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consecutively. During this period, I was Production Director at Bridgemen and recall that our original stock was received from the Hillier Arboretum as grafting scions. It was only distributed in small numbers and it is probable that the few specimens around today derive directly or indirectly from that source. The two trees that used to grow at Hilliers are both now dead. A 30-year-old specimen growing in the Dorothy Clive Garden in North Staffordshire, just a few miles east of Bridgemen, flowers more or less simultaneously with *P. x yedoensis* 'Someiyoshino' (Tokyo cherry, usually in late March to early April).

#### A puzzle presents itself

Until recently, I had never given any thought to the origin of this tree, no doubt assuming it to be another Japanese cultivar because of its name. But once it had been confirmed by several Japanese contacts that it was not known there, I began to investigate its history. At first, the earliest reference in the literature I could find was in Geoffrey Chabund's *Flowering Cherries* (1972), where it was described as "a little-known variety" but with no indication of its origin. The only other source was *The Hillier Manual of Trees and Shrubs*, where it first appeared in the fifth edition (1981) with the briefest of descriptions and no mention of origin. These apart, I failed to trace the name in any other printed source.

The question then arose as to who might have named a flowering cherry after a bird and moreover used the bird's Japanese name. The finger of suspicion pointed in only one direction – that of Collingwood (Cherry) Ingram (1880–1981), the celebrated UK authority on flowering cherries of the 20th century. The circumstantial evidence is compelling. Firstly, Ingram was also an ornithologist – it was his interest in birds that first took him to Japan in 1907, after which began his obsession with cherries. However, he always retained his love of birds and wrote a number of scientific articles for ornithological journals. In addition, he had a special interest in the swallow and even wrote a small book about them (*The Migration of the Swallow*, 1974). I obtained a secondhand copy hoping to find some reference to the cherry, but with no luck except that as early as page 4 the word *Tsubame* appeared as the Japanese name of his favourite bird.

A second point in favour of the Ingram theory was that he had previously named a cherry of his own raising after the Japanese black-winged gull, 'Umeneko' sometime prior to 1928. But here is the

*Prunus x yedoensis* 'Tsubame' is a beautiful, spreading tree, but where did it come from?

# The mystery of *Prunus* 'Tsubame'

A Japanese bird and a forgotten index are two clues that set **Chris Sanders** on the chase to uncover the origins of a choice cherry





mystery, in spite of all this there is no mention of *Prunus* x *yedoensis* 'Tsubame' in any of Ingram's published books or articles. Further, Ernest Pollard, his grandson-in-law who holds the Ingram archive has confirmed that the name does not appear in any of Ingram's diaries or cherry notebooks.

**No cherry stone unturned**

For a time I was struck, but so convinced was I that no one other than

Ingram could have given this name to a flowering cherry that I went back to the Hillier Arboretum to enquire about the origin of their original trees, fully expecting that they must have been received directly from Ingram himself. At first the response was not encouraging – their modern computer records did not go back far enough to provide the information. I then turned to Roy Lancaster for help, for I knew that he would have been working with the late Sir Harold Hillier in the

1970s. Although Roy could not recall anything about the cherry, or of any relationship between Sir Harold and Ingram, he was able to inform me of the possible existence at the arboretum of a hand-written card index, painstakingly compiled by his assistant at the time, Hatton Gardener. If this could be found, he was fairly certain it would contain the record I was looking for. Luckily for me, present curator David Jewell managed to unearth the index from the depths of Jermyns House. It contained nine cards for *Prunus* with numerous entries on each one. An initial examination revealed a number of records of scions received from Ingram in 1972 and 1976, but frustratingly they did not include 'Tsubame'. My luck changed when a few weeks later I called at the arboretum to see David and we looked again at the card index and this time discovered the missing record. Again it involved the receipt of scion material, this time in 1974, but much to my surprise the donor was not Ingram as I had



Collingwood Ingram had a fascination with birds as well as Japanese cherries.



Rowland Jackman

expected, but one R Jackman! At once, I guessed that this could only be George Rowland Jackman VMH (always known as Rowland) (1902–1976), the last of the famous dynasty of five generations of Jackmans of Woking, best known for clematis but who also grew a wide range of trees, shrubs and other hardy plants. So, if I was right about Rowland Jackman, he must have been growing 'Tsubame' in 1974 or at least had access to it and obviously considered it important enough to pass on to the Hillier Arboretum in order to conserve it. However, I knew that the Jackman family business had been sold in 1967, although it is known that Rowland acted as a consultant to the new owner for several years afterwards. But did this mean that Jackmans Nursery grew the tree commercially and, if so, did they raise it themselves or, if not, from where did they obtain it?

**The evidence of the *Planters Handbook***

In my library I have a copy of a scarce little book entitled *Jackmans of Woking* (1995) by the late Pamela Gauntlett (née Jackman). Pamela was Rowland's daughter and her book consists mainly of reminiscences of her father's time in charge of the family business (1934–1967 and up to 1972). On page 59 is a list of 33 plants introduced by Jackmans during this period. Number 13 in the list is none other than *Prunus* x *yedoensis* 'Tsubame'. This was both exciting and perplexing news



The cascading flowers of *Prunus* 'Tsubame' are borne in profusion in late March or early April.

