

Issue No. 42

January 2016

Friends of Thwaite Gardens Newsletter



MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL REMINDER

***Annual subscriptions were due on 1st November 2015
They are £8 per person or £12 for two people living at the
same address***

***Anyone who has not paid by the Open Day 2016 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.***

***N.B. We rely on membership fees as our main source of income
to allow us to continue with our garden projects.***

Please note: new members who have joined on, or
after, the Open Day in May 2015 do not have to renew
their subscriptions until November 2016.

Diary DATES

Talk

7.30pm, 22nd March - Dr Robb Robinson, Maritime
Historical Studies Centre, The University of Hull .

***"Botanists, Explorers and Sailors: from Hull and
Cottingham to the Ends of the Earth."***

Open Day

Sunday 22nd May 11am to 4pm

Open Day 2016
22nd 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, assisting with refreshments, handing out brochures, signing up new members, manning the plant stall or 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 Pam Bailey, 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.

The gardens in November 2015 and plans for the future.

Thwaite Gardens

On 6.11.15, John Killingbeck led the Friday volunteers (15 of them) round the sections of the gardens where the volunteers work. This was our second such “walk” and we plan to have 6 a year so we are all aware of the overall development and plans.

Most sections have a volunteer with key responsibility although all the volunteers work throughout the gardens as and when necessary.

1. LONG BORDER – (Olive)

This is the first part of the garden, on the right as you come through the main gates. The removal of the old tassel tree (Garrya) has made the front much lighter, enabling other trees and shrubs to thrive. There are a number of rare trees. Various trees and shrubs are in bloom, including a lovely big hydrangea, originally grown from cuttings, and a green smoke bush, which, although less rare than its neighbouring purple one, has lovely autumn colour and plumes. We are letting the hydrangea spread naturally, at least for the time being.

Along the left hand wall there are lots of interesting plants and shrubs, with little room left for anything else.

Plan: gentle manipulation of planting.

2. CAR PARK AREA – (John)

This is very sheltered, allowing tender palms, a banana and giant echiums to thrive, as well as a Meleanthus Major (S.African).

Plan: considering moving the big rose bush (“Maiden’s Blush”) which flowers well in situ but does not really belong to this group of plants. Not sure where to move it to. It is a lovely rose. Need to plant something more sub-tropical here.

The lean-to greenhouse has no heating, floods in heavy rain and the soil is very poor, but the plants within are quite nice and doing quite well. The agapanthus, planted some years ago as tiny things, are flourishing.

3. WINTER BORDER – (Barbara)

This is on the left, behind the sheds and facing the big lawn. It is purely aesthetic rather than having specific botanic interest but has developed well in recent years.

Plan: maybe some more groups of spectacular things.

4. HERB GARDEN –(Jean M)

This is the oldest of all our projects, developed 15 years ago. It is well maintained and looks good.

The fence at the east end is to be replaced by a hornbeam hedge.

Plan: John to order the hornbeam so that they can be planted fairly soon.

5. HERBACEOUS BED – (Pat)

This is in front of the high red brick wall. The wall needs to be repaired/repointed. It is the only large wall we have so has great potential, although facing east. Originally a new gardener planted fruit trees but he then left so the trees now need skilled pruning. There is a well established quince tree, bearing fruit. Developing this bed could be quite a big project involving a number of skills.

Plan: widen the bed; liaise with the university about repairing the wall; discuss further at next committee meeting.

6. WOODLAND & SECRET GARDEN –(Steve)

Vandalism has been a problem here and some plants have been stolen. This has been very dispiriting as an immense amount of effort by all the volunteers went into clearing and developing these areas. We have had to remove the bench overlooking the secret garden.

Steve has planted rhododendrons and acers and ordered hollies to plant along the edge of the ditch, hopefully to deter people climbing in at night or at other times when the gardens are closed. The ditch is to be fenced. (Paid for by the university).

Plan: extend the woodland atmosphere; plant and maintain warmth-loving plants; remove one of the conifers to make room.

