

# The Continuing Mystery of *'Rose de Rescht'*



*(There has been some recent interest in this article, which was published in April, 2008)*

Miss Nancy Lindsay was in absolutely no doubt as to where she found this rose. Her description of it read:

***“‘Rose de Resht’ <sic> A curious rose of a similitude to the 19<sup>th</sup> century European breed of Hybrid Perpetuals but happened on in an old Persian garden in ancient Rescht and owning its origin to the tea-caravans plodding Persia-wards over the Central Asian steppes. Study yard-high bushes of a glazed lizard green, perpetually emblazoned with full camellia-flowers of pigeons-blood ruby irised with royal purple haloed with dragon-sepals like the painted blooms on oriental faience.”<sup>1</sup>***

Perhaps her prose WAS a bit over the top. Graham Stuart Thomas, (who appears to have disliked her cordially) said of Miss Lindsay:

***“No fulsome praise was too much for her beloved roses. Nobody could excel her lavish imagination and great sense of history; only a few could also see the differences between closely similar plants.” [OUCH!] <sup>1</sup>***

He also accused her of ***“lengthy embroideries.” <sup>1</sup>***

These two seem to have had a bit of a history of bumping heads.

Thomas writes that he first saw ***‘Rose de Rescht’*** on a visit to Miss Lindsay’s garden, on ***“30<sup>th</sup> June 1946.”***

His companion on this visit, James Russell, is said to have told Thomas that the rose in question was grown at Castle Howard, Yorkshire, ***“before the Second World War and also in France.” <sup>1</sup>*** But no name was given for the rose Russell remembered, (or Thomas did not record it). Knowing how very similar some roses may look, it seems reasonable to take this recollection with a grain of salt.

If we absolve Miss Lindsay of outright falsehood, (and even Thomas appears to acquit her of that) we might theorize that the rose was in commerce in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Thus, it could have been carried to Persia by English or French governmental, commercial, or military personnel. (If it was not, simply, a Persian rose to begin with).

Rescht, after all, was an important provincial Persian capital, and a relatively cosmopolitan place. Governmental and Commercial Representatives from many parts of Europe came there, and travelers were commonly guested by resident countrymen. Any resident European might have brought roses *“from home,”* and such roses might have been shared with Persian friends and colleagues. As a rose of Persian origin, it could have been collected in the Rescht area in the 19th Century.

## What Do We Know For Sure?

Much of what we know about the origin of ***‘Rose de Rescht’*** is unsubstantiated recollection or guesswork. That’s not uncommon in the world of Found Roses — and this ***IS*** a Found Rose.

We know that Miss Lindsay collected plants in Persia (modern day Iran and Iraq) in spring, 1935. She traveled there in the company of Mrs Alice Fullerton. The ladies were assisted with equipment, advice, and official backing from the Natural History Museum.

Taking minimal personal luggage, traveling on a shoestring, the ladies personal luggage gave way to botanical equipment lent them by the NHM – equipment which was later returned to England filled with botanical specimens and field notes.

This would be a massive adventure for two women in our time (and a dangerous one). It was considered to be extraordinary, in its day. The adventure is recounted in Mrs. Fullerton’s 1938 book, ***“TO PERSIA FOR FLOWERS”***.

From that trip, the ladies returned with *R. hemispherica* – *“The Flower Of Persia,”* and other plants, including a few roses. Among roses successfully propagated, Fullerton describes ***“a deep Chinese Pink whose flowers were flat with green centres.”***

Was this our ‘*Rose de Rescht*’?



*‘Miss Nancy Lindsay’ From  
“Cuttings From My Garden  
Notebook”  
Graham Stuart Thomas  
(Ethne Clark Photo)*

Mrs. Fullerton returned to England alone, apparently in ill health. She recovered, to enjoy her garden tend some of the plants they’d collected, and publish her book.

Miss Lindsay remained in Persia for a time, explored further, and may have eventually made a second visit to the area. ‘*Rose de Rescht*’ could have been collected at any point in these adventures.

Though it was known and widely distributed, ‘*Rose de Rescht*’ didn’t make it into ARS’s “**MODERN ROSES**” until the 6<sup>th</sup> edition (1965). The listing does not reflect Miss Lindsay’s certainty about where the rose was collected. (Did this wording reflect Thomas’ skepticism?) The entry reads:

***“Rose de Rescht, S. (Brought to England by Miss Nancy Lindsay from Persia or France.) Very full rosette form, very fragrant (Damask), bright fuchsia-red, fading with lilac tints. Fol. Dense. Vig., compact; long-season bloom. Ir & dp ”***

Subsequent editions more or less followed this pattern, other than re-classification as a Portland, (which makes sense) and a brief flirtation with a 1950’s introduction date.

Miss Lindsay passed away in 1979 or 1980. One wonders what she thought of that entry in “**Modern Roses**”, and what she’d think of the most recent changes in the record of “her” rose. For “**Modern Roses 12**” (2007) reflects a huge change:

***“Rose de Rescht P, dp, about 1880, from Iran; flowers bright fuchsia-red, fading with lilac tints, very dbl, rosette, borne mostly singly, intense damask fragrance; recurrent; foliage dense; vigorous, compact growth; originally introduced into England about 1880, but was then forgotten about, and re-introduced in the 1940’s.”***

Reading this entry, we’re left wondering about the “back-story” that led to such a complete change. We wish ARS would publish an explanation. Without that – we have only speculation.

If Graham Stuart Thomas is to be believed, Miss Lindsay would likely respond to this most recent description with some passion, and “*a deep intake of cigarette smoke . . . to be expelled . . . with an explosive ‘NO!’*”

Thomas wrote a little more of ‘*Rose de Rescht*,’ also in “**Cuttings From My Garden Notebooks.**”

He said:

***“A rose about which we know little is one brought from Iran by Nancy Lindsay and called by her ‘Rose de Rescht’, after the town where she found it; it was, however, in this country under some other name before she imported it. When we have managed to sort out all these obscure roses, it may prove to be the long-lost ‘Rose du Roi’. . . . The proof would be to obtain ‘Panachee de Lyon,’ which had pink stripes; it is recorded as a sport from ‘Rose du Roi’.”***<sup>2</sup>

We do agree with Mr. Thomas when he says:

***“. . . is it not better to preserve and enjoy these valuable old roses, regardless of their names? They represent a very special phase in rose hybridizing, bring in the recurrent-flowering habit before the influence of the China rose was used, to the same end, but with very different effect.”***

— JMJ, 3-08

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1. “**Cuttings From My Garden Notebooks**” Graham Stuart Thomas, 1996

2. The true ‘Rose du Roi’ WAS rediscovered in just this manner, at Vintage Gardens Rose Nursery, Sebastopol, CA. Unfortunately for Thomas’s deduction, the correct ‘Rose du Roi’ is NOT a match for ‘Rose de Rescht.’