

British Art Talks podcast

Season 1, Episode 7 Medicinal Garden

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Anna Reid: *British Art Talks* from the Paul Mellon Centre; championing new ways of understanding British art, history, and culture.

I'm Anna Reid, Head of Research at the Paul Mellon Centre. Welcome to Episode 7, the final episode of the Summer 2020 series of *British Art Talks*. In this episode, I'm joined by three speakers.

Clare Hickman, a Senior Lecturer in History at Newcastle University. She's recently completed a research fellowship addressing the garden as laboratory.

Claire Preston is Professor of Renaissance Literature at Queen Mary University of London and works on the intersections of early-modern literary and scientific writing.

Carole Rawcliffe is Professor Emeritus of Medieval History at the University of East Anglia. She is published widely on the history of the pursuit of health in the premodern period.

Pharmacognosy is the branch of knowledge concerned with medicinal drugs obtained from plants and other natural sources. Today, pharmaceutical crops are growing on an industrial scale. Research continues to identify and find new uses for medicinal substances such as colchicine, a bitter-tasting alkaloid found in the crocus used to treat inflammatory conditions, or vincristine, an anti-cancer compound of the Madagascar periwinkle.

[background noise]

This episode draws the ears and eyes to the therapeutic properties of the landscape. In a series of thought pieces followed by a discussion, spanning a timeframe from the medieval to the 18th century, our speakers venture beyond the uses and applications of herbs by physicians and apothecaries to reflect on intuitive knowledge, narrative, and unseen processes in a rich experimental sight and history of the medicinal garden.

[music]

Carole Rawcliffe on the medieval garden.

[background noise]

Carole Rawcliffe: In 2013, a report to parliament confirmed that universal access to green space could save the NHS £2.1 billion a year in health charges alone. More recently, during the COVID-19 epidemic, the media have repeatedly highlighted the beneficial effects of gardens and gardening in fostering mental health in lockdown. Neither of these findings would have surprised anyone living in the 14th or 15th centuries when gardens were believed to possess powerful therapeutic properties well beyond their value as a source for medicinal plants.

The word medieval is often used today as shorthand for anything that seems backward or superstitious, but just because they didn't know about germ theory or the circulation of the blood, doesn't mean that our medieval ancestors were any less intelligent than us, or lacked a lively sense of self-preservation, especially during plague time. Indeed, being well aware that, once lost, good health could rarely be recovered, they placed great importance upon preventative medicine and the need to keep physically and mentally fit. Their approach was based upon ancient Greek ideas about human physiology.

Humoral matter, which nourished the body, was produced from food, and transported to the extremities, in the veins, as a substance called natural spirit. The quality of one's environment was crucial here, for it was understood that corrupt, foul-smelling air spread diseases such as plague. Guides to health for all pockets, in prose and verse, circulated widely in the late and middle ages providing clear advice about how to keep your mind and body in optimum condition through the management of external agents known as non-naturals.

A good diet was naturally essential, as was fresh, clean air and regular exercise which was good for the digestion, as well as keeping you fit. It's easy to see what a crucial role gardens played in such a holistic system in which mental, physical, and spiritual health were interdependent. Not only were they a source of fresh invigorating air, and a place where one could take exercise or relax, the scent of

plants, the vista of rolling lawns, and sight of lovely flowers, the plush of fountains and song of birds, all contributed to a sense of well-being.

Medieval society was, moreover, profoundly religious, placing great emphasis upon the therapeutic effects of prayer and meditation. Where better to pray than in a garden, with its inevitable resonances with Eden, where Adam and Eve had enjoyed, but lost perfect health? Because of their vital role in both conservation and restoration of health, gardens were regarded as an essential therapeutic resource, especially in monasteries. When the Augustinians of Barnwell felt depressed or burnt out by the constant discipline of the religious round, they were prescribed soothing walks in the gardens and vineyards, rather than medication in the infirmary.

Lack of adequate green space was, on the other hand, a cause of bitter complaint during the monastic equivalent of the Ofsted inspection. In 1455, the Durham Benedictines protested that it was impossible to keep fit because they had so little garden space in which to exercise. Significantly, their complaint was upheld. Dependence on gardens increased during plague time at all levels of society. One of the most popular guides against pestilence advised its readers to smell roses, violets, lilies, and other cooling odours before leaving home.