7. MEDITERRANEAN BEDS –(Pam)

These are thriving. Pam has planted more lavenders.

Plan: the two beds to be joined into one big one with a new cork oak at the centre.

8. BAMBOO GROVE – (Steve)

This is at the back of the gardens, near the back gate (tennis courts beyond), on the right hand side.

Plan: Steve to purchase more varied bamboos and plant up.

9. ALPINE HOUSE –(Pat)

This has been a very successful project and looks lovely.

Plan: no particular planting needs, but possible purchase of interesting alpiners, especially for winter colour. Maintenance.

10. AUSTRALASIAN/ANTIPODEAN BED – (John)

This is in the lawn, opposite the alpine house.

Plan: nothing more at present.

11. RAISED BEDS –(various volunteers)

These are themed.

- a. Outdoor alpine
- b. Desert garden (spikey plants)
- c. Acid bed – to be cleared and replanted

- d. Second alpine bed
- e. Bog garden
- f. Salvias – should look dramatic in future.
- g. End bed – mixed planting at present
- h. 3 water tanks

Plan: all these being maintained or developed.

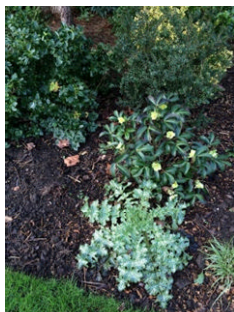
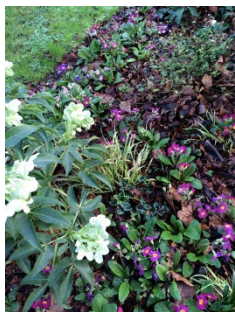
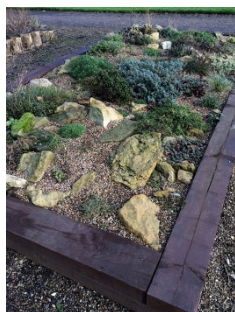
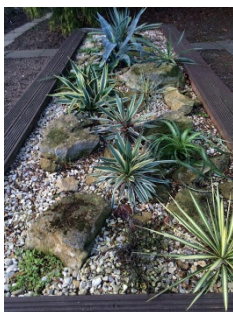
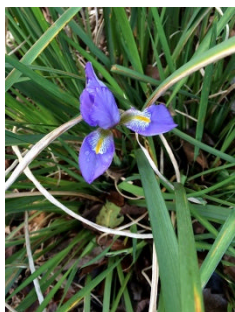
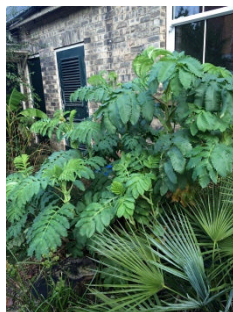
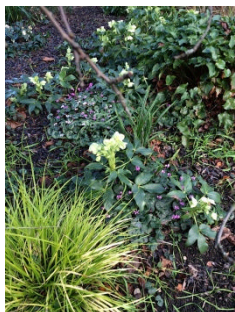
All woodwork is painted and maintained by Bill.

12. GREENHOUSES –(John, Steve, Annie)

These are also themed.

- i. Desert greenhouse –cacti - an early project – a nice collection – praised by the Cactus Society, which was a pleasant surprise – need to keep a careful watch for mealy bug.
- ii. Eco-house – edible or commercial plants, tropics or sub-tropics. Being redeveloped this year.
- iii. 2 or 3 “university greenhouses” – used by staff and students. We have access to the propagation unit.
- iv. Corridor – mostly maintained by university staff although we occasionally tidy, prune, clean off blackfly from citrus plants, etc.
- v. Fern house – John. Many big ferns.
- vi. Evolution House – John. 2 or 3 years old now. Time consuming. Needs attention currently. Story of plant evolution, starting on right. Middle: fantasy Jurassic forest, with Dawn Redwoods (well pruned and roots restricted)
- vii. End house (left side): Being developed. Centre: Xeric High Mountain Chilean bed and, at end ,insectivorous bed in a sphagnum bog. Outer side (near gardens) – Canary Island corner and S African plants. Inner side – a range of semi-tropical exotica, currently mainly cannas.
- viii. End house (right side) and adjacent house – Fern houses. These belong to Yvonne Golding who is secretary of the British Fern Society. We are very pleased to have them.

