

How helpful is the idea of ‘archiving for the future’ for understanding early modern cultures of record keeping?

It is useful to consider the differences between the processes of ‘archiving’ and ‘record keeping’. The nineteenth-century American pioneers of the ambitiously named discipline of archival science clearly laid out this distinction. Records, they claim, “have immediate utility” whereas “archives are stored for posterity and for the use of others than those who originally created them.”¹ Collections of sources deliberately preserved for the people to read in the future, for any reason, are archives. Although these definitions do not capture how early modern people, ignorant of archival science, used these words in their writing or conversations, they are useful to historians of early modern England who rely, to a significant degree, on records that were collected because they were useful at the time. By understanding archiving and record-keeping as distinct processes, the historian can identify early modern practices in which future-oriented values of archiving intruded upon the collection of records with immediate utility. By doing so, a historian can appraise the extent to which a desire to archive, predicated on the expectation of future readership, emerged in early modern knowledge practices.

This essay will focus on record-keeping within the domestic sphere. This is a restrictive scope and excludes many sorts of record-keeping that resulted from institutional directives rather than organic cultural impetus. Examples of such directives include the Church of England’s requirement, from 1538 onwards, for parishes to maintain a register, and the Royal Society’s prescription of certain scientific methodologies. In the household, functional knowledge, as embodied in cookbooks and family registers, was subject to less formal arbitration and was certainly a cultural concern. The praxis of record keeping within these environments often came to resemble archiving not only in its concern with

¹A. Walsham, ‘The social history of the archive: record-keeping in early modern Europe’, *Past & Present* 230 (2016), p. 13.

posterity, but through the clear cultural motives of those engaged in record keeping. By taking this approach, one can see how record keeping for epistemic purposes was done with the expectation of future readership and contribution, how record collections were sustained by the expectation of the intergenerational transmission of records, and how forms of spiritual self-writing often served as a means for authors to communicate their piety with the future.

Historiographical discussion of archiving has been shaped by Derrida. His 1994 work on Freudian psychoanalysis, *Archive Fever*, contained, among other theses, the contention that the conditions of archiving prevent any archive from being a true representation of its historical moment, making “it a movement of the promise and of the future no less than of recording the past.”² As a result of the finite scope of any archive and the necessary exclusion of some sources in its creation, Derrida suggests that there is a process of narrative ‘suppression’ inherent in the construction of an archive. In Derrida’s archive, Elizabeth Yale suggests, alternate possibilities of telling any story are repressed.³ Considering the partiality of many early modern collections of records, particularly those concerned with the contemporary sectarian conflict of the Reformation or the political strife of the English Civil Wars, such an approach is helpful to historians.

Indeed, the usefulness of the very concept of ‘archiving for the future’ is enhanced by the notion that early modern records, like the bases for historical truth claims, possess the same limitations, yet were often kept with the expectation that they would be read in the future as forms of memorialisation. This is applicable not only to records concerned with matters of political contention, but also domestic writing in which the author sought to construct an impression of themselves. Carolyn Steedman, discussing questions of archival materiality, notes that some early modern record-keepers were likely self-conscious about the historical role of their writing. Steedman argues that the normative historical expectation in studying records, of encountering “something that was not intended for [their] eyes,” cannot apply to many sources written in anticipation of being read with a historical eye.⁴ As an example, she points to the diaries of the eighteenth-century socialite Hester Thrale, characterising them as a “highly crafted, controlled, and managed account

²J. Derrida and E. Prenowitz, ‘Archive fever: a Freudian impression’, *Diacritics* 25 (1994), p. 24.

³E. Yale, ‘The history of archives: the state of the discipline’, *Book History* 18 (2015), p. 334.

⁴C. Steedman, ‘Something she called a fever: Michelet, Derrida, and dust’, *The American Historical Review* 106 (2001), p. 1177.

of herself, directed at future audiences.”⁵ This is a tendency that is particularly pronounced in forms of self-writing and devotional record-keeping from the period, concerned with using the archive to communicate the record keeper’s piety with the future.

With institutionally-led record keeping falling outside of its purview, this essay must disregard the practices of natural scientists, whose demand for records as important epistemic tools⁶ led to the formation of archives as “institutions where papers could be deposited and made publicly accessible down through history.”⁷ Nor can it address habits of record keeping within the established church and the way in which many of its record collections were constructed with the view that they would be read in a historical light. Such was the case with the parish register⁸ of Thomas Boetler, the vicar of Much Wenlock, whose occasional lapses into written medieval Latin appear to be a way to communicate his catholic sympathies to an anticipated future readership.⁹

Recipe record-keeping

The construction and family stewardship of recipe books in the early modern English home offers a useful view for the historian into the cultural practice of archiving. An exercise predicated on the retention of records with clear utility; this practice placed a significant cultural premium on retaining knowledge for the future. Through its relationship with the family, it was closely connected to both formal or informal processes of intergenerational knowledge transmission. The keeping of prayer and receipt books was a widespread textual genre in Early Modern England, usually undertaken by women. William Sherman has referred to such texts as examples of ‘matriarchives’, borrowing Derrida’s neologism, and has discussed the use of collections of records made by women to construct archives of themselves and their families.¹⁰ Derrida states that the archive is formed through a

⁵Steedman, ‘Something she called a fever’, p. 1180.

⁶F. Holmes, ‘Laboratory notebooks and investigative pathways’, in *Reworking the bench: research notebooks in the history of science*, eds. F. Holmes, J. Renn, and H. J. Rheinberger (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2003), pp. 295-308.

⁷E. Yale, *Sociable knowledge: natural history and the nation in early modern Britain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), p. 216.

⁸Alexandra Walsham has expressed doubt about the provenance of this source (personal communication, 21 November 2023).

⁹The register of Sir Thomas Botelar, Vicar of Much Wenlock’, *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Natural History Society* 6 (1883), p. 106.

¹⁰W. Sherman, *Used books: marking readers in renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), p. 72.

process of “domiciliation” and “house arrest”¹¹ and these texts, which were largely collated within homes and other domestic spaces, may be regarded as a literal expression of this archival process.

