

Issue No. 61

March 2023

Friends of Thwaite Gardens Newsletter



Links with the community: Friday nature talks.

We have been trying to think of different ways in which we can share our lovely gardens with different groups of people, in the process encouraging new members to join FOTG.

One of the volunteers, Patrick Quinn, came up with the idea of providing nature talks to members of the Cottingham U3A gardening group, partnering with our own volunteers, some of whom shared or will share their own expertise. This new initiative started successfully on Friday 27th January from 1.00 – 2.30/3.00pm.

Our own John Killingbeck entertained everyone on that date, talking about “Exotic and Ancient Trees”, while Yvonne Golding explored “The Wonders of Ferns” on 24th February, and Roland Ennos will talk on 24th March about “How Trees Grow”.

Each talk started/will start with chat and refreshments from 1.00-1.15 pm, and the talk was/will be followed by guided looks at relevant plants in the greenhouses and gardens.

The first session, held in our classroom, was attended by about 18 U3A members and about 7 or 8 of the Friday volunteers and was deemed a great success.

We charge £5 per session but have made the sessions free to members, so several of the U3A members joined. Some were already members.

Hopefully this will be the start of new initiatives in which we can all share.

Annie Bourton Card 02.23

Diary dates

Evening meeting- Tuesday 21st March 2023 Methodist Hall
Cottingham (more details on p12)

Open Day- Sunday 21st May 2023 (details to follow)

Cottingham Open Day Sunday 11th June 2023
(to raise funds for Dove House Hospice)

AGM-17th October 2023(details nearer the date)

TREES OF THWAITE – FALSE ACACIA (*Robinia pseudoacacia*)



This is a fairly widespread species in our part of the country and at Thwaite can be seen overhanging the main drive just as one reaches the car park. In fact there are several individual small trees growing together. These are probably clones of one original which has since died. The survivors will have begun as root suckers from the original, which is one of the main methods by which the species reproduces itself. In fact, in many European countries where this tree has been introduced from its original home in eastern North America, it has proved quite invasive, even problematic. In parts of Hungary, for example, False Acacia has become a dominant species, the suckers spreading to form

entire woodlands over extensive areas. In the cooler climate of East Yorkshire, spread is far more restrained and very limited.

Even so, the tree grows well here and can make a fine and characterful specimen. Growth is very rapid in youth with strong yet elegant looking branches, which are very thorny, clothed with delicate rounded compound pinnate leaves. As it matures however the habit changes and in time becomes particularly picturesque with twisting gnarled branching and craggy bark. Its peak of glory is reached at flowering time, when the beautiful racemes of white blooms looking exactly like white Laburnum or Wisteria appear. Blooming may occur any time from late May to July, depending on temperature. In general, the hotter the summers experienced by the tree, the greater the intensity of flowering and as a rule it is far more profuse in warm urban and southern districts. The flowers are sweetly perfumed too and very attractive to bees. From them we obtain Acacia honey, a delicately flavoured, pale, light honey regarded as one of the best types.

There is an interesting history of naming connected with this tree. 'False Acacia' refers to the fact that it was originally thought to resemble the true Acacias of Africa and is indeed closely related to them, all being in the pea family, *Fabaceae*. The classic suburban name "Acacia Avenue" is derived with reference to this too. The Americans on the other hand call it 'Black Locust'. Locust in this case is another reference to something similar – the 'Locust' or Carob tree of the Bible, eaten in the wilderness by John The Baptist and others; and because the seed pods look similar, were so named by religious early American settlers perhaps looking out for signs of God's favour in the American wilderness. A third widely used name is Robinia the same as the Latin name which it was given in honour of French botanist, Jean Robin, whose son was the first to cultivate it at Le Jardin des Plantes in Paris in the C17 when it was one of the first American trees to be introduced to Europe.

Another curious and slightly implausible tale connected to the Acacia is that it was once part of a money-making scam. In the early C19, a certain William Cobbett, on returning to Europe from America, convinced timber growers that the wood of this new American tree was wonderful and would be commercially

lucrative to plant. Having set up his own nursery to supply the saplings, demand was so great that he could not keep up with it. Eventually, not only were claims for the wood discovered to be much exaggerated, but worse, it was realised that the tree had actually been growing in Europe for the past 200 years already!

