

Issue No. 26

February 2010

Friends of Thwaite Gardens Newsletter



Membership Renewal Reminder

Just a reminder that annual membership subscription was due on 1st November 2009, and there are still quite a few people who have not yet renewed their membership.

Membership fees remain at £7 per person or £10 for two people living at the same address.

Cheques should be made payable to “The Friends of Thwaite Gardens” and sent to the treasurer, who’s contact details are at the end of this Newsletter.

It is our policy to remove from our mailing list members who have not paid by the end of this current year.

Please note: new members who have joined on, or after, the Open Day in May 2009 do not have to renew their subscriptions until November 2010.

A GREAT GIFT IDEA!

Why not treat family or friends to a years membership of the Friends for a birthday present ?

Membership gift cards are available on request.

Please ask a member of the committee if you are interested.

OPEN DAY 2010

Following another very successful open day last year, we are now busy preparing for this year's event and hope that as many Friends as possible will be willing to lend a hand.

There will again be a plant stall with a wide variety of plants for sale. Donations of plants from Friends would be welcome.

There will be the usual refreshments served from 11 am in the corridor, and we would very much welcome contributions of home baking to this stall, as it usually goes down very well!

Other ways in which you can help to make the day a success are:-

<i>Welcoming visitors</i>	<i>Taking admission fees</i>
<i>Handing out brochures</i>	<i>Signing up new members</i>
<i>Manning the plant stall</i>	<i>Assisting with refreshments</i>

Please indicate your preference and the time which would suit you best on the accompanying loose leaf form and return it to the Secretary, Pam Bailey – contact details at the end of this newsletter – or drop it in to the greenhouse block at the Botanic Gardens.

Admission to the Open Day is free to members and for non-members is the very reasonable price of £1.50, so please tell all your family and friends about the event and let's try and make this year's Open Day even more of a success than last year!

**OPEN DAY IS ON
SUNDAY MAY 23rd
11am to 4 pm.**

The Missing Link!



The picture above shows the site of the bridge which used to cross the lake, but which was taken down some years ago because it had rotted.

There is a feeling among some of the Friends that this bridge ought to be reinstated because it will connect the main path into the woodland and create a safer route than the present one, which is at the end of the lake and at times can be slippery and unsafe, particularly for children.

Additionally it would make a nice feature and would complement the jetty built by the Friends.

We would welcome comments from fellow members as to whether this should become a future project.

Please could anyone having any thoughts on this matter send them to the Editor at the address on the inside of the back cover.

Principles of Woodland Management



Many people believe that woodland habitats will manage themselves, without any intervention. Whilst they will undoubtedly grow and develop on their own, the actual wildlife value can sometimes be limited. Through careful management and intervention, it is possible to enhance an already established woodland to improve its diversity and benefit to flora and fauna.

As I am sure most visitors will be aware there is a lot of work going on in the woodlands. Some of you may also be aware that the grounds were put on the English Heritage “at risk” register early last year. To gauge exactly why we were downgraded by English Heritage I met their representative on site.

What he said gave me the impetus to act, as for some time I have been considering on how best to “tackle” the woodlands, to open them up and increase the composition and structural diversity. One of the main reasons for the drop in status was the loss of views across the lake. With this in mind and following 5 simple woodland management principles we have started a rolling programme of development work.

The basic 5 principles are:-

1. **The amount of light available beneath the canopies** – By removing the self-set, invasive species and by selective felling, we are creating glades for new species of flora and fauna to colonise.
2. **Whether the resident trees and plants are native or non-native** – We are removing non-native species such as sycamores and will be replacing them with oaks, beech, ash, Scots pine and larch.
3. **Structural diversity (heights, densities, composition of trees)** - By spreading the work over a few years we will soon build up a mixture of heights in the lower stories as new growth is staggered. A quick count of the trees has shown the woodland is roughly 25% sycamore, 20% birch, 20% chestnut, 10% beech, 10% ash, with the remainder being made up of yew, cherry, hawthorn, willow, lime, holly, elm and oak. By carrying out new planting this imbalance can be re-addressed.
4. **The age of the resident trees**
5. **The provision of decaying wood** – Although we will be clearing the debris from the woodland floor there will be many piles left and the occasional standing dead tree (if safe to do so) will be allowed to decay naturally.

Other issues to consider are:-

The woodland boundary with the lake, where the high water levels have claimed numerous trees and allowed others to thrive, now requires an element of control. Also a gradual transition would be preferable from the margins to the woodlands. Having mature trees running straight into the lake provides poor structural grading and is therefore poor for biodiversity.

The ivy on the trees provides feeding opportunities and shelter during the winter months. However, it needs managing as it is very invasive and can disguise trees that are showing signs of disease. As this is woodland where

the public have been given access, we have to balance good conservation practices whilst keeping in mind the health and safety aspect.

