

## **The History of the Front Garden – Dr Francis Burroughs**

Our meeting finished with views of front gardens designed for busy working families who like to entertain friends at weekends, rather than be involved with gardening. Seating, lighting and hard landscaping were set off by green lawn and shaped shrubs. There was no seasonal planting and very little needing watering but all was tidy and easy to maintain and it served a good purpose. But how did we arrive at this? Our speaker, Francis Burroughs looked at the history of garden ownership, going back hundreds of years.

First of all a stable political and social situation is needed before we think about a garden. In Ukraine at the moment, not many people will be thinking about garden design. Also, making a garden needs land and money. People have gardened for centuries. We have archaeological information, both at Fishbourne Palace outside Chichester and at The National Museum of Wales in Cardiff, confirming that the Romans had gardens. We know that the Vikings grew plants for domestic use as they certainly had dyes for colourful clothing and these were made from plants and the Abbey Garden in Shaftsbury is an example of an Anglo-Saxon garden.

Jumping across hundreds of year, now we live at a time when every town has at least one garden centre, there are TV programmes on all aspects of gardens and gardening, we can buy seed packets with glamorous pictures on the front and villages compete in 'Britain in Bloom'. This means that it is hard for us to realise that for many centuries, gardens of the rich and famous were just green. However, a lawn, without a lawn mower, is a nightmare so the green did not come from a lawn. Think shrubs and gravel and then you are nearer the mark. Leven's Hall in Cumbria was built in 1685 and it has the most interesting seventeenth century garden with huge evergreen shrubs cut into fantastic shapes. Some of these plants are very elderly now but we can see history in front of us. Those shrubs were originally spaced out around the garden though they seem close now that they have expanded.

Sometimes, rich landowners would use small evergreen shrubs, closely planted to make little hedges that were positioned to make designs that we call 'knot gardens'. The little hedges were planted in complex patterns of intertwining circles and such like and the shapes created would be filled with different

colours of gravels and sand and other hard materials which would have to be locally available. Rich Tudor families would have had these.

In this century and the last, more people have a front and back garden to use as they please. Gardens with cultivated flowers are a very modern thing and the 'chocolate box villages' with manicured gardens of 'Britain in Bloom' are a very new idea. Much of this is possible because garden centres are thriving and they have developed from garden nurseries in the last forty or fifty years.

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