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Garden History, Gardens and Plants –

Talks and Displays on all aspects of plants and gardens, both ancient and modern

All my talks can be adapted to suit your requirements. I can talk in costume and provide a table display for some talks.

The talks are designed to be informative and light-hearted so that they can be enjoyed by all.

All talks are presented using good quality images. I supply my own projector and laptop.

A selection of my talks – please ask about others.

My book about Medieval Gardens is now due out January 2022. Published by White Owl Books.

‘Gardens in the Age of Chivalry’ - Medieval Gardens- This talk has been completely revised to tie in with the book about medieval gardens that I have nearly completed. I discuss the influences on medieval gardens, explaining the garden features, how gardens were used uses of the garden and talk about some of the plants.

Another completely new two talks for 2022 are-

Easter and Springtime Customs. How the return of the warmth of spring has been celebrated in the past with Easter and Spring traditions. The talk includes flowers, some music.

‘To Drive the Cold Winter Away’ - How our ancestors passed away the cold, dark nights of winter, whether Pagan or Christian. The talk includes some music.

‘A Rose by Any Other Name’ - Roses have had an interesting story, from being symbols of Aphrodite and Venus, Christ, Romantic Love and the practical uses of medicine, food flavouring and cosmetics. Learn about the nations favourite flower.

‘Death in the Garden’ – My most popular talk is now available as a book. It has gone into a second print run!

Over the centuries poisonous plants have been used to remove an unwanted partner or rival, as aphrodisiacs, for pest control and the means to foretell the future or speak with the gods.

Learn about the mysterious mandrake and how a pot of Basil helped to conceal a savage murder, until...

Be warned, many of these plants may well be growing in your garden.

This is a popular talk as it appeals equally to gardeners and non-gardeners.

‘Gardens in the time of Jane Austen’ – Jane Austen uses gardens to set the scene as her characters go about their daily lives. We will look at the gardens of taste, where size did matter. What did the gardens look like? How were they looked after by the invisible gardeners? All will be revealed.

‘Shakespeare’s Flowers’ – Shakespeare made many references to plants and gardens. He also made use of classical mythology about plants and the current medical theory to emphasise what his actors were saying. Plants, poetry and social history. This talk can be given in period costume.

‘A Bouquet of Weeds’ – We curse them and try to kill them, but in the past most of our common weeds were grown on purpose because they were useful; yes, even Ground Elder! Learn how to love your weeds and get your own back at the same time.

‘The Language of Flowers’ – A Victorian Gentleman’s amorous adventures described through the now mostly forgotten language of flowers. Flowers, social history and romance; what more could you ask for?

‘Capability Brown. Hero or Hooligan?’ Lancelot Brown was probably England’s most famous garden designer. Was he the vandal some say? After listening to my talk, you can decide for yourself.

‘Heritage Lost. The Menagerie and the Lost Grotto.’ - I was Head Gardener when Gervase Jackson Stops created the quirky and memorable garden at the Menagerie, Horton, Northants. This is a personal memory of the gardens being built and of the grotto that has since been removed.

‘The Georgian Gardener’ – The life and work of a Georgian Gardener. This is based around a talk that I prepared for Stamford Georgian Festival from contemporary gardening books.

This talk discusses the practical work and the life of the gardener as he met not only the challenges of new technology and plant introductions, but also changing fashions in garden design.

The talk can be given in Georgian costume and includes a display of period gardening equipment.

‘A History of Gardening in 100 Objects’- Well less than 100, or we would be there for hours, but the idea is the same as the radio series. I will bring a display of gardening items and explain the gardening and social significance of the object. Gardening and History, and some mysterious items too.

‘Eat Your Greens!’ – The story of Vegetables in England. New exotics, such as the now humble potato, and how vegetables were grown.

‘Flora and Pomona’ - A roman slave gardener will help you to understand the practical and luxurious gardens of ancient Rome. What did the Romans do for us? They gave us Ground Elder for a start!