Whilst we are carrying out this work it is essential that all visitors observe any work warning signs, avoid these area where the work is being carried out, keep dogs on leashes as policy states.

Joe Garner

Gardens and Grounds Manager

Diary Dates

30th March – Talk by Mr Doug Stewart – subject tbc

Members Free, guests £3

! N.B. Please note date correction for this talk !

23rd May – Open Day

5th October - AGM

PLANT OF THE MONTH : GLASTONBURY THORN
(*Crataegus monogyna* 'Biflora')



This must rank as one of the strangest of winter flowering plants; rarely grown yet imbued with as much magical symbolism as holly or mistletoe. Thwaite gardens has this plant represented in the hawthorn collection, because essentially it is simply a bizarre variety of the common hawthorn or May tree.

This May tree flowers twice in the year. Apart from the usual late spring flowering it also blooms in mid winter, though admittedly rather sparsely. Why is this so? This is where folklore and legend has provided a magical explanation for this undeniably strange phenomenon.

The story goes that on a visit to Glastonbury around AD 30 to 60 Joseph of Arimathea drove his hawthorn staff into the ground whereupon it miraculously took root and blossomed thereafter every Christmas. Over the years scions of the tree were taken and distributed to various localities which is fortunate since the original tree was said to have been destroyed by puritans in the seventeenth century. If this particular part of the story were completely true, this would make the tree about 1,600 years of age at the time - greatly in excess of its normal lifespan. So it seems that the mythology may have grown from obscurity, perhaps to

reinforce belief in miraculous forces among the faithful. Yet as with so many strange and apparently (to modern eyes) ridiculous superstitions, there may be a few grains of truth in the story.

Hawthorn has a very wide distribution in Europe, and beyond into the middle-east, so there is scope for variation within such a large population. Some authorities state that middle-eastern forms of the tree habitually bloom in winter. So it would seem quite possible that the Glastonbury thorn could indeed originate from Holy Land stock, though not of course necessarily delivered by the hand of Joseph of Arimathea.

However, there has been a long history of hawthorn importations to Britain from the continent, (notably during the enclosure period). This still goes on today. Many continental trees, genetically attuned to severe winters, break into growth very early in Britain and may be noticed particularly along modern roads greening up as early as February. I even know of individuals west of Hull along the A63 which often bear a few flowers in mid winter. Effectively, these are wild Glastonbury thorns, suggesting that the original plant could also have a more prosaic origin.

The final twist to this ancient tale brings us right up to date. People interested in the effect of climate change on the British countryside have adopted May blossoming dates as an easily recognised monitoring device, in which the public are invited to participate by submitting their own observations. Ironically due to the diverse origins outlined above, hawthorn would seem singularly unreliable for this purpose.

John Killingbeck
December 2009

TREES OF THWAITE No 6 :- TWO NUTMEG TREES
(*Torreya californica* and *T. nucifera*)



These two evergreen trees are good examples of species which are easily overlooked and unappreciated in the Thwaite garden, yet rank among the most important in our collection.

There are six species of *Torreya* worldwide; four in East Asia and two in North America. They are closely allied to and generally resemble the yew (*Taxus*). This is probably why Thwaite's two *Torreya* are easily missed because both look, to the casual glance, like slightly odd yew trees. In the wild they grow rather taller than the average yew, however, both Thwaite specimens are far from full sized. We have one Californian nutmeg (*T. californica*) and one Japanese nutmeg (*T. nucifera*).

Another source of confusion is the name "nutmeg" tree. *Torreya* is quite unrelated to the spice nutmeg used in cooking, which is a tropical plant. Nevertheless the seeds have some resemblance to those of the true nutmeg and indeed the seeds of some *Torreya* are eaten in their native countries. As far as I am aware, neither of the Thwaite trees has ever produced fruit, a feat made less likely because the trees are mostly

(though apparently not universally) dioecious ; i.e. males and females are separate plants.

Perhaps partly because they have been overlooked, both Thwaite nutmegs are severely suppressed by surrounding shrubs and trees. Our Californian nutmeg is particularly badly overwhelmed and would be even more so had not Friends volunteers removed some of the competitors. It is now at least possible to see the plant fairly easily, though further remedial action is required for it to develop properly as befits a distinguished botanical treasure. On examination, its leaves can be seen to be at least twice the length of common yew and are also much stiffer.

The nearby Japanese nutmeg has fared better. After much persistence, Thwaite gardeners were eventually persuaded to remove overhanging ash branches some years ago, which has been a great help to the tree. Nevertheless, more light and space is still required.