Recipe books and household manuals served a key role within the archival strategy of early modern families. Two recipe books compiled by the late seventeenth-century English herbalist Joanna St. John exemplify this practice. The first contained directions for preparing food and preserves. The second was her ‘Great Receipt Book’ begun around 1680, which consisted of a catalogue of medical preparations and cures. It can be understood to be a clear exercise in record keeping in the modern sense, as a collection of knowledge with immediate utility. The book contains instructions on how to treat “a Kanker in a womans Breast” by making a salve, directions on how to prepare “Cock Water for a Consumption”, as well as a recipe of “Burr seeds & sweet Fennel seed” intended to remedy “Paine in the side coming og wind.”¹² As with many other recipe books, its records were collated from a variety of often-named sources, as was the case with her recipe for “Dr Bates Head Pills”. Prescriptions or consultation letters from doctors were often copied out or preserved in their original form within recipe books. One woman, Anne Meyricke, copied her doctor’s advice to drink a posset of white wine, scurvy grass, horseradish, and brooklime in her book verbatim.¹³ The creation of these recipe books involved collating knowledge from multiple sources, demanding a level of curation which Derrida describes as inherent to the archive.

Manuscript books of the sort created by St. John and many other women were locations in which knowledge, acquired in many ways, was stored for future readership. This was typically the author’s descendants, and family inheritance usually provided the model for the transference of these records. St. John had a clear level of concern for the generational transmission of the knowledge provided by her book, with her will made out in her own hand in 1703, leaving both books to her inheritors alongside traditional bequests of money, jewellery, and clothing. Her granddaughter Lady Johanna Soame received the cookbook, and her daughter Lady Anne Cholmondeley inherited the ‘Great Receipt Book’.¹⁴

¹¹Derrida and Prenowitz, ‘Archive fever’, p. 2.

¹²Johanna St. John, *Johanna St. John her booke*, Wellcome Collection, MS. Western 4338.

¹³E. Leong, *Recipes and everyday knowledge: medicine, science, and the household in early modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), p. 42.

¹⁴Leong, *Recipes and everyday knowledge*, p. 12.

As such, recipe books can be seen not just as stores of records but as important parts of a future-oriented family archive. Elaine Leong has argued that “family members also saw their recipe books as a space to acknowledge, record, and further social connections and family alliances.”¹⁵ This was borne both out of their content and distribution among family members. A recipe book begun by Mary Cholmeley before her marriage to Henry Fairfax in 1627, which subsequently travelled down the family line as the *Arcana Fairfaxiana*, is full of textual remnants of constant re-examination and engagement, typical of a family archive. The product of multiple people writing in a variety of hands, this book shows a significant degree of contemporary engagement with its content, consistent with the suggestion that recipes were intended for use by future generations. Mary and Henry Fairfax’s book was transmitted down through both the male and female line, being given to their eldest son, Henry Fairfax, before passing to their granddaughter Anne. Another book, which might thus be considered to belong to a wider Fairfax ‘family archive’, passed from Henry’s sister-in-law, Rhoda Hussey Fairfax, to her grandson, Thomas Cartwright, before coming into the possession of his daughter, Ursula Cartwright.¹⁶

The multigenerational nature of this book is apparent in the addition of notes and recipes beyond Mary Cholmeley’s ‘starter’ list. These records were part of an ongoing and invited dialogue, beginning with Henry Fairfax’s additions, like his marginal note “& is good for bleeding” on a cure for “looseness of the bowels”¹⁷, and Rhoda Fairfax’s crossing out of recipes with which she was not satisfied.¹⁸ References to a more expansive archive of many individual record books heightens the sense of collective endeavour. Accompanying the instructions to prepare ‘Doctor Stephens Water’, a recipe that appears word-for-word in the 1668 printed confectioners book *A Queens Delight*, as the ‘sovereign water’ that allowed its namesake to “preserve his life, till extreme age,”¹⁹ is the instruction to the reader in Henry Fairfax’s hand to “see my brother Hen. Cholomey’s book.”²⁰ This is a recognition that the book was not intended to be consulted in isolation, but within an even

¹⁵Ibid., p. 145.

¹⁶George Weddell (ed.), *Arcana Fairfaxiana manuscripta: a manuscript volume of apothecaries’ lore and housewifery nearly three centuries old, reproduced in fac-simile of the handwritings used, and partly written by the Fairfax family* (Newcastle-on-Tyne: Swan & Morgan, 1890), p. x.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁸E. Leong, ‘Collecting knowledge for the family: recipes, gender and practical knowledge in the early modern English household’, *Centaurus* 55 (2013), p. 91.

¹⁹*A queens delight, or, the art of preserving, conserving, and candying: as also, a right knowledge of making perfumes, and distilling the most excellent waters* (London: J. Winter, 1668).

²⁰Weddell (ed.), *Arcana Fairfaxiana*, p. 132.

wider collection of books which between them represented the Cholomy family archive.

It is made good ink

Take a quart of Rains water, or Chelwell
 water or Road water not being too purr
 5: Ounce of Gall / 4: Ounce of Copperas
 3: Ounce of Gum / beat up Gall and
 Copperas a little together to 2: Ounce of Rains water
 Let it stand up before / note the
 Gum would be put in first
 after 5: Days hand more beaten together a
 little but never let it be long
 or twice of it / Some put a penny
 worth of white Sugar

Take a quart of fair Spring Water. one ounce of Copperas. 2 ounces of Gall. &
 7 ounces of Gum Arabic. mingle the together & let the stand. *Mr Madgeley*

Take 4 ounces of Gum arabick beat small. 2 ounces of Gall beat gross.
 one ounce of Copperas. & 1 quart of 7 comings off of strong Ale, put all
 these together & stirr them 3 or 4 times a day about 14 days. then
 strain it through a cloth. *Mr Doehery.*

Imade Ink by above recd only putting half
 of Arabic. and as good as ever was up
1/2 green

Mr. Maxon Excisioner his List for
making Ink, which is very good

Take a quart of Rain or other soft water
 and put to it 4oz of Galls gross by beatin
 let it stand was in for 3 days then add 2oz of Copperas
 1/4 oz of Gum. Ditto. Allam let it stand 2 or 3 days longer
 but shake it up 2 or 3 times a day put a little brandy into

