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James Evans and Mary Martin: *Tamar Valley Cherries: Forty Years of Hard Graft*: published by the authors, 2021: paperback, available from Bookstop, Tavistock or direct from James Evans <jame77@phonecoop.coop>; £10, plus £2 p&p.
'When Spring is sprung and grass is riz, I wonder where the birdies is?' First daffodils then cherry blossom followed closely by ice cream vans. Before the Second World War cherry blossom in the Tamar valley was so magnificent that people took paddle steamer trips up the Tamar with brass bands on board just to catch glimpses of 'Paradise'. There were cherry orchards and avenues of cherry trees on both sides of the river. In 1846 the writer Rachel Evans commented on *regrators* or fruit sellers who 'take possession' of trees or orchards for a season and when the cherries are ripe, they come back up river with gangs of young women to pick the cherries. They go back down on the next tide, to the markets of Plymouth. One of my own relatives Mary Trick from Landulph was a regrator in Devonport at this time. Her father was a mariner and '40 years afloat'. A sea of cherries and cherry blossom. Until the First World War both sides of the valley yielded 30 tons or more. One tree in Bere Ferrers was said to have yielded 1,000lb of fruit. At Pentillie Castle there were cherry feasts with huge cherry pies. Market gardening was almost a religion.

But where have all the cherries gone? Chekhov would understand only too well. Cherry orchards like apple orchards are vulnerable to predators and economics. Birds, chainsaws and south west gales as well as cheaper imports from France and Spain have also eclipsed the trade. But thankfully over the last forty years, two people have painstakingly researched cherry trees, discovered 'new' varieties and helped replant them. James Evans and Mary Martin, well known 'Cornish Apple people', from near Cotehele, have just published a book with their findings: *Tamar Valley Cherries: Forty years hard graft* – very apt. James, ace grafter, is an engineer and Mary a '*plein air*' artist who has recorded the beauty of the Tamar fruits with her paintbrush all her life.

She waxes lyrical: 'Outdoors is so vibrant;' 'Grandfather was the last miller at Cotehele Mill. Father was small holder of about 80 acres and lots of relations were involved in growing cherries and apples.' Her uncle, Ernie Reep was the fruit grower, 'When it was cherry time he spent all his time keeping the birds off – flocks of marauding starlings. He had a big gun at 4 a.m. No idyll. It was really hard work. The women with big old trees went up the 40 bar ladders. Better pickers, cherries with the stems. More dainty in long skirts. Once they were up the top, the skirts acted as parachutes. Dangerous work if you fell.' Nimble fingers, a fine sense of balance and decorum were required. The men held the ladders and moved them with the women still aloft. There are stories of women singing to each other across the valley rather like songs of the Auvergne.

But times change. Mary remembers a row of cherry trees her grandfather cut down for firewood in the 1950s. 'There were so many. That was the end of the cherries. 80 people were involved in the market slopes between here and

Cotehele Quay. A mile. All south facing slopes. Much of the fruit ended up in Covent Garden.'

In their small book there are descriptions of old varieties such as Birchenhayes, Burcombe, Rumbullion, Fice, Upright, Halton Black, Smutts, Brandy Mazzard and many more. All recorded from the villages of St Dominic, Botus Fleming, Cargreen and Calstock; and on the Devon side Bere Ferrers, Bere Alston and Slew near Lamerhooe. What is equally gratifying is the replanting of cherry orchards. James Evans is a very skilled grafter and they have two or three mother cherry orchards of their own. Even Cotehele House has it own cherry orchard planted by John Lanyon and Dave Bouch back in 2004. Look out for cherry trees both in blossom and in fruit. If you are very lucky you may even get to taste Tamar cherries this summer.
(This review first appeared in the *Western Morning News*.)

James Crowden

Stephen Skelton: *The Knight who Invented Champagne: How Sir Kenelm Digby developed strong glass bottles – verre anglais – which enabled wine and cider makers to produce bottle-fermented sparkling wines*: S.P. Skelton Ltd., 2021: 168 pp., paperback, £27.50.
Sir Kenelm Digby (1603–1665), elegant courtier, diplomat, pirate, swordsman and eminently learned food historian is no stranger to *PPC* or Prospect books. You only have to cast your minds back to 1997 when Tom Jaine republished the 1669 version of *The Closed Opened* with a powerful introduction by Jane Stevenson and Peter Davidson. Digby, whose father was hung drawn and quartered for taking part in Guy Fawkes's ill-fated attempt to blow up Parliament, struts his stuff between the pages with copious recipes for game, fair and fowl, metheglin and sider, jams, conserves, syllabubs, possets, mead and slip-coat cheeses. Digby was also employed by the Navy.

One of Digby's many skills, apart from courting the beautiful Venetia Stanley, whom he had known since childhood, was to have a hand in glass-making, with his old chum Admiral Sir Robert Mansell. Now Digby, the 'Ornament of all England', is the subject of yet another book, *The Knight who Invented Champagne* by Stephen Skelton. Stephen is a Master of Wine and an expert commentator on English wine. He had his own vineyard at Tenterden in Kent for 22 years, now known as Chapel Down. Stephen also made wine for Lamberhurst. He has written several books on wine and was won the André Simon Food and Drink Award. Sparkling wine is close to his heart.

This latest book is a devoted and well-researched tome all about Sir Kenelm. The key fact (which has been known about for years) is that in a court case in 1662 challenging glassmaking patents, Digby was named by four glassmakers as the 'inventor' of the wine bottle thirty years before, i.e. in 1632. This is supposed to have happened in Newnham on Severn, a wonderful spot close