In the wild, most *Torreya* are having a difficult time. Partly this is because they are very slow to reproduce and grow, as well as to the usual problems caused by man. Consequently the genus is the subject of conservation efforts. One of these projects is based at Edinburgh botanic garden. Many years ago a botanist from Edinburgh happened to be visiting Thwaite and was delighted to find our Japanese nutmeg. He took away some cuttings in the expectation that they may harbour genetic variation now lost in the much reduced wild population which might later be returned to bolster the wild gene pool.

This is surely a lesson in the importance of botanic garden work in which Thwaite could play a much bigger part given the right direction.

John Killingbeck
December 2009

OBITUARIES

This year has seen the death of several members of the friends and our thoughts and condolences go to their families and friends.

Two of those members are worthy of special mention.

DENNIS HALLETT

Dennis was the original treasurer of the Friends and did a lot of work when we first started, to get things up and running. He was a popular and regular visitor and supporter of all the Friends events.

KEITH ALLISON

Keith was an academic who's subject was history, but who's interests lay in many areas relating to our heritage and to nature. He wrote several books including "The East Riding of Yorkshire Landscape". Following retirement, he travelled widely with his wife studying birds and also developed an interest in fungi, bees, ladybirds and moths. His main claim to fame in relation to the Botanic Gardens was his determination to control the Himalayan Balsam, an invasive weed growing around the lake. In the last Newsletter he wrote an article about it and requested more help in 2010 to keep it under control. Hopefully someone else will continue his work.



Cottingham Wildlife Watch.

Cottingham Wildlife Watch is a junior branch of the Yorkshire Wildlife Trusts, aimed at children from the age of four to fourteen years old.

We involve children in environmental projects including wild flower and tree planting, reserve management at one of the Trust Reserves and litter picking.

Thwaite Gardens have kindly allowed the Watch Group to use the grounds and facilities a number of times.

These events usually attract a full turn out of members, approx 20 children with parents. With such large numbers we separate the children into two groups.

The first group of children take nets for pond dipping collecting many pond creatures that live in the lake. Part of this activity is to look at the water quality; pH, Clarity, Nitrate, and recently we have been able to have a COD (Chemical Oxygen Demand) test and a value for the suspended solids. These simple tests demonstrate to the children that water quality has a direct impact on our wildlife and plant life. The second group have a mini beast hunt in the shrubbery near the lake side, collecting bugs, beetles and insects for identification. After about one hour the groups then change activities.

One of their favourite activities is Owl pellet dissecting. This activity takes place under cover near the green houses. Investigating the pellets teaches the children not only about the varied diet of the Barn Owl, but also fine motor skills for using tweezers and a magnifying glass to look at smaller specimens, for example the teeth of a shrew or the microscopic pond creatures we use a microscope.

Basic water tests carried out at Thwaite Gardens.

	11/08/2007	17/05/2008	12/09/2009
Test	1	2	3
pH			7.13
Nitrate mg/l			
Clarity	1	1	1
COD (Chemical Oxygen Demand mg/ltr)	35		54
Suspended Solids. mg/ltr			40
	Sample taken after the floods.		

A few pictures taken at our last meet on the 12th September 2009



Smooth Newt found by one of the Watch members



Low water levels require a different approach to pond dipping!



Owl pellet dissections.

Roy Humphries
Cottingham Wildlife Watch

Mavis's Seat



*Former Chairman Mavis May
has generously donated a seat
for the front garden so that
Friends can rest from their
voluntary labours and enjoy
the view. We hope you will all
take the opportunity to rest on
the seat – but not for too long!*

EXCITING BAT FIND



www.arkive.org

Two years ago, the Friends group made a grant award for the construction of twelve “Warwickshire” style bat boxes to be located in Thwaite grounds as a biodiversity initiative.

An evening bat walk in the grounds, armed with an ultrasound Bat Detector, showed that there were a small number of common Pipistrelles (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*) to be found feeding on insects. It was considered at the time, although there were no known daytime roosting sites in the grounds, that provision of bat boxes may increase the number of species of bats present.

The first annual inspection of the boxes, located at the west end of the grounds on trees near the railway station, revealed that only species of spiders had taken up residence.

Last year the first bat was found, a male brown long-eared bat (*Plecotus auritus*). This find was remarkable as it represented the first of its kind in Cottingham.

The species is the second most common in Britain after the common Pipistrelle. Long eared bats are specialist moth eaters and use their large ears to listen for their prey, which commonly comprises orange underwing moths (*Noctua species*) a pest of garden plants.

Tony Lane
Secretary
East Yorkshire Bat Group

Don't forget, we always need more helpers to keep up the work in progress and for new projects. It's your Friends' and its continuation depends on the voluntary work done by you the members.

As a certain retailer says –“ every little helps!”

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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.

Note: Articles are published on the understanding that they represent the views of the writer.