While a popular 15th-century verse recommended that you should walk in clean air and avoid black mists. Delight in gardens for their great sweetness, which is sound advice that we can still follow today.

[music]

Anna Reid: Claire Preston on the medicinal garden of the 17th century.

[background noise]

Claire Preston: Seventeenth-century science is largely determined by the work of Francis Bacon, who, in the advancement of learning, gives us a theory of scientific activity and progress. He lays out what needs to be done. One of the things he talks about is the idea of reparation or reconvening of lost knowledge. This is knowledge that was lost to mankind, a perfect understanding that fell when Adam fell in the Garden of Eden. Bacon calls this a knowledge broken. Botanical and physic gardens of this period seem to echo those kinds of undertakings of reparation and collection.

If you look at a picture of the Oxford physic garden or the Padua physic garden that are on the website, you'll see that it's laid out in quadrants, in subsections very elaborately. The sections of the garden might be organised by cure or by season or by place of origin. This last parameter, place of origin, is yet another way that the botanical garden maps knowledge, attempts to put it all together literally in the

earth. These botanical physic gardens are indicative of lots of impulses to gather, collect, classify, describe the things of the natural world.

In that sense, they are encyclopedic, and they also, particularly, try to be medical encyclopedias. They're interested in finding medicinal plants that cure diseases. That reconvening or collection of natural specimens is understood as an Adamic enterprise - something that Adam himself did in the Garden of Eden. Lost medicinal knowledge to be reconvened and recuperated is going to be discovered through something that we now call the doctrine of signatures. Signatures are signs that are inherent in plants particularly, but in the whole of the natural world, that tell us what they do, what they're good for, what they can be used for.

These signatures are usually detected as suggestive physical analogies between the look of plant materials or plant parts, and the diseases or conditions or parts of the human anatomy that they are meant to cure or assist. For example, a walnut shell and the walnut kernel look like the skull in the brain and were thus meant to be good for wounds to the head or diseases of the brain. The hairier sorts of ferns such as Maidenhair, supposedly cures baldness, Convolvulus, or Morning Glory treats intestinal ailments because the plant twists the way the gut does. One of my favorite works of signaturism is one that's not related specifically to medical signatures. It's one of the most remarkable signaturist works of the 17th century. This is Sir Thomas Browne, *The Garden of Cyrus* of 1658. Browne was a distinguished learned physician who wrote extensively on theology and natural philosophy. He was interested in signatures and symbols as part of his professional and scientific investigations.

The signature that he writes about is called the Quincunx. By that, he means the lozenge or diamond shape, or, decussation, is another word he uses. These are fancy words for a diamond shape parallelogram, which has four points at each of the angles, plus a central point. The Quincunx was used initially as a way of planting trees to allow maximum air and sun and room for each plant, but Browne extends this very utilitarian idea to include a huge variety of very unlikely things. For example, he finds the Quincunx in Roman battle formations, in Greek bed Springs, the way they strung the ropes, starfish, seaweed, thistles, even the inside of a bee's mouth.

The Garden of Cyrus is not really a work of practical signatures. I think that's obvious from those examples. Instead, it's very playful, and it's especially much more mystical than medical signaturism. The other thing about *The Garden of Cyrus* is that it is about verger itself, not really about gardens. The basis of verger for Browne is that it is spontaneous and rampant and uncontrolled. Its verdancy and vigour is itself a signature of the marvels of the vegetable world. It's natural rampancy, which he imagines must have been characteristic of the Garden of Eden.

The signature I'm suggesting, and what Browne seems to be saying is that the signature is God's way of proposing Himself and His work to our inspection, and we neglect our devotion to Him if we neglect that search

Anna Reid: Clare Hickman on the doctor's garden of the 18th century.

[background noise]

Clare Hickman: Here I am in the windy and rainy Northeast looking out onto my blustery garden, but I would like to imagine that we are in the summer of 1794. We are on a lovely sunny day, and we are walking around the landscape garden of Dr. John Coakley Lettsom. Like many busy medical practitioners who have successful practices, he has a city house in the middle of London, which is where he works from. He also has this rural estate, which is out in Camberwell, which we now think of as a busy London suburb, but back then was quite a rural village. It's here that his wife lives, and it's where he spends his leisure time when he has some.

