

Issue No. 30

August 2011

Friends of Thwaite Gardens Newsletter



SECRETARY'S REPORT 2010-2011

This year we have had three excellent presentations, Gail Summerfield "Going for Gold", Vanessa Cook, "Plants for shade" and the ever popular Doug Stewart who also held a question time at our Open Day. Our presentations are currently held in January, March and October and we welcome your feedback and any suggestions for future presenters/topics.

Open Day was a huge success and despite unexpected strong winds, the number of visitors was higher than ever. We finally lost the battle to keep the Marquee upright mid-afternoon but thanks go to everyone who helped on the day. We are extremely grateful for your time and for the many donations. Thank you.

After the long winter of 2009 perhaps we thought that 2010 would not be so harsh. How wrong we were. For those of you who may be still lamenting over the loss of the *Cordyline australis* take heart in the fact that being classed as half hardy to frost tender they have had a good run in this area in particular. In fact the RHS advise that if you live in a frost prone area they should be grown as an indoor plant. (You may have to get a bigger coffee table!)

However on the serious side there have been many losses at Thwaite not just in the Mediterranean border as expected but in all areas. Also part of the roof on one of the greenhouses collapsed due to the weight of the snow and was therefore out of bounds until it could be repaired. This also resulted in the loss of stock plants.

As the weather improved, work began to assess the damage. The loss of so many mature shrubs and plants was quite devastating but that is gardening, you cannot control the weather. However I am pleased to say that we have recently had some new volunteers which are a big help when there are so many jobs to be done. Thank you to all our volunteers, Jean M. Jean H. Pat, Lynn, Bill, Norman, Richard, June, Jacky, Barbara, John, Doug, Vic and Sue everyone has worked so hard.

We are always looking for more volunteers. Please contact me for further details if you are interested.

If you have an interest in Alpines you may wish to become involved in one of our future projects.

Enjoy the gardens!

Pam Bailey Secretary
Tel. 01482 843304
12/08/2011

Membership Renewal Reminder

Just a reminder that annual membership subscription is due on 1st November 2011. Anyone who has not paid for the previous year will be deleted from the database with immediate effect.

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

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.

Please note: new members who have joined on, or after, the Open Day in May 2011 do not have to renew their subscriptions until November 2012.

TREASURER'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31ST JULY 2011

The year closed with a balance of £5811, down from the £7426 at the close of 2009/10. The accounts are yet to be verified by our accountant.

Income is generated from a variety of sources, mainly membership fees and the annual Open Day.

Membership fees totalled £2030 an increase over 2009/10. Open Day was once more a success with a slight overall increase on our excellent day last year-

Gate receipts	£670	(£565)
Plant sales	£269	(£360)
Refreshments	£300	(£259)

Over 40 new members were enrolled on the day or very soon thereafter.

As mentioned in the Treasurer's Report last year a large expense of around £800 was needed to refurbish a greenhouse with new windows and this year an amount of £873 was spent to accomplish this.

Two other large amounts were for a water drip feed system £170 and a soil heating system £235.

Overall there was a £470 increase in plant expenditure and a £1600 increase in materials (including the three items mentioned above). Other expenditure were 1) officers expenses (mainly stamps, envelopes, receipt books) 2) Speakers £437, 3) Printing £359 and 4) Hall Hire £145.

D.James
Treasurer
16.08.2011

PLANT OF THE MONTH

RUSSIAN SAGE (*Perovskia atriplicifolia*)



Russian sage is a plant with many virtues but is not widely planted although easy to grow, probably because it rarely looks impressive in the garden centre or nursery container. When young and potted it looks completely dead in winter and even in summer, rather weak and straggly with thin flowers. Once released from its confinement and settled in however it quickly becomes more interesting. In fact it is a plant for virtually all seasons.

Russian sage is one of those plants which hovers between being herbaceous and woody. Strictly speaking it is a small shrub, but because much of the top growth dies back each year; for convenience it is often treated as herbaceous, with most of the top being cut back with secateurs to base each

year. Nevertheless, to cut it back in autumn would miss out on its winter display of spidery white twigs which though not as striking as dogwood, still make a decent frosty looking decoration.

