

Issue No. 39

January 2015

# **Friends of Thwaite Gardens Newsletter**



# **FRIENDS OF THWAITE GARDENS**

## **Minutes of A G M October 2014**

### **Acting Chairman's Welcome:**

The acting chairman, J. Killingbeck welcomed and thanked the members and guests for attending the Annual General Meeting.

**Apologies For Absence:** Mavis May.

### **Minutes of AGM 2013:**

Due to the sudden illness and resignation of the previous chairman the 2013 AGM did not go ahead with the election of a new chairman. J. Killingbeck agreed to take the role of Acting Chairman until an election took place.

The minutes were agreed.

### **Acting Chairman's Annual Report:**

In his first year as acting chairman he wished to thank the volunteers for all their hard work and also for the support of the members. Reference was made to the previous year, as being a distinct and promising year. New to the University of Hull, Professor R. Ennos and Dr. Y. Golding have already made an enormous difference creating further connection with the university and giving aims and direction for the future.

Many of the latest projects have been admired by the increasing number of visitors and further development will include a garden / plants question facility and open greenhouses at the gardens on Friday mornings.

It is also proposed to have an Autumnal walk from next year.

## **Treasurer's Annual Report:**

This report was presented in the last newsletter. The treasurer, Annie Bourton Card gave details of the increase in the number of Friends members, which now reaches 550. The cost of becoming a member has not changed for many years and the treasurer proposed to the members present to consider and vote on the agreement to increase the fees from £7 to £8 for a single person and £10 to £12 for a couple at the same address.

This was agreed by a show of more than 2/3 of the members present. This will now need to be amended in the constitution (para.4).

A further request by the Treasurer referred to para.5 of the constitution. This refers to the auditing of the accounts. The previous auditor has not been available and it was considered that someone who was qualified to "examine" the accounts was more appropriate for the Friend's accounts.

This was proposed to the members present and agreed by the majority. The constitution will therefore require amendment.

## **Election of Chairman:**

John Killingbeck (Acting Chairman) was willing to be considered for the role of Chairman.

The secretary asked the members present if there were any other nominations or nominees for the role of chairman.

As there were no further nominees, a member present proposed that John Killingbeck become Chairman. This was also agreed by a second member present.

## **Election of Committee Members:**

The Chairman requested the proposal and second person for election of the following members who are willing to stand for a further year.

The following were elected:

Pam Bailey Secretary, Annie Bourton Card, Treasurer, Pat Foreman Events Secretary, Steve Howe, Jean Major and Vic Swetez.

## **Members Questions and Comments:**

Compliments were made for the volunteers who looked after the refreshments during Open Day. It is a particularly busy area and is constant throughout the day. The refreshments including cakes and scones were well recommended.

A member wished to thank Pam Bailey who wrote on behalf of the Friends of Thwaite Gardens, the eulogy for Charles Levitt who passed away in July of this year. The family were very touched by the eulogy.

Professor Roland Ennos wished to thank, on behalf of the university, all of the hard work undertaken by the volunteers. Many have worked hard over many years to develop the gardens into what they are today in particular the greenhouse displays.

The Chairman concluded by agreeing that the Friends wished to work together with the university to take forward new ideas and development for the future.

The meeting was then closed by the Chairman.

## *Open Day 2015 - 17<sup>th</sup> May*

We shall soon be busy preparing for this year's open day 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**

**Handing out brochures**

**Manning the plant stall**

**Assisting with refreshments**

**Signing up new members**

**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 - ALGERIAN/WINTER IRIS (*Iris unguicularis*)



There are many winter flowering plants, ranging from the small and subtle to the showy and conspicuous though most are restrained in form compared to summer flowers for obvious practical reasons of survival in winter conditions. So, of all of them, surely the most flamboyant and implausible of all is the winter iris. In size and structure it gives no quarter to the harshness of the season and would not be out of place blooming in mid- summer.

As its name suggests, the plant originates from North Africa, though in fact has many outposts and differing forms across the eastern Mediterranean including Turkey. It forms dense rhizomatous clumps with long grassy-looking evergreen foliage. It is naturally late winter – early spring flowering, though will begin blooming in December. Flowers are produced in prolonged succession, often fairly sparsely, unless there is a good spell of very mild weather, in which case a quite eye catching bouquet of soft purple irises will erupt amongst the foliage. Conversely, a severe spell will bring a temporary halt to the production. Since the foliage is not particularly attractive and tends to conceal the flowers, many gardeners cut the leaves back fairly sharply in late autumn to set blooming off to best advantage.

