

Bananas!

Thomas Johnson (d.1644) was an apothecary. An Apothecary was like a chemist. He sold medicines. His shop was in Snow Hill, London. He was very interested in plants and liked to collect rare plants. Around 11th April 1633 he was given a present. It was a rare plant. It was from his friend, John Argent. John Argent was President of the College of Physicians. That meant he was an important doctor. A merchant had just sailed home from the Bahamas. The Bahamas are islands far away, in a hot part of the world. He brought something home from the Bahamas. It grew there. It would not grow in a cold country like Britain. He gave it to John Argent and John Argent gave it to Thomas Johnson.



The present was a bunch of bananas! It had some leaves on it too. The bananas were not ripe yet. Mr Johnson hung them up in his shop window and everyone came to look. No one had seen bananas before. Mr Johnson wrote down what the bananas were like. They were ripe after a month. They were soft and tender to eat. What did it taste like? “A bit like a musk-melon,” said Mr Johnson. “The leaves are so big!” he said. “You could wrap up a two-year-old in them.”

It was a long time before bananas came to Britain all the time. It was not until 1884. Then an importer brought them in from the Canary Islands.

Can you find the Canary Islands and the Bahamas on a map?