

# Nicolas Marchant (? – 1678)

## Jean Marchant (1650 – 1738)

The name Marchant is perhaps best known for its association with the genus *Marchantia*, which although frequently attributed to Linnaeus, was named in 1713 by Jean Marchant in honour of his father. The interests of the early French botanists Nicolas Marchant and his son Jean were so similar that the works of one have often been attributed to the other. Both devoted themselves – Nicolas the last ten years of his life, and Jean almost all his life's work – to the preparation of a large number of botanical descriptions for the *Histoire des Plantes*, undertaken in 1667 by the Académie Royale de Sciences but abandoned in 1694. The *Histoire* was never published.

Nicolas Marchant held a degree in medicine from the University of Padua. His early interest in botany was almost certainly a progression of his medical studies on the identification and curative properties of herbs. After qualifying he became apothecary to Gaston, duc d'Orleans, brother of King Louis XII, and often spent time at the Chateau of Blois, where Gaston had established a botanical garden. Marchant collaborated with the garden's three directors and in 1657 may have accompanied Scottish botanist and taxonomist Robert Morison on a botanical excursion to the area around La Rochelle. Morison, a royalist in exile, had studied in Paris under the guidance of Vespasian Robin,

botanist to the king of France, who introduced him to Gaston. On Robin's recommendation, Morison became a director of the Royal Gardens. After the duke's death on 2 February 1660 Marchant entered the service of the king, but it is not known what position he held in the royal household. Two of the directors received no official re-employment, while Morison rejected an offer and returned to England. In 1674 Marchant was appointed director at the Jardin du Roi, with a garden at his disposal for the experimental cultivation of exotic species. A founding member of the Académie Royale des Sciences, he was for many years the only botanist in the organisation. He was also one of the first botanists to study the lower plants, and 35 years after his death in Paris in June 1678, his son named the common liverwort *Marchantia* in his honour.

Jean Marchant was elected to his father's place at the academy and also succeeded him in his post at the Jardin du Roi. He continued his father's work on the *Histoire* and increased the number of species in the experimental garden until 1694, when the academy abandoned its project and his position at the royal garden was disestablished. However, he continued to prepare botanical descriptions, a few of which appeared in the academy's *Mémoires*, but most remained unpublished. Jean Marchant died in Paris on 11 November 1738, at 88 years of age.

### ***Marchantia foliacea***

Because of a perceived resemblance to the lobes of a liver, species of *Marchantia* were used by mediaeval herbalists to treat liver ailments – hence the name liverwort. Most *Marchantia* are recognised by the general form of the thallus, but they also have distinctive cup-shaped structures in which gemmae are produced for vegetative reproduction. Sexual reproductive organs are stalked disc or cap-like structures held above the thallus. Three species occur in New Zealand. *Marchantia foliacea* ('leafy') shows a large range of form and is a darker green than *Marchantia berteriana*, with which it sometimes grows. Common to 1500 m in New Zealand, it is also found in Tasmania and in the Chiloe and Juan Fernandez islands off the coast of Chile.

