



# The Cunning Man's Handbook: The Practice of English Folk Magic, 1550-1900

*Jim Baker*

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"The desire to understand magic in any specific cultural context is an intellectual puzzle not only for scholars but believers." - Jim Baker

The Cunning Man's Handbook is a monumental work of phenomenal scope and scholarship, a comprehensive and challenging exploration of the practices and beliefs of Cunning Folk in Britain and America between 1550-1900, their heyday. Exploring the social and theological milieu of the period, the author demonstrates the essentially Christian nature of Cunning practices, presenting an illuminating discourse on the concept of magic and its perceived methodologies. Operating at the boundaries of the law and society, between medicine and magic, Cunning men and women occupied a liminal role as healers, charmers and magicians. Drawing from a huge range of sources, the range of services offered by Cunning Folk is thoroughly expounded, from divination through astrology and geomancy to dream interpretation, from charms, spells and curses to conjurations and treasure hunting. As author Jim Baker states, "The focus here is on the practice of folk magic and divination for access to the preternatural". The evolution of Cunning practices as a living tradition over a three hundred and fifty year span is explored in depth, illustrating their practical and contemporary nature. The analogous practices of African-American conjure and root work are also discussed and offer insights into oral fragments of Cunning practices lost to history, presenting a compelling example of how modernity modifies tradition. Referencing dozens of Cunning men and women and their practices, this work offers a unique glimpse into magical history, and the opportunity for readers to reclaim the practical essence of Cunning Magic.

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