

A re-examination of *Rosa* × *perthensis* Rouy

R. MASKEW

Coppice House, Bannalls Lane, Stoke Bliss, Tenbury Wells, Worcestershire, WR15 8RZ

and

A. L. PRIMAVESI

Saint Marie's, Oak Street, Rugby, Warwickshire, CV22 5EL

ABSTRACT

In 1892 W. Barclay discovered a strikingly unusual rose near Auchterarder, Mid Perthshire v.c. 88. Specimens were sent to H. J. Coste, who incorporated them in the *Herbarium Rosarum* of Pons & Coste (1899). Rouy (1900) described the plant as *R. × perthensis* (“× *R. perthensis*”). The plant still grows at the type locality and we conclude that it is an unusual variant of the hybrid *R. mollis* Sm. × *R. sherardii* Davies. As *R. × perthensis* predates *R. × shoobredii* W.-Dod the former is the correct name for this hybrid.

KEYWORDS: *R. × perthensis*, persistence, cytological examination.

In 1892 W. Barclay found a strikingly unusual rose growing near Auchterarder Railway Station in Mid Perthshire, v.c. 88. Barclay sent material of this to H. J. Coste, who incorporated it in the *Herbarium Rosarum* of Pons & Coste (1899) under the name of *Rosa pimpinellifolia* × *tomentosa*. G. C. C. Rouy had access to this collection, and described the plant in his *Flore de France* under the name × *R. perthensis* (Rouy 1900).

Since that time, as described below, everyone, with one notable exception, has considered this plant to be a hybrid, and there has been much speculation as to its parentage. It is obvious that the plant named by Rouy as *R. × perthensis*, whatever may be its parentage, is a unique variety. In 1919 J. R. Matthews planted seedlings raised from the Auchterarder plants near St. Andrews Cottage, Dunning, a few miles from the original site, and J. W. H. Harrison, who had seen the Auchterarder plants, reported having seen it at Forres, near Elgin, v.c. 95. Specimens in all the major British herbaria of this variety examined by us are all from Auchterarder, apart from a few from elsewhere which were wrongly named. In 1999 R. Maskew visited the site at the now defunct Auchterarder Railway Station, and found the plant still growing there. He did not find it at Dunning. As far as we know, apart from these records, this unique variety as described below has not been found in any other locality. In order to be sure that the plant at present growing at Auchterarder, which we name as *R. × perthensis* Rouy, is the same taxon as that so named by Rouy himself, a specimen was obtained from Lyon on loan to LTR stamped on the sheet with HERBIER ROUY. This specimen is selected here as the lectotype for *Rosa × perthensis*. The sheet has the printed label common to all the sheets of No. 378 of the *Herbarium Rosarum* of Pons & Coste. It reads:

Dr. Pons & Abbé Coste

Herbarium Rosarum

5e fascicule (années 1898 et 1899)

No. 378 *Rosa pimpinellifolia* × *tomentosa* (*R. involuta* Sm.var.)

Ecosse: Auchterarder, comté de Perth

3 juillet, 6 septembre, 1899

Barclay

In addition to the printed label, also written on the sheet is:—

R. perthensis = (*pimpin.* × *omissa*) Rouy Fl. Fr. V1, 430

There are two branches on the sheet, one in flower (3 July) and the other in fruit (6 September).

The following description refers both to the material from Lyon, and to that collected from Auchterarder by R. Maskew in 1999:

Erect suckering shrub; main stems straight in the lower part, slightly arching near the top, brown or green; young stems slightly zigzagging with wine red or purple pigmentation; stem prickles unequal, some small and almost straight, mixed with others larger and more curved with stouter bases, both mixed with scattered acicles; leaflets consistently seven, 1.8–3.5 × 1.2–1.9 cm, ovate or ovate-lanceolate, glandular-multiserrate; upper surface dull matt green, slightly pubescent; lower surface moderately pubescent on the midrib, less so on the remainder of the surface; both surfaces covered in dark red stipitate glands with a very strong resinous odour; petiole and leaf rachis densely glandular-hispid with numerous glandular and eglandular unequal acicles; stipules 10–13 × 3–6 mm, densely glandular; hips 1.8–3 × 1.4–1.8 cm, subglobose to pyriform, densely glandular-hispid with some acicles reaching 7 mm in length; pedicels 0.5–1.5 cm, densely glandular-hispid, with long eglandular acicles bearing short lateral gland-tipped branches mixed with shorter simple glandular ones; sepals 2–2.5 cm, spreading-erect, pinnate with long leafy tips, some tips reaching 10 mm in length, very densely glandular hispid, some acicles in the lower half with short lateral gland-tipped branches; styles slightly hispid; stigmas in a small flattish head partially concealing the disc; disc slightly concave; orifice 1/3 the diameter of the disc.

