

## Cherry Varieties in the 17th Century

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Cherry blossom

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'Noble' variety, Far Forest

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John Gerard (c.1545-1612), John Parkinson, (1567-1650) and John Rea (1605?-1677) were leading figures in the world of horticulture whose careers overlapped. Each published important books giving details for plant cultivation and describing many varieties of flowers, vegetables and fruit. Cherries, are the focus of our local interest.

Born in Nantwich, Gerard was apprenticed to the Barber-Surgeons in London and became well known as a skilled herbalist. He lived all his life in Holborn and tended the gardens of William Cecil, Lord Burghley, in the Strand and also Theobalds in Herefordshire, as well as his own garden and the physic garden of the College of Physicians. His major work was 'The Herbal', (1597), and later he became Master of the Barber-Surgeons and also 'herbarist' to James I.

John Parkinson, an eminent scholar, lived in London close to people with power and authority. Born in Yorkshire, he was apprenticed, aged fourteen, as an apothecary in London, rising to become apothecary to James I until the King died in 1625. He was also a founding member of the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries, serving on their governing body, The Court of Assistants, and contributed to their London Pharmacopoeia of 1618. He lived at Ludgate Hill and nurtured a two acre botanical garden at Long Acre, a district of market gardens, near Covent Garden, (close to the present Trafalgar Square). He exchanged plants and seeds with eminent English and Continental herbalists, plantsmen and botanists, including his neighbour John Gerard and his close friend the elder John Tradescant, gardener to the King.

Parkinson is famous for his two great books. The first, '*Paradisi in Sole Paradisus Terrestris*', (1629), is in three sections; the flower garden, the kitchen garden and the orchard. Each section begins with a general description as to how each should be set up and managed. Following chapters describe as many as

possible of the known species and varieties of plants. (The first biological definition of species was given by John Ray in 1686).

The work was dedicated to King Charles 1's young queen, Henrietta Maria, with whom Parkinson had worked closely since 1625. A revised and enlarged edition was published in 1656. This work has been described recently as the "earliest important treatise on horticulture published in England" (Henry, 1975). Many earlier studies were translated from French. Hunt, (1991) described it as "a very complete picture of the English garden at the beginning of the seventeenth century".

Parkinson's second work, '*Theatrum Botanicum*', (1640), amounts to 1688 pages introducing over 3800 plants including many new introductions from the Americas and Middle East. Amongst these were 33 native species previously unrecorded. The book was intended as a reliable guide for apothecaries and as such it remained as the last significant herbal.

In contrast, John Rea followed a relatively isolated, provincial life at Norton's End, Kinlet, on the northern side of Wyre Forest, describing it as; "my remote residence"; "the rural desert where it was my unhappiness to Plant". We do not know of any education, yet he regarded himself as a gentleman, keeping in touch with scientific and cultural developments, enjoying musical instruments and books on music. He communicated with other florists and nurserymen, while gentry and aristocracy were his clients.

He, too, is famous for an important book. '*Flora, Ceres and Pomona*', (1665), was conceived as an updated version of Parkinson's 1629 work, (2nd edition 1656) and indeed followed a similar format. An earlier article (WFSG Review, 2012) gives more detail and describes the book's significance. Whereas Parkinson

wrote a manual for apothecaries, giving descriptions concerned with the uses of plants, Rea was aiming to provide a working manual for gardeners, giving cultural details derived from his own trials and experience with the many new plants being brought from overseas.

Each author gave comprehensive lists of varieties using Latin binomials and common names, but descriptions are of little value for any identification. In those times there was no consistent or reliable naming as Parkinson writes. "...scarce one of twentie of our Nurserie men doe sell the right, but give one for another: for it is an inherent qualitie almost hereditarie with most of them, to sell any man an ordinary fruit for whatsoever rare fruit he shall ask for: so little they are to be trusted."

Gerard's work was a culmination of the Elizabethan tradition of herbals, 'manuals for medicine', and dealt with familiar European plants. Parkinson's career spanned the period when the systematic study of plants was just emerging as the science of botany. King Charles I rewarded him with the title Royal Botanist in 1640. Even so, Parkinson's concept of plant structure is revealed in his description of "The English Cherrie". "... the flowers come .... at a knot or joint... everie one by itself...consisting of five white leaves, with some threds in the middle; after which come round berries, greene at the first, and red when they are through ripe, ....".

The herbals were for medicinal uses and dealt with familiar European plants. With the large numbers of new and unknown plants being brought from the developing world, there was urgent need for some ordering of the mass of new knowledge. Immediate problems concerned the grouping and arrangement of specimens. What criteria should be used to evaluate similarities and differences? Such issues demanded close observation, accurate description and careful recording, thus forcing a more systematic and scientific approach to be developed. Early efforts to detail fruit characteristics had been made in Switzerland by Jean Bauhin in 1598. Not until nearly one hundred years later, near the end of the 17th century, did systematic study really develop with the work of John Ray, (1627-1705). From 1686 to 1704 Ray and his patron Francis Willughby published '*Historia generalis plantarum*', a definitive catalogue and classification of all known plants and animals, about 18,600 species.

The lists of fruit varieties presented by Gerard 1597, Parkinson in 1629 and Rea in 1665, represent some of the earliest fruit names we have. Indeed Gerard's list of twelve sorts of 'Cherrie Tree' is the first such list. Parkinson lists thirty varieties of cherry as *Cerasus* and Rea lists twenty-four sorts recommended for walled gardens, also under *Cerasus*.