The plant is basically hardy and easy to keep alive. However to ensure a heavy crop of flowers, it needs to be situated in a very warm sunny spot – typically near a dry south facing wall. It will live in less ideal conditions but may fail to produce many flowers. Some degree of summer drought stress may be optimal and the plant will certainly not require watering, however

hot the summer. Once established, the clump will live for years with little attention, slowly increasing in size. It is said to resent disturbance so is best left alone unless propagation is required. In which case, split pieces off an established clump after flowering – preferably without digging it up.

There seems to be some disagreement as to the soil fertility best suited to the plant. Some books claim that winter iris prefers poor stony conditions. Possibly this is confused with the need for dryness because in my experience the most floriferous plants I have seen have been on richer soils.

Winter iris does not seem to suffer much from pests. However among the most annoying are early caterpillars and slugs which devour the tender flowers with relish as a succulent post hibernation snack, partly because they also find the dense sheltering tussocks an ideal spot to hibernate in! Some plants also suffer from virus disease made manifest by pale streaky foliage. Avoid plants like this if offered to you.

There are a few named varieties of winter iris, notably 'Walter Butt'. White forms are also available. Much rarer is the attractive dwarf Cretan form. A closely related species – *Iris lazica* – is similar but with more attractive foliage and is said to require less sun, so is worth looking out for.

John Killingbeck Jan 2015

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## Membership Reminder

Annual subscriptions were due on 1st November 2014. 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 will be removed from the database.

## TREES OF THWAITE No. 20 GOLDEN MONTEREY CYPRESS

(*Cupressus macrocarpa* 'Lutea')



It is perhaps the inevitable fate of the old to be superseded by the new - but sometimes what is lost can be of greater merit than that which keenly replaces it. Such is the case, I would argue, with regard to this particular conifer. We have one mid aged specimen at Thwaite, easily seen somewhat overshadowing the new alpine glasshouse and itself being overshadowed by the adjacent plane tree.

*C.m.* 'Lutea' is a gradually diminishing, though not as yet rare, feature of the East Yorks. treescape, mostly found in old Victorian gardens, originally a sport of the commoner, yet also diminishing natural green type Monterey Cypress. Neither tree is much planted nowadays. They have been replaced by the ubiquitous Leyland Cypress hybrid (*xCupressocyparis/Cupressus leylandii*). Ironically, the Monterey is one parent of the hybrid assassin Leyland - the other parent being the Nootka Cypress (*Xanthocyparis nootkatensis*) young trees of which can be seen near our 'Lutea'. Leyland inherited its legendary speed of growth from the Monterey and combined it with greater hardiness inherited from the Nootka which is native to western Canada.

Hardier or not, Leyland failed to inherit the nobility of its Monterey parent. Whilst young the two trees are only subtly different, but as they mature the Monterey comes increasingly to resemble that most effortlessly majestic of landscape trees – the Cedar of Lebanon - whilst the Leyland remains a shaggy narrowly egg shape for all its life. Even in East Yorkshire old Montereys can be mistaken at a distance for modest cedars (closely examined, cones and foliage are entirely different). But in milder areas of coastal south west Britain and even more so in Ireland, Cedar and Monterey are almost equally matched, both having magnificent spreading tabular branch structure borne by a massive trunk. In short, the Monterey contributes a far finer profile to the treescape than Leyland.

It might also be added, that in a windswept, mild coastal locality, the Monterey will prove a far better tree than cedar. Few species can rival it for endurance of coastal exposure and in many such areas from north Wales to the Isle of Wight and Channel Isles it is a dominant species in the landscape. Even the infamous “hurricane” of 1987 failed to dislodge many specimens. Given suitable habitat like coastal dunes or rocky heath, Monterey will self-seed and partially naturalise in places where few other large trees can endure.

Surprisingly perhaps for a tree so successful in parts of Britain, Monterey cypress hails from California. More specifically to a very limited coastal district of that state centred round Monterey, near San Francisco. Clinging tenuously to the sea cliffs there and nowhere else – it has an extraordinarily limited natural distribution. This precarious existence it shares with other cypresses (one of which – *Cupressus goveniana* -we also had at Thwaite until recently) and pines – including Monterey Pine (*Pinus radiata*) which also flourishes grandly in the same regions of Britain as the cypress. Clearly these trees have enormous potential, so why are they so confined in the wild, one might ask? The explanation offered is to do with past glacial climate when the trees were forced ever southward down the narrowly mountain constricted American west coast. But when the climate rapidly warmed again, they found themselves trapped by increasing heat and aridity inland,

to shrinking temperate havens near the coast. Here they remained until liberated by European plant collectors in the nineteenth century.

