

PINKS – Also known as the *Gilly Flower*, they were considered a symbol of the Virgin Mary.

PRIMROSE – It was used to decorate church altars in May, ‘the month of Mary’, and was seen as a symbol of beauty and innocence.

ROSE – This flower symbolises the Virgin herself, who was sometimes known as the ‘mystic Rose’. Here we are growing two antique roses: *Rosa Gallica* (the ‘apothecary’s rose’) and *Rosa Alba*. The *Gallica* is thought to be the oldest cultivated rose, the ancestor of all European medieval roses. Rosary beads were made from fragrant compressed petals.

ROSEMARY – The pale blue flowers are said to have taken their colour from Mary’s veil when she spread it over a rosemary bush. Legend also says that the plant provided shelter to the Holy Family during the flight into Egypt.

SNOWDROP – ‘Our Lady’s Bells’. Snowdrops flower at *Candlemas* (The Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, also known as The Purification of Saint Mary the Virgin), which falls on February 2nd. They were also known as *Candlemas Bells*.

VIOLET – ‘Our Lady’s Modesty’. The violet’s delicacy, colour, sweet scent and heart-shaped leaves refer to Mary’s constancy, humility and innocence. They are said to have blossomed outside her window when she spoke the words: ‘Behold, the handmaid of the Lord’.

WILD STRAWBERRY – Designated as the fruit of the Virgin Mary and of blessed souls in heaven. They are depicted growing in the grass beneath Mary’s feet in paintings by Jan Van Eyck. The strawberry was also called ‘Fruitful Virgin’ because it has both flowers (white) and fruit on the plant at the same time, representing the twin attributes of purity and fruitfulness.

Notes collected by Marion Standing

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THE CHURCH OF ST MARY DE HAURA
NEW SHOREHAM SUSSEX

The Mary Garden



THE MARY GARDEN

*Established as part of the St Mary de Haura
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In Medieval times, a garden could have a symbolic and spiritual dimension. The *hortus conclusus* or enclosed garden was a sacred area which might represent the Christian soul, enclosed in the body, or the Church, formed of the body of the faithful. It was also, in the late Middle Ages, an image of the Blessed Virgin Mary, identified with the bride in the *Song of Songs* in the Old Testament. In the fifteenth century depictions of the Virgin in a Paradise Garden were frequent, in particular in Flemish and German painting. In these images, the flowers all have a symbolic meaning, representing Mary's virtues.

By growing these flowers outside our own church dedicated to St Mary, we have created an area of colour and interest and also linked ourselves with the medieval inhabitants of Shoreham, who would have understood very well the spiritual significance of these lovely plants.

CHRISTMAS ROSE – This is said to have bloomed on Christmas Day to honour the birth of Jesus, son of Mary.

COWSLIP – 'Our Lady's Keys'. In Medieval times, St Mary was often referred to as 'Our Lady'.

DAISY – Symbolic of purity and simplicity, it is widely portrayed in the 'flowery mead' or meadow in medieval paintings.

FORGET-ME-NOT – 'Our Lady's Eyes'.

FOXGLOVE – 'Our Lady's Gloves'.

HEARTSEASE – Known as Herb Trinity because of its white, yellow and purple colouring. Common in medieval paintings of Mary.

IRIS – It is compared to the Virgin in mystic devotion. The blade-shaped foliage denotes the sorrows which 'pierced her heart' in accordance with Simeon's prophecy at the Presentation of Christ in the Temple.

LADY'S MANTLE – 'Our Lady's Mantle'. The leaves are covered with fine silky hairs on which raindrops can settle without wetting the leaf. Possibly because of this it was likened to a cloak for the Blessed Virgin.

LILY – Lilies regularly appear in paintings of the Annunciation, when the angel Gabriel greeted Mary with the joyful news that she was to be the mother of Jesus, the Saviour of the World. The Venerable Bede, the great eighth-century chronicler of the English Church and people, claimed that the whiteness of the petals represented her physical purity, and the golden anthers the radiant light of her soul. According to tradition, the dazzling whiteness of the Madonna lily became so only after she picked one – prior to that it had been yellow.

LILY OF THE VALLEY – 'Our Lady's Tears'. It was said to have grown where she wept, and was one of the flowers used to decorate the 'Lady Chapels' of churches. It is shown growing in the grass beneath Mary's feet in paintings by Jan Van Eyck.

LUNGWORT – 'Mary's Tears'. The white spots on the leaves are her tear stains, and the changing colour of the flowers from pink to blue represent her blue eyes reddened with weeping. Lungwort is also known as 'Mary and Joseph'.

MARIGOLD – Called 'Mary's Gold' by early Christians who placed the flowers around statues of Mary, offering the blossoms in place of coins.

MILK THISTLE – The pale veins of the leaves are said to contain milk which fell on them while Mary was nursing Jesus.

PEONY – A gloriously rich medieval flower which features in many paintings and tapestries.

PERIWINKLE – The Virgin's Flower, probably because of its blue, star-like flowers. Mary was often referred to as *Stella Maris*, 'Star of the Sea'.