

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MASSAGE

History shows that although the early Egyptians made reference to the benefits of massage, the Chinese were actually the first to recognise its healing value at around 3000 BC. Roman and Greek philosophers and physicians both prescribed it for its restorative powers after battle and for general preservation of the body and mind. Although the Romans believed in its curative powers, the art of massage also became part of a daily ritual for relaxation. After bathing, oils would be used to anoint the body from head to toe, followed by a luxurious massage.

Herbalists throughout history have used massage to heal the body and soul, both by applying balms and by laying their own hands on the afflicted to expel evil spirits and clear the mind. It was not until the end of the 18th and 19th centuries, though, that massage became popular throughout Europe, thanks to the work of Per Henrik Ling (1776 - 1839). Ling was a Swede who travelled to China and returned with a detailed insight into their massage techniques. From these he developed his own system of massage based on a variety of movements, involving pressure, friction, vibrations and rotation.

This wealth of practical knowledge soon spread and medical and non-medical professions worldwide began exploring the benefits of massage. This eventually established the basis of massage today, which in many ways remains the same now as those early Swedish techniques.

Along with basic massage, we are now experiencing a revival of interest in many of the ancient arts, which place such great importance on touch. These include aromatherapy, reflexology, shiatsu, Indian head massage and Reiki - all distinctive natural therapies, which have a very distinctive roll to play in “alternative” health care.

