

Issue No. 24

June 2009

Friends of Thwaite Gardens Newsletter



OPEN DAY A SUCCESS ONCE AGAIN!

This year's Open Day took place on a beautiful warm early summer day, which showed off the gardens to their best advantage.

Although fewer people came through the gate than last year (possibly because it was a Bank Holiday weekend and also because there were 2 other gardens open in Cottingham that day), which resulted in our takings being down on last year, all those who attended were very impressed with the garden and the work done in it by the Friends.

Thanks to everyone who gave their time to help, but particular thanks should go to Pam Bailey for organising the duty rota, Doug James for sorting out the money (despite the distraction of Hull City!!) to Marilyn Page (a benefactor of several local charities) for making all those wonderful scones; to the ground staff for preparing the grounds and to Vic Swetez for making sure the glasshouse complex looked its best.

Summary of takings (last year's figures in brackets):-

Gate - £330 (£450.50)

Plants - £195 (£307)

Refreshments - £175.03 (£216.15)

New members signed up on the day - £160.50 (£296)

New members signed up since open day - £64

TREES AT THWAITE No.4

CAUCASIAN WINGNUT (*Pterocarya fraxinifolia*)



This article will introduce what is potentially one of the most handsome trees in Thwaite gardens - a tree with many unusual and distinctive characteristics. The name “wingnut” refers to the long chains of seeds which hang in profusion, like green necklaces, from the branches in summer and autumn. Each seed is a small nut with wing-like flanges which aid seed distribution. These fruits make the tree quite distinctive from the similar and related walnut, for which it might be mistaken at first glance.

This is only one of several strong features which make the wingnut easily identified. Even in winter, the “naked” buds (having no bud scales) are notable. The buds grow in lush, exuberantly healthy, ash-like foliage. The Thwaite tree is multi-stemmed. This is a fairly consistent, though not universal, characteristic of the species, as are the suckers which surround it in almost alarming profusion. The suckers have the potential to form a small copse. One of the finest examples in Britain - at Cambridge Botanic Gardens – has done just that. At Thwaite conversely, occasional attempts have been made to control the suckers with weed killer, despite the fact that spraying the suckers is effectively spraying the tree itself!

Odd doses of herbicide do not entirely account for the weakened condition of our Thwaite tree however. Recent flooding round the lake has had a seriously detrimental effect on our wingnut, and although potentially of considerably greater stature, it has become sickly of late. It may even be worth allowing one or two of the suckers full rein to grow as a possible replacement for the original if the decline continues.

Although quite an “unusual” tree, the Caucasian species is much the commonest of the wingnuts encountered. There are a number of other species, mostly found in special collections. The Chinese wingnut (*P.stenoptera*) and its hybrid with the Caucasian species (*P. x rehderiana*) are the next least rare. Thwaite Gardens however has another of the scarcer ones - the Japanese wingnut (*P.rhoifolia*) growing in the wood. This is a taller, more elegant tree which mercifully continues in good health. It also seems to produce far fewer suckers, though even these were dosed with herbicide a few years back. This Japanese wingnut is one of the most valuable trees in the entire Thwaite collection.

John Killingbeck



THWAITE FEATURES IN PLAN FOR COTTINGHAM’S FUTURE

A team representing most of Cottingham’s community organisations has listed Thwaite Gardens among areas which are most important in encouraging and protecting the village’s wildlife .

Thwaite is singled out for its bird population – particularly little Grebes, Sedge Warblers, Tawny Owls and Blackcaps.

Along with several other listed areas the Cottingham Community Plan says they must be protected and enhanced because a shrinking supply of building land increases the threat that greenfield sites will be targeted for development.

Other areas listed as important for wildlife are Millbeck wildlife area, King George V playing fields, Priory and Snuffmill fields, The Dene, Oppy Wood, Castle Hill new woodland and St Mary’s churchyard.

Charles Levitt

PLANT OF THE MONTH

GIANT LILY (*Cardiocrinum giganteum*)

Inspiration for this article came on the recently held Thwaite Gardens Open Day when this plant attracted a certain amount of attention, even though it was not yet in flower. It is a recent introduction, planted in one of the raised beds beyond the greenhouses which have been restored by Friends volunteers to house Chinese woodland plants.

The giant lily is an extraordinary plant in many ways. The sheer size of the inflorescence is its most striking feature, as this can tower to over 2 metres tall, decorated with enormous white trumpet lily flowers. More remarkable perhaps; the plant is “monocarpic” (flowers only once). It spends the first few years of its life building an enormous bulb, the entire stored energy of which is eventually expended in one dramatic flowering. Following the production of seed, the plant then dies, though offsets may persist.



Those anticipating such a dramatic display from the Thwaite plant, however, may yet be disappointed. A more bizarre flowering event probably lies in store because, by chance, our plant is suffering from “fasciation”. This is a curious and not uncommon disorder, which causes a plant to grow abnormally, resulting in distorted flattened growth. It is particularly common in Delphiniums, Lupins and Forsythia, but may be seen on almost any plant,

sometimes resulting in striking, if slightly gross, floral displays. Cacti so affected are described as “monstrous” forms. The effect it may have on our *Cardiocrinum* can scarcely be imagined! We await.

Incidentally, a plant grown specifically for its fasciation growth can be found near the jetty by Thwaite lake. This is *Salix sachalinensis* ‘Sekka’. It’s pads of silvery catkins appeal, apparently, to flower arrangers of a more avant-garde turn of mind, though it is otherwise quite an undistinguished plant.

