

ANOTHER BUNCH OF WILD FLOWERS in CATHAYS CEMETERY



The Friends of Cathays Cemetery

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Wildflowers at Cathays 2 – Facts and Folklore



I hope this second selection of plants and their unusual stories gave you some light enjoyment and a little entertainment. Maybe you'll look on the small humble weed in a whole new light. All the photos were taken in Cathays Cemetery.

1. Creeping Cinqfoil



This plant is known also as 'Five Fingers' due to the number of leaflets on the leaves. The powdered roots were used to stop internal bleeding. It could also relieve mouth sores. In Ireland it was even used against malaria. Nearer to home in Gloucestershire it was used in tea for red rash. The most unusual use was on the continent where it was hung with Hawthorn on May Day over the doors and in bedrooms to ward off witches. It is meant to give a restful night's sleep and was used by witches as a love potion. It is part of the Rose family and looks similar to a buttercup.

2. Cuckoo Flower

A plant with a pinkish flower belonging to the Cabbage family. It has been used as heart sedative. It is often associated with milkmaids, cuckoos and the Virgin Mary, leading to its name 'Lady's Smock' and in Devon 'Milkies'. In Northampton it is considered unlucky to pick so is known by the name 'Pick Folly'. In Germany picking it is considered to cause thunderstorms and in Austria risked adder bites. The flowers can be used for nervousness, epilepsy and hysteria. Today it is used to treat indigestion and promotes appetite. In folklore it is associated with evil fairies and is thus best kept out of the house. The leaves and shoots are rich in vitamin C and adds a strong taste to salads.



3. Dandelion

The name derives from the French 'Dens de Lion' or Lion's teeth and is a reference to the shape of its ragged leaves. It is used for a number of complaints; liver, kidney, rheumatism, jaundice and skin complaints. Regular consumption of its juice makes one bright eyed and clear of complexion. In Ireland it is said to cure chicken pox but only if a man gives it to a woman or vice versa. It too is hung around windows on St Johns Eve to deter witches. More importantly it is used to make beer and the flowers to make wine. The leaves can be eaten in salads. One unusual fact is that the plant gives off a gas, Ethylene, to inhibit the growth of other plants around it.



4. Daisy

Daisy is a contraction of 'Days-eye'. It is also known as Bessy Bairnwort for its treatment to children. In my native Somerset it is known as Miss Modesty. The Welsh apparently drank it to lower fevers. In the Middle Ages the juice was fed to children and puppies to restrict their growth. An unusual tale is that the Celts believed every time a child died a daisy appeared. Maidens used them to see who they would marry. A person who treads on too many daisies could be pushing them up by the end of the year. A tale exists that the fairies danced on so many that their feet bled, staining the tops of the outer petal ends. Take a look yourself.



5. Germander Speedwell



In Wales this plant is known also as Cat's eyes or Bird's eye. It also gets the name Dolly's eye as the bright blue flowers resemble doll's eyes. Be warned, picking risks your mothers eyes being pecked out by birds – so it is also known by the name 'Tear-your-Mothers Eyes-out'. It was used in infusions for coughs and to purify the blood. In Germany picking it could cause storms. In some areas it was used as a cure for the painful sounding 'Itch'. In the South it was used to soothe tired eyes. However, those who destroyed it could expect an imminent encounter with an avenger.

6. Mouse-ear Hawkweed



Hawkweeds are extremely complicated and difficult to identify, there being over 245 different species in the UK. Identification is often only possible through the leaves.

In Greek and English folklore this plant was thought to be uprooted by hawks and smeared onto their eyes to improve their vision. Treats coughs and throat infection and has a dual purpose as a love oracle to young maidens. It is named after the backs of its leaves which are furry and resemble a mouse's ear shape. The lemon flowers are borne on a short stem and it is part of the daisy family.