Let us walk around this garden on the winding paths. We go past the Botanic garden, which is laid out scientifically and systematically. There's also an orchard, there's pleasure grounds, and there's a vegetable garden, which we pass at lunchtime. We can see the gardeners hand-feeding the tortoises, which have been sent from America. Like many medics of the time, Lettsom was introduced to botany and developed a love of plants as part of his training. Before he became a successful physician, he started out as an apothecary's apprentice in Yorkshire, where his time was spent botanising, collecting and naming plants in the hedgerows and fields around Settle.

This was a way of understanding both their medicinal and botanical value. Other medical practitioners though, particularly physicians, developed their botanical knowledge through university courses, which use gardens as a teaching and research laboratory. Botany was part of the main medical curriculum during this period. In Edinburgh, in the late 18th century, Professor John Hope taught these medical students within his state of the art garden on Leith Walk. Here he lectured on the use of all the senses as ways of knowing about plants, particularly taste and smell.

He describes how you should develop those senses, say, taste, in the same way that someone tasting wine would. He used the material from the garden, which was often brought in, as part of his teaching practice. Dissection of individual plants, so holding them by hand and close observation was an essential part of the education, which is about understanding physiology and anatomy, which could be transferred perhaps to animals and humans, as much as understanding which plants might be medicinally useful. It's perhaps not surprising then, that medical practitioners, such as Lettsom, had their own botanic collections later in life.

At a time when the ever-expanding empire meant that plants were seen as economically important, both at home and abroad, and they were arriving daily in massive numbers on docks around the country, many people from the landed gentry to medical practitioners and lawyers, took an interest in growing and understanding these new vegetable productions.

Dr. John Fothergill, writing in 1774, said that he called himself a sensuous botanist because he collected what he found delightful to all his senses. As a man who had an enormous botanic collection of his own, it's obvious that plant collecting was for enjoyment for him as well as scientific and economic interest.

Although it is worth reflecting here on the intersection between these gardens, our wider histories of empire and the slave trade. The relationship between slavery and science is particularly embedded in the natural history and botanic collecting networks of the time. As Kathleen Murphy has shown, particularly in relation to the 17th century, many of the maritime men, which included a large number of ship surgeons who were collecting for naturalists and botanists around the Atlantic, were doing so along slave trade routes. The ships then, which perhaps went out carrying human cargo, may often have returned with productions of trays, alongside exotic plants and animals for British gardens.

Some of these specimens were even collected by enslaved people themselves. Someone like Lettsom, a Quaker, who released the slaves on the plantation he inherited when he was in his 20s, was still benefiting from the Atlantic slave trade, as plants and animals that came in off these ships ended up decorating his garden. Like the gardens themselves, which formed interlinked networks across the empire as places where plants could be acclimatised, grown, and dispersed to other places, such as Kew Gardens, owned by the King and John Hope's garden at Leith Walk.

It is clear that the beautiful use for-- and the scientific interest in garden terms-- are inextricably linked to wider global, social, and economic context. The beauty of the gardens that we go and visit now, or even the plants that we grow in our own gardens, often hides the much darker and violent past.

[music]

Anna Reid: Carole Rawcliffe is author of *"Delectable Sights and Fragrant Smells": Gardens and Health in Late Medieval and Early Modern England*, where she cites the 15th-century Neoplatonist physician, Marsilio Ficino's 1489, *Three Books on Life*. "You can draw the most from the spirit of the world, especially if you nourish and foster yourself by things which are still living, fresh, and all but still clinging, as it were, to Mother Earth, and if you dwell as frequently as possible among plants, which have a pleasant smell, for all herbs, flowers, trees, and fruits have an odour,

even though you often do not notice it. By this odour, they restore and invigorate you on all sides as if by the breath and spirit of the life of the world. Your spirit I say is very similar by nature to odours of this sort, and through the spirit, a mediator between the body and the soul, the odours also easily refresh the body, and are of wondrous advantage to the soul.”

Carole, your words, as well as Ficino's words, point to a sense of the very physical health benefits, not just of diet, fresh air, and exercise, but the sensorial, and even the aesthetic experiences of sentient rolling lawns or bubbling fountains. Are we to take seriously these medieval intuitions?