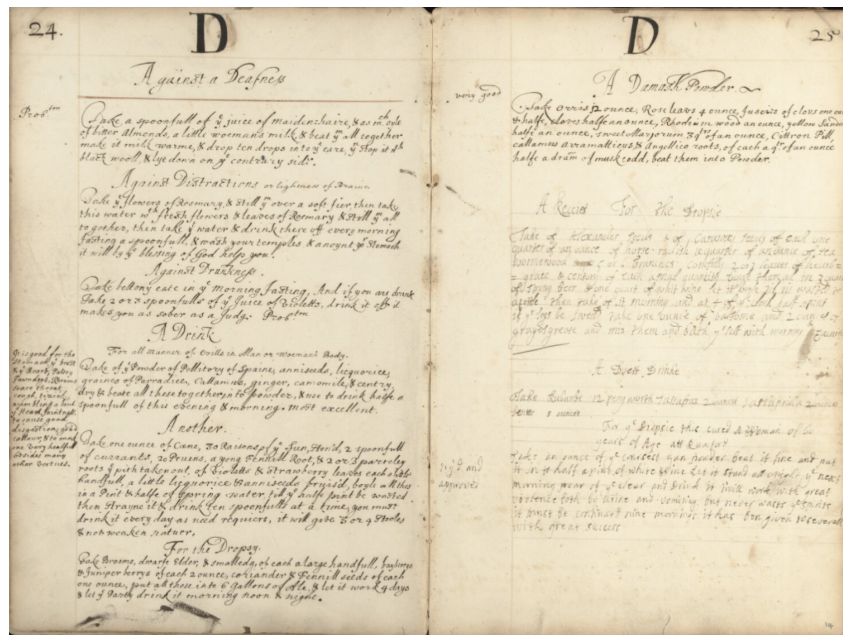
Handwritten notes in left margin:
 Receipt Book
 11. Number 6
 12. Number 6
 13. Number 6
 14. Number 6
 15. Number 6
 16. Number 6
 17. Number 6
 18. Number 6
 19. Number 6
 20. Number 6
 21. Number 6
 22. Number 6
 23. Number 6
 24. Number 6
 25. Number 6
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 83. Number 6
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 85. Number 6
 86. Number 6
 87. Number 6
 88. Number 6
 89. Number 6
 90. Number 6
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 92. Number 6
 93. Number 6
 94. Number 6
 95. Number 6
 96. Number 6
 97. Number 6
 98. Number 6
 99. Number 6
 100. Number 6

An example of the varied authorship of the Arcana Fairfaxiana, with this recipe for ‘good ink’ containing annotations and notes in at least four different hands, indicating varied and multi-generational authorship.

A similar manuscript family archive, which has attracted less academic interest, is Elizabeth Hirst’s late seventeenth-century receipt book,²¹ to which a range of marginal annotations have been added. Although the pattern of inheritance is harder to trace than with the Fairfax book, contributions to Hirst’s book were made well into the eighteenth century and long after Hirst’s death. This is another example of an original record book created by one person serving as a ‘starter’ for a more expansive archive with

²¹Elizabeth Hirst, *Mrs Elizabeth Hirst, her book*, Wellcome Library, MS 2840.

multiple contributions. Hirst anticipates future authorship in a similar fashion to Cholmeley, alphabetising her collection and leaving multiple blank pages after the end of her ‘starter’ entries. This space was used by other readers for comments, with one writing “it is very good against piles” next to Hirst’s recipe for “Oyle of Pillwort.”²² The blank pages were also used to add entirely new cures, like one titled “For those who can not hold their water.”²³ In this way, the archive expanded over multiple generations.



Two pages from Elizabeth Hirst’s receipt book, containing a significant number of annotations.

Efforts taken to ensure these recipe books were preserved and distributed within families were extensive and further indicate the centrality of future readership to this form of domestic record keeping. Recipe books were not infrequently included in wills alongside other valuable bequests, thereby affording them legal protection.²⁴ Other efforts were taken to ensure their physical survival. Lady Frances Catchmay, when leaving her household book to her son, wrote that she was “chaging him to lett every one of his Brothers and Sisters to have true coppyes of the sayd Bookes.”²⁵ By doing this was trying to ensure that her archive reached a future readership and, in doing so, realised its objective.

Thus far, it has been demonstrated that recipe books were often subject to alteration

²²Ibid., p. 56.

²³Ibid., p. 77.

²⁴Leong, ‘Collecting knowledge for the family’, p. 97.

²⁵Leong, *Recipes and everyday knowledge*, p. 127.

by a significant number of actors and, even if they were not actually being written in by multiple people, usually served as an archive of many individuals' knowledge. Informed and shaped by many cultural concerns, they can be considered exercises in archiving. They should be understood, as Kristine Kowalchuk posits, as necessarily social texts written with a focus on readership by others.²⁶ Given that these were usually distributed within families and given to descendants, it is likely that the knowledge they contained was expected to be passed on to future generations. As such, it is helpful for historians to consider the culture of recipe record keeping as focused on a process of archiving, in which domestic knowledge from a wide variety of sources was collated with the intention of preserving it for future readers.

Genealogies and shared spirituality

Recipe books were only one facet of a broader culture of early modern record keeping. The family archive offers a useful analytical framework for historians studying many other forms of domestic record keeping, of which genealogical recording and religious note-taking are two examples. Constructed through a range of writing forms, the family archive was expansive, self-referential, and future-focused by virtue of its intergenerational structure. It is thus helpful to the historian to consider these practices as part of a process of 'archiving for the future.'

Exercises in family record keeping were not limited to dedicated manuscript books of the sort already discussed. The late Natalie Zemon Davis's approach, in which the printed book can be understood as a "carrier of relationships"²⁷ through consideration of its social milieu, has much value in analysis of the family archive. William Sherman has identified cases in which the marginalia of early modern printed literature had "little or nothing to do with the text they surrounded", and instead served as stores of, or means to circulate, "individual and collective records." An inscription in an 1612 copy of James Guillemeau's printed medical book *Child-Birth; or, The Happy Delivery of Women*, attesting to the circumstances of the births of two children in Berwick, Samuel

²⁶K. Kowalchuk, *Preserving on paper: seventeenth-century Englishwomen's receipt books* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), p. 44.

²⁷N. Z. Davis, *Society and culture in early modern France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), p. 192.

and William Holles, is just one instance of this practice.²⁸ The paper family archive was an expansive phenomenon made up of records of various different types of record.

