

Issue No. 37

March 2014

Friends of Thwaite Gardens Newsletter



TREES OF THWAITE No. 18 – RED MAPLE (*Acer rubrum*) and *Acer x freemanii*

I will deal with these two trees together because the latter is a hybrid of the former.

The red maple is one of the most notable of its tribe for autumn colour. It forms one of the major constituents of the famous fall colour display in New England. For this reason it might be assumed that the name “red maple” is occasioned because of the colour of the autumn leaf. Perversely this is not so but rather because of the somewhat less spectacular spring flowers of thin bright red racemes. These are sufficient to impart a distinctive red haze to the tree in early spring and so it is for this reason that I choose to write about this species now.

The autumn colour of the red maple is in fact quite variable and although it certainly can be red it may range between this and pure yellow. Our tree at Thwaite is usually a rich golden colour and is very striking as it turns. Overall the species sheds fairly early in the season ahead of many other trees and might then be easily noticed growing among the group of maples in the centre of the western lawn. There are a number of named forms of red maple of particularly vivid colouration of which ‘October Glory’ is the most widely available. This is an intense sunset orange – though my experience of an example at Bishop Burton was that it was usually in its peak of colour in November rather than October.

Another misconception about red maple is that it features on the flag of Canada. Judging by the outline of the flag maple leaf, this is far more likely to be sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*) than red maple. The leaf of *A. rubrum* is more trident shaped with a slightly silvery underside. The silver underside is an important identification feature as there are few commonly encountered maples that bear this trademark. Confusion may arise however, in the case of the silver maple (*Acer saccharinum*) which also has an even more silvery leaf underside (hence its name) and of the two is if anything more widely planted in East Yorkshire - at least until recently. Overall however it is a poorer tree in the long term and with weak autumn colour. Although *A. saccharinum* starts

gracefully and vigorously, rapidly attaining height, it does tend to be rather brittle and unsuitable in a windy city like Hull where it has been planted in streets and parks in the past. Many of these have become broken and misshapen well before their prime. It is not even very well regarded in its native North America, where some cities have determined never to plant it in public space.

Red and silver maples do have a natural hybrid however, which sometimes occurs in the wild where the two overlap. This is known as *Acer xfreemanii*. As it happens, Thwaite acquired one of these about 12 years ago, planted with several other trees to commemorate an anniversary of the original founding of the Botanic Garden. The VC at the time, David Dilks, was very keen to revive the garden and for a while it seemed that a new golden age for the garden might dawn. The tree plantings were his symbolic opening stroke but sadly his tenure at the University proved too brief to achieve any other progress beyond this. Nevertheless, we did still have *Acer xfreemanii* which positively rocketed upward from that time on. The speed of growth on this tree has been truly remarkable and its height has probably already equalled, if not exceeded that of our much older *A. rubrum*. *A. xfreemanii* is considered to embody the best features of its parents (i.e. vigour combined with good autumn colour). Ours is the clone 'Autumn Fantasy'- a somewhat overwrought "plant breeder's rights" trademark name which clearly spells out the intended effect. I have to say though, that for me, ours has yet to achieve the dizzying sensual height promised. It is said and seems likely, that a hot summer climate is required for a really outstanding display.

Acer rubrum is perhaps a tree that deserves to be much more widely planted in East Yorkshire as it is still relatively scarce. Although some books claim that it prefers acid soil it does seem to grow quite well here. The best specimen I know of in the region actually grows on the main campus of the University, though in a rather out of the way location. Some of the clones like 'October Glory' are utterly sensational – the sort of colour one feels one can warm ones hands against on a chilly autumn day! *A. xfreemanii* is also worthy of experimentation particularly where fast growth is required. Red maple is also

noted for its ability to grow in wet soils, which perhaps explains its success at Thwaite.

