

# **The Hospitallers' Garden at St Mary de Haura**



**A history of medicinal herbs in  
Shoreham-by-sea**

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## **A History of Medicinal Herbs**

The growing of medicinal herbs by a religious establishment has a long history. The Hospitallers' Garden commemorates the Knights Hospitaller, who, in the 12th century, had a hospital in Shoreham. The hospital was then on the route of pilgrims to the Holy Land and other places, giving shelter to travellers.

Historic maps show the hospital located south of the present High Street, opposite John Street whose name gives a link to this establishment. There was also a Carmelite priory sited near the Footbridge as well as the Hospital of St James situated above the north-east corner of the Churchyard. The coastline of Shoreham is much altered since the 12<sup>th</sup> century when the harbour and the river Adur's wide estuary mouth were located close to the present-day railway-crossing bridge rather than further east as now. The 12<sup>th</sup> century saw no long shingle spit on which the present Shoreham Beach development is located.

By the 16th century, encroachment by the sea had washed away both the Hospitallers' and Carmelites' Houses. The Reformation, during the reign of Henry VIII, saw the further dissolution of religious Houses, along with the loss of the associated medical facilities. Plagues and the silting-up of the harbour added to Shoreham's economic problems. As upkeep became unaffordable, the weakened nave of the Church collapsed in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century during the great storm. The ruins of the west wall are situated west of the Hospitallers' garden.

The tradition of growing medicinal plants for the use of parishioners, however, continued. George Herbert,

(1593-1633), priest, poet, and mystic, in his book '*The Country Parson*', directed advice to clergy to provide medicinal plants to poor parishioners to save them the expense of going to the Apothecary. Nicholas Culpepper, (1616-1654) produced his Book, '*The English Physician*'. Today, we have a nearby Medical Centre and local pharmacies while the Hospitallers' Garden continues to produce useful herbs such as those used by our predecessors.

### **Plants in the Hospitallers' Garden**

The selected plants in the garden are cared for in order to maintain the history of plants used for either Culinary or Medicinal Purposes.

**Rosemary** used to stimulate memory and as an anti-inflammatory.

**Sage** and **Thyme** for their antiseptic qualities.

**Peppermint** for digestive problems as well as for flavouring sweets.

**Lemon Balm** for calming.

**Parsley** gives good flavour to food and the root was used in kidney and bladder medicines.

**Oregano** for anti-inflammatory, to treat chest infections.

**Lavender Hyssop and Chamomile** for both calming and healing. Small sachets filled with dried flowers provide a pleasant scent. The flowers are attractive to butterflies, moths, and bees too.

**Elecampane** is a tall plant with long leaves and yellow daisy flowers with a large root which Culpepper describes as 'curing pestilential fevers and even the plague,' among its other medicinal uses.

**Marshmallow** has large roots used for digestive and urine tract disorders. The boiled roots make a poultice.

**Scabious** to treat scabies,

**Fleabane** to get rid of fleas.

**Vervain** for health conditions, including bladder stones.  
Romans and Celts regarded the plant as sacred.

**Lady's Mantle**, sacred to the Virgin Mary and used for women's health issues.

**Feverfew** cured headaches and fevers.

**Chives** are an excellent culinary herb, useful in salads and other dishes.

**Foxgloves** were the original source of the heart medication, Digitalis, which is the plant's botanical name,

**St. John's Wort** used as an antidepressant, still valued today.

**Southernwood**, when dried, deters clothes moths.

**The Hospitallers' Garden continues a fine tradition to help conserve wildflowers and herbs.**