*Cerasus* was a town on the southern coast of the Black



'Ironsides', a West Midland cherry variety, one of 2 remaining trees at Far Forest

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Sea, (the modern town is Giresun), sacked by the Roman, Lucullus, during the Second War (83-81BC), with the Great Mithridates VI Eupator (120-63BC), King of Pontus. Herodotus (480?-425 BC) mentions a cherry called 'ponticum' grown in this area by the Scythian people. Pliny the Elder recorded that the first cultivated cherries, and other top fruits, were brought to Italy from Persia via Greek cultivation, thence to Europe and England. Matching modern names to those from ancient Greek, Roman and Saxon evidence is problematic and descriptions are not sufficient for more than a general idea. Similarly, 17th century names are very different from those coming before or since.

## Names used by John Gerard, (1597)

1. *Cerasus vulgaris* The common English Cherrie. Illus.
2. *Cerasus praecox sine Belgica* The Flanders Cherrie. Illus.
3. *Cerasia Hispanica* The Spanish Cherrie. Illus.
4. *Cerasia Gasconica* The Gasconie Cherrie. Illus.
5. The late ripe Cherrie. Text
6. The Cluster Cherrie. Text
7. *Cerasus multiflora fructus edens* The Double flowered Cherrie. Illus.
8. *Cerasus multiflora pauciores fructus edens* Double flowered barren Cherrie. Illus.
9. *Cerasus avium nigra & racemosa* Birds Cherrie and Blacke Grape Cherrie. Illus.
10. *Cerasus racemosa rubra* Red Grape Cherrie. Illus.
11. *Cerasus nigra* The common blacke Cherrie. Illus.
12. *Chamaecerasus* The dwarffe Cherrie. Illus.

## Names used by John Parkinson (1629)

There is a brief description of each of thirty varieties and a full page wood-cut showing twelve common sorts, little more than diagrams, but each given a Latin binomial, *Cerasus* and a specific name, as well as the common English name, for example ; *Cerasus maculate*, The biguarre or spotted cherry. (No. 15, below.)

1. The English Cherrie;
2. Flanders Cherrie;
- 2b. The early Flanders Cherry;
3. The May Cherrie;
4. The Arch-Duke Cherrie;
5. The ounce Cherrie;
6. The great leafed Cherrie;
7. The true Gascoign Cherry;
8. The Morello Cherrie;
9. The Hartlippe Cherrie;
10. The smaller Lacure or Hart Cherrie;



- 10b. The great Lacure or Hart Cherrie, Some doe call the white cherrie, the White hart cherrie;
11. The Luke Wardes Cherrie;
12. The Corone Cherrie;
13. The Urinall (shaped) Cherrie;
14. The Agriot Cherrie;
15. The Biguarre Cherrie;
16. The Morocco Cherrie (Some doe think that this and the Morello be both one.);
- 16b. The Naples Cherrie ( is also thought to bee all one with the Morello or Morocco.);
17. The White Spanish Cherrie;
18. The Flanders cluster Cherry, greater;
- 18b. The lesser Flanders cluster Cherrie;
19. The wilde cluster or birds Cherry, called of some the Grape cherry, red and black;
20. The soft sheld Cherrie;
21. John Tradescantes Cherrie;
22. The Baccalaos or New-found-land Cherrie;
23. The strange long cluster Cherrie or Padus Theophrasti Dalechampio;
24. The Cullen Cherrie, (Dutch);
25. The great Hungarian Cherrie of Zwerts;
26. The Cameleon, or strange changeable Cherry;
27. The great Rose Cherry or double blossomd Cherry;
- 27b. The lesser Rose or double blossomd Cherrie;
28. The Dwarfe Cherrie, a fastigiata form and spreading form;
29. The great bearing Cherry of Master Millen;
30. The long finger Cherry.

## Names used by John Rea, 1665

Rea gives only English names for his cherry varieties, many are similar to those of Parkinson, which he recommends for growing in walled gardens. He does not include orchard trees.

1. The May Cherry;
2. The early Flanders Cherry;
3. The Later Flanders Cherry;
4. The Flanders cluster Cherry;
5. The Great bearing or preserving Cherry;
6. The Morello Cherry;
7. The Arch-Dukes Cherry;
8. The Carnation Cherry;
9. The Lukeward Cherry;
10. The black Heart Cherry;
11. The Black Cherry of Orleance;
12. The black Spanish Cherry;
13. The Bleeding Heart;
14. Prince Royal;
15. Portugal Cherry;
16. The Kings Cherry;
17. The Corone Cherry;
18. The Biguar Cherry;
19. The White Spanish Cherry;
20. The Amber Cherry;
21. The red Heart Cherry;
22. The Hungarian Cherry of Zwerts;
23. Ciliegi Birricloni;
24. The Dwarf Cherry;

As we continue our project to discover and rescue the old varieties of cherry, it will be informative to trace connections to the ancestors of modern varieties. This will only be possible for a few varieties. Roach, (1985), made some attempt, but without continuous documented evidence linking fruit names directly,

such as that for John Tradescant's cherry, there would be little prospect of success. The problems are exemplified by comparing the three contemporary lists above.

Locally, old cherry trees are being lost and now, even more than with other fruit species, a systematic search of old orchards is needed. Plans are in hand to collect specimen young leaves from living trees so that DNA analysis can be used to discover the identity. Once so distinguished, trees can be propagated from known material and a reference collection built up as a 'cherry museum'. Single identifications cost £144, but if funding can be obtained, batch testing from 100 or more trees would reduce the individual costs to about £30. The National Collection at Brogdale has most cherry varieties, but three trees of each is not a very large or varied gene pool. We need to rescue the local West Midlands land race adapted to the local microclimate and propagate new stock as a genetic resource. This is an urgent task.

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Female Orange Tip butterfly at night roosting on Wild Cherry, 18 April 2014

Rosemary Winnall