



A tiny leather bound volume (2 inches x 1½ inches) with gold tooling on spine, gold edged pages and decorative metal clasp; Glamorgan Archives, ref. DNCA/27



Catillac



Forelle

### Dimlands Pears Hilary Thomas

*Plant pears for your heirs* says the old English proverb, but when John Whitlock Nicholl Carne compiled a list of pears growing in his gardens at Dimlands, near Llantwit Major on the coast of the Vale of Glamorgan, he may have been anticipating the fruits of his own labours. His father the Rev. Robert Nicholl Carne (d.1849) built the first house at Dimlands at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The layout of the house and garden is shown on a contemporary map. Robert's notebooks and accounts contain numerous entries recording purchases of seeds and plants. Whilst there are references to apple trees in blossom, not a single entry referring to pear trees, or their fruit, has been found, so it seems likely that it was his son John Whitlock Nicholl Carne (Dr. Carne) who was responsible for planting pears at Dimlands as he upgraded the property in the early 1850s. In 1860 John Whitlock Nicholl Carne recorded and described twenty-seven different varieties (cultivars) of pears at Dimlands in his tiny notebook (see above). Some were probably grown as freestanding trees, but many would have been grown as espaliers, cordons, or

fan trained within the shelter of the walled gardens to the north and east of the house and along the boundary wall to the north-west. Neither the number of trees of each variety planted, nor the fruit yields were recorded, so it is impossible to determine the scale of this 'experiment' in pear cultivation.

Most of the pears listed are dessert pears, but two are hard culinary pears (known as 'wardens'). One is Catillac or Pound Pear, one of the earliest cultivars, first recorded in 1665, and described by Carne as *the best stewing pear from December to April*. There is also Uvedale's St Germain, another early cultivar that was listed in William Airtion's *Hortus Kewensis, or, a catalogue of the plants cultivated in the Royal Botanic Garden at Kew* (1789) and described by Carne as *an excellent stewing pear, ripe January to April. Flesh white and juicy*.

The majority of the Dimlands pears would have come from specialist nurserymen such as Thomas Rivers of Sawbridgeworth in Hertfordshire. In 1840 Rivers published *A Descriptive Catalogue of Fruits cultivated in his nursery*. Over 150 different pears are listed, giving their size and quality, productiveness and fruiting season. The trees are priced with advice on planting and cultivation. All but one of the Dimlands pears, the venerable Catillac, are included in Rivers' catalogue, but it is not



known where the Carnes obtained their trees.

John Carne's list provides not only the names of the pears grown at Dimlands but also their fruiting season, texture, quality and flavour. Such details were (and still are) given in nurserymen's catalogues, and he may have copied them directly. The cramped, handwritten entries put the pear orchards at Dimlands into a precise context of a local landscape and climate (neither of which seem ideal for pear cultivation), and reveal the enthusiasm of the man who planted the trees and enjoyed the harvests.

Some of the pears at Dimlands were self-sterile (as are many pears) and needed a suitable pollinator to produce fruit, and here again the knowledge of a specialist nurseryman would be invaluable. Most of the trees seem to have matured and fruited well, with only the occasional problem, as with the delicious summer pear Citron de Carnes which, according to Carne, *was very apt to crack*.

The pears planted at Dimlands were selected to provide a succession of early, mid and late season fruit. Carne's notes are a personal record of his observations:

*Aston Town: Ripe October and November. Good bearer. Medium size fruits. Flesh yellowish white, buttery, high flavour and perfumed.*

*Bishop's Thumb: An old pear, ripe October. Fruit large. Flesh greenish yellow, melting & juicy, rich sugary & vinous flavour.'*

*Chaumontel: High merits. Ripe from November to March. Fruit large, oblong. Flesh yellow white. Melting, rich and highly perfumed.*

*Citron de Carnes: A delicious summer pear, ripe July and August. Very apt to crack.*

*Glou Morceau: Ripe December and January. Skin smooth, pale green yellow. Flesh white, tender, smooth. Rich sugary flavour. This pear is described in Rivers' catalogue as succeeding well on quince stock in his nursery but seldom succeeding well on pear stock.*

*Knight's Monarch: Ripe December and January. Fruits round. Flesh yellow, melting and very juicy with rich, piquant and perfumed flavour. This pear was propagated by Thomas Andrew Knight (d. 1838), the botanist and horticulturist of Downton Castle, Herefordshire. Knight, an important figure in the cultivation of pears and a fellow of the London Horticultural Society, was the author of *A Treatise on Culture of the Apple and Pear* (1797).*

*Williams' Bon Chrétien: Ripe in August and September. To be gathered before it is yellow. Skin smooth. Flesh white, fine grained, melting. Rich flavour. Musky aroma. This pear was raised in the garden of a Berkshire schoolmaster named Wheeler in the late eighteenth century. Subsequently it was raised from grafted stock by nurseryman Richard Williams of Turnham Green and named after him.*

Many of the Dimlands pears originated from Belgium, where the first deliberate hybridisation of pears, led by the community of monks at Mons, took place. Other early cultivars were raised in Germany and France:

*Beurré Rance: A green skinned pear, one of the best late*



Detail from map of Dimlands, early 19th century, Glamorgan Archives, ref. DNCA/27Map

pears was discovered growing at Rance, in Hainault, Belgium in 1762 and was raised by Abbé Hardenpont a pioneer of pear cultivation at Mons. Was this the only failure at Dimlands? Carne has left that page blank apart from the heading.