The climate of maritime Britain proved ideally suitable for the Monterey, because unusually cold sea currents off California cause the weather on the coast there to be remarkably and unexpectedly chilly and misty for that latitude. However, though quite hardy in many areas of the UK, quality of growth does deteriorate markedly as climate becomes harsher. I fancy one can actually judge the relative mildness of a particular region of Britain by the quality of its Montereys! Still, the supposed tenderness of the Monterey compared to Leyland seems exaggerated. Many of our local trees are at least a century old and have survived every winter in that time, though young trees may be vulnerable to severe cold.

*C. macrocarpa*. 'Lutea' has a direct usurper in the form of depressingly popular, dull yellow *C. leylandii* 'Castlewellan', a far coarser looking tree. For every 'Lutea', there seem to be hundreds of 'Castlewellan' – a triumph of industrial marketing over taste. We have two examples looming over Green Wickets lawn at Thwaite. The Monterey however, has fought back with *C.m.* 'Goldcrest'. This variety is a bright acid yellow far outshining 'Castlewellan', although it is certain to grow rapidly too large for small gardens in which it is popular. As it has only been widely planted in recent decades, there are few trees of sufficient maturity to compare it in the longer term with 'Lutea'. It seems likely to be narrower and denser in habit as well as brighter in colour.

John Killingbeck Jan 2015

## ???? GARDENER'S QUESTION TIME ????

A series which attempts to address Friends' common garden problems.

*Example:-*

Q. What is the best way to deal with unwieldy plants that start to flop and fall over?

A. This might depend on the plant in question but a good start is to anticipate the problem as far as possible. It is much harder to lift a plant back once down than to prevent it falling. Easier said than done of course and for most gardeners it is the other way round. Herbaceous plants are the most commonly involved, so the routine supporting of a large border is advisable since one plant falling can create a domino effect. How one tackles this is a question of taste as well as practicality.

1. The BAMBOO and STRING method – is the commonest but also the most tedious and least attractive and never looks right if the plant has had to be lifted from a prone position. So are there other ways?

2. Metal 'PLANT LINKS/RINGS' are often offered commercially but are more fiddly than they look to set up and definitely need to be done before the plants get going in spring and so are no use as a remedial action. Once in place many gardeners leave them in because the task of setting them up each year is too laborious. They are rather odd looking in bare winter borders and may get in the way of maintenance tasks.

3. Small but sturdy TWIGGY BRANCHES are perhaps the most satisfactory method overall, thrust between and around the plants. These are usually free, easy to set up and look natural. They can even be used to ease up a plant which is falling without looking too contrived. The main problem might be acquiring enough of the right twigs, which can be stored or discarded at the end of the year.

4. Sheets of CHICKEN WIRE or plastic NETTING (wide gauge) supported on small stakes is a method used for extensive borders in stately homes. Once again though, it needs to be set up well in advance of plant growth each spring and needs to be removed for border maintenance in autumn. More than one tier can be used to accommodate tall plants.

5. ARTY WILLOW woven structures – can be made to enmesh sizable areas and look wonderful in its own right but only for the skilled practitioner with plenty of time on their hands!

6. 'CHELSEA CHOP' or dwarf varieties. This avoids staking almost completely – the former by cutting summer plants by half in mid- May, the latter by selecting only small sturdy species in the first place. The chopped plants will flower as normal but on shorter less top heavy stems. ANY method that avoids contrived artificial staking must surely be a good thing.

What about young TREES or big shrubs that start to fall over? Usually a lost cause I'm afraid. Tempting though it is to try to prop up an ailing tree, in the end it is unlikely to become stable and will need ever bigger stakes as it grows. It is often wiser, though needs courage, to cut the tree in half or even to the base and start again. The resulting growth will usually be much more stable. Exceptions might be made in the case of something already very old and valuable.

JK

*If you have any plant or garden-related questions, please send them to John Killingbeck (Johnkillingbeck7878@btinternet.com) or Vic Swetez (V.Swetez@hull.ac.uk).*

*Those not on email can send questions either to John, or the Newsletter editor, at the addresses on the back page, or drop them off at the Gardens.*

## Signs of Spring at Thwaite Gardens

As I write this, in mid-January, there are already signs of spring in the gardens. The Daphne bush, opposite the gardeners' entrance, is in flower and its delicious perfume holds a promise of other fragrances to come. It is a harbinger of spring.

As you walk through the gardens, you will see bulbs pushing their noses up, indeed by the time this is printed many will be in full flower. More harbingers.

The combined efforts to construct and plant up the alpine house have been most successful. It is a pleasure to peek through the glass and see everything neatly planted, lots of different greens and now some colour too.

