

Issue No. 62

September 2023

Friends of Thwaite Gardens Newsletter



Diary dates

AGM-Sunday 22nd October 1.30 pm.

Please note that this years' AGM will be held in the classroom at the Botanic Gardens.

Members will be able to walk around the gardens prior to and after the meeting.

AGM - we will be sending you more information regarding the AGM in October.

Should anyone want to stand for any position or nominate anyone for the committee please let our secretary Dr Lindsey Atkinson know email l.j.atkinson@hull.ac.uk or respond to this email.

Membership renewal reminder-Renewals where due on the 1st of August 2023

Wild Life at The Botanic Gardens



Southern Hawker Dragonfly



Hoverfly *Volucella zonaria*
(Britain's largest hoverfly)



Brimstone butterfly



Hoverfly *Volucella pellucens*.

I'm sure we all appreciate the wonderful gardens here at Thwaite, and these gardens are still evolving and improving each season thanks to the Friends and volunteers who care for them. It's a joy to be part of the Friend's community and a privilege to be able to come here to help. There is also a fantastic array of Bees, Dragonflies, Hoverflies, and many other insects that live here in Summer and add to the broad tapestry of what we see every time we come to the gardens and their colours and forms are also a joy to behold. I do have a special amateur's interest in these invertebrates and photograph as many as possible.

Here is then a small sample from the summer of 2023.

Bob Hall

Friends of Thwaite Gardens AGM

Environmental Classroom

Botanic Gardens

1.30pm Sunday 22nd October 2023

Agenda

- 1. Apologies:**
- 2. Minutes of the last AGM (18th October 2022)**
- 3. Matters Arising**
- 4. Chair's report**
- 5. Treasurer's report**
- 6. Election of Chair**
- 7. Election of Committee**
- 8. Events**
- 9. AOB**
- 10. Date of next AGM**

TREES OF THWAITE – GOLDEN INDIAN BEAN TREE (*Catalpa bignonioides* ‘Aurea’)



The Golden Indian Bean is a bushy looking tree right at the back of the border behind the classroom and can be recognised by its large yellow leaves.

This is one of the smaller trees at Thwaite and unfortunately it has become rather overwhelmed by the big fastigate Hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus* ‘Fastigiata’) growing nearby. This situation is a classic problem in tree collections. When these two trees were first planted, maybe 60 years ago, there was more than ample space for them to grow and it would have seemed so for decades into the future. However, in the last ten years the crowns have met and the Hornbeam, being the more vigorous has pushed the Catalpa outwards so that it is now rather misshapen. We could of course cut back the Hornbeam – and may yet do so. The problem with that idea is that the Hornbeam is itself one of our best trees and would not be enhanced by pruning and also this would only be a temporary solution until it grew back again. Such are the dilemmas of managing trees and emphasises that gardens containing trees need a long term and stable vision to be successful.

Why the name “Indian Bean Tree”? Most people assume this means the tree is from India. Not so. It is from North America and the “Indian” referred to is actually the Native American so called “Indians”. The “beans” are the seed

Pods which look a bit like long French beans, which themselves are native to the Americas. Catalpa pods do not contain beans however but have thin dry papery winged seeds which enable the trees to colonise open spaces quickly.

Catalpas are extraordinary and almost implausibly exotic looking trees, redolent of something from the tropics. The plant family to which they belong *Bignoniaceae* is in fact a predominantly tropical or sub-tropical one. Their leaves are large and soft looking and the flowers big and sweet smelling. They are borne in bold panicles a little like those of Horse Chestnut, but the individual blooms are larger, like flared trumpets, white with yellow striped and speckled throats. The golden form 'Aurea' is much shyer flowering than the natural green type but in either case, flowering is much better in hot summer conditions. In fact in Britain this tree is really only at its best in warm sheltered situations and the finest are found in the south, particularly in urban areas.