Collingwood Ingram's book on swallows, Pamela Gauntlett's work on Jackmans of Woking and The Planters Handbook catalogues produced by Jackmans all provided clues along the trail.



because it hardly fitted my previous theory as to its origin. The next step was to examine Jackmans nursery catalogues for further information.

Fortunately, the Library at RHS Garden Wisley holds a complete set of the *Planters Handbook*, as Jackmans catalogue was called. *Prunus* x *yedoensis* 'Tsubame' (Swallow) first appeared in the 1961/2 edition with the following description: "A very lovely lawn-tree. Its horizontal, undulating branches are held like the spread wings of a bird and are festooned with single white flowers". Standards only were offered at 47/6 (£2.375) each. Strangely, it was not described as NEW as were many other (but not all) Jackmans introductions when listed for the first time, and no claim was made that they had actually raised it. Frustratingly, no indication of its actual origin was included. Exactly the same description was repeated in all the subsequent issues of the *Planters Handbook*.

### The balance of probability

This is where the trail finally goes cold. I cannot find evidence that any other nursery ever listed it for sale until Bridgeman did so for a few years in the late 1990s. The following conclusion to this mystery is conjecture on my part but is based on the few facts that I have discovered with circumstantial evidence and a bit of guesswork thrown in. It is probably not far off what actually happened.

It may be significant that from as early as 1953/4 Jackmans first listed two of Collingwood Ingram's better known flowering cherry cultivars, 'Kursar' and 'Okame', in a *Supplementary List of Choice and Unusual Trees, Shrubs and Climbers*. 'Kursar' was described as NEW, but oddly, 'Okame' wasn't and in neither case was Ingram mentioned as the breeder. From that point onwards these two cultivars appeared in every edition of the *Planters Handbook*. They were joined by another Ingram seedling, 'Umeneko', in 1956/57. This was also described as NEW, but again with no reference to its origin. There are other cherries in Jackmans' lists which probably came from the same source, such as *P. connatiina* (now *P. hirtipes*) 'Semplena' and *P. x damryckensis*, both brought to the attention of horticulturists by Ingram. Possibly the only other major nursery to simultaneously include almost exactly this same group of cherries was Notcutts of Woodbridge, Suffolk, and it is interesting to note that the late Charles Notcutt spent a period of training under Rowland Jackman as a student. The only difference was that 'Tsubame' was only ever listed by Jackmans.



All this suggests that Rowland and Ingram knew each other well or at least had some sort of contact. According to Ernest Pollard there is nothing in the former's notebooks or diaries to corroborate this, but it is conceivable that Rowland visited Ingram at his home in Benenden, Kent, perhaps to collect scions or budwood.

Now it was well-known that Rowland Jackman had a very good "eye" for a plant – in fact most of his introductions were of plants that he had discovered while out walking or driving rather than having deliberately raised from his own crosses. A prime example is the still popular *Sorbus aucuparia* 'Sheerwater Seedling' that he spotted in a private garden in the village of Horsell, near Woking. The owner told him that she and her husband had found the tree growing on common land along the Basingstoke canal near Sheerwater to the east of Woking. They admired its compact, erect shape and heavy fruiting, dug it up and planted it in their front garden, where Rowland later saw it and was given some budwood. Again, when it appeared in the *Planters Handbook*, no reference was made to its origin.

In the chapter entitled Hybridising in his book *A Garden of Memories* (1974), Ingram mentioned



'Umeneko' and 'Okame' are cultivars raised by Collingwood Ingram and appeared in Jackmans catalogues as new but without reference to their origin.

what he referred to as his "brood mares", flowering cherry mother plants that he grew in pots and kept in a cold glasshouse during the flowering period for breeding purposes. He only mentioned one by name – *Prunus* x *yedoensis*, so it is reasonable to assume that he raised seedlings from it. Now, it is clear from his writings that he was very critical of his own seedlings and was usually quick to consign anything he considered inferior to the bonfire. However, it is conceivable that Rowland Jackman, while visiting Benenden and with his plantsman's eye for garden potential, might have persuaded Ingram to spare what the latter judged to be an ugly, prostrate seedling from its fate. One can imagine him shrugging and saying, "Take it, it's no use to me". Later, when asked to suggest a name, he might have casually suggested 'Tsubame', the Japanese name of his favourite bird.

### Case not closed

As I said earlier, the above scenario is all conjecture on my part. There could be other less likely, but still possible explanations. For instance, Jackmans had a separate small nursery in the village of Worpleston, near Guildford, Surrey, where they

only grew hardy trees and shrubs from seed (*Liquidambar styraciflua* 'Worpleston' for instance). Perhaps 'Tsubame' occurred there too as a chance seedling and Rowland asked Ingram to name it for him. If that were the case, though, I would have expected him to have claimed the credit for raising it in his catalogue description.

If there is anyone out there who can add anything to this mystery, I would be delighted to hear from them.

*Prunus* x *yedoensis* 'Tsubame' is present in both the UK National Collections of *Prunus*: Mr CG Lane, Witch Hazel Nursery, Newington, Nr Sittingbourne, Kent ME9 7LU; Keele University Arboretum, Keele, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire ST5 5BG. **○**

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**Chris Sanders** VMH is a member of the RHS Woody Plant Committee and is involved in several RHS woody plant trials as a forum member.

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