Following its early spring trim, the hoary looking small serrated leaves re grow and gradually extend into tall elegant stems. At this stage another less obvious quality of the plant is revealed. Anyone brushing against it will be immediately aware of a strong menthol smell emanating from it. Rubbed very vigorously, the vapour will be almost too strong, but in moderation is pleasant. In fact the scent persists on the stems throughout the year.

The stems branch into large (about a metre or so high), wispy terminal panicles which bloom in mid to late summer for a number of weeks. The flowers are small purplish blue with a velvety purple calyx and though individually rather tiny are produced in such quantity that the overall effect is of a mauve haze. They are besieged by bees and the display may persist from July to September.

The plant is not particularly fussy as to soil, though needs to be well drained. Excessively rich or very poor soils are not ideal either. The plant is well behaved and of quite strong, bone hardy constitution (as you might expect from a Russian plant) and if well suited may spread moderately by suckers. Only the most tidy minded of gardeners would be alarmed by these however, since they insinuate themselves so elegantly between other plants. Good companions for Russian Sage might include the grass *Stipa gigantea* or for lovers of strong contrast – orange *Crocsmia* or yellow *Rudbeckia*.

John Killingbeck

Heritage Open Days 2011 - Hull

Thursday 8 – Sunday 11 September

This year the University of Hull is participating in the annual Heritage Open Days organised by Hull Civic Society. The event provides the opportunity for the city's residents and visitors to appreciate for themselves Hull's unique heritage.

The local programme has a wide range of activities offered over the four days including talks and exhibitions, guided tours and access to buildings not usually open to the public. All events are free (although a charge may be made for refreshments). The published programme is being distributed throughout the city; it can also be accessed via the web – www.hodshull.co.uk.

The University's programme includes a guided tour of the Thwaite Botanical Gardens on Friday 9 September from 2.00 – 3.00pm (to be led by John Killingbeck). People are requested to book for the tour via the University Reception – 01482 346311.

It is hoped that local residents will take the opportunity to experience the history and culture of the University and enjoy the activities on offer. In addition to the Gardens guided tour these include "hands-on" experience of cutting edge technology in the Hull Immersive Visualisation Environment, access to the University's Map Library, a University of Hull History Tour, and an 'Afternoon with Larkin'. The University Art Collection will also be available to visit and an illustrated talk (Arctic Trawlermen: Last of the Hunters) will be given by Alec Gill in the historic Blaydes House in Hull's Old Town.

A special Jubilee Heritage Lunch will be on offer (£5 per head) in the Jubilee Restaurant on the University's Hull Campus on Thursday 8 and Friday 9 September for which booking is recommended – 01482 466903.

Please take time to look at the Heritage Open Days programme -

with its diverse events, both at the University and in Hull, it's sure to have something which you will enjoy.

Monica Birch
University Governance and Compliance Officer

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Diary Dates!

AGM -Tuesday 4th October

First meeting of 2012 –
31st January 2012

Both meetings at Cottingham
Methodist Hall, Hallgate at 7.30



There are many trees in the Thwaite collection that are often described as “unusual”, yet there must be few so deserving of the title in quite so many ways as the Pride of India. For those looking to find this tree in the gardens, it is easily noticed as one of those in the entrance garden, just beyond the large blue birch. It is one of the trees the Friends “rescued” early on – from being crushed out of shape by a large *Cornus mas*, which although quite a good specimen itself, was much less exceptional and was also represented elsewhere in Thwaite.

Even the name “Pride of India” conjures up in the mind something extremely exotic and worth searching out. The first oddity offered by this tree is that, despite its name, it originates from China, not India! Why it comes to be called Pride of India rather than China is something of a mystery. I have never heard any plausible explanation, but it is possible that the genus *Koelreuteria*, which contains two other very similar but more sub-tropical species, came to be grown in India and picked up the name by mistake. The tree is also

sometimes called “Golden Rain Tree” but this runs the risk of confusing it with *Laburnum* which is similarly graced with that name from time to time. More bizarre names are occasionally offered, for example: “Willow Pattern Tree”, on the grounds that it is supposed to be illustrated therein. Personally, I have never been able to pick out its likeness in said pattern, which is not even oriental in origin anyway and is, I believe, a piece of western pastiche.