John Killingbeck

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DOGS ON UNIVERSITY PREMISES

Joe Garner, Grounds and Gardens Manager, has sent us the following contribution to clarify the position regarding dogs.

The University recognizes that its campuses, particularly Thwaite Gardens, are used by members of the public and staff to walk their dogs. Unfortunately, allowing dogs onto the sites can sometimes cause problems for other users or those living in adjoining property. Dogs can also be detrimental to the flora and fauna and cause health and safety problems, for example from their excrement.

To manage the growing number of persons with dogs using the sites, the University will shortly be looking at amending its current dog policy and looking at making all sites lead only areas (with the exception of sports grounds from which dogs, other than assistance dogs, will be excluded).

When this amendment comes into operation, all members of the Friends who bring their dogs into Thwaite gardens, will be asked to register them with the University. This will make it easier to identify those dog walkers who are not members of the Friends and to allow a greater control over stray dogs.

The co-operation and help of the Friends in this matter would be much appreciated.

ELVIS AND THE POKEWEED

A plant that Elvis Presley sang about in 1970 is growing in Cottingham. It features in his ballad “Poke Salad Annie” about a poor American girl who could feed herself only by scouring the countryside for plants that grew wild.

So desperate was Annie that her miserable diet included a shrub that was deadly poisonous – the American pokeweed. And she wasn’t alone. Many others in the poverty stricken southern states did exactly the same. Like them, Annie survived only because she knew the secret. They boiled the leaves in a pan then threw the water away; boiled them again in fresh water and that too was thrown away. After a third boiling the leaves, known in the local dialect as “poke sallet” – which translates as cooked greens – were safe to eat.

There are many types of pokeweed – all dangerous. The Cottingham specimen is in Thwaite Gardens. It is a thriving shrub nearly 6ft tall, covered, in spring, with bold pink flower heads, followed in autumn by clusters of black shiny fruits very similar in appearance to blackcurrants.

Further south you can find the pokeweed in a roof garden full of edible plants at the Business Centre in Reading – set up to study and display the international trade in foodstuffs.



Cottingham’s specimen will be in flower for the annual Friends Open day in May. For next years open day, the Friends are hoping to find a track of the Elvis recording capable of being played outdoors to highlight this unusual plant and salute the wealthy singer’s recognition of how the poor of the land managed to live on plants that could easily have killed them.

Charles Levitt

SCHOOL PARTIES ON THE INCREASE!

It is good to be able to report that Thwaite Gardens are being used more as a teaching resource, not only by our own University students, but increasingly by local schools.

This year we have seen the gardens used by school groups for various field studies. Examples of the school projects are:-Kelvin Hall- sampling of different habitats followed by computer analysis,The McMillan School group has set up a Forest School (see below) and Frederick Holmes special school has been looking at adaptations of various plants, such as succulents, bog and water plants and herbs, to their habitats.

Building better links with schools is good for the University and hopefully some of the children visiting the gardens will be motivated to come and study at the University.

Thanks for the support given by the Dept. of Biological Sciences, the Centre for Educational Studies, the Facilities Directorate, Health and Safety Services and the Friends of Thwaite Gardens

Vic Swetez

Hull Forest Schools Project

Clifton/Lambert/McMillan Children's Centres Triangle Network

Core Aims of the project:- To develop opportunities for children living and working in areas of Hull which have a very limited access to environmental learning in natural spaces. To develop cross-curricular learning in a challenging natural environment which allows for long-term child-led learning as well as skills development in using natural materials. To work with a range of partners in developing the Forest School environment, access and sustainability of the project long-term,

Why is Outdoor Learning so important for the network?

"Children must be supported in developing the knowledge, skills and understanding that help them to make sense of the world. Their learning must be supported through offering opportunities for them to use a range of tools safely; encounter creatures, people, plants and objects in their natural environments and in real-life situations; undertake practical 'experiments'; and work with a range of materials."

(Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, DfES, 2007)

Endike Primary School Foundation Stage are developing their outdoor area - with help from the University Gardens at Thwaite Hall.



The children at Endike wanted to develop their outdoor area by building tunnels and teepees to play in. The staff contacted Vic Swetez and he helped us to find willow withies that would be suitable for building these large structures.

We hope that the willow will start to grow into 'living sculptures' for the children to enjoy playing in.

Where they cross, the withies should join making the structure more stable. The fact that it is a living structure makes this a very special place.

The children helped to make the structures, and to water the withies.

The visit to Thwaite Hall was an experience in itself. Endike staff were very enthusiastic about the potential for educational visits.



We hope that we have made a link with the University that we can build on in the future. We are arranging a visit to bring all the Foundation Stage children (aged 3 to 5) to the Thwaite Hall Gardens later this term.

They will be able to explore the plants, trees and wildlife in a local environment.



Kate Ranner, Deputy Head



Open gardens

Thwaite Gardens

Sunday 2 August 2009, 11am – 4pm

Refreshments, cakes, tombola, books, bric-a-brac, plants

redcross.org.uk

The British Red Cross Society, incorporated by Royal Charter 1908, is a charity registered in England and Wales (220949) and Scotland (SC037738).

Please support the above event, which is to raise money for local Red Cross services and which will be manned by volunteers from Cottingham Red Cross Centre (several of whom are also members of the Friends).

If any member has any plants or other items which can be sold on the day, please leave them with Vic at the gardens at the end of July. Thank you very much for your support.

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We welcome contributions to the newsletters from all members, so if you have any articles, ideas, photographs, letters etc which you think would be of interest or would provoke discussion, please send them to the Newsletter Editor at the address above.

