

WILD FLOWERS in CATHAYS CEMETERY



The Friends of Cathays Cemetery

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Wildflowers at Cathays – Facts and Folklore

On one of the few dry days in early June I decided to take a leisurely stroll along the path by the railings next to Fair Oak Road. As the grass had not been cut for a few days, the grass was mixed with an array of flowering plants of all shapes and sizes. Thinking myself to be a budding amateur botanist I armed myself with a copy of "The Wildflowers of Britain and Ireland" by Ralph Coates and a camera and set about identifying as many plants as I could. To my surprise many of the flowers and even the plain common varieties had an interesting story to tell.



1 Borage



The happiness plant on account of its ability to lift man's spirit and cheer him up. The flowers were placed in wine to eliminate sadness and melancholy. The cobalt-blue flowers have been used to decorate salads and soups. Fresh leaves can be added to cheese sandwiches or placed in homemade lemonade as they taste of cucumber. Borage has been used medicinally for weak hearts, to cool fevers and calm delirium. Today it is used on inflamed skin, eczema and other chronic skin conditions.

2 Petty Spurge



All parts of this plant may cause severe discomfort if ingested and contact with sap may irritate the skin. Its curious flowers lack sepals or petals. The milky sap is acrid and poisonous and was formally used to treat warts. The Petty Spurge is a smaller version of the Sun Spurge.

3 Red Clover



The shape of the clover's three-lobed leaf is much used in church architecture such as window lights and tracery to represent the Trinity. Clover is a magical and protective plant and in the North, farmers put it in their stables to protect livestock. It is said that clover only grows where elves live, and it's the only plant that will enable the wearer to see fairies. To dream of clover means health, happiness in marriage and for men, a prosperous wife. If its leaves fold up, it means that it's about to rain. Clover stands for fertility, contentment and plenty. The flowers are good pollinators for bees leading to its nickname "bee bread". It's especially visited by the five-spot burnet moth. Red clover syrup was a cure for whooping cough and is traditionally a blood and skin cleanser. It is used in the treatment of breast cancer. The flowers and leaves make a solution to treat coughs, indigestion, acne, eczema, enlarged glands and even as a sedative.

4 Rough Hawkbit



Rough hawkbit appears during August and September. It was recommended for kidney complaints and dropsy. It is a powerful diuretic to help rid your body of salt (sodium) and water. It is a similar species to a dandelion.

5 Wood Avens



This small yellow flowered plant is found in shady places. It has hooked animal-dispersed fruits. In gardens it can be awkward to remove as its brittle stems tend to snap, leaving the roots. It is faintly clove-scented and the roots used to be used to flavour ale or even as an insect repellent.

6 Self Heal



Self heal grows freely on grassy verges. It consists of a cylindrical spike of purple flowers. It apparently has been used in China for over 2,000 years for liver complaints. It is known as Carpenter's herb and is supposedly effective in healing wounds inflicted by chisels, sickles or other sharp carpenter's tools. It is also known as hook-weed or woundwort, as it was used to stem the flow of blood from deep cuts. Miraculously the plant is known as all-heal, touch-and-heal and heart's ease as it allows someone to cure themselves without help from a doctor.

Used also as a mouthwash and to gargle with. In the 16th century it was even used to treat throat diseases such as quinsy and diphtheria. Modern usage is against herpes and AIDES, and even diabetes and high blood pressure.

7 Ribwort Plantain



A very common distinctive plant with flower heads borne on long stalks. Many children have played games with these tough-stalked flower-heads. Flowers April to August.

8 Primrose



The “first-rose” of spring. In folklore they are a symbol of youth, believed to be lucky in love and marriage. If you were to hang a bunch of primroses in the cowshed, your cattle would be protected from evil spirits. A bunch left on your doorstep on the eve of May Day would repel witches. The leaves and petals would be added to salads, and eating them turns the invisible visible and children would be able to see fairies. The flowers were used for “he loves me, he loves me not”. In Germany the flower could even open locks. Wives used to make primrose tea to ease rheumatism, arthritis or migraine.

The Romans used primroses against malaria and jaundice. In Wales primrose juice was a cure for madness. An ointment was made by boiling the flowers in lard for chilblains. Juice from the stems rubbed on the face removed spots, freckles and blemishes.

9 Lesser Celandine



Flowering early in the year, between March and May in woodland, hedgerows, stream banks and damp pastures. They are known as pilewort and have been made into an ointment to treat haemorrhoids. Other local names are Golden guineas, Golden Stars, Brighteye and Starflower. They have glossy yellow flowers which close up in the cold or in rain and are a member unsurprisingly of the buttercup family. They are supposed to remind farmers of cows' teats, hence their names, Butter-and-cheese, Cream-and-Butter, and they are hung in the cowshed to ensure a rich supply of creamy milk. The high concentration of vitamin C in the leaves brought about its name of Scurvywort, the leaves being boiled and eaten like spinach.

10 Wood Anemone



A member of the buttercup family, flourishing in windy places. In wet weather the flowers droop to protect the stamens from the rain, said to provide shelter for elves. This slow-growing plant only spreads at a speed of 2 metres every century. The flowers are loved by pollinators such as bees, bumblebees and certain flies. Their musky smell has led to them being known as Smell-fox. The plant is actually poisonous, but people used to press a poultice of the leaves on their foreheads to cure headache. Local names include, Thunderbolt, Granny's nightcap, Moggie nightgown, Moll of the Woods, Moon flower, Silver bells, Drops of snow and Thimbleweed.

11 Tufted Vetch



A plant which grows high through the tall grass or hedgerow by means of its ladder-like leaves. The pale purple flowers fade to deep violet and are shaped like spires of small pea-flowers. The smooth pods contain 2-6 seeds each. The many leaflets are tipped with branched tendrils to aid its climbing. Flowers June to August.

12 Rosebay Willowherb



This plant grows widespread in section H of the Cemetery. It consists of very pretty slender spikes of rose-purple flowers. In autumn it forms masses of plumed seeds as the fruit splits. Originally this was a rare plant but was spread through the creation of railway embankments. It spreads underground and flowers July – September.

13 Common Ragwort



This relative of the Daisy causes problems in pasture as it is toxic to livestock. The poison destroys the liver over a period of months. One of the few creatures to tolerate its poison is the Cinnabar moth, whose black and yellow caterpillars take over the plant's chemical defence, making them distasteful to birds. In folk medicine, ragwort was used to cure eye infections, cancerous sores and painful joints.

14 Lords and Ladies



The wavy-edged leaves of the Arum push through the ground in late winter, usually in a shady place. It is also known also as Cuckoopint, due to its connection to early spring and the arrival of the cuckoo. It has also been called Adam & Eve, bulls and cows, men & women, kings & queens, Jack in the pulpit, starchwort, arrowroot and stallions & mares. Powdered and mixed with rose water, the starch was made into face-cream to whiten the skin and improve the complexion.

The pale green hood of the lords and ladies either contain a purple or yellow poker-like spike. Its bright red berries in July and August are poisonous although the root is edible and quite nutritious if well baked.