We hope that the big greenhouse on the corner, which until recently has housed geraniums and other over-wintering plants, will be planted up with things typical of the Canary Isles.

Some of the volunteers have started to prune the climbing roses on the trellis near the herb garden. Again, this will be completed by the time we go to press, laying the foundations for what we hope will be a glorious display in the summer. This varies from year to year, reflecting the vagaries of the weather: 2013 was better than 2014 for our roses.

We continue to take cuttings and pot these up for sale at Open Day. All the baby geraniums are looking good. Seed planting time will soon be here.

Our volunteers now number 17 and we usually have between 12 and 15 people working for two or three hours on Friday mornings, so the gardens reflect the care they get. Efforts have been made to construct four large compost heaps, using pallets, to clear the ground around the greenhouses, to develop the beds and to continue with interesting and unusual planting. Last autumn we ordered and planted all sorts of interesting bulbs, so do come along and see what you can spot. Most are within the area containing the greenhouses and the open area to the left of this where the winter garden is

situated but some will be found in the main gardens where we have assisted the gardeners in creating a wild meadow area.

As always, we depend on your financial support through your membership of the Friends of Thwaite Gardens. Most of our expenditure is on plants and materials such as compost and bark. Application forms for renewals continue to arrive: do keep them coming! (This is what is known as a gentle reminder.)

Annie Bourton Card  
Treasurer

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## Dogs at Thwaite Gardens



I have worked at the gardens for 48 years, and in that time, as you can imagine, I have seen many changes and, in fact, have been involved with some of them.

When I first started, you could count the number of dogs around on the site on the fingers of one hand. In fact there were more gardeners than dogs! However, since 2000, when the Friends of Thwaite Gardens was set up by the University, the number of dogs at the gardens has increased dramatically. I hasten to say that quite a number of people visiting the gardens with dogs

are not members of the Friends. However, it may be that, having seen members of the Friends bringing dogs on site with them, locals have got the impression it's a facility anyone can use.

This increase has created several problems.

Firstly, the obvious one of is that of dog mess not being cleared up, and in some cases (which is even worse) dog mess being put into non-degradable plastic bags and thrown into the bushes. Dog mess left on the lawns causes a hazard for visitors, who may stand on it, and also for our ground staff as it is often shredded and thrown up into their faces by the grass cutters.

Secondly, we are trying to promote the site as a valuable teaching resource, not only for our own students, but also for local schools. Dogs approaching children can frighten them, even if they are just being friendly. Sometimes they get over-enthusiastic and jump up, possibly knocking a child or even an adult over. There have been incidents of this nature that have been reported in the past.

Some dogs can, however, be less friendly and may become aggressive to people or to other dogs. There are also adults who are afraid of dogs, possibly because they have had a bad experience with one in the past. Therefore they can be perceived as a risk even if they are not.

Thirdly, dogs running through flower borders cause damage to young plants, especially in the vicinity of the glasshouses, where the Friends volunteers have put in a lot of time and effort to create colourful and interesting borders for the enjoyment of all visitors to the Gardens. It is a bit disheartening for them to see plants damaged in this way.

Finally, dogs can frighten and upset the ducks and ducklings on the lake if they are allowed to run free. Frequently they get quite excited when they see ducks and bark at them or chase them.

In summary, please remember that the site belongs to the university, which has allowed members of the Friends access to enjoy it. Security staff will be

doing spot checks on visitors to the site, so please always carry your Friends membership card with you when visiting to prove that you have a right to be there. Please adhere to the notices now displayed on site about dogs and remember that Thwaite Hall is the home of the students who live there. Therefore, please do not go too close to the hall and invade their privacy.

If anyone has any comments or feedback on this article, please feel free to get in touch with me.

Vic Swetez, School of Biological, Biomedical and Environmental Sciences

[v.swetez@hull.ac.uk](mailto:v.swetez@hull.ac.uk) Telephone Gardens 305230 or 465485

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### ***Diary Dates***

***24th March , 7.30, Cottingham Methodist Hall***

***Bob Brown – Cotswold Garden Flowers***

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***“Too Many Plants, Too Little Space”***

***Open Day 17th May, 11am to 4 pm***

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***Open Evening 24th June, 6pm to 9 pm***

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***Autumnal Guided Tour 24<sup>th</sup> October, 10.30 am to 1 pm***

## Thwaite Gardens Photographs

The lovely photos of the gardens below have been submitted by 2 of our new members, Paul Lakin and Layne Scott in response to our request for contributions from members, so thanks to them for that. Hopefully it will encourage other members to submit items of interest for inclusion in future Newsletters.





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