

Birthwort is an example of the medieval Doctrine of Signatures, based on the idea that plants could be used to treat problems in parts of the body they resembled. The bulb of these small yellow flowers was believed to look like the womb, so it was used during childbirth. Today, it is regarded as one of the most poisonous of plants.



An old damask rose, *Rosa gallica* 'Versicolor', also known as *Rosa mundi*, has a heady scent. It grows in Henry, The Poet's Garden at the Prebendal Manor.



A highly-scented pink rose in Henry, The Poet's Garden.

The garden named after him contains a large variety of flowering plants. These include *Rosa mundi*, iris, yellow daisy-like inula, ox-eye daisies, allium and Madonna lilies. There are also familiar herbs, such as borage, rue and fennel. Less common is birthwort, *Aristolochia clematitis*, with attractive, pale yellow flowers.

"This was widely used during childbirth throughout the medieval period," says Jane. "Sadly, it probably only made the event more life-threatening. Its deadly effects have only been documented and identified in recent decades."

The plant was recommended by Dioscorides, the Greek physician and botanist, in the first century AD. Roman texts recommended it as a medicine to be ingested to treat asthma, spasms, pains and the expulsion of the afterbirth. Its name reflects its common usage, taken from the Greek *aristos*, meaning best, and *lochia*, meaning childbirth.

On the southern perimeter of the garden is the Rose Walk. On one side, it is bordered by wooden screening that supports climbing roses. These are densely underplanted with perennials and annuals, including geranium, campion, peonies, ferns, pulmonaria, primula and aquilegia. Vines are set at both ends of the perimeter.

The walk leads into, and looks out across, the adjoining Pleasure Park, separated from the garden by an ancient wall.

In the park

On entering the 4-acre Pleasure Park, there are more edible treats, with an orchard and Nut Walk, made from trained hazel, *Corylus avellana*. Records confirm an orchard at the Manor centuries ago, providing fruits for cooking and >

The Rose Walk forms one side of Henry, The Poet's Garden. It leads away from the formal garden into the Pleasure Park, orchard and nuttury. *Rosa alba* and *R. Gallica* intertwine around sturdy oak screening. The walk is densely underplanted with annuals and perennials.