Carole Rawcliffe: We certainly are. Ficino, who lived in Florence at the end of the 15th century, he died in 1499, was a philosopher *and* a physician. The extract that you've just read comes from a wonderful guide to how to have a long and healthy life, and to stay happy as well. Just advice we can all follow, I feel. Medieval ideas about the senses are very different from our own. People believed that images were absorbed directly into the eye and thence to the brain bearing with them the imprint, and the nature, or actual substance, of whatever you happen to look at.

If you were transfixed by some horrific site such as a person dying of plague, there was a strong possibility that you could contract the disease itself because you would absorb it into your body. Conversely, though, something beautiful or very holy would have a health-giving effect on both the body and the mind. The same as Ficino points out, host to of scent, which could make you very ill or even kill you if they came from something like a rotting dung heap, or greatly enhance your capacity to resist disease. Interestingly, Robert Burton, a great 17th-century author of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, actually, becomes very medieval when he says that sweet smells of fine fresh meadow flowers, and the melodious harmony of birds, can dispel the black, dark, cold humor of melancholia. That's what we call depression.

Also, in addition to this theory of intermission, we should bear in mind that scent, sound, and sight had a dramatic effect on your animal spirits that influenced how you behaved, that drove your nervous system, that influenced your thoughts and your reactions. The calm beauty of a garden would soothe your spirit. It would keep you relaxed and happy and contented, rather than sending your animal spirits into a frenzy of fear and terror, and perhaps cause a heart attack or a stroke.

Anna Reid: Claire Preston is author of *The Poetics of Scientific Investigation in Seventeenth-century England*. She points to Thomas Browne's *The Garden of Cyrus*. “The ancients venially delighted in flourishing gardens. Many were florists that knew not the true use of a flower. In Pliny's days, none had directly treated of that subject. Some commendably affected plantations of venomous vegetables. Some confined their delights on to single plants. Cato seemed to dote upon cabbage,

while the ingenuous delight of tulipists, stands saluted with hard language, even by their own professors.”

Claire, Browne's words in *The Garden of Cyrus*, give such a sense of adventure, and the play of metaphor in the 17th-century pursuit of knowledge. Did narrative play a much more central and generative role in Bacon's empirical method than has been appreciated?

Claire Preston: It's certainly true that Bacon has long been thought to be the person who banished the metaphorical, the analogical, the narrative from the development of scientific writing, and that's clearly not true. He doesn't ever say that. In fact, one of my favorite phrases of Bacon's is that he says, “In order to express the new ideas that the science of the 17th-century is throwing up, we must pray in aid of similitudes.” He has a very strong sense that the resources of rhetorical figures, of tropes and figures, of analogies and similes, can actually assist scientific expression, and possibly even assist scientific thinking, and investigation itself, at a primary level, to think of things un-understood as like things that are understood as a way of moving from ignorance to knowledge.

Anna Reid: Thomas Browne's, *The Garden of Cyrus* has been described as a rhetorical tract. How does Browne make use of narrative and metaphor?

Claire Preston: [chuckles] Browne is very geeky. That's the first thing to say about him. The first thing he does and, virtually, everything he writes is tell you everything that has ever been known or ever been said about a subject. In the case of *The Garden of Cyrus*, it's about the Quincunx and the diamonds shaped lozenge, and where it appears and who has talked about it and who's used it, but I think that the important thing to understand about the way that Browne and others are deploying their rhetorical systems, whatever those may be, is that this is a period in which there is no, as yet, agreed-upon way in which to express the findings of science.

All the people that we call scientists were not only not professional scientists because there was no such thing, but they had never been trained as scientists, or you could be trained as a doctor, but nothing else. These are all people whose training is highly verbal. It's highly rhetorical, it's humanist. They are using the resources of classical antiquity, particularly the writings of Cicero, Seneca, Ovid, Virgil, and so on, to think about the way that you make points and how you provide conclusions. What I'm getting at is, there is no approved, scientific way of speaking or of delivering information. They're using what they have, which is to write just, for example, dialogues. Robert Boyle writes a dialogue set in a garden with named speakers who all have dramatic parts to discuss different systems of chemistry. He doesn't do that, neither of them do this because they think it's amusing or decorative, it's because it's as good a way as any to express competing views about

