

“Excellent Vertues” and Virtuositic Speculations: Medical and Historical Knowledge about  
Coffee in England, 1650-1730  
Thomas Ladendorf

Research Strategies

When I commenced my work on this essay, I started with background reading. I knew I was interested in coffee and coffeehouses in England and Britain in the period 1650-1730, and a quick Google search pointed me to Brian Cowan’s *Social Life of Coffee*, which provided an excellent background on the subject. I also looked to the introductory material in Markman Ellis’s *Coffee-House Culture* to gain more familiarity with the subject. Both of these works provided interesting and even inspiring reading and made me really eager to start my personal research on the subject, but they also provided me with a significant problem: they did not leave much unsaid. Indeed, these works were thorough and comprehensive, covering pretty much every aspect of coffee’s history in early modern Britain that I could think of. Determined to produce an essay that offered original insight into this subject, I decided to restrict my scope and focus on a very specific aspect of my topic. Based on my own interest and the source material I had available, I decided to look at early medical understandings of coffee, which were certainly tied into coffee’s widespread acceptance. This decision was definitely influenced by my readings of reprinted primary sources in Ellis’s *Coffee-House Culture*, which contains a number of early medical and scientific writings on coffee. With my interest piqued and my line of analysis more or less decided, I resolved to start closely reading primary sources while also looking at relevant secondary material. Andrew Wear’s *Knowledge & Practice in English Medicine: 1550-1680* gave me an excellent background on early modern medicine in England, and Walter Houghton’s “The English Virtuoso in the Seventeenth Century” allowed me to get better acquainted with the

authors of my primary sources. My primary sources mostly came from Ellis's *Coffee-House Culture*, but I also found several scans of primary sources online that I was able to incorporate into my paper. With all my research materials located and on hand, I began to take copious notes and write drafts, which led me to forming my argument and, after much revision, completing my paper.

I located the material I used in a number of places. Cowan's book, which I found out about on Google, was available through Ebrary on IUCAT. Reading an entire book online seemed unexciting and even cumbersome at first, but it ended up being really straightforward and simple. The same set of IUCAT searches, in which I simply entered queries like "coffee england" and "coffeehouses history," led me to find Ellis's multivolume *Coffee-House Culture* in Wells. This work is a veritable cornucopia of primary sources relating to coffee and coffeehouse history, and once I restricted my topic, focusing mostly on volume four prevented me from suffering from information overload. Professor Spang had demonstrated how to use the IU Libraries Resource Gateway in class, and she specifically recommended Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO) for those of us interested in England. ECCO ended up being the place where I located most of the digital reproductions of primary sources that I used. I also looked at, but did not end up using material from, Eighteenth Century Journals I & II, as well as British Newspapers 1600-1900, both of which are in the set of links on IU Libraries' History: Resources page. Professor Spang recommended looking at Wear's *Knowledge & Practice in English Medicine* based on my choice of topic, and this ended up being another resource available online through Ebrary on IUCAT. The last resource I used, Houghton's journal article about the virtuosi, was available through JSTOR, which I again accessed through the libraries.

At the time I wrote this essay, I had never used the libraries' resources so extensively. I feel that access to these resources helped to give me my first taste of what real history writing is like, and also gave me the skills I needed to be considerably more effective as a researcher and writer. I now regularly use the History: Resources page for material for literally every paper I write, and many other invaluable resources have been available through IUCAT and interlibrary loan. This essay was my first exposure to all these resources, and it gave me the foundation in research skills I needed to really grow as both a student of history and the humanities more generally.