New project gives rhubarb a voice – quite literally

Researchers from Lancaster University have been working with the garden team at Clumber Park’s Walled Kitchen Garden to give it a touch of twenty-first-century magic and to bring the garden to life in new and unexpected ways.

One of the highlights of the project is the ‘Rhubaphone’: real rhubarb sticks that talk when grasped, explaining facts about their diverse varieties.

The ‘Rhubaphone’ was designed by PhD student Liz Edwards to introduce visitors to the historical, cultural and culinary aspects of varieties, forming part of the Trust’s wider work in raising awareness of plant conservation and biodiversity.

Another of Liz’s designs are digital wooden apples, carved by the Clumber estate team, which hang from the trees and play when ‘plucked’ from the tree. The ‘Audio Apples’ tell stories of the garden taken from diaries from the 1880s and memories and facts about the garden Clumber’s garden’s team.

‘We want to encourage people to explore the garden and find out more in new and exciting ways,’ says Liz, explaining how the project came about. ‘Rather than sticking to the paths, we hope that visitors will walk under trees, touch plants and listen to stories they might not otherwise hear.’

The Walled Kitchen Garden last year received national collection status for its rhubarb and apples. It is home to over 130 varieties to rhubarb, the largest collection in the UK, and 72 varieties of apple.

The Walled Kitchen Garden is open all year. For times and more information go to www.nationaltrust.org.uk/clumber-park

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