

Plumier made detailed notes and drawings of all his discoveries but alas, his plant specimens never reached Paris, for he was shipwrecked on the way home. His notes he managed to save and these are stored in the same National Library as Surian's. Plumier was awarded the accolade of '*Botaniste du Roi*' for the amazing work he carried out, for on this and two subsequent expeditions between 1690 and 1704 he discovered hundreds of new plant families in the Americas. In all he produced three major works and some 31 manuscript volumes of drawings and descriptions, a truly extraordinary achievement when one considers the dangers he faced, the difficulties under which he doubtless worked and the shipwrecks he survived. Plumier was a man of many talents who added immeasurably to our knowledge of the natural world and well and truly deserved the title of '*King's Botanist*'.

Plumier is credited with instituting the charming custom of naming new plant families after notable persons and amongst his discoveries he named *Magnolia* for Pierre Magnol, Director of the Montpellier Botanic Gardens, and *Fuchsia* for a noted German botanist Leonard Fuchs, and many more. His only mention in the floral pantheon is in the name *Plumeria* bestowed in his honour on the Frangapani, and in one species of begonia, the shrub-like *B. plumieri*.

The City of Rochefort maintains and operates a great conservatory housing a significant collection of the rarest species of the *Begoniaceae* in honour of Michel Begon who is greatly revered for his work as *Intendant* of Rochefort-sur-mer. In 1694 his *Intendancy* was extended to include the whole of the newly declared Province of La Rochelle (which included Rochefort), and he was virtually the absolute master of the area with the Naval Commandant filling a secondary role. As with Plumier, Louis XIV accorded him an accolade, describing him as "*le meilleur Intendant de Louis XIV*" (Louis XIV's best *Intendant*). He died in office in 1710 having spent 21 years administering the affairs of this great seaport and province.

So the begonia story began.....

(Note - I am indebted to Patrick Rose of the Rochefort Begonia Conservatory for much of the information regarding Michel Begon.)