John Killingbeck
Feb 2014

~~~~~

### **Diary Dates**

**25<sup>th</sup> March**, 7.30 Cottingham Methodist Hall – talk by Rob Potterton, Potterton Nurseries – “Alpines and Bulbs from Mountain to Market” – plants for sale

**18<sup>th</sup> May** - Open Day – helpers needed – see next page

**25<sup>th</sup> June** – Open Evening

**7<sup>th</sup> October** – AGM

Followed by a talk by Dr Y Golding, General Secretary,  
British Pteridological Society, entitled  
“The Private Lives of Ferns”

## *Open Day 2014 – 18<sup>th</sup> May*

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:-

- **Welcoming visitors**
- **Assisting with refreshments**
- **Handing out brochures**
- **Signing up new members**
- **Manning the plant stall**
- **Taking admission fees**

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 on production of their membership cards and for non-members is the very reasonable price of £2.00 with accompanied under 16s free, 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

## PLANT OF THE MONTH *Cyclamen coum*



This little plant is one of the undoubted jewels of the spring garden – perhaps unrivalled in its sheer charm combined with pleasing colour. The snowdrop may be more famous and more widely loved; the crocus more dazzling; the aconite more spectacular and the first daffodil more showy, but *Cyclamen coum* surely has the crown for charm.

It also wins the prize for endurance. In a mild year it will begin flowering earnestly- almost implausibly- in mid winter. This display will continue unabated until well into spring, outlasting most of its rivals. Such dainty flowers seem unlikely to have much strength, yet they do. The flowers are borne on short curving fleshy wire like stems, suspended downward in a manner that recalls tiny butterflies or less poetically – small propellers. Colour is variable but most commonly some shade of pink between very pale to a deep cerise. The plants seem at their most attractive when the colour range mingles in an informal mixture.

Like most Cyclamen it is a winter growing and summer dormant plant. It grows from a rounded corm which lives more or less close to the soil surface. Unlike many spring bulbs and corms however, the leaves are fully evergreen, making an appearance in autumn before dying off in early summer. The leaves themselves are worthy of note and of ornamental value. The foliage consists of small rounded leaves, leathery and shiny in texture and in many

cases bearing attractive, very individual marbled patterns. Some varieties have been selected for their foliage which can be entirely silvery.

Most people buy their cyclamen as either dormant corms in summer or as a growing flowering plant in spring. The former method is usually cheaper but the latter has the advantage of being able to assess flower colour and foliage quality. Once in the ground the plants will persist indefinitely and have the potential to naturalise steadily by means of seed if well suited. They may even naturalise in thin grass/moss lawns and are particularly useful as an early groundcover underneath shrubs. However, if one wants this delightful naturalised affect to occur properly, DO NOT DIG the soil! Digging will destroy dainty seedlings and risk damaging dormant corms.

Digging is one of the more curious ingrained habits that many gardeners seem to have, particularly given that it is both hard work and unnecessary. In established borders digging only damages surface feeding roots (the most abundant type), weakens the plants, killing earthworms and soil fungi. It releases an excess of nutrients into the soil through over aeration. The only types of plants which really prosper in these conditions are invasive weeds, which is one reason why weeds are so common in gardens. How often does digging occur in nature – yet vast numbers of plants flourish? If you like the “fresh dug” look – try organic mulching instead.

Actually some gardeners are quite evangelical about “no dig” methods. One such, locally, is Roger Brook. There are many good gardeners around who can create a great display but few master gardeners like Roger who is best known for such superb works as Bolton Percy churchyard, a study in naturalistic gardening. His website can be accessed through “Roger Brook – the No Dig Gardener”.

*Cyclamen coum* seems to prefer reasonably clay soils. It fails to flourish in my own infertile light soil at home. Here however, the autumn flowering *C. hederifolium* naturalises widely, which is some compensation I suppose.

John Killingbeck , March, 2014

## Horticulture in the Next Life



During my career, whenever I was asked whether I would follow the same path over again, I used to reply that in the next life I was going to do horticulture. Fortunately I haven't had to wait that long and I am still enjoying this life.

Friends of Thwaite was started sometime around the millennium (1999/2000 to be precise) and I joined then so that I could enjoy walking in the gardens. I had lived in Thwaite Hall as a university student but had never liked to go in thereafter, until becoming a Friend. Following my retirement I tried to be a more active member, attending talks and the AGM. When Pam Bailey asked at an AGM for volunteers to work in the gardens on Friday mornings I approached her and was encouraged to come along. There followed some two years or so of volunteering and now I am treasurer too.

Friday mornings are a source of delight to me. The other volunteers made me very welcome, showing me around on the first session and then happily letting me join in. Anyone for weeding? Oh, the joys of clearing ivy! By the time I joined the group of volunteers had swelled to about twelve to fifteen. If fifteen people work for two or three hours once a week, it is like having a fulltime gardener. Even I could see the difference we were making and have continued to make. It was lovely to see hidden areas being cleared of the aforementioned



ivy, particularly the area by the back gate, which we refer to as the secret garden. It was indeed a secret. It became a revelation.

It goes on being lovely seeing new planting, new beds being developed and greenhouses filled with speciality plants. The new Alpine House is near completion. So I encourage you to come and walk in the gardens, to come along to the Open Days (our own in May and the Red Cross day in August), and to encourage your friends to join The Friends of Thwaite Gardens. It is the income from members which enables us to continue to develop these lovely gardens.

Annie Bourton Card  
March 2014



## **Welcome to a new member of the Friends**

Dr Yvonne Golding is the General Secretary of the British Pteridological Society, the UK's society for fern lovers. She is an experienced grower of ferns, both in the garden and greenhouse, and has produced medal-winning displays of ferns at several RHS flower shows. She has also organised a number of trips to look at ferns in the wild as far afield as China and La Palma, as well as around the UK. A keen natural historian, with a Ph.D. on the mimicry of hoverflies, she is interested in all the wildlife to be found in the garden as well as in ferns and garden plants.

Yvonne will be giving a talk on ferns after the AGM.

## **GARDENERS' QUESTION TIME – A NEW SERVICE FOR FRIENDS**

At the last Thwaite committee meeting we discussed the possibility of introducing a new “service” exclusively for the benefit of Friends – a gardeners’ question forum. Friends are invited to submit any gardening or related question to the panel (contact details yet to be decided). Answers, perhaps more than one, will be published in the next newsletter. Any Friend who also has an answer might want to submit this to a “general forum” of discussion in the following newsletter.

To start the ball rolling – a fictitious question from Mr. and Mrs. Growalot.

Q. We love daffodils in spring but find the leaves after flowering rather unattractive and in the way when planting out summer flowers. What is the best way to deal with them?

A. To some extent this is a matter of personal preference and there are several possibilities. The only thing to bear in mind is that the leaves are vital to the bulbs to build up their resources for next year and the less chance the leaves have to do this job the weaker the bulbs will become.

For this reason it is unwise to cut them straight off after flowering, unless one does not care whether they bloom again. Conversely, leaving them completely until withered away in mid summer would be ideal for the bulbs. But if you must cut them entirely it is said that at least 6 weeks should elapse from end of flowering if possible.

A good compromise is to cut them off to about 9” above ground early on. This way the remaining leaves will still function but appear tidier and less floppy and can then be left until withered.

A popular method is to tie the leaves in knots. Whether this actually enhances the look of the garden or is worse than the loose leaves is purely a matter of opinion. However, knotting will also prevent most of the leaves from functioning properly.

Digging up the whole lot is another possibility. Leave this job as late as possible then carefully dig the bulbs and their leaves with the soil around their roots and place them in pots or an unused border out of the way and leave them until the leaves are withered. Water them at first until the leaves start to go yellow.

The most cunning plan is perhaps to plant your daffs in pots, plunged below the ground in the border and simply remove everything out of the way when finished. Unfortunately, this requires some planning and space to stand the pots. Easier said than done!