According to Matthews (1934), Barclay, and both Baker and Nicholson, at first named it *R. × involuta* Sm. var. *sabinii* Woods, and it is recorded under this name in Buchanan White's Flora of Perthshire (White 1898). This is unacceptable nowadays because *R. × involuta* is the name given to *R. pimpinellifolia* L. × *R. sherardii* Davies, and *R. × sabinii* to *R. mollis* Sm. × *R. pimpinellifolia* L. Later Barclay (1911) expressed as his final opinion that the plant was *R. spinosissima* × *R. omissa* (i.e. *R. pimpinellifolia* × *R. sherardii*) "with a leaning to the *omissa* side" – in other words he considered it to be *R. sherardii* (female) × *R. pimpinellifolia*. A. H. Wolley-Dod (1911) first became involved in this matter when he stated that *R. × perthensis* was best referred to as *R. involuta* var. *nicholsonii* Crépin. He subsequently confused the issue by naming it as *R. barclayi*, a name doubly illegitimate because (a) the name *R. × perthensis* had priority, and (b) *R. barclayi* had already been applied to another taxon. Later (1930–31) he described *R. × perthensis* under his group *Spinossimae* × *Villosae*, but this cannot be acceptable because it cannot be applied to any of the three British species of the Subsection *Villosae*. (a) *R. × involuta* has priority for *R. pimpinellifolia* × *R. sherardii*; (b) *R. × sabinii* has priority for *R. mollis* × *R. pimpinellifolia*; and (c) *R. tomentosa*, the third British species of this Subsection does not occur so far north, and hence is very unlikely to form part of this hybrid.

The plant was figured by Harrison (1921), and later Matthews (1934) stated that Harrison had informed him that he had cytologically examined the plant and had found no evidence of its being a *spinossima* hybrid. Matthews (1934) gave a detailed discussion in which he rejected the idea of hybridity and stated that he considered *R. × perthensis* to be *R. omissa* Déséglise (= *R. sherardii* Davies var. *omissa* (Déséglise) W.-Dod). Matthews (1934), like Wolley-Dod, was convinced that all rose hybrids must show at least partial sterility, but he found that *R. × perthensis* was fully fertile, and had raised from seed an F2 generation which was identical in characters with its parent. He also claimed that *R. pimpinellifolia* did not appear to occur anywhere near Auchterarder.

Over forty years later Matthews (1976) revealed that he had long had proof that *R. pimpinellifolia* could not be involved. He had already (1934) stated that Harrison had examined the plant cytologically, and had found no evidence that *R. pimpinellifolia* was involved. This could only mean that Harrison must have studied the behaviour of the nucleus during meiosis, where the behaviour of the 28 chromosomes of *R. pimpinellifolia* if present would have been apparent.

Melville (1975) had evidently not taken this into account when he stated that *R. × perthensis* was the triple hybrid *Rosa pimpinellifolia* × *R. rubiginosa* × *R. sherardii*. In any case the characters he cites as evidence for *R. pimpinellifolia* influence are unconvincing. The presence of seven leaflets in the leaves is a common feature of the caninoid roses, and the slender nearly

straight prickles do not necessarily point to *R. pimpinellifolia*. The acicles cited as evidence by Melville do not resemble those of *Rosa rubiginosa*, and, with careful examination, we can find no sweet briar type subfoliar glands – all the glands on *R. × perthensis* are downy rose type with a very strong resinous odour.

That *Rosa sherardii* Davies is involved has been recognised by nearly everybody since the plant was first discovered (*Rosa tomentosa* of the earlier authors, e.g. Rouy, almost certainly referred to the aggregate name, which at that time covered all the downy roses), the zigzag habit of some of the branches, and a number of slightly curved prickles with comparatively broad bases, are indicators of this species.

The other species involved can only be *Rosa mollis* Sm. This is indicated by straight main stems with a tendency to sucker, and a number of slender, almost straight prickles. The long and numerous acicles on the hips are not indicative of any other species, but rather an exaggerated form of the normal character of *R. mollis*. Other characters such as the resin-scented glands typical of the downy roses are common to both species. In this hybrid it is unusual for the indumentum on the lower surface of the leaflets to be more or less confined to the midrib and veins. However, there is more regional variation in *R. sherardii* than in most British roses (Graham and Primavesi 1993). This is particularly noticeable in the degree of pubescence in the leaflets, where, in some districts, this is much reduced from normal. If the plant is examined in the light of modern taxonomic opinion and research, it can be seen that there is only one deviation from *R. mollis* × *R. sherardii*, namely the unusual profusion of stipitate glands and gland-tipped acicles, which tend to obscure and distract from the normal characters of the two species. The fact that this unique plant has persisted so long at the original site is probably due in part to its suckering habit, enabling it to perpetuate itself vegetatively, and that it grows in isolation on the bank of a quiet country lane, and has somehow managed to avoid destruction from mechanical hedge cutting.

The name *Rosa × perthensis* Rouy predates *R. × shoobredii* W.-Dod, and is therefore the correct name for the hybrid *Rosa mollis* Sm. × *R. sherardii* Davies.

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