

## Rare Franklin tree blooms at estate after seven years thanks to Indian summer



The Franklinia alatamaha – the Franklin tree – is extinct in the wild.

ONE of the world's rarest flowers has bloomed near Probus, from where it disappeared two centuries ago.

The *Franklinia alatamaha* – the Franklin tree – is already extinct in the wild and is grown in only a handful of nurseries worldwide.

It was a project carried out by nursery manager Luke Hazelton at the Trewithen Estate after seeds were found, and took seven years to flower.

The plant was discovered on the banks of the Altamaha River in Georgia, USA, in 1765 by John and William Bartram, and named after their close friend polymath Benjamin Franklin.

A few years later a specimen was brought back to Trewithen

but disappeared soon afterwards.

Now three shrubs have flowered and more are expected to follow next year.

Mr Hazelton said: "We found out how rare it was after we learned that the Botanical Gardens at Kew didn't have one.

"There's been a great deal of interest in it, we even got a call from one guy from the US who said he used to swim in the river near where they were found.

"But we've only got a few so are selling them to people we know will be able to look after them. Of course, it doesn't come with a guarantee it will flower."

He started growing it seven years ago, but bad weather

hampered its progress.

He said: "Even though we have it in a greenhouse, the summers are not light enough or hot enough.

"But this year we've had great weather and a fantastic Indian summer so everything has worked out.

"Now I've got to do it again next year just to prove it was not a sheer fluke."

The tree, which can grow up to 10m (33ft) is priced at £100 plus VAT.

A spokesman for the Royal Botanical Gardens said: "The plant is very delicate and usually only stands a chance if it is kept in a greenhouse.

"However in Cornwall, the environment would make it possible to grow outside."