

Citrus

Rutaceae

Citrus is derived from the classical Latin name for *Citrus medica*, citron.

The general name Orange (used for some of the species in this genus) comes originally from the Sanskrit word *nagaranga* via the fruit's Arabian name, *naranj*. Oranges and lemons were only beginning to become familiar in Britain towards the end of the Medieval Period. Today the 17th Century church of St. Clement Danes in London stands on the site of another thought to have been built in the 10th Century. The earlier church was situated in an area inhabited at the end of the Middle Ages by a small community of Danes and had a churchyard which is thought to have extended to the banks of the River Thames (unlike today's Church which is isolated on what could be called a 'traffic island' where the Strand, the Aldwych and Fleet Street meet). By at least the early 1600s the imported citrus fruit were being brought up the River on barges. Although some authorities believe they were offloaded near St. Clement's in Eastcheap others think they came ashore further up the River at the churchyard of the old St. Clement Danes before being carried by porters through Clements Inn to Clare Market – and Clements Inn exacted a toll for this access. With time this toll converted into a custom that was only to fall into disuse at about the end of the 19th Century. In this tradition the attendants visited and presented each of the Clements Inn tenants on New Year's Day (January 1st) with one orange and one lemon (and according to some versions, half-a-crown). The interregnum lasted until 31st March 1920. On that date not only were the bells of St. Clement Danes re-dedicated (they had been silent since 1913 when their oak frame became unsafe), but an annual ritual, Oranges and Lemons Day, was also instituted. On this Day local children received oranges and lemons provided by the Danish community in London. The Ceremony was interrupted during the Second World War when the Church and its bells were seriously damaged in 1941. After the War it became the Royal Air Force church and the building was restored. In the 1950s its bells rang out again and the annual Ceremony was re-instated. At the end of March 1957 local school children attended a short service led by the Royal Air Force Chaplain, which was (and still is) concluded by a rendering of the nursery rhyme

Oranges and lemons

Say the bells of St. Clements

played on handbells by the London County Association of Change Ringers. As the children leave they then each receive an orange and a lemon. The Church's bells also chime the nursery rhyme daily at three-hourly intervals from nine in the morning.

Warning – the oil from the peel from some of these species can cause photosensitivity and dermatitis, and the rare prickles can cause physical injury.

In Malaysia oranges are believed to be able to repel evil spirits, especially gnomes in mining areas.

Today the orange continues to be used as a traditional Chinese symbol of prosperity and good luck in Chinese New Year celebrations.