how the world is made, and how we might think of the natural world. I think that if we remember that there is no lab report [chuckles] in the 17th-century. There is no scientific journal until the late 17th-century, and even then, there's no format for doing this, we have a very broad range of rhetorical and stylistic resources to use. Browne's is to pile instance upon instance. When you read something like *The Garden of Cyrus*, what you have is a kind of compendium, an encyclopedia, of everything that you can possibly ever want to know about the Quincunx. One of the funniest things that I've noticed about this, because I'm also editing this for an edition, is that the original printer of the 1658 edition, clearly, runs out of capital Qs for Quincunx because no printer has ever had to use the Q so much because the Quincunx is so often mentioned in the tract.

That sense of verdancy, abundance, of rampancy, even of examples, is very typical of the way Browne makes the point about, in this case, the commonality of the Quincunx in nature.

[music]

Anna Reid: Clare Hickman is the author of *The Doctors Garden: Medicine, Science and Horticulture in Late Georgian Britain*. Dr. John Fothergill, writing in 1774 to John Bartram regarding shipping of animals with plants to his garden.

Narrator reading as Dr. John Fothergill: "Please, let him know that I received the turtle in good health, and shall be much obliged if he will procure me a male and female bullfrog. Mine are straight away notwithstanding my best endeavors. If they are put in a little box of wet moss, they will come safe. At least, I received a little American frog, the *rana asiatica* in a box of plants filled with moss.

Anna Reid: Clare, does the medicinal garden of the 18th-century pose a reality, quite different to that represented by much historical writing on garden design and landscaping of the same period?

Clare Hickman: I think there are other ways in which we can think about it, that do that. One of the interesting things about the medical practitioner I've been looking at, and their gardens, is there's not a named designer who works with them. Rather than thinking about how they designed them, and why they designed the way they did, it's more interesting, in some ways, to think about how they connect to wider ideas beyond. Thinking about how people, plants, animals circulate through spaces; How things come from other gardens, maybe abroad, maybe in the same country; How people train in different gardens, and then move on elsewhere, as a way of thinking about the processes that happen within the space.

I've been thinking a lot about uses and experience, which we also see in texts about the general eighteenth century gardens we hear about. We often hear about

Capability Browne and his work at Stowe, we hear about Stourhead. A lot of the time the fixation is on the aesthetics, the kind of classical ideas that they use. I think we can also take these ideas that we think about with less known gardens to consider how they were used and experienced. The kind of sensory experience that Carole talks about in relation to the Medieval garden. We can think about what was the sensory experience like if you were in some of these other gardens, so what would you come across?

What would you hear? The kind of animals that turn up in the gardens are a good way to think about this. Then we can think about, where do those animals come from?

There's some lovely stories about American bullfrogs, which arrive in boxes of plants to John Fothergill's garden in West Ham, in London. He talks about how he makes a space for them in the garden, how the bullfrogs try and escape. One of them does escape, and how he was going to send these to the King (I don't think these ever actually make it to George III). The bullfrogs themselves, then escape out into the world.

By thinking about that, we can think about what those human-animal relationships are like, what the sensory experience is like, and then how this connects to other gardens, other places, how it connects to the empire more broadly. It just gives us a different lens to think about how gardens operate in this period.

Anna Reid: The exploitative aspects of 18th-century medicinal commerce that you describe, still resonate today. Don't they?

Clare Hickman: Yes, there's a lot of hidden labour, I would say, to deal with gardens, whether it's how the global trade works. When we think about gardens themselves, and we visit them particularly, we think about beauty. We don't really think about who does all the work in the garden, so the gardeners get excluded generally, but then how do things arrive in gardens, and what are those trade routes? Of course, the trade routes for plants and medicinal plants, are often the global networks in the indigenous world. They follow slave trade routes. There seems to be a lot of work in 17th century, in James Petiver, and the kind of routes he was using for his natural history collecting.

There's no reason to suppose that that's plants must have been coming in on similar approaches. Then, of course, indigenous people's knowledge often gets excluded because when plants come back to this country, we changed the taxonomic names. This European renaming of plants, often showing networks of friendship amongst botanists, which takes out that indigenous knowledge of who used the plants in other countries, how they are used, who collects the plants, how they then arrive in Britain. That seems very hidden, but I think it's a way of opening up these kind of

stories about how we can tell more inclusive stories about landscape now, and how we can think about how we relate the English landscape garden we often talk about, to wider global networks and think about this in a broader way.

