

Issue No. 48

February 2018

Friends of Thwaite Gardens Newsletter



Diary DATES

Open Day

Sunday May 20th

Evening Talk

At Cottingham Methodist Hall, 7.45 pm on Tuesday 20th March

“Unnatural Gardening”

By Peter Williams, retired plant scientist

A humorous talk questioning the current fashion for “Naturalistic” and
“Wildlife” gardening

Advance Notice

We are hoping to get approval to run a 6 week Appreciation of Trees course
in the classroom in July and August.

Before we take this any further, we will need to know how many people are
interested in attending as there will be no point in running it if there are not
sufficient numbers. Please could you let John Killingbeck know if you are
interested as soon as possible. His email address and phone number are at
the end of this newsletter.

PLANT OF THE MONTH – LARDIZABALA (*Lardizabala bitermata*)



This is perhaps one of the more obscure plants growing in Thwaite gardens and you are unlikely to encounter it in many other places. But I think it is always worth pointing out such plants to people in particular because, this winter, it is flowering for the first time in many years. Everyone entering the garden will have walked right past it on every visit, perhaps not noticing it from the abundant ivy in the vicinity. It is a vigorous evergreen climber that grows at the far end of the low wall along the entrance path inside the main gate.

The history of our *Lardizabala* is essentially unknown, in that it probably dates from the time when the garden was set up and run by the long defunct university botany department. In which case it may be over 50 years old. It was certainly never planted by the Friends but it was rescued by us from near oblivion: enveloping ivy and inadvertent cutting by staff who were perhaps unaware of its rarity and significance. It is typical of the sort of scientifically interesting but not particularly noticeable plant that is often included in a true botanical garden.

In fact there were originally two plants growing together. Why so, you might ask? This is because the plant is usually thought to be (though apparently is not always) dioecious – which means male and female plants are separate. This means that if fruits are desired, both sexes must be grown in reasonable proximity – rather like holly. Fruit production if it does occur results in 7cm purple ‘sausages’ – so is worth trying for! Unfortunately the partner of our *Lardizabala* was on the point of death when discovered and failed to revive:

rescue came a whisker too late to continue its long life here. The flowers on the surviving plant, so far, look to be male.

Lardizabala is interesting in many ways. It is the sole member of its genus, it hails from the Chilean rainforest and it flowers in mid- winter. See if you can spot the small purple- green racemes among the foliage. The reason it has flowered for the first time for us is probably because some of the outer growth has reached stronger light after years of overhanging shade. On inspection the foliage is rather attractive – trifoliate, lush, shiny and evergreen - resembling, if anything, the ‘Kangaroo Vine’ houseplant (*Cissus*).

Perhaps because of its Chilean rainforest origins, *Lardizabala* is considered to be tender, thus mostly grown in mild western gardens. However, the decades long survival of our plant suggests otherwise. Conceivably it may even have survived the all- time severity of 1963 in its early days?

Although an unusual plant, it does have relatives that are commoner in gardens. One of these – *Akebia quinata* (also an evergreen climber) grows rampantly in the opposite side of the entrance garden at Thwaite. Propagation is difficult but has been achieved recently by Vic Swetez, the university technician at Thwaite. Interest has been expressed by the Yorkshire arboretum in obtaining propagules.

John Killingbeck Jan 2018

TREES OF THWAITE ----- COLORADO WHITE FIR (*Abies concolor*)



We have several of these conifers in the garden – all in the same area – in the wood near to the path at the far end of the lake. They form two tight groups of tall trees, mostly approaching 20m in height. For those of you who labour under the difficulty of identifying any conifer from another, these are easy to pick out as light blueish ‘Christmas Trees’, contrasting with the dark green of most others.

Abies concolor is native to the southern end of the Rocky mountain ranges, from Utah to northern Mexico. This high altitude locality at a southerly latitude probably explains their blue colour, which is caused by a coating of wax on the leaves. The wax protects both from dehydration in the dry cold of winter and also reflects strong damaging ultraviolet light from the intense sunlight at all seasons. Even in mid- winter, the snow reflects sunlight powerfully – which humans without eye protection can experience as ‘snow blindness’ when skiing, for example. Thus these trees have their protection in the same way.

There is a much better known and more widely grown conifer from this region which is also blue – the Colorado Blue Spruce (*Picea pungens glauca*). The bluest selections are grown for their attractive near artificial looking appearance, although the majority in the wild are duller and greener. Similarly extra blue forms of *A.concolor* are sometimes offered for sale – known as A.c.

violacea – and even more so in the variety called ‘Candicans’. In general these extra bright forms are far more often encountered in gardens than the normal type, though usually in unsuitably confined locations.

Superficially, firs and spruces seem very similar. So how, in general, does one separate a ‘spruce’ from a ‘fir’? Both have a very symmetrical ‘Xmas tree’- like habit when young, although many firs as they age tend to become less so and more heavily branched. If cones are available however, they are easily separated. Spruce cones are pendulous and fall off the tree intact. So if your ‘Xmas tree’ has cones scattered underneath it will be spruce. Fir cones are borne upright, like candles and disintegrate on the tree, leaving a strange nail – like core on the branches. Only loose scales are likely to be found beneath the tree. If you have no cones to go by, after leaf drop, spruce twigs are scratchier with rough peg like attachments whereas fir twigs are relatively smooth.

On the whole, spruces seem to grow better in East Yorkshire than firs, many of the latter doing well in higher rainfall areas. *Abies concolor* is one of relatively few firs that seems to grow quite happily here though in general is not often seen. Our trees at Thwaite have done fine so far, though it is plain they would prefer more open conditions away from nearby large deciduous trees. There is also evidence that some of them may be declining, probably due to the increasing wetness near the lake which has weakened and killed a number of our trees in recent years.