In the wild, *K. paniculata* is said to frequent relatively hot, dry, river valleys, mainly in northern China. I gather it is not uncommon by The Great Wall. For this reason, as a warmth-loving species, it is mostly found and grows best in southern England, where it is not uncommon in university courts and finer parks of the more salubrious towns of the south. This makes the Thwaite specimen all the more special, since for the north of England, ours is an unusually fine and large example.

The tree is of quite picturesque gnarled habit as it matures and although too large for a small garden, is not excessively big for those of a moderate size. The young foliage emerges quite early for a warmth-loving tree of continental affinities and is, at first, an attractive pinkish colour. Mature foliage is graceful and ash-like, finishing the year with a flourish of sometimes quite vivid autumn colour.

A further “unusual” quality is offered by the flowers, which as well as blooming usefully in mid-summer, consist of large panicles of tiny bright yellow flowers, creating an overall effect of golden haze on the tree. Good blossoming is encouraged by hot summer weather and if the summer is a good one, a further oddball delight appears in the form of the fruits which resemble little Chinese lanterns. While ripening, these are rosy pink but mature to parchment brown and may be retained among the bare branches for much of the winter. Each fruit contains several shiny black seeds which are easily grown and even self-sown. Over the years our Thwaite tree has spawned many offspring, distributed around East Yorkshire, including my own garden. My own tree is about 12 years old and although not flowering as well as its parent, has stunning salmon orange autumn hues.

Can there be anything else “unusual” about this tree? Well, yes! It is the only member of the mainly tropical soapberry (*Sapinadaceae*) family that is generally hardy in Britain. At least it was until botanical geneticists got hold of it. This is a relatively new way of looking at taxonomy, which works by analysing the chromosomal links between species and families instead of the traditional comparison of floral parts. This has resulted in many upsets in the old system. In the case of our tree, I gather the soapberry family has been found to have such close affinity to the maple family (*Aceraceae*) that it has been proposed that the two be amalgamated. So our tree no longer exists in quite such splendid and singular isolation, because, of course, there are a great many maples which can be grown here. But such is the way of science – the frontiers of knowledge are forever in flux.

For those who might wish to grow this tree for themselves, basic cultivation is not difficult. It seems to be happy on most soils, though is perhaps most suited to dry poorer ones. A warm, sunny, sheltered spot is desirable for good flowering and certainly for fruiting. Frosty sites are to be avoided, as the foliage is very prone to damage by unseasonal freezes at either end of the year, though when dormant, the tree is completely hardy. Pride of India is quite quick growing, so even starting your tree from seed is a feasible project and while small, it is still very attractive.

John Killingbeck

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### **OPENING TIMES REMINDER**

**THE GARDENS ARE OPEN TO FRIENDS MEMBERS:-**

**MONDAY TO THURSDAY 12.30 – 3.30**

**FRIDAY 12.30 – 3.00**

**(except bank Holidays and other days  
when the University is closed)**

# Plants Growing in the Glasshouse

## No 3 *Lantana camara*



Country of origin Tropical America and Africa

Common Name: Lantana

Family : Verbenaceae

You will find this shrub growing in the central corridor near the succulent glasshouse. It is not hardy and needs winter protection.

It is a hairy evergreen shrub with shining dark green leaves and has a strong smell. Like many other plants in growing in the corridor it has been there for many years.

If grown as a climber it will need some support and has attained a height of 8 feet or more grown under our conditions. The foliage is similar to verbenas and so are the flowers. It flowers prolifically throughout the summer months producing balls of pink flowers which turn yellow, red and orange creating an impressive range of colour as shown in the photograph.

Vic Swetez

## **A GREAT GIFT IDEA!**

**why not treat family or friends to a year's  
membership of the Friends for a birthday or  
Christmas present ?**

**Membership gift cards are available on request.  
please ask a member of the committee if you  
are interested.**

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**Please remember that dogs
brought into the gardens
must be kept on a lead at all
times.**

Thank you

Thank you!

Thank you to all those members of the Friends who supported the Red Cross Open day on 7th August.

These open days have been running annually, by kind permission of the University, as part of the national Red Cross Open Gardens programme, since well before the inception of the Friends.

Many of the Cottingham Red Cross members are also members of the Friends, and help at both events, so it is nice to see that we are able to give each other mutual support.

In fact several people who visited on August 7th, asked for Friends membership application forms, so working together is advantageous to both groups!

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.

Friends website:-

www.hull.ac.uk/thwaite-gardens

