



Perfume

Mmm..... scented candles, trees, bonfire smoke and plants.

So a right bag of subjects in this month's broadcast you might think, but ponder more deeply and you will discover the cunning link. Well alright then just one clue (*spray*). Of course, the connection this month is with perfume.

For about the last fifty years, nearly all commercially produced perfume has been made from synthetic compounds, but it wasn't always so.

The ancient Greeks of Mycenae, Corinth and Cyprus used olive oil mixed with crushed natural ingredients to capture the essence of almonds, spices and flowers.

The Romans meanwhile used smoke as a means of propagating their favourite aromas like Jasmine and our very word for perfume comes from this practice of conveying scent by smoke, 'perfumo' in Latin.

So much for the ancients, what do the French know about perfume? Well, quite a lot as it happens. The French minister of culture has paid tribute to the genius of French perfumiers and to the importance of the perfume industry within the national economy. Brands like Chanel and Dior have become household names. France is indisputably a world leader in the olfactory arts. And the town of Grasse in Provence is unequivocally at its centre. To mark its importance there's even a permanent perfume exhibition in Grasse.

Nearer to home, La Roche Jagu, recently hosted an exhibition of its own on perfume, which intriguingly they entitled "Perfume, Mirror of Society". According to the organisers perfume reflects social attitudes and anxieties. The exhibition finished in October but with spring poised for action the real scents of roses, jasmine and lavender will be assailing our nostrils in the not too distant future.

One of the perfume bottles on sale at the La Roche Jagu was Antique Rose by Corrine de Provence. A nifty little number that convinced my olfactory sense at least that it was made with natural ingredients.

But if you are lucky enough to have old fashioned and highly scented roses rambling around house and garden then maybe the need for artificial scents like these isn't so great after all.

But how do we explain the almost universal appeal of pleasant fragrances? Medieval physicians believed that by introducing nice smells to defeat the noisome odours of illness and infection they were helping to cure their patients. Perhaps, we still consciously think that being surrounded by pleasant odours helps to promote our own well being.

Whatever the reason, perfumes of all kinds, whether in the bottle, in candles or in bars of soap, are no longer exclusively associated with wealth. Indeed with a scented substance never so widely available you may feel that perfume has lost its luxurious allure. If its exclusivity that you want then even the limited edition 'Juice' isn't likely to satisfy. Perhaps Prada's new Eau de Parfum at £2,500 from Selfridges, hurry while stocks last! Will strike you as being far too plebeian

So it's gratifying to know that with the help of a professional perfumier you can create your own unique perfume which will remain forever beyond the clutches of the hoi polloi.

Take this one for example, absolutely priceless, (*spray*), *sigh*, *ah*, *cough*, *cough*.