With the increasing availability of printed religious texts in the home, bibles and books of common prayer became increasingly typical locations in which families took records and constructed archival accounts of themselves. Sherman points to the early seventeenth century adaptations made by Giles Hungerford to his Book of Common Prayer as an example of this.²⁹ In the flyleaf, Hungerford makes a record of his first marriage in 1624, to his “my most deer and loveinge wiefe” Elizabeth to which he adds, in 1632, the details of her exit from “this wretched World.” Upon his remarriage in 1633, he commits the details of Joan, his “deere and loveinge wiefe” to a blank page at the back of the book to which he also adds the names, birthdays, and godparents of the four children he shared with Joan. These were not ephemeral notes, but rather individual records within a wider archive of Hungerford’s family. Alterations of this sort, often to large and treasured print works, might be characterised as attempts to contribute to enduring family archives. Although these relate to a wide variety of knowledge practices, with a 1622 concordance to the bible bearing a woman’s signature on the flyleaf accompanied by a recipe “to ease the goute,”³⁰ records of childbirth and family change are particularly frequent.

In this way, the manuscript genealogies and family registers which adorned the inner pages of many devotional books attest to a widely held desire to construct lasting family archives. One example is a 1549 English Book of Common Prayer, which was altered by various Norfolk-based owners in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.³¹ The book contains two collections of family records, one inscribed on the first page of the table of worship and another on the very last page of text. Written by two different authors, who record their births as 1591 and 1535, respectively, each contains details of births, baptisms, marriages and deaths in their families. The newer set of records was made by William Priest, who describes the birth of his wife, the date of his “contracted unto her,” and other significant events in his family’s history, concluding with the death of his “deere wife” in 1654. The older records are less clear in their authorship and,

²⁸Sherman, *Used books*, p. 80.

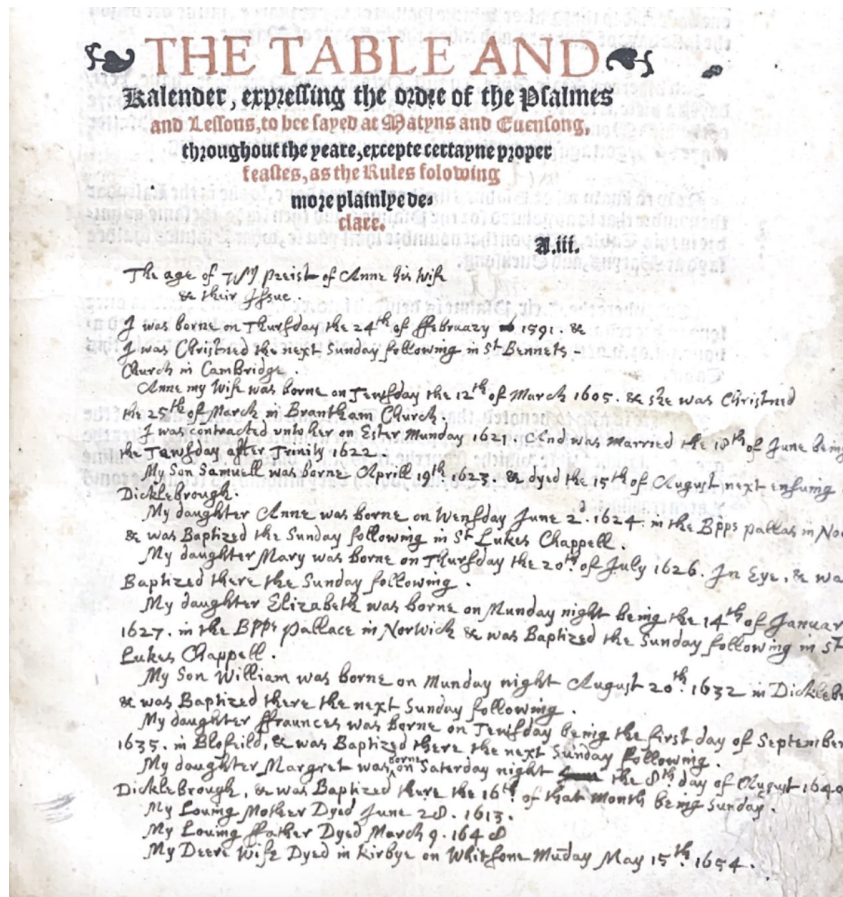
²⁹Ibid., p. 105.

³⁰Ibid., p. 80.

³¹*The booke of the common prayer and administracion of the sacramentes, and other rites and ceremonies of the Churche: after the use of the Churche of England* (London: Edouardi Whitchurche, 1549), Cambridge University Library, Sel.3.218.

although not written in the same hand that inscribes the book ‘Thomas Whyple’ on the table of worship, describe his family history up to 1587. The other hand, which recurs in marginalia throughout the book, was likely either Whipple writing in a different manner than his signature or a family member writing on his behalf.

Priest would have received this book replete with the annotated Whipple family records, and by contributing notes about his own family, expanded upon the intergenerational archive within. It is likely that he did so with the expectation that his work would be seen by another owner. This likely happened, as the book passed into John Moore’s ownership in the mid-seventeenth century, though he did not contribute to the archive. Moreover, it is possible that Whipple, who would have been fourteen at the time of the book’s printing, and whose mark in the title page appears to indicate that it came into his possession in 1562, was probably not the first owner of this book. Although there are no signs of previous ownership, the notion that Whipple received the book after it had begun its intergenerational voyage makes it more likely that the record of his life was created with the expectation it would be read by some future owner.



The title page of a table of worship within the 1549 Book of Common Prayer, containing an inscription by Whipple and a set of life records by Priest.

The making and sharing of sermon-notes within families is another practice where manuscript record keeping was intended to present an account of family to some future reader. In this case, the account was largely concerned with family piety. Ann Hughes has discussed this with reference to the seventeenth century note taking by Katherine and John Gell, two married presbyterian church goers who recorded the details of, and the moral lessons they took from, most sermons they attended. Katherine, the more industrious noter of the two, died having written at least sixty volumes of sermon notes.³² These were written, Hughes claims, as “heirlooms to be organised and pondered by the next generation of note-takers.”³³ Similarly, Sir John Hartopp’s assiduous recordkeeping within the seventeenth century congregation of John Owen, during which he noted every sermon in shorthand then arduously copied it out in his commonplace book, was undertaken

³²A. Hughes, “‘A soul preaching to itself’: sermon note-taking and family piety”, in *People and piety: Protestant devotional identities in early modern England*, eds. E. Clarke and R. W. Daniel (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), p. 65.