Anna Reid: Does the recalling of these histories of the medicinal garden enhance our contemporary understanding of human health?

Clare Hickman: By thinking about the garden in the past and how people related to it, particularly with ideas around sensory engagement, is really important if we think about how we respond to gardens now. In my other work, I've looked at modern hospital gardens and psychiatric institution gardens. There's clearly a long history that builds through all the things that Carole and Claire have talked about with this idea of how you respond to the garden. How we have both a physical sense of being in the garden, of walking around the garden, of exercise outdoors. All those sensory engagement with the outside, so particularly with things like birdsong.

I've been looking at accounts of open-air hospitals in the early 20th century, so where people went for things like tuberculosis. Because you're outdoors all the time, the relationship with the birds becomes particularly strong and when we think now about our engagements in lockdown with COVID, I see a lot more people talking about the plants in the gardens, but also their relationship with birds. I've got a blackbird called Bernard who's been coming into my garden. I'm very excited when I see him, but that's because my world has shrunk. Then my sense of wellbeing is then related to this smaller compass of a world, which is plants, but it's also animals and birds.

I think that sensory experience runs all the way through, and we can think about our relationship in much longer historical terms.

I was interested both by what Carole was saying at first about the healthful regimen of being in gardens, and being allowed to walk into experience in a sensory way, the various things that plants and flowers can give us. Also what Claire was saying about our current world being so constricted by coronavirus. Bacon says somewhere that he tells the story of a nobleman who, every morning, would have his servants bring to him a sod of freshly turned earth, which they would bring to him on a tray, and he would breathe it in, in bed, before he rose.

To this, he attributed his very long and healthy life. That sense of being outdoors and that itself being helpful, persists today, even if we're not in a garden. If we're simply outside and outdoor air is thought to be inherently better, and better for us than anything else, but there's a scientific and horticultural background to that idea.

Anna Reid: Do you think there is a value to the history of the medicinal garden in a current context where questions of ecology and biodiversity are pressing?

Claire Preston: I'm interested in the way that early modern gardens are thought of as not only as encyclopaedic, but specifically as arcs or as repositories of banks, of not really information, but the physical plants themselves. I'm very moved by the way that the seed banks of the modern age, especially, for example, the one at Kew Gardens, are rigorously preserving specimens, seed specimens, usually, but sometimes other kinds of specimens, rigorously preserving all these, against the, I was going to say the coming catastrophe, but the catastrophe is upon us, and that these are almost like reservations for plants as refugees.

The problem that we've created in the world, which is that we have mass extinctions happening and climate change making certain kinds of growth now, completely unavailable to us, is being remedied, restored, saved, reconvened in a funny way, rather like the early modern thinking about the reconvening of knowledge is being convened in these rather artificial, but nevertheless, very essential repositories. The irony of it is that, and I'm not going to be able to remember offhand where it is, I think it's in Scandinavia, a seed bank in the high Arctic was recently damaged by the fact that rising sea levels, owing to climate change, made the whole secure container leak, and has destroyed many of the seeds that are meant to survive that very catastrophe that we've created for ourselves.

Clare: I think this idea of the repository and the place and the value is a really interesting one, that Claire has brought up. I'm just thinking about, we talk about plant blindness now that people don't necessarily value plants, that they don't notice them, that they're not part of their world, although people are obviously doing quite interesting things at the moment with chalk writing on pavements to point out wild plants, so people notice them. In these earlier periods, plants themselves were incredibly valuable. They had economic value, but they also had scientific value, and they were really regarded as very important.

In this time when we're thinking about what is important and the ecological value, we see ourselves sometimes now as humans, and then nature is the thing out there. In these earlier periods, there was more of an intertwining of human and nature lives, and that the ecological system is seen as more entangled and together. I think this is something that we can learn from. We think about how we relate to nature now.