There are a number of ornamental varieties of False Acacia. The oddest, though not widely grown now is the 'Mop Head Acacia' (*R. p. 'Umbraculiflora'*) which has tight, umbrella-like growth, so neat it might almost have been clipped. Several once grew and perhaps still do, down Fairfax Ave. Hull. The most popular variety by far is the golden form 'Frisia', one of the most beautiful of all golden trees. Almost over planted at one time, it seemed to suffer setback following a period of very cold winters and miserable summers around 2010 when many hitherto good flourishing specimens in our area were subject to heavy dieback. It is still being re planted locally but really good examples seem to be common only further South East in England today. As well as being a bit brittle it clearly needs warm summers to thrive. Becoming popular is the contorted variety 'Tortuosa' – a picturesque tree where even the leaves are curly. In Newland Park, Hull, is a single specimen of the form 'Unifoliola' growing there, but nowhere else locally that I know of. It has distinct leaves with only a few large leaflets. Pink flowered hybrid forms are also encountered from time to time, cross bred with other species.

Because, like all leguminous plants, False Acacia harbours nitrogen fixing bacteria in special nodules on its roots, it is sometimes planted on very poor, dry soils, difficult for other trees. It has been widely used in warmer parts of Europe for this purpose, for stabilising slopes etc. and from where it has become naturalised. The nearest example of this locally, is perhaps on the M18, in a steep cutting just north of Doncaster, where it has spread extensively by suckering and looks very much at home.

John Killingbeck Feb. 2023

TRIP TO FLORIADE 2022

Floriade is a huge garden festival held every ten years in the Netherlands.

It covered 150 acres which is about 60 times the size of our Botanic Garden in Cottingham and took 3 years to construct and thousands of trees, shrubs, creepers, hydrophytes, and flower bulbs were planted before it was opened to the public.

It is now closed and is being developed into the new green city district Hortus. A housing development incorporating some of the Floriade features.

Our visit was in September, which was towards the end of the season but nevertheless there was still plenty to see.

As with any garden large or small things change throughout the season and to appreciate it fully you need to visit several times which was not practical



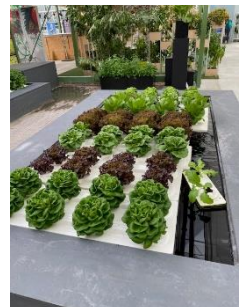
for us so we had to make do with our September visit. It would have been nice to have seen the bulbs flowering in spring. The focus of Floriade 2022 was on imagining sustainable, healthy city living for the future. The species of plants on display had been chosen for their special qualities, and how they can contribute to a green city space in

terms of biodiversity, air purification, food production and city climate management.

Also on site was a huge glasshouse with tender plants and displays showing modern growing techniques to include ornamentals and edible glasshouse crops.



For scale Sue is standing between the two figures!



What impressed me the most were the stunning orchid displays as hopefully you can see in the photos.



Paleis Het Loo

Whilst over there we also visited the Paleis Het Loo which was originally occupied by the Dutch Royal Family.

It is in the town of Apeldoorn about 1hr's drive from Amsterdam and if you are in the area well worth a visit. The house inside and outside is very impressive, and the Gardens are well laid out and spectacular as can be seen in the attached photos.



There were lots of water features which added character to the intricate bed layout. (I wonder how many volunteers they have to keep the garden in such good condition!!!)

If you want to know more about this garden just follow the link below.

www.paleishetloo.nl

Okay that's my bit for the Dutch Tourist Board

Finally, for me, any visit should have a decent café serving proper cappuccinos and cake.

The one at this garden did not disappoint.



Best wishes for 2023

Vic.

PLANT OF THE MONTH: PHOTINIA (*Photinia x fraseri*)



(*Photinia x fraseri*)

This shrub can grow large enough to fall into the category of a tree, so could perhaps be written about under the “Trees of Thwaite” item of the newsletter. However, most people know it as a shrub, so I include it here. Take note, though, anyone searching for a ‘small tree’, this also makes it a strong contender for that purpose.

Photinia x fraseri has taken off as a plant of mass popularity during the period of my own horticultural career. Up until the 1970s it seemed virtually unknown but as soon as the variety ‘Red Robin’ became widely available and publicised it seemed to spread like wildfire everywhere from private gardens to car parks, new housing estates and large-scale public works. Fire being the word because its chief attraction is the bright red young growths which seem to appear at various points through the year.

