



Boundary Way

## Plant Folklore with herbalist Maria Billington

### Brambles

During the US Civil War (1861-65) the soldiers would take part in Blackberry Truces where both sides would take time out to pick the blackberry leaves to make tea to treat diarrhoea and dysentery, which was rife on both sides.

It is believed across the country that you should not eat blackberries after September 29th, Michaelmas or the feast day of St Michael because the devil will have spat on them making them tasteless and putting the fruit under the devils influence. It's believed anyone who would eat them after this date would come under Old Nick's control and lose their souls to the devil. This belief likely comes from late season blackberries that have not had the full benefit of plenty of sunny days to make them big and juicy.

The legend of Sleeping Beauty had her protected for a hundred years by a thicket of blackberry and wild rose. Can you imagine how quickly it would be almost impossible to get through that tangled thorny mess!

In Scotland there is a proverb that goes "As cross as a bramble" and in parts of England the stems are called lawyers because 'when once they get a holt an ye, ye doant easy get shut of em'.

Where Brambles long stems arch over and then the tip roots itself it forms a natural arch – these arches have been used for years in folk practices and ceremonies and were said to treat many ails. The patient would be passed through the arch symbolising a new beginning with the hope the ailment would go. In Herefordshire they took this to further lengths where the Lords Prayer was recited whilst the patient, who would be eating bread and butter, would be passed through the arch nine times. Sometimes they would add the rhyme: Under the briar and over the briar, I wish to leave the chincough here. The remains of the bread and butter would be given to a passing animal or bird as the patient returned home – but never to a Christian! If the food was consumed then the cough would disappear. Apparently the same cure was used on cows and horses too.



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