Abies concolor is closely related to the much commoner Grand Fir (*Abies grandis*) and there is an ‘intergrade’ species – Low’s Fir (*A. concolor* var. *lowiana*) – intermediate between the two. This is perhaps an example of evolution in action – one original form splitting into two. But it also illustrates the difficulty of deciding at precisely what point one species can be separated clearly from another (in time or space) – or, perhaps, even the notion of “species” itself.

John Killingbeck Jan.2018

Welcome to 2018 at Thwaite Gardens

May I take this opportunity to greet everyone for the first time in 2018.

Those of you who have email will have seen the Christmas greeting from Vic Swetez, which included the confirmation that the university plans to sell Thwaite Hall and possibly some of the land, but that, thankfully for all of us, everything is continuing more or less as before at the Botanic Gardens, which are managed by the Friends in partnership with the university. Sadly for us, and the gardens, the two gardeners have been moved from their base at Thwaite Gardens. The gardeners could always be relied on to maintain the grass, among other things. In the autumn it was being cut less regularly and not as short as previously, so we will have to see what happens as this year progresses.

My thanks to those of you who have renewed your membership. Just before the AGM in October we had 566 members, but as yet not everyone has renewed. Thank you, too, for enclosing a stamped addressed envelope with your renewal slips. This makes a huge difference to me in terms of time and effort addressing envelopes, it means I can send your cards out immediately and process the renewals later on, as well as saving us a tidy sum in stamps. Better to spend the money on plants and compost!

For the Friday volunteers, our first major task in January has been to prune the roses on the long rose arch, under the guidance of Jean Major. It always seems a massive task to face, but steady work means that after a couple of hours we can stand back and can “see where we have been”. It takes a few weeks to complete, but then looks neat and tidy, all ready for the spring and summer growth.

We wonder if there are some of you who would like to join the Friday volunteers? Currently there are 16 of us, and usually 12 or 13 people turn up at 10.00 on Fridays. We limit the number to 20, but that leaves four vacancies

at present. You need a little gardening knowledge but we don't require expertise.

It is lovely to see the first signs of spring in the garden. Even in bleak January days, the Hellebores are coming into flower, the cyclamen add colour and the Daphne smells wonderful. If you stand at the far end of the car park area, with the lean-to greenhouse on your right, the smell of the Daphne will lead you to it. The first snowdrop came out on 12th January, a harbinger of spring. Lots of bulbs are "pushing up their noses".



We hope to see some of you at our March meeting (20.3.18) in Cottingham Methodist Hall. We have been asked to start the meeting a little later, at 7.45 instead of 7.30. This is just about the availability of the room.

Our Open Day will be Sunday May 20th: I hope to see lots of you there.

Annie Bourton Card
Treasurer

A MESSAGE FROM ABERDEEN

Last November I had the pleasure of visiting the University of Aberdeen's Cruickshank Botanic Garden (CBG) – the most northerly botanic garden in the UK. It has many features that make it an interesting comparison with Thwaite and perhaps one model among many others for Thwaite's future and guiding principles. All quotes are taken from the garden literature. Read – and draw your own conclusions.

The garden originally started as a bequest to the University of 7 acres (in 1898), including the present plant and soil science building - under the 'Cruickshank Garden Trust' (CGT) of stated purpose: "For the teaching and study of Botany as a pure science, and as applied to the Arts and Industries, and for the furtherance of University interests and the public good". Described as: "an appropriate statement of value then and now".

The land was gradually added to until the 1960s when it reached its current size of 11 acres. It comprises at present of over 3,200 taxa.

"The Garden Team includes the Keeper, the Curator, Head Gardener, a Skilled Horticulturist and a Horticultural Technician (combining laboratory work and gardening throughout the year) along with a sponsored Horticultural Trainee (a post generously funded by the Friends of Cruickshank Botanic Garden). Additional assistance by an increasing number of volunteers.....is of great help".

No wonder it looks so good! – though has much less under glass than Thwaite has even now.

"In recent years the University of Aberdeen has once again recognised the crucial role of botany and horticulture when combined with the significant resource of the Botanic Garden as a University asset for research, learning and public engagement".

"Change across CBG continues to be evident new vistas being created, research beds now exist in the public domain and an increase in public events

is occurring. Furthermore, appropriate to CBG's geography, climate and soils, additional temperate species are being added from the latitudinal extremes of both hemispheres".

How good it would be if this message from Aberdeen were to produce an echo in Thwaite. I would recommend anyone visiting the Aberdeen area to see Cruickshank.

John K.

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*Open Day 2018*  
*Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> May*

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 new classroom, 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 Vic Swetez 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 £3.00 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.

**MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL REMINDER**

***Annual subscriptions were due on 1st November 2017.  
They are £8 per person or £12 for two people living at the same  
address***

***Anyone who has not paid by the Open Day 2018 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 2017 do not have to renew  
their subscriptions until November 2018.***

*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*

**Gardens Opening Times Reminder**

**Monday to Thursday 10am to 3.30 pm  
Fridays 10am to 3pm except on Bank Holidays and at other  
times when the University is closed**

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# Hortus Botanicus - Amsterdam Botanical Gardens

Just a few photos of Amsterdam Botanical Gardens, taken during a visit to Amsterdam last year.

Amsterdam has one of the oldest Botanical Gardens in the world. Established in 1638 as a specialised medical garden for doctors and pharmacists. It has over 6000 plants and is well worth a visit should you ever be in Amsterdam.

Vic Swetez



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