

Mulberries for Prince Henry at Charlton House

But he died young, never to be King Henry the Ninth. He was only eighteen. Do you know? He was young but I was younger.

Four hundred years have passed. I am rooted here, alone.

I am fenced in a ring of iron whose spears pierce my arms. An iron gate breaks the ring but it cannot be opened: it cannot be closed: the gate is firmly in my grip.

I am *Morus nigra*, Black mulberry, planted by order of King James the First and Sixth.

Come by bus, I can see the stop, numbers 54 and 53.

Come by car, I am caged next to the carpark: don't forget to pay.

Dog walkers, do use the waste bin; there, I can touch it, almost.

Come and look at me, children. I spread and I slouch. Do you spread and do you slouch uncaring like me? I hope you do.

Come in summer. Reach up to be spattered and stained ruby-red and purple-black, red handed, and red everywhere.

Mulberries burst open when you touch but please, come and taste. I hope you do.

Look. Look at me. I have a sapling growing strong and tall. There in the centre.

Philosopher Children in four hundred years, am I the same tree that was planted by order of King James? Do I spread and do I slouch lazily like you? I hope I do.

And look, is that a sapling? Just there. Look.