7. Bird's Foot Trefoil

Named 'Eggs and bacon' because of its bright orange and yellow flowers, it is also known as Dutchman's Clogs and Lady's Boots on the shape of the flower. Sinisterly known as Devils Claws or Grannies Toenails because of its black seed pods, it is unusually known as Tom Thumb after its appearance as a restless goblin with black fingers ending in a claw. Children took it school believing it would save them from punishment. It is a favourite with bees and the day-flying five-spot Burnett moth. It is a member of the Pea family.



8. Meadow Buttercup

This is known under many names including Bassinet, Clovewort, Soldiers Buttons, Crow Peckle and Blistercup because its sap raises blisters. In the Middle Ages, beggars would tie crushed leaves in rags over boils to raise blisters to keep wounds open for sympathy. Farmers believed the more buttercups in a field the creamier the milk yield. So they rubbed buttercup juice on the cows' udders, which would in fact put calves off by the bitter taste, so the milk actually became creamier. If it appears yellow under a person's chin they are supposed to be telling the truth. Apparently it's also a favourite with pigs.



9. Yellow Rattle



A plant of sunny, grassy places, with yellow hooded flowers, best known in fruit when the seeds rattle inside the capsule and papery sepal-tube. It is a partial parasite, as some of its nourishment comes from grasses and other herbs through joined roots.

10. Orange Hawkweed



This plant is known as “grim the collier” in mining districts as its sepals are likened to coal-dust. The French use it for lung ailments and according to folk medicine, it is an antibiotic and makes an effective gargle.

11. Cleavers



A 'clinging' plant that climbs and rambles over other plants - it can grow ten feet in a season. Hairs and prickles cover most parts of this plant which make it cling to clothing and fur. The square shaped stem supports small, round fruits, little white flowers and thin leaves in swirls of 6-8. Known also as Goosegrass, in the 15th century it was chopped up and fed to Geese and chickens. Other names include gosling grass, sticky Billy, beggar lice, clinging sweethearts and Robin-run-the-hedge. Oddly it was used by the Greeks to strain hair out of milk. The young shoots can be made into soup and the seeds roasted as a coffee substitute.

12. Greater Stitchwort



In Anglo-Saxon folklore this plant cured pains caused by elf-shot, so it was also known as pixie flower. Anyone picking this flower would be led astray by pixies that would be hiding in it. It is also known as Devil's shirt-buttons or devil's plaything. It's also known as a flower to banish evil. The white star shaped flowers have also led to it being called "star of Bethlehem". To some it causes thunder and lightning and is known as a thunder-flower. In Cornwall it tends to grow where snakes live so is called "Adder's Meat". The plant tends to have weak brittle stems and hence is known as "snap-dragon". The plant attracts moths, butterflies, beetles, bees and hoverflies. Numerous other names include: bachelor's buttons, eyebright, shirt buttons, smocks, mikmaids, star flower, starwort. Jack-in-the-box, pop jack, pop gun and poppers. The latter from the way the seeds pop off when ripe. This makes them popular with the birds.

13. Herb Robert



Found close to human habitation, this is from the cranebill family, and was cultivated in Middle-Age gardens. Often associated with goblins and magic, in Cumberland it is known as “death-come-quickly, so advisable not to pick it. It smells quite horrible so is used as an insect repellent, and hence its names “stinking Bob” and “stink flowers”. It’s also known as red Robin, bloodwort, granny’s needle, hedge lovers, jam tarts, poor Robert redbreasts and snake flowers.

During the Middle-Ages it was used as a wound healer, and against some stomach and digestive complaints and kidney and bladder infections. Used in poultices for inflammation or a remedy for skin eruptions and bruises.

Its name either derives from the 11th century monk, St Robert of Molesme or from Robert, Duke of Normandy, son of William the Conqueror and patron of medical botany. Hence the plant was known as a cure for “Robert’s plague”.

14 Hop Trefoil



The Hop Trefoil is a small, clover-like plant with tiny yellow flower-heads, and is common in short grass. The fruiting heads look like diminutive hops, owing to the dry petals which remain attached. Black Medick is often mistaken for Hop Trefoil but has coiled black pods without remains of the flowers.

