

**Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> January, 2019**

## **Fascinating Flowers**

In days gone by, Sweet Violets, *Viola* were scattered over the floors of cottages and churches to sweeten the air and to hide any musty odours created by damp conditions. Strangely, the scent of Sweet Violet is lost almost as soon as it is detected, which is why it was so effective. With its scent, Sweet Violet produces ionine, which quickly dulls the sense of smell. This means that as well as the scent of the violets, other smells vanish as well. An early air freshener!! You can prove it too - sniff a Sweet Violet until you can no longer smell it, then move the flower away from your nose for a moment before smelling it again. The scent will return until the ionine does its job again!



One of the old names for the Snowdrop, *Galanthus nivalis*, is 'snow-piercer'. Another name from the past was the wonderful 'Fair Maid of February'. This refers to an old custom which was connected with the Feast of the Purification of St Mary, which took place on 2<sup>nd</sup> February. Village maidens would collect bunches of Snowdrops and wear them to symbolise purity. The Snowdrop's generic name, *Galanthus*, comes from two Greek words meaning 'milk' and 'flower'.

The generic name of the Primrose, *Primula*, comes from two Latin words meaning 'first rose' or 'first flower' - *prima rosa*. Because Primroses flower when there are not many insects about, the flowers often remain unpollinated. In *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare wrote of 'pale primroses that die unmarried'. I love these old references to nature in literature - they show how much more connected to nature people were in times past. In the Middle Ages, a concoction made using Primroses was used to treat gout and rheumatism. An infusion of the roots was apparently good for 'nervous headaches', the flowers were said to have been used in the preparation of love potions!



The Garden Volunteers are here every Wednesday morning, and are always happy to speak to visitors about all things gardening.