³³*Ibid.*, p. 70.

in the hope of them being “transmitted down to posterity.”³⁴ The preservation of this spiritual archive was an objective to which he was so devoted that he eventually conspired to have his records printed in full.³⁵ Sermon notes are one example of spiritual archiving taking place along family lines.

Whipple’s annotated Book of Common Prayer is an expression of another side of liturgical archiving. A printed text whose ownership and usage were transferred between different people, the main text of the book was transformed into a spiritual archive by the addition of notes. A page containing a prayer for the giving of communion is heavily annotated, with some sections of the printed text crossed out and others underlined.³⁶ Written in the same hand that constructed the older collection of family records in the book, it contains the author’s own prayers as well as less emotive notes on the liturgy. It is likely that the author, having already included a collection of family records in the book, considered that it would likely be subject to future readership. Not only was this a form of record keeping with the evident utility of aiding prayer, but it was also a way for the author to communicate their spirituality with future generations.

The intergenerational transmission of sermons between two seventeenth-century priests offers further insight into the interaction between family archiving and cultures of spiritual record-keeping. Hannah Yip has traced the transmission of two sermons included by Robert Bagnall in his published 1622 quarto, *The Stewards Last Accovnt*, through the media of print and manuscript recording into a record-book of sermons written by the obscure Somerset vicar Robert Bagnall in the 1670s. Considered by Yip to be probably related, if only by virtue of the two Somerset men sharing an unusual name, she has noted that the content of two sermons recorded by Richard Bagnall was identical in part to that written by Robert. Appearing in an octavo manuscript, likely for the purpose of being preached from directly, Richard appears to have been engaged in what Yip refers to as a type of familial piety arranged around sermon record keeping.³⁷ Robert Bagnall’s sermons, re-recorded by a younger relative, were added to a more expansive family archive.

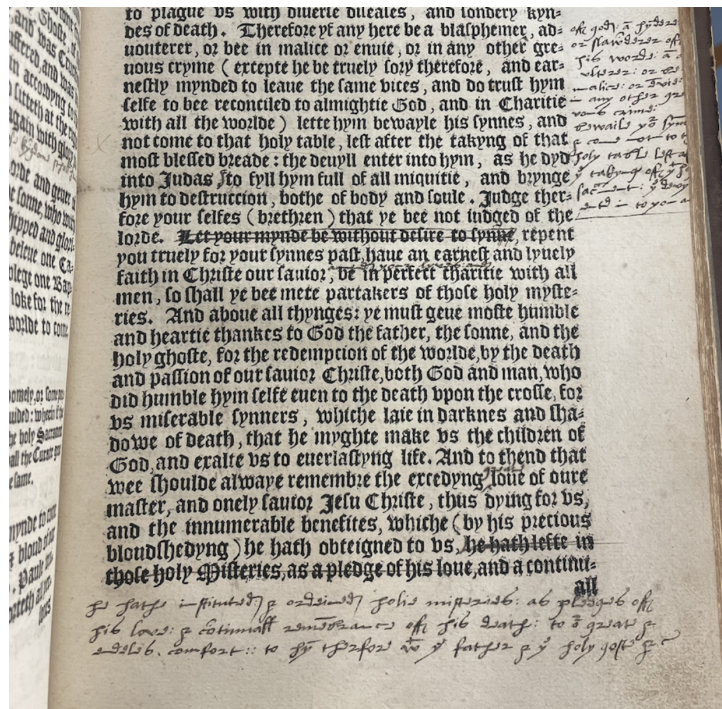
Stores of family knowledge were constructed and preserved through a variety of

³⁴Ibid., p. 71.

³⁵Z. McCulley, ‘Commonplacing John Owen: auditors’ sermon notes in Restoration England’, *The Seventeenth Century* 38 (2023), p. 695.

³⁶*The booke of the common prayer*, fol. cxii.

³⁷H. Yip, ‘The familial afterlives of parochial sermons in early modern England’, *Reformation* 27 (2022), p. 139.



Marginal annotations in the 1549 Book of Common Prayer.

writing practices in early modern England. For example, records that were kept and distributed in correspondence can be considered by the historian as the foundations of a wider epistolary archive. Scholarship over the last thirty years has moved towards considering letter writing as a form of ‘personal’ self-writing or record-keeping,³⁸ and by collecting and preserving them for the future, many early modern correspondents engaged in a form of archiving. This is the case with letters sent by Lady Brilliana Harley to her son, Edward, while he was studying at Magdalen Hall, Oxford, immediately before the outbreak of the civil war. An educated woman of a clearly puritan disposition, her highly affectionate letters contained prayers and devotional tracts written to aid her son’s “thirst after the sweet waters of God’s word.”³⁹ These were records of spirituality and beliefs with clear utility, which she intended for her son to revisit and treat as a continually growing archive of religious knowledge at his disposal. Alongside these pious instructions, Harley used her letters to add more typical family details to this archival account of herself. One letter is entirely dedicated to an attempt to submit a true record of her age to her son, explaining that she had “haue hid [her] agg” when her marriage was contracted.⁴⁰ Others

³⁸L. Stanley, ‘The epistolarium: on theorizing letters and correspondences’, *Auto/Biography* 12 (2004), pp. 201-235.

³⁹Brilliana Harley, *Letters of the Lady Brilliana Harley: wife of Sir Robert Harley, of Brampton Bryan, knight of the Bath*, ed. T. T. Lewis (London: Camden Society, 1854), p. 28.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 25.

contain medicinal knowledge, such as a recipe for “scruigras pounded and strained with beare.”⁴¹ It reinforces the suggestion that these letters were being consulted as a form of archive that, although Edward preserved them well, they were kept close enough to hand that he occasionally used their margins as a location in which to practise his arithmetic. The cultural expectation that these were written to maintain a record for the future was pervasive enough that Edward integrated his mother’s correspondence into his own family papers, which eventually became the object of Victorian historical interest. Record keeping within the family, spanning a wide variety of textual genres, was often concerned with creating archival collections of knowledge to be preserved and passed down through generations.