~~~~~

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL REMINDER

Annual subscriptions were due on 1st November 2013.

They remain at £7 per person or £10 for two people living at the same address

Anyone who has not paid by the Open Day 2014 will be removed from the database.

Cheques should be made payable to "The Friends of Thwaite Gardens" and sent to the treasurer, whose contact details are on the last page of this Newsletter.

Please note: new members who have joined on, or after, the Open Day in May 2013 do not have to renew their subscriptions until November 2014.

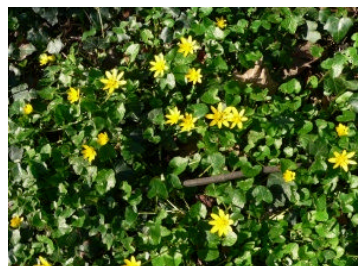
WOODLAND WALK - THWAITE GARDENS



Not much is mentioned about the main woodland north side of the lake but it is well worth a stroll to see what is there, before the leaf canopy appears.

Below are a few of the plants that you will find in the woodland. Hopefully you will be able to identify them, even though some were not flowering when this article was written. The woodland habitat is home to many plants animals and insects. Even the dreaded Ivy plays a role by providing shelter for insects and nesting for birds.

The woodland supports numerous ecosystems where non-living components, such as water, air and light, interact with living organisms such as bacteria, fungi, animals and plants.





It is hoped to produce a woodland walk guide, similar to the tree trail, which will be of use particularly to visiting schools.

Many thanks to the University Grounds staff for maintaining the paths and keeping them in good condition.

Whilst in the wood, please stick to the well-defined paths and beware of trip hazards and low branches. Enjoy your walk!

Vic Swetez

School of Biological, Biomedical and Environmental Sciences

Contact Details

Acting Chairman

John Killingbeck
7 Ash Grove
Market Weighton
YO4 33DY

01430 872312

Johnkillingbeck7878@btinternet.com

Secretary

Pamela Bailey
39 Priory Road
Cottingham
HU16 4RR

01482 843304

pambee123@gmail.com

Treasurer

Annie Bourton-Card
595 Endyke Lane
Hull
HU6 8TE

01482 849158

card33690@hotmail.co.uk

Newsletter Editor

Sue Swetez
141 Mill Rise
Skidby
Cottingham
HU16 5UA

Tel 01482 846487

s.swetez@hull.ac.uk

Events Secretary

Pat Foreman
12 East Mount
North Ferriby
HU14 3BX

Tel: 01482 634091

patforeman@hotmail.com

Friends' website:- www.hull.ac.uk/thwaite-gardens

