

PART B

HISTORY OF COMFREY

Chapter 12

Prehistory, Ancient Times, Middle Ages and Comfrey

History of the Word 'Comfrey'

The word 'Symphytum' is Latin and comes from the Greek 'symphis', 'symphyo' and 'syumphuo' which mean 'growing together' and from 'phyton' which mean plant.

"The bird called chloris from being yellow beneath, is of the size of the lark, and lays four or five eggs; it makes its nest of Symphytum, which it pulls up by the root, and lines it with straw, hair, and wool. The blackbird and jay do the same, and line their nests with the same materials."

-**'History of Animals' or 'Historia Animalium' by Greek philosopher Aristotle, 384-322 BC**, ten volumes written in fourth century BC. Book IX: 'Social Behaviour in Animals; Signs of Intelligence in Animals such as Sheep and Birds'. Translated by Richard Cresswell, Oxford England, 1878.

"The Comfrey derives its name, according to Dr. Prior, from the Latin word Confirma, from its supposed strengthening qualities. It is slightly stringent, and was formerly regarded as a septic and vulnerary. It was known to our fathers by the name of the 'great consound'. It was also used for 'griefes of the lungs, and possibly with good effect, as the leaves, stems, and the root abound in mucilage'."

-**'English Botany (Sowerby's); or Coloured Figures of British Plants: Volume 7'** by John T. Boswell and John Edward Sowerby, London, England, 1880, page 116.

Etymology (origin of words) of Consound:

From Middle English consoude, consowde, consol, consold, consaud, consaude. From Old English consolde. From Old French consolde, consoulde, consoude. From Latin consolida, because it heals.

In the Middle Ages (1275-1325 AD) the word used for Comfrey in Middle English was 'cumfirie' and 'conferye'. In Anglo-French the word was 'cumfirie'. In Old French it was 'confire'. Those words come from the Latin words 'conferva' and 'confervere'.

'Conferva' (confervae) is a feminine, singular noun. It means a freshwater (aquatic) plant with medicinal power. The word appears in Pliny's "Natural History" (Naturalis Historia), a 77 AD encyclopedia written in Latin by Pliny the Elder, a Roman author and naval commander.

'Confervere' (confervo) is an intransitive verb in the third conjugation. It mean to knit broken bones, to grow together, to heal, seethe / boil together. From the "Oxford Latin Dictionary", 1982.

"Etymology of Word 'Comfrey':

The Comfrey is generally supposed to be the plant described by Dioscorides (40-90 AD) from 'to unite', on account of the consolidating and vulnerary qualities which were ever attributed to this plant. Hence also the Latin Consolida, Symphytum, and the French Consoude.

The term Comfrey was probably derived from the old French word Comfrie or Consyre, having the same meaning as the foregoing. In rural dialects it has also the names of Consound, Knit-back, Bone-set and Blackwort."

-**'The British Flora Medica or, History of the Medicinal Plants of Great Britain'** by Benjamin Barton and Thomas Castle; Revised and Condensed by John R. Jackson; London, England: Chatto and Windus, 1877. See 1838. Symphytum page 117.

"One of the most difficult problems in the study of plant names is the identification of the plant itself, which the very name often helps to obscure.

However, there are cases which present almost insuperable difficulties of identification, and the Old English name of the plant is accordingly difficult or impossible to explain.

Consider, for example, the term galluc or galloc, which in the Old English Herbarium designates herba confirma ('Comfrey', Symphytum officinale Linn.), whereas in the 'Epinal-Erfurt Glossary' and in the 'Corpus Glossary' it translates the Latin headword galla, 'gall-nut'.