Spiritual autobiographies and archives of advice

Records of personal devotion, of the sort that Harley’s writing occasionally becomes, can often be considered as archival representations of the author’s personal spirituality written for a future audience. The process of archiving for Derrida, as Yale argues, necessarily involved “other ways of telling the story [being] repressed or suppressed.”⁴² Through this process of curation, the assemblage of early modern domestic religious records might be considered a form of self-expression for the future, or even a form of memorialisation. Many collections of religious records include clear statements indicating that they were intended for an anticipated future audience. In the dedication of *The Stewards Last Accovnt*, the elder Bagnall expresses his hope that his sermons might, through the “processe of time... obtaine some fauour in the world.”⁴³ Records of piety were often made with the expectation that they would serve as testaments to the religiosity of the author. Two genres of writing which will illustrate this early modern cultural urge are spiritual autobiographies and advice books (or legacies). They can be considered archives not just because they were collections of discrete records with utility, but because they were often intended to be consulted for guidance in an archival fashion. This was especially true of books of advice written by parents for their children.

Spiritual autobiographies can, like recipe books, be considered as part of the

⁴¹Ibid., p. 53.

⁴²Yale, ‘History of archives’, p. 334.

⁴³R. Bagnall, *The stewards last accvnt: delivered in five sermons vpon the fixteenth chapter of the gospel by Saint Luke, the first and second verses* (London: George Purlow, 1622), p. A3.

domestic matriarchive. Walsham has identified them as such.⁴⁴ One of the few textual genres that provided women with the opportunity to write about their own lives, many of which were concerned with intense religious self-examination. Likely influenced by popular exemplars of religious lives like Walker's *Sufferings of the Clergy* and John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, autobiographies afforded the opportunity for devotees to place themselves within the category of the godly by giving an account of their religiosity. Composed of records of individual episodes from the lives of devotees, this sort of writing is appropriate for the literary mode of analysis championed by Steedman,⁴⁵ in which archives are subject to examination from a literary standpoint. They would thus be interrogated as much for the choice of which records were included or omitted as for their content. Often part of an intergenerational inheritance, or even explicitly written to be read by their author's descendants, these were spiritual 'guides' that were geared towards future readership. The archive provides a useful conceptual framework in which the historian can situate these sorts of texts.

The autobiography of the seventeenth-century Northamptonshire gentlewoman Elizabeth Isham can be understood as an effort to archive herself for future readership. The subject of much scholarship in the last two decades, her *Booke of Remembrance* was exercise in record keeping that belonged to that same puritan tradition of confessional self-examination that moved hundreds of others to produce similar works.⁴⁶ Written in around 1638, this manuscript can be considered more of an archive in the Derridean sense, a future-oriented social artefact, than an inanimate store of useful records. Isham intended multiple social purposes for her book. It served not only as a monument for her late mother and sister, ensuring that their memories did not "die in oblivion," but also as a repository of maternal advice for her brother Justinian's four daughters, to whom she bequeathed her book. There was thus an other-focused social purpose to this piece of writing, suggesting it was not a private diary but an archive written in anticipation of future readership. Isaac Stephens has characterised Isham's record as an exercise in public self-memorialisation and a justification of her position among the elect.⁴⁷ He has noted

⁴⁴A. Walsham, *Generations: age, ancestry, and memory in the English reformations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), p. 499.

⁴⁵Steedman, 'Something she called a fever', p. 1180.

⁴⁶K. Sharpe and S. Zwicker, 'Introducing lives', in *Writing lives: biography and textuality, identity and representation in early modern England*, eds. K. Sharpe and S. N. Zwicker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 1-26.

⁴⁷I. Stephens, *The gentlewoman's remembrance: patriarchy, piety, and singlehood in early Stuart*

the value of the archival turn in understanding what spurred Isham and others towards self-writing.⁴⁸ The notion of archiving for the future is thus very helpful in considering this attempt to create a testament to someone's life through record-keeping.

There is additional value to the historian in considering Isham's self-writing through the lens of the family archive. Text played a significant role in the distribution of knowledge within Isham's family, and it is likely that self-writing was part of this intergenerational knowledge transmission. Not only does Isham make repeated reference to the or sharing of godly books between her mother and grandmother, but she also writes of occasions where they were read out loud to each other.⁴⁹ The sharing of autobiographical writing within this environment contributed to this family archive. Isham references reading other women's religious writing when recounting her mother's spiritual difficulties, stating that she can "no better express my mothers troubles then out of the nots of her owne hand writing, which she kept (carring them about her) as rememberances & instructions to her self."⁵⁰ In doing so, Isham validated her mother's attempt to archive for the future. Through this spiritual family archive, Isham was equipped with both a model of self-writing and an inspiration for consigning herself to posterity through writing.

Alice Thornton's seventeenth-century *My First Booke of My Life* is another example of female spiritual life writing where records were collected with the ambition of communicating an account of herself to posterity. Thornton describes her book in its preface as a store of "knowledge & remembrance, which are most worthy of perpetuall memmore."⁵¹ She sought to begin a kind of perpetual memory upon her death, bequeathing her "three Books of my owne Meditations and Transactions of my life" to her daughter.⁵² Not untypical of the genre, Thornton seeks to create an account of herself and her status as a member of the spiritual elect by collecting records of both her material and devotional life.⁵³ She selects for inclusion events in which she felt God's intervention in her life. This begins with the narrative of her survival, "by the Prouidence of God

England (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), p. 45.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 235.

⁴⁹F. Molekamp, *Women and the Bible in early modern England: religious reading and writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 15.

⁵⁰Stephens, *The gentlewoman's remembrance*, p. 31.

⁵¹Alice Thornton, *My first booke of my life*, ed. R. Anselment (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), p. 6.

⁵²Ibid., p. li.

⁵³Stephens, *The gentlewoman's remembrance*, p. 23.