*Forelle: This is a pear, which probably originated in North Saxony (forelle the German word for trout). Carne records it as *Forelle or Trout*, and commends it as *an excellent pear with vinous white flesh*, and notes that it is *covered with crimson spots like a trout*.*

*Glou Morceau: This is another old Belgian pear raised in the mid-eighteenth century in Mons, by Abbé Hardenpont. It was introduced into Britain in 1820.*

*Louise Bonne of Jersey: A pear raised c. 1780 by M. Longueval in Normandy before it reached England via Jersey in the Channel Islands. Carne describes this October ripening pear as *a good bearer, medium size'* with *'white buttery & melting flesh and a rich, sugary & brisk flavour*, which suggests a personal preference for this particular fruit.*

*Beurré Diel* was discovered c. 1800 at the Chateau de Perck, near Vilvoorde in Belgium by Pierre Meuris, Head Gardener to the Belgian pomologist and plant breeder Jean Baptiste Van Mons. It was named after the German physician and promoter of fruit cultivation Dr. August Diel.

A number of the new Flemish introductions including *Passe Colmar*, *Napoléon* and *Marie Louise* are also included on Carne's list. His comments suggest that they all flourished at Dimlands and yielded excellent fruit:





Dimlands Castle c.1850

*Passe Colmar*: Ripe November and December. Medium sized. Skin smooth, deep lemon colour. Flesh yellow white, melting, juicy. Rich sugary aromatic flavour. This pear was raised by Abbé Hardenpont at Mons in 1758. Thomas Andrew Knight described it as *by far the most valuable pear I have ever seen*, but while noting its sweet, aromatic flavour, Carne did not single it out for special favour.

*Napoléon*: Ripe November and December. Good and large fruit. Skin smooth. Flesh white, tender, very juicy, rich and refreshing flavour.

*Marie Louise*: Ripe October and November. Good bearer. Tender bloom. Large fruits, very juicy, rich and vinous. Flesh white, melting. Skin smooth. This pear was named after the second wife of Napoleon Bonaparte. Both Napoleon and Marie Louise were raised in Belgium early in the nineteenth century and were brought into this country in 1816.

*Thompson's*: Best of pears. Ripe November. Medium size, Skin pale yellow. Flesh white, melting, very juicy & rich with fine aroma'. This pear originated in Belgium and is thought to have been raised by Dr. Van Mons who sent it, unnamed, to England c.1820. It was named after Robert Thompson, fruit foreman at the Horticultural Society garden at Chiswick.

Carne's descriptions of the individual cultivars and their merits suggest that he kept a careful and knowledgeable eye on his pear trees at Dimlands and was something of a connoisseur of the fruits. Perhaps his tiny notebook was tucked into a waistcoat pocket for quick reference when he examined his trees to see how well they were fruiting. In the context of Glamorgan he may well be considered a pioneer of pear cultivation, for there is little evidence to suggest that his neighbours' orchards were similarly stocked. Dimlands House and gardens stand on a slightly elevated site just two fields away from the Bristol Channel, not the most obvious location for pear cultivation, but a southerly aspect and the walled gardens seem to have provided sufficient warmth and shelter from the prevailing winds for a 'pear friendly' environment, enabling the Nicholl Carne family to enjoy pears for many months of the year.

John Whitlock Nicholl Carne's enjoyment of his orchards was short lived. In 1869 he moved to St. Donats and Dimlands was leased to a succession of tenants who would have enjoyed the fruits of his labours.

J.W. N. Carne's List of Pear trees in the Dimlands garden, made 1860:

*Aston Town; Marie Louise; Chaumontel; Napoléon; Citron de Carmes; Louise Bonne of Jersey; Dunmore; Bishop's Thumb; Brown Beurre; Beurré Diel; Thompson's Glou Morceau; Passe Colmar; Easter Beurré; Beurré Rance; Williams' Bon Chrétien'; Winter Crassane; Knight's Monarch; Hacon's Incomparable; Ne Plus Meuris; Forelle or Trout; Suffolk Thorn; Winter Nelis; Uvedale's St Germain; Cadillac or Pound Pear; Duchesse d'Angoulême; and the Colmar d'Aremberg.*

#### Notes:

Carne's tiny book is probably the smallest known book on pears. A printed label advertising 'HENRY PENNY'S Patent Metallic Books' is attached to the inside front cover. At the back of the booklet is a list of the fifteen varieties of strawberries grown at Dimlands, among them Adair, La Reine, Sir Harry, Nimrod, British Queen, Prince of Wales and Penllyn Castle ('a preserving strawberry').

#### Bibliography:

Hilary M. Thomas, *'Dimlands, Llantwit Major: a small-scale gentry house in Glamorgan'*, *Archaeologia Cambrensis* Vol 153 (2004)

*'Dimlands', Historic Gardens of the Vale of Glamorgan* (2007):

For a useful and beautifully illustrated introduction to the history of pear cultivation see: *Jim Arbury & Sally Pinhey, Pears, (Wells & Winter, 1997)*