Catalpa bignonioides – known as the Southern Catalpa is the commonest of several species. It tends to form a short trunked broad spreading tree. Given that it is native to the steamy lower reaches of the Mississippi valley it is perhaps surprising that it grows here at all. But there are a few decent specimens in East Yorkshire, the best of which is down Wolfreton Garth in Kirk Ella – a superb tree. The golden form used to be rarer but is becoming increasingly popular and there are several in Cottingham alone including one about the same age as ours next to Thwaite Hall.

The Northern Catalpa (*C. speciosa*) seems unknown locally but there is a hybrid (*C. x erubescens*) between the Southern Catalpa and Yellow Catalpa (*C. ovata*) which is fairly frequent in Hull and is, if anything, even more impressive, being more vigorous and tall growing. A particularly magnificent one grows down Goddard Avenue. Towering over nearby houses it is perhaps Hull's most extraordinary tree with its huge leaves and magnificent flowers waving on the summer breeze. Hybrid Catalpa has more angular leaves and also fruits more heavily than Southern Catalpa and the pods often hang in thick bunches through the winter.

The few other *Catalpa* species are much rarer, the following two being from China, rather than America. We have one *C. ovata* growing over the road from Thwaite on Cleminson estate – which was originally owned by the university and explains its presence there - planted by the same people who planted Thwaite. There seem to be no others locally. The gorgeous pink flowered *Catalpa C. fargesii*, except for a small one Friends have planted recently in Thwaite garden, is seemingly unknown anywhere else in East Yorkshire. However, a fine one grows over the river in Elsham village, in a private garden along the main street.

As garden trees, *Catalpas* work well given reasonable space. Their main weakness other than needing warm conditions, is that they are extremely late into leaf. Indeed they are pretty well the very last trees of all into leaf and are virtually bare until June and not in full leaf until July in many years, particularly cool ones. Foliage is shed without colour in autumn as soon as conditions become too harsh for it. They are fairly quick growing, though, and not overly fussy about soil. They can be pruned and some people do this regularly to give extra lush non flowering plants for foliage display. 'Aurea' is particularly suited to this.

In leaf, *Catalpa* is easily confused with Foxglove Tree (*Paulownia*). *Paulownia* has more felt textured leaves however and the two are not related. Besides 'Aurea' there is another rather small mop headed variety called 'Nana', usually grafted onto a stick-like stem and sometimes seen for sale in garden centres. As a *Catalpa*, it seems strangely pointless.

John Killingbeck Aug 2023

Open Day and current financial position

Our Open Day in May was, to our very great surprise, an even bigger success than last year. Thank you for coming along, if you did. I estimated that 850 people came during the course of the day. The weather was most clement, the choir sang wonderfully, the tombola was fun, the plant sales were amazing. Refreshments were also a great success and, thanks to the generous baking undertaken by our volunteers and many others, we did not run out of cake this year. There were two small cakes left which I bought, at the going rate, for my next gig.

I cannot thank the volunteers enough for all their help and hard work both before the day and on the day itself.

Thanks also to the choir. What a great turn-out!

Thanks also to Paul Lakin for lots of wonderful photos. Those of you who keep abreast of the Cottingham Facebook site will have seen these.

I have just finished preparing the end of year accounts and note that we took over £6k at Open Day and also another £1k+ over the course of the year selling plants at other events.

The plants we sold at Cottingham Open Gardens were sold in aid of Dove House Hospice and we were able to make a significant contribution (over £430).

What is also interesting in the accounts is that over the course of the year we spent, on plants, compost and other gardening materials and equipment, almost the same as we took in. This gets spread out over the year so we are still in a healthy position financially. Prior to the AGM we will circulate more precise figures. Your own contribution as members of the Friends of Thwaite Gardens is our second most important source of income, so thanks for joining us.

We were given a garden bench last September (which is at the back of the gardens in the “Secret Garden”) and in July I bought two more from a couple who came to Cottingham Market selling their garden furniture at show prices. These were significantly reduced in