‘In a Monastery Garden’ – Monastic Gardens will be explained by Brother Michael, including their uses, symbolism, features and some of the plants. Parts of this talk are included in my book, **‘An Introduction to Medieval Gardens. Gardens in the Age of Chivalry.’**

‘Knots and Bowers. The Tudor Garden’ – Pleasure Gardens showed your status and were for entertainment, privacy and to show off your wealth. Elsewhere, plants were grown for practical purposes.

‘Many a Sundry Flower’ - The early uses of plants: The practical uses of plants from the medieval period, some of the plants are still in use today. It includes medical, culinary, and cosmetic but also some of the more unexpected uses such as lighting.

‘Gods in the Garden’ – Statues were placed in gardens throughout history for decoration and perhaps to suggest that the owner resembled the figure in the statue, bravely heroic in the case of Hercules. Learn the stories behind the statues. Who needs TV, when visiting gardens will become much more interesting after hearing this talk?

‘The Glory of the Garden’ – The Victorian and Edwardian Garden, and the gardeners who did the real work. Based around Kipling’s poem, Mr. Brown, Head Gardener to the Right Honourable de Basing, will describe the gardener’s life from apprentice to Head Gardener and the work that it entailed, including glasshouses, planting, different garden areas and the work involved.

‘All in a Garden Green’ – Take a pleasant stroll up the garden path to learn about the different areas or buildings that you may find in an historic garden. Temples, bridges, hermitages and some more unusual features that you may want to investigate during your next garden visit.

‘Early Gardening Methods’ – The gardener’s work from the Roman times onwards. Some methods make good sense today; others are interesting, but of dubious value or positively dangerous.

‘Making a Splash’ – The history of fountains and the use of water in the garden from the Romans to modern times. How to find a suitable water source and build an historic water feature. Some ideas are still great for use in your garden today.

‘Ghastly Gardening - Horticulture’s Horrible History’ – It wasn’t all sweetness and delight; horticulture has its own Horrible History too! Evicted peasants, hermits, murder and ‘widow makers’- all in the name of Gardening!

‘The Sorcerer’s Herbs’ - This is a talk with a Harry Potter - type theme. There were many plants used for magical purposes. Mandrake was not the only dangerous plant to harvest. Beware of woodpeckers waiting to peck your eyes out! You will have to hear the talk to find out why! Plants were used for magic and in potions. Sadly, there is no guarantee that any of the spells will work.

‘Plants among the Ruins’ – Many people visit historic sites to look at ruined castles, monasteries etc. This talk looks at the plants you may find growing there, why they may be there and how they were used in the past.

‘We Made a Medieval Garden’ – How I made the medieval garden, problems and all, at The Prebendal Manor, Nassington, Northants.

‘William Cowper and his Gardens’ – The poet William Cowper discovered for himself the therapeutic benefits of gardening. Using his poems and letters we discover his trials and successes and the gardens that he loved.

OTHER TALKS

‘A Medieval Christmas’ – A talk presented in 14 century clothing about the Christmas traditions, myths and plants of the medieval period, with music played on early instruments.

‘Pilgrimage – In search of Saints and Relics’ – Pilgrimage could be carried out for devout reasons or as an excuse for a holiday. Join me on a journey to distant shrines and witness the miracles and frauds of pilgrimage. The talk includes music played on replica period instruments.

‘The Road to Santiago’ – A personal look at one of the most popular pilgrimages today. I follow the route from France to northwest Spain, not only as it would have been experienced by medieval pilgrims, but also by modern ones. This talk also includes music.

‘Food and Feast - Medieval Food and Banquets’ – Forget Hollywood’s version of bone throwing and dogs all over the place. Discover how the wealthy really ate, and what the peasants had too.

‘Courtly Love’ – The medieval ideal of Chivalry and Courtly Love did not always meet the standards that it aimed for. Discover what was meant to take place – and what really happened...