A selection of plants photographed by Annie Bourton Card whilst on the walks round the gardens



Garden Walk with Friends Volunteers, 8.1.16

John Killingbeck led 7 volunteers round the gardens, starting from the car park.

Long Border (between car park and gates)

It has been such a mild autumn and early winter that many plants are flowering early. The winter jasmine is almost over. We noted many things in bloom, including: various cyclamen, various hellebores, primulas and the first snowdrop.

Also noted: winter flowering honeysuckles, Xmas box, perennial wallflower (mauve), eskalonia (pink), aconites, and many bulbs shooting up.

Car Park area

Echium thriving. Eleanthus almost 6ft tall with big buds (we hope these will survive the frosts forecast). Banana still green (ditto).

Lean-to greenhouse (in car park)

False sasparella (mauve), Giralton wax flower (white) & bottle brush (red).

Winter Garden (on left, behind sheds)

The daphne smells gorgeous. Daphne Bholua (out now) and Daphne Odorata (out soon).

Daffodils in full bloom, var.: "January"- earliest variety but seldom out so soon.

Copper witch hazel in flower. Dogwoods and other barks: red and orange. Winter flowering cherry in bloom. This bed is glorious now, as planned.

Raised beds

Hardy exotics looking nice (prickly plants)

Outdoor alpine, two beds, also looking good.

Bog garden also .

Alpine House

Everything looking healthy. Some plants in bloom.

Mediterranean Beds.

Looking healthy. Only shrub in flower: the yellow Coronilla at the far end.

Rock garden

The Incense Cedar has lost a huge trunk/branch in the gales.

Small plants emerging. Wintersweet (shrub) near wall has lovely smell.

Woodland

Viburnum in flower. Magnolia in bud.

Mahonia Japonica on right of path back to garden doing well, smells like Lily of the Valley.

Thanks to John for an interesting and informative session.

As recorded by Annie Bourton Card 8.1.16



Pam Bailey is retiring as secretary after 14 years, we would like to thank her for all her hard work and her commitment to the Friends of Thwaite Gardens during that time. She will continue to be one of the Friday Volunteers.

PLANT OF THE MONTH ---- *Daphne bholua*



There are some plants so highly regarded that they are spoken of in almost hushed tones – at least as long as they remain rare and the preserve of a select few gardeners. This could be said of *Daphne bholua* at one time, though now because it is freely available, far less so.

Many visitors to Thwaite will have noticed it growing on the edge of the winter border at the entrance to Green Wickets- spectacularly thick with pale lilac blossom and heavily fragrant, since before Christmas, still going strong in January and beyond. It is one of the top flight winter flowering shrubs.

Many Daphne are rather idiosyncratic plants and most gardeners find a Daphne will do either very well or fail. This is sometimes due to particular requirements but can often be for cultural reasons. Some fail to thrive if transplanted and others dislike pruning of any more than very modest amounts. They can also be difficult to propagate. However, I have been pleasantly surprised by my own experience of *D. bholua* which I initially took to be temperamental.

I first acquired one about 15 years ago when they were just becoming widely available. Believing I had come across a great treasure I carefully planted it in a pot and over wintered it in a cold greenhouse, thinking it might be too tender and unsuited to my poor rather chalky soil to grow in the garden, yet anticipating a greenhouse flooded with winter fragrance. But the plant still failed to thrive, so in exasperation I eventually decided to plant it out – the only spot available being particularly harsh chalky rubble in which I expected it would finally expire. To my amazement it suddenly changed its demeanour and began to flourish. It is now approaching 3m in height.