Being similarly evergreen with red shoots meant ‘Red Robin’ was sometimes originally marketed as ‘Poor Man’s Pieris’ - *Pieris* being that gorgeously aristocratic ericaceous shrub that gardeners on dry alkaline soils were unable to grow without a lot of troublesome TLC. However, other than the colour of the shoots there is little to compare between the two and *Photinia*, far from

being a 'poor' *Pieris* is in many respects a far more vigorous and dramatic plant as well as much less fussy. The most favourable contrast concerns the red shoots themselves. Whereas those of *Pieris* are mainly produced in one flush in spring, those of *Photinia* begin in late winter and continue intermittently at other times of the year. Whereas the shoots of *Pieris* can be devastated by one unlucky spring frost, those of *Photinia* seem almost implausibly cold hardy, only withered by a significant period of cold dry winds and rarely completely.

Pieris also produces rather lovely, 'Lily of the Valley' flowers at about the same time, or just before the new shoots. *Photinia*, too, produces white flowers, though in flat heads of small *Sorbus*-like blooms which reveal that, like *Sorbus*, it belongs to the rose family. They are mostly in flower when the first spring flush of growth is extended.

We do not actually have a specimen of 'Red Robin' at Thwaite but it is easy to see in gardens everywhere and is grown as a most eye catching hedge more or less opposite the entrances to Castle Hill Hospital beside the new housing estate there. What we do have at Thwaite is three of *Photinia x fraseri* 'Robusta'. This is a different variety of *P. x fraseri* that is far less common than 'Red Robin' and in my humble opinion is at least as garden worthy if not more so. The three we have grown at the rear of the Winter Border and one of them can be seen forming a large evergreen dome near the car park. 'Robusta' seems more readily to develop a tree-like form than 'Red Robin' and we do not yet know how big it will grow. The plants are currently about 15 years old and though lushly evergreen have survived all winters so far, including 2010, pretty well. Their shoot colouration is more a bronzy orange than red, though equally striking and their flowering profuse with a scatter of blooms sometimes in mid-winter. Overall, their habit is more luxuriant than 'Red Robin' with darker finer foliage.

The parent species of the *P. x fraseri* hybrid are *P. glabra* and *P. serratifolia*, neither of which have been widely grown in the past, particularly in the north. However, a variety of *P. serratifolia* has recently appeared which Thwaite has planted, called 'Crunchy'. As well as having the striking red shoots typical of the genus, the leaf margins of 'Crunchy' are delightfully serrated in a crinkly

sort of way. It is growing at the back of the 'Long Border' at the entrance to Thwaite and although still small it is hoped it will make a strong backdrop shrub. 'Crunchy' is only one of several alternative forms of *Photinia* which up until now have been somewhat eclipsed by the overwhelming popularity of 'Red Robin'.

Before 'Red Robin' came along the most popular *Photinia* was *P. davidiana*. It was perhaps never very common but is an excellent large shrub or small tree having a rather attractive combination of semi evergreen foliage, white flowers, red berries and red autumn colour when a portion of the leaves drop at the end of the year. It still deserves to be more widely grown, though nowadays is usually sold in the unaccountably more popular, rather sickly variegated form, 'Palette'. We have an old, though slightly suppressed specimen of *P. davidiana* by the old wooden gate that used to lead through to the lake area of Thwaite before it was sold off. Like other *Photinia* species it originated from China, though because 'Red Robin' was first bred in New Zealand, many people mistakenly think it is native there.

John Killingbeck Feb. 2023



P. serratifolia 'Crunchy'



'Red Robin'

Evening Meeting

7.30 pm, Tuesday 21st March 2023 at Cottingham
Methodist Hall, Hallgate, Cottingham

Speaker: - Prof Phillip Gilmartin (University of Hull)

Title - 'Primroses, an insight into their incredible flowers'



Members – free, non- members - £2

Keep in touch.

It's easy to keep up with all the Thwaite Gardens news!
As well as all the info in this newsletter we have a website, a Facebook page, and a Twitter feed. All are regularly updated to give you news and upcoming events as well as photos of plants and projects. We welcome your comments and questions and try to get back to you as promptly as we can.

Website

<https://thwaite-gardens.hull.ac.uk>

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