& my dere mothers skill,”⁵⁴ from a fall aged three, and continues into her adult life to include her miraculous “deliueranace from a Surfett of Lobster” in 1643, and herself and various other members of her family’s affliction with, and recovery from, smallpox.⁵⁵ As with Isham’s work, there was an evident concern with memorialisation, with Thornton writing upon the death of her brother in 1651 that she had taken it upon herself to “relate the truth of these Sad afflictions. . . & to leaue them for the right information to [my] Posterity.”⁵⁶ Thornton appears conscious that she belonged to a culture of record-keeping in which committing the dead to the future was a form of memorialisation. It follows that, by committing her own life to paper, Thornton was consciously engaged in memorialising herself.

The archival lens offers the historian an opportunity to view Thornton’s writing as an attempt to construct an account of herself for the future through the Derridean ‘suppression’ of alternative narratives. Thornton’s efforts were focused on selecting memories of her religiosity in the face of significant personal difficulty. Thornton’s detailed account of the traumatic stillbirth of her first son in 1657, accompanied by the record of her anguished prayer reflecting upon the event, illustrates this archival intent. Although a clear factual record of the circumstances of her son “coming into the world with his feete first,” it is fraught with the expressions of her religious identity.⁵⁷ Her description of the “exquisitt torment” of her labour, already an unusual exercise in an early modern context, is of particular interest due to its exclusive selection of these memories of the religious fervour of childbirth.⁵⁸ By exclusively recording her pious thoughts on the birth and excluding all others, Thornton can be seen as attempting to present an archival account of herself for the future in a way that was congruent with Steedman’s notion of self-conscious personal writing.

This is not to say that the identity of Thornton’s book is defined solely by the nature of what she chose to exclude. In some instances, the addition or juxtaposition of particular records within the text can be seen as an expression of authorship directed at a future audience. This is the case with Thornton’s account of her stillbirth. It is

⁵⁴Thornton, *My first booke of my life*, p. 7.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 233.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 68.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 100.

⁵⁸L. Schwartz, ‘17th-century childbirth: “exquisite torment and infinite grace”’, *The Lancet* 377 (2011), pp. 1486-1487.

accompanied by a strikingly anguished ‘praier’, a discrete record in Thornton’s book and contained under a different heading. Seeking forgiveness for any transgressions she had committed against God, and attempting to conquer her grief through faith, adds a much more emotive record to her account. It also contains an explicit wish for future readership, expressing the hope to god that her book should become a “an eternall monument & a record of thy honour, & all generations which shall be borne shall be borne shall [to] praise thee.”⁵⁹ Although not of the same intensity, other exercises in domestic archiving involved supplementing records with more emotional detail. One much less expansive example is Frances Matthew’s modest one-page list of the circumstances of her children’s births. Originally compiled around 1629, the details of those who predeceased her were added in a different ink, clearly at a later date than the creation of the document.⁶⁰ In this case, there is a process of deliberative authorship evident in the gradual collection of records together into what can, even in this single sheet, can be referred to as an archive. Though structured as a collection of discrete episodes in Thornton’s life, much of her book can be understood, as with Isham’s, as a coherent archive of one woman’s spirituality in which ‘the future’ was the intended audience as well as God.

As with Isham’s record, Thornton’s book is also helpful to historians when considered through the lens of the family archive. Not only was the book distributed within the family through inheritance, but it also included contributions from other family members. Thornton includes an addendum to the record of her daughter Alice’s birth reading that her “deare mother” was “pleased to assist. . . in powring out our requests to God for me.”⁶¹ The accompanying prayer, entirely different in register from Thornton’s own and written in the third person, appears to have been written by her mother, Alice Wandesford. It appeals for God’s intervention on behalf of “this thy distressed handmaide in traueill of Childe birth.” This was her mother’s prayer within Thornton’s Book. This spiritual autobiography, like household books, was subject to a degree of communal authorship as a facet of the family archive.

As with other family members, Thornton appears to have attempted to memorialise her mother when writing about her death in 1659. Thornton’s account of her mother’s godly conduct throughout her illness, in which she is described as a “great example &

⁵⁹Thornton, *My first booke of my life*, p. 101.

⁶⁰Frances Matthew, *The birthe of all my children*, York Minster Library, MS 322.

⁶¹Thornton, *My first booke of my life*, p. 94.

paterne of Pietie”⁶² seems to accord with the early modern religious trope of exemplary maternal death.⁶³ Like Isham, Thornton sought to create a monument to her mother, intended for future readers. However, although Thornton intended the text to be her own memorial to her mother, by contributing a prayer to Thornton’s book, Wandesford can also be considered to have committed something of herself to the future.

There is another category of early modern domestic self-writing written as a form of self-memorialisation that historians ought to anticipate. These were ‘legacies’ or advice books written by parents for their children. These can be considered a form of record keeping, as they were composed of collections of records with utility intended for their children: pieces of moral advice, collections of prayers, and other devotional writings. Advice books were a broad textual genre that existed in wider print distribution as well as in manuscript form, with one example, the 1679 *Protestant tutor*, declaring in its subtitle that it was written for the purpose of “instructing children to spel and read English, and ground them in the true Protestant religion.”⁶⁴ Their production and distribution within families can be considered a cultural phenomenon. Lady Frances Abergavenny’s bequest upon her death in 1576 of a selection of prayers and religious acrostic poems to her daughter Mary Fane is one instance of a parental ‘legacy’ being committed to the future through intergenerational inheritance.⁶⁵ Her record was preserved with much more certainty when, in 1582, it was included by Thomas Bentley in his printed collection of Elizabethan women’s prayers, *The Monument of Matrones*. In this way, it was committed to an even larger spiritual archive. Although it is uncertain whether Abergavenny intended her writing to be preserved in this way, it is clear she intended for them to be keenly read by her daughter and likely added to an ongoing family archive. The collection is described by Bentley as “Praisers made by the right Honourable Ladie Frances Aburgauennie and committed. . . as a Jewell of health for the soule, and a perfect path to Paradise.”⁶⁶ Although genuinely personal exercises with stated private purpose, personal legacies evidently had a

⁶²Ibid., p. 112.

⁶³B. A. Doebler, *“Rooted sorrow”: dying in early modern England* (London: Associated University Presses, 1994), p. 215.

⁶⁴*The Protestant tutor: instructing children to spel and read English, and ground them in the true Protestant religion, and discovering the errors and deceits* (London, 1679).

⁶⁵J. Heller, *The mother’s legacy in early modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p. 6.