D. bholua is usually grafted on to another easily grown *Daphne* and at Thwaite, the rootstock of ours has itself grown. Though with only dull green flowers and of unidentified species, we have allowed it to grow on, out of interest. It has red berries in the autumn. But another rather lucky peculiarity of my plant at home is that, rather unusually perhaps, it is growing on its own roots. Somewhat astonishingly (for a *Daphne*) it produces suckers, several of which I have transplanted successfully in the garden.

So, *D. bholua* is well worth a go in any garden. It survived December 2010 here relatively unscathed so is certainly hardy. There are several varieties available. Ours (much the commonest) is 'Jacqueline Postill' and is more or less evergreen. The deciduous varieties however, are more highly regarded because the flowers are totally unconcealed – 'Gurkha' being the best known of these. Many of the cultivars were originally of wild origin and the differences in winter leaf retention are due to the very different altitudes from which they were collected in their Himalayan home. The Himalaya also accounts for the strange sounding name, "bholua" which is the local peoples' name for the plant.

So, pick your site carefully- ideally, sheltered to trap the perfume, plant, leave alone and enjoy!

John Killingbeck Jan 2016

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*We welcome any contributions from members, of articles, photographs, letters etc. to future copies of the Newsletter, so if you would like something including, please contact the Editor, whose details are at the end of this Newsletter*

## TREES OF THWAITE ..... NORWAY MAPLE (*Acer platanoides* 'Cucullatum')

Last issue we had sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* as our tree and we continue the “Platanus” or plane tree theme here with another look alike of the genuine plane. In fact this tree, at casual glance, looks so like a sycamore that many people do not realise they are two distinct species. I will return to this later.

But first I must point out that one variety of the Norway maple we have in the gardens – variety ‘Cucullatum’ is quite a rarity and apparently a “regional champion” – meaning the largest measured specimen of this region of the British Isles. This tree is not particularly eye catching in any way, but is situated more or less in the centre of the garden roughly north of the halls of residence on the main lawn. Cucullatum is distinguished from other forms of this maple by its curious rather crushed and slightly tatty looking leaves. It does not sound too attractive does it? It is a good example of that curious love amongst many gardeners for what, bluntly, are monstrosities - that is, plants that have little to recommend them except that they are peculiar in some way from the norm. In nature they would soon die but in cultivation they continue.

Whilst ‘Cucullatum’ is perhaps thankfully rare, the normal Norway maple is rather common, not only in Thwaite gardens but generally. It is widely planted in streets and parks in Hull and elsewhere and like the sycamore often regenerates in the wild though far less profusely. Although similar to sycamore, it is a more refined tree with finely pointed tips to its leaf lobes. The bark is smoother than sycamore though still textured with grooves and ridges and the tree itself, though quite big, does not usually grow quite as large as many sycamores. The tree it also resembles closely is the American sugar maple *Acer saccharum*, though this is rather rare. The name “Norway maple” is something of a puzzle, because although native to far southern Norway, its main distribution is in central Europe.

There are two seasons when the reason for the Norway maple’s general popularity become obvious. In spring it flowers very early, usually in March

when the entire tree is transformed into a bright acid yellow/green cloud – most refreshing and utterly uplifting after the dark and bare branches of winter. At this time, the tree can be picked out easily even from a distance, shining out amid the bareness of others. The second season of majesty is autumn, when unlike the sycamore it is reliably a beautiful golden yellow, in better years flushed with rosy scarlet or orange. The tree is hardy and adaptable to both maritime and continental climates having been widely planted in America, even in severe mid- western states – not a bad recommendation in a nation with so many fine trees and is one of few European trees to have made this transition.