Clare Hickman: Browne in *The Garden of Cyrus* is very interesting in that respect. Clare, you were talking about the way that people now point out flowers and trees by writing on the pavement in chalk. Browne's *Garden of Cyrus*, the middle chapter, which is Quincunxes in the vegetable world, is entirely about local plants. He lives in Norridge. He's roaming around East Anglia, and he only talks about local plants, and most of them are weeds. They're not even economically valuable plants. They may be

medicinally valuable, but they're not crops. I think that's really we're thinking about, that there's wonder in the local.

This is not exotic stuff that's been brought from the four corners of the globe. It's stuff that's growing outside his house that's a mile away from his house, and his whole sense of the way the natural world entwines with one's personal world is very geographical and local in that way. I think, again, we're having more of this looking back to a much more symbiotic relationship in a much more natural local, rather than global sense of the world as impinging on us in our everyday lives.

Anna Reid: Do these histories and stories help us to reimagine the relationship between the human and the landscape?

Carole Rawcliffe: I think one of the very striking elements here, which doesn't obtain so much today, I suppose, is the strong religious element that one has in the past with gardens. Certainly, one that Thomas Browne would have had. Clare mentioned the idea of Adam as a gardener, and it's very striking in the period I work in, certainly, how far people regard the garden as a simulacrum of paradise, that they're trying to get back to a paradise, trying to get back to a Garden of Eden, and trying to create something that we had lost. Perhaps we, today, have lost something about the awe that people may have felt about gardens and the part that it may have played in their religious lives as a locus where you would go to meditate, or where you might go to study, where you might go to think about your spiritual life as well as your physical life. That's something that's absent, I feel, from modern-day reactions to gardens. It would have been impossible in the middle ages to separate the religious from the non-religious, the secular. For example, there are images which survive, one of which is on our website, of Christ as a gardener, appearing to Mary Magdalene with a very, very medieval-looking spade with which you could do some serious digging in a garden, which is full of scented herbs so that when you walk on it, it would release these wonderful odours that would go into the atmosphere. There's a wattle hedge around the outside. In a sense, it's quite realistic, but there's that idea that all the time that you are in a religious space, as well as in a very functional space where you can grow plants, where you can take exercise, are both very closely connected.

Clare: Yes, I think that religious understanding is a really important one. A lot of the doctors that I've looked at are actually Quakers. In the 18th century, there seems to be a Quaker sensibility about plants and the combination of their beauty and their usefulness is also related to the religious worth, I think. There is a moral underpinning that runs through this in terms of how they're thinking about the role of gardening and the role of plants, whether it's growing things for food or whether it's growing things to wonder at God. That sense of wonder, which I think Claire also

mentioned in her section earlier, is a really important element of this, the idea of the plant being the exciting thing.

Even agricultural crops in the pyramid I look at, are seen as really exciting because they're new, and they're different, and farming experimentation is sort of a wonder in itself. I think, yes, that sense of wonder and awe is an important element to the stories we tell. I think by connecting these things together, by telling these kind of new, different stories about the garden, we can perhaps encourage a wider audience of people, maybe, to engage with the past, and what the past can tell us about our relationship to nature today.

Clare Hickman: Carole was just talking about the way that the garden is imagined as in some way related to what we are trying to get back to, what we've lost. Browne says at the very end of his, his dedicatory epistle to *The Garden of Cyrus*, "The delightful world comes after death, and paradise succeeds the grave, since the verdant state of things is the symbol of the resurrection, and to flourish in the state of glory, we must first be sown in corruption." The idea there [chuckles] that it's not merely that we must make gardens, but we must be gardens. We must be sown in corruption in order to be verdant and to achieve paradise. I love that phrase.

Anna Reid: Thank you to our speakers for this final episode of the summer 2020 series of *British Art Talks*.

The Doctors Garden: Medicine, Science, and Horticulture in Late Georgian Britain, is a forthcoming monograph by Clare Hickman for Yale University Press.

Claire Preston is the general editor of the forthcoming Oxford edition of *The Complete Works of Sir Thomas Browne*.

Written in collaboration with Claire Weeda, Carole Rawcliffe's *Policing the Urban Environment in Premodern Europe*, is published by Amsterdam University Press. You can find a set of images relating to this episode of the Paul Mellon Centre website.

That's also where you can find the full Summer 2020 series of *British Art Talks*. Thank you for listening.

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The Medicinal Garden is produced by Freya Hellier. The assistant producer is Alexandra Quinn. It is a Loftus Media production.

[music]

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