax payments. Like the shipping records, collections of production and sales records can be found in collected works. Some of these may be reprinted as part of the history of guilds or of towns.

Poetry and Song: Some of the more ancient cultures passed down their history in story, song, or verse.

Eventually, these works of art were written down and translated / transliterated for general consumption. Such works as Beowulf, y Gododdin, or the Kalevala explain the finished product of brewing in sufficient detail to discern the most probably techniques. The Kalevala actually defines the entire brewing process in the ancient Middle East in some detail.

Monastery / Convent Records: The first mention of hops in brewing was a 12th century diary entry by Abbess Hildegard, who was a nun in central Germany very much into brewing. I found a translation of that writing through The Gutenberg Project.

Royal Decrees: Fairly well documented, the legal workings of the government play heavily in primary documentation. As examples, the Reinheitsgebot, or German purity law of 1536, or a proclamation by a French noble that all foreign yeast sold within his demesne had to pass an inspection before being sold to bakers or brewers.

Architectural Records: Something as simple as Charlemagne dictating the relationship in city design between the bakers and the brewers, and the reason why (for the transmittal of yeast between the two industries) can be documentation for a process.

Scientific Documents: Particularly for things like distilling, mashing, boiling, temperature control, clarifying agents, yeast culturing, etc., there are many scientific publications going back to before the Roman Empire that tell us explicitly what was common practice for the zymurgists of the day.

Personal Writings: Journals (such as the travel diary of Marco Polo), personal letters, proceedings of a meeting, counsel, or even a private party, and other such personal writings can include important clues for not just the ingredients in a brewed product, but the presentation of that product to the intended audience as well. Examples include writings indicating the Romans sweetened their wine with honey, and those stating that fruit was soaked in wine served in large bowls in 16th century Spain.

In short, by looking less towards what we in the modern age consider proper brewing documentation and more towards the various parts of brewing, we can discover a host of primary sources to lean on through every step of our own historically based process.

Here are a few tips for locating a variety of sources that brewers might use to assist them in their documentation.

First, Wikipedia. Yes... Wikipedia. If you do a wiki search on your project, any of the ingredients, or any of the processes, someone has probably done a wiki article that is relevant. Read through the article looking for key information, and note what source the author has cited. Odds are you can find that source through one of many publishing preview sites available to the public, some of which are detailed in this handout.

The Gutenberg Project (www.gutenberg.org) is an open source, wiki project that enables users to scan and upload books that have passed their copyright end date. There are tens of thousands of books available in plain text format from the Roman Empire all the way up through the early 20th century. If you know which book you are looking for, it's easy to search their rolls to see if someone has scanned or transcribed the text, and they frequently have an English translation of books written in foreign languages.

Google Books (books.google.com) is another great resource that will give extensive previews of books available for sale at Google. I have been able to search entire chapters in the preview mode with great success. This site works best with books that are still in publication, so doesn't provide much in the way of primary sources. Another popular Google resource is Google Scholar (scholar.google.com) which specializes in research based articles primarily for secondary and post-secondary education. Google

Scholar, like Google Books, is a sub-search engine. Be advised that many of the sources available through this type of search are “pay for access” articles. Unlike Google Books, Google Scholar does not provide extensive free previews of the contents, but will generally provide a free view of the abstract or summary.

The Internet Archive (archive.org) is another location where past-copyright books can be accessed with a simple search. This site frequently cross-references with the Gutenberg Project.

There are several other internet archives for scholarly papers or texts of an historic and/or scientific nature. A couple of my favorites are scribd.com – subscription access to books, many of which are out of print; springer.com, an online archive collection of scholarly works that includes a category in chemistry and material sciences; jstor.com, a collection of scholarly periodicals available by subscription; Project Muse (muse.com), similar to JSTOR; highwire.com, headquartered at Stanford University, a collection of research articles in various topics; and the Oxford University Press (oxfordjournals.org).

One of my favorite sites for source documentation is Stefan's Florilegium (www.florilegium.org) – a site specifically aimed at the SCA audience, Stefan accepts articles, research papers, and bibliographies from anyone who wishes to contribute, and organizes them on his site by topic. He cross references submissions that address more than one subject. One unique feature of this site is that he includes archives of discussions from the old SCA bulletin boards and news groups.

The Library of Congress and the inter-library loan program: The Library of Congress has an extensive web resource that is available with registration. Although some of their more rare documents are not available for checkout, you can book time with one of their librarians who will be happy to assist with research and provide excerpts electronically or in person.

There are literally dozens of university and community libraries across the nation that are part of the LoC network. University libraries have the added benefit of graduate level research papers on file, and are frequently accessible through the web. A fairly comprehensive list is available at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_academic_databases_and_search_engines.