⁶⁶Thomas Bentley (ed.), *The monument of matrones conteining seuen seuerall lamps of virginitie, or distinct treatises; whereof the first five concerne praier and meditation: the other two last, precepts and examples, as the woorthie works partlie of men, partlie of women; compiled for the necessarie vse of both sexes out of the sacred Scriptures, and other approued authors* (London: H. Denham, 1582), p. 138.

wider appeal as stores of useful devotional and moral knowledge. While it has been astutely observed that advice books, one of the few permissible outlets for female writing, offered their authors a rare “vehicle into public discourse,”⁶⁷ the existence of this alternative purpose does not negate consideration of them as vehicles for the transmission of earnest parental piety. Elizabeth Joscelin’s urging of her future child towards Sabbatarianism in *The Mother’s Legacie, To her Vnborne Childe*, for example, though a matter of public religious contention, might also be seen as a sincere statement of her own religious self.⁶⁸

Discussion of self-archiving has so far been limited to consideration of records written by women. Spiritual autobiographies and archives of advice were compiled by men as well, and the notion of archiving for the future is similarly helpful to historians when considering record keepers from either gender. Father’s legacies for example have been the subject of recent scholarship by Walsham regarding books of advice written with the intention of instructing their sons in correct moral manners when they reached manhood. With their creation borne out of a similar desire to archive religious and moral lessons for the future, they can be considered future-oriented records in the same way as mother’s legacies have been. Collections of moral advice compiled by men made up a majority of surviving examples of the genre, likely due to what Walsham describes as “a culture of inheritance that revolved around primogeniture.”⁶⁹ Their survival was also ensured by their more regular transferral into print, as was the case with William Cecil’s moral directions to his son, printed for a wider readership shortly after his death as *The Counsel of a Father to his Sonne, in ten seuerall Precepts*.⁷⁰

⁶⁷M. Urban, *Seventeenth-century mother’s advice books* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 36.

⁶⁸Elizabeth Joselin, *The mother’s legacie, to her vnborne childe*, ed. J. LeDrew Metcalfe (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), p. 92.

⁶⁹Walsham, *Generations*, p. 427.

⁷⁰William Cecil, *The counsel of a father to his sonne, in ten seuerall precepts* (London: Joseph Hunt, 1611).



The Praiers made by the right Honou-
 rable Ladie Frances Aburgauennie, and
 committed at the houre of hir death, to the right
 Worshopfull Ladie MARIE Fane (hir onlie daugh-
 ter) as a Iewell of health for the soule, and a perfect
 path to Paradise, verie profitable to be vsed
 of euerie faithfull Christian
 man and woman.

A fruitfull praier to be said in the
 Morning.



Almightie God, and
 most mercifull father, the
 fountaine of all felicitie,
 from whom onelie proce-
 deth all good gifts, most
 humble I beseech thee of
 thine abundant mercie &
 exceeding kindnesse, so to
 direct and gouern me this
 daie and euer with thy
 good guiding Spirit, that
 all my thoughts, words and deeds, may onelie be occu-
 pied in thy seruice, faith, feare and loue, and so assist
 and strengthen me with thy grace, O most mercifull
 and louing father, for thy sonne Iesus Chrust his sake,
 that neither sinne, death, hell, nor Sathan haue the
 dominion and vpper hand of me. Indue my hart with
 the true vnderstanding of thy true and liuelie word,
 that I may be readie and prone manfullie to fight vn-
 der the standarde of my gloriovs captaine Iesus Chrust
 against

Frances Abergavenny's prayers printed in The Monument of Matrones.

The forms of self-writing discussed can be considered exercises in archiving for the future, even if they were not printed and had limited readership, even among the author's family. Moreover, it is likely that the widespread distribution of these printed exemplars solidified cultural conventions around self-writing that conformed to habits of memorialisation. Although forms of self-writing varied in format, sometimes taking the form of commonplace books or collections of letters rather than manuscript volumes, they were regularly written with the intention of being consulted as an archive. Not only was this sort of record directed at posterity, but it also invited its reader to treat it as an archive of moral and spiritual guidance containing a wide range of advice and consult it in that manner.

Conclusion

The idea of ‘archiving for the future’ is multifaceted and offers historians of early modern English cultures of record keeping a variety of methodological opportunities. By principally addressing habits of recording within the home, this essay has sought to limit its consideration of cultures of record keeping to those that were not institutionally directed. With access to printed literature and literacy growing in tandem across early modern Britain and Europe, the period can be regarded as one of drastically expanding cultures of personal record keeping, in which people were keen to assert their own legacy through writing.⁷¹ The advent of print did not render manuscript record-keeping obsolete; instead, by increasing the circulation of knowledge on paper, it gave additional impetus to record-keeping practices. As Yale writes of the period, “old uses of writing expanded and new ones were created.”⁷² Manuscript recording, which took place independently of and alongside the production of print, rose to a new level of prominence in the lives of many ordinary people. The idea of ‘archiving for the future’ not only provides a useful analytical framework to interrogate habits of record keeping in the period but also describes the intent of many who engaged in record keeping.

Applying the Derridean approach to the archive to the study of these early modern practices of record keeping affords the historian the opportunity to examine them not simply as the basis for historical truth claims, but also as literary exercises in self-expression. This understanding is applicable to many practices of self-writing, where the ambition to save an account of oneself for the future is particularly evident. Much of this is predicated on intergenerational inheritance, and by extension, the retention of knowledge within a wider family archive. The recipe book represents another identifiable form of ‘archiving’. Although a store of records with immediate utility, their careful preservation and transference throughout families points to the idea that these were being consigned by their creators to posterity.

Many of the domestic record-keeping exercises this essay has addressed were produced by women. Formally disempowered in many other cultural pursuits, record keeping might have been regarded by women recorders as an opportunity to submit a record of their own lives to posterity. This is particularly apparent in the writing of

⁷¹E. Eisenstein, *The printing press as an agent of change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 33.

⁷²E. Yale, ‘Introduction: consider the archive’, *Isis* 107 (2016), p. 75.

spiritual autobiographies, although advice books and recipe books can also be considered stores of personal knowledge intended to be passed on to future generations through inheritance. In all these cases, the idea of archiving for the future provides historians with a very useful insight into the motives of those who recorded knowledge of their lives, families, and the techniques by which they were fed and cured of illness.

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