There are several ornamental forms of Norway maple, of which we also have one or two at Thwaite. ‘Drummondii’ is brightly variegated and looks almost snowy in early summer, though becomes more sickly green later. See it growing near Thwaite Hall. Often sold in garden centres, it is ultimately too big for small gardens and in advancing age it gradually reverts to green. ‘Crimson King’ is very popular because being purple people think it colourful and ‘different’ from green. Unfortunately when something ‘different’ is planted everywhere it ceases to be so – and such is the case with ‘Crimson King’. It is the heavy dark purple of copper beech, all summer, though without that tree’s refinement and presence. Growing rapidly too large for the small gardens in which it is often planted, ‘Crimson King’s common fate is to suffer mutilation by bad pruning before finally being removed. We shouldn’t give it space at Thwaite but we do – more than once. There are other very similar purple varieties, though the much less frequent ‘Schwedleri’ is a gentler red at first with the good manners to become a more modest greenish copper in summer. The semi fastigate ‘Columnare’ is becoming frequent in urban streets.

A final recommendation over sycamore, is that Norway maple does not drip honeydew, so one can leave, park or plant things under it without them being plastered.

John Killingbeck Jan 2016

## GARDENERS QUESTION TIME

Q. Why do winter flowering plants bloom in winter?

A. This is a question that often crosses a gardener's mind as they wander in winter. It seems an idiotic idea, as there may be very few if any insects about to visit the flowers and it is often dark and frosty. So why not wait till spring?

This I think is actually quite a complicated phenomenon to which there may be many answers. But one might be, that if there are any insects about, a plant in bloom will have very few rivals in attracting them. So given a reasonable number of very mild clement days, it may be worthwhile. However it is notable that most winter bloomers are exotics. There seem to be very few native plants of this type, suggesting that it is not worthwhile in nature in Britain. The stinking hellebore (*Helleborus foetidus*) is one of a few but is native only in the south. Daisies often do, and a few weeds, but mostly opportunistically, outside their main blooming time. Hazel and daffodils might, though only precociously in very mild winters and hazel is wind, not insect pollinated.

True winter bloomers are often Mediterranean in origin. *Viburnum tinus*, *Coronilla valentina*, *Heleborus argutifolius* or *Clematis cirrosa* would be good examples. The winter climate of Britain is mild enough for them to carry on normal winter blooming – except in severe weather.

Early winter flowering plants, mostly from East Asia, China etc. where the summer and autumn climate is far hotter than in Britain, are probably late summer/autumn flowering in the wild. In chillier Britain, they are simply very late behind schedule. I base this on the observation that in warm years they often start very early and may finish before Christmas. Examples might be winter Mahonias, Winter Jasmine, *Viburnum farreri*. As with native ivy which, in Britain, also blooms in autumn, there are plenty of insects at this time in their homelands.

Late winter bloomers are probably mostly the opposite. They normally bloom in spring, being dormant in the cold continental winters of their places of origin. But they are lured into early growth by the much milder British winter, under the delusion that spring has arrived. Oriental hellebores, Christmas

rose, Crocus, snowdrop, aconite, *Hamamelis*, *Bergenia* and overall, the majority of winter plants might fall into this category.

A final complication is hybridisation and deliberate human selection of unseasonal winter blooming varieties. The classic example of the latter is the Glastonbury Thorn – a type of common hawthorn. Similar might be *Prunus subhirtella* ‘Autumnalis’. But there is no end of hybrids of things like hellebores, primulas, pansies etc. At Thwaite, we have a daffodil variety called ‘January’. No prizes for guessing when this should be out – though here it is usually a little late. Many Narcissus varieties have Mediterranean origins and in mild years are eager to get going. Indeed this is the basis of the cut flower daffodil industry in the very mild Scilly Isles and West Cornwall.

John Killingbeck Jan 2016

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Gardens Opening Times Reminder

Monday to Thursday 10am to 3.30pm

*Fridays 10am to 3pm, except on Bank Holidays and at
other times when the University is closed.*

*Please note – occasionally, the main gates on Thwaite
Street, may be locked before 3pm. If you are in the
grounds at the time, please use the Thwaite Hall exit.*

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