Last but not least, a simple google search will turn up anything from regional history sites to periodicals to university research papers to virtual museums. What's important with any website is to verify that their information is valid – Is it properly footnoted? Does it have a bibliography? Is it something more than just a cut-n-paste of the Wikipedia article? In my experience, it is usually better to check the original references rather than to simply cite the internet article. This is where the next step in documentation comes in.

Email and telephone calls: Many times, I have followed up a review of a web article or museum site by contacting the author / webmaster / curator for additional information or clarification. During the writing of one of my more in depth research papers, I spoke with university professors and museum curators in a dozen countries. With one exception, none of them put me off or refused to answer any of my inquiries. In one case, I wound up in a two-hour long phone conversation with the USA's foremost authority on mezzo-American culinary culture. Don't automatically discount a reference to an email or phone conversation properly cited in the paper. These can be tremendously rich resources.

Below are some of the most common primary sources that I have used over the last decade in documenting beers, wines, and meads. This list does not include the museums, universities, and academic specialists that I have accessed outside the world of literature, but will help get you started:

1. Aneirin, y Gododdin, published circa 700 C.E., translated by Joseph Clancy at <http://www.missglen.net/celtic/gododdin/poem.html>
2. Apicius, De Re Coquinaria, from a 9th century manuscript resident in the Academy of Medicine, New York, retrieved

via email.

3. Bancke, An Herbal, published 1525, facsimile & transcript edition by Larkey & Pyles, Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, New York, 1941.
4. Bock, Hieronymus, Kreutterbuch, J.Rihel, Strasbourg, 1565.
5. Boorde, Andrew, The Fyrst Boke of the Introduction of Knowledge, published 1542, Early English Text Society (translator), N. Truebner and Co., London, 1870.
6. Boorde, Andrew, A Compendyous Regymentor a Dyetary of helth, 1557.
7. Brunswig, H., Liber de arte Distillandi de Compositis, Straßburg, 1532.
8. Columella, Lucius Junius Moderatus, de re Rustica, Book III, published 1st century C.E., translation by W. Thayer, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, Massachusetts, 1941.
9. de Tyr, Guillame, Historia rerum in partibus transmarinis gestarum, translated from French and printed by William Caxton, 1481 (edited for the Early English Text Society by K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., London, 1893.)
10. Gairdner, James (editor), The Paston Letters: 1422 – 1509 A.D., volume I: Henry VI, 1422 – 1461 A.D., A. Constable & Co., Westminster, 1896. (a compendium source)
11. Gerard, John, The herball, or Generall historie of plantes, John Norton, London, 1597.
12. Great Britain Privy Council, Acts of the Privy Council of England, Volume II, 1547-1550, John Roch Dasent (editor), Eyre and Spottiswoode, London, 1890. (a compendium source)
13. Hall, Lesslie (translator), Beowulf: An Anglo-Saxon Epic Poem, published circa 1000 C.E., translated from the Heyne-Socin text, D.C. Heath & Co., Boston, 1892.
14. <http://www.winzerfreunde-ruesselsheim.de/weinberg.htm>, *Winzerfreunde Rüsselsheim* - facsimile and translation of the 1435 document.
15. Hudson, William et al, The Records of the City of Norwich, Ulan Press, 2012. (a compendium source)
16. Libavii, Andreae, Alchymea, Petrus Kopff, Frankfurt, 1606. (a Gray Period source)
17. Markham, G., The English Housewife, (originally published 1615), M. Best (editor). McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 1986. (a Gray Period source)
18. Mascall, Leonard, Booke of the art and maner. how to plante and graffe all sorts of trees Arte of planting and graffing, Henrie Denham, London, 1589.
19. Pliny the Elder, Naturalis Historia XII, published circa 75 C.E., translated by John Bostock in The Natural History: Pliny the Elder, Taylor and Francis, London, 1855.
20. Polo, Marco and Rustichello of Pisa, Devisement du Monde, published circa 1298. Colonel Sir Henry Yule (translator and editor), The book of Ser Marco Polo the Venetian concerning kingdoms and marvels of the East, volumes I and II, 3rd edition, John Murray, London, 1903.
21. Scot, Reynolde, A Pefite Platforme of a Hoppe Garden, Henrie Denham, London, 1576.
22. Taliesin, *Kanu y Med* (c. 6th century), published in Llyfr Taliesin circa 1275 and retained in the National Library of Wales.
23. von Bingen, Hildegard, Physica, published circa 1158, Priscilla Throop (translator), Healing Arts Press, San Francisco, 1998.

A list of the most common secondary sources can be accessed at http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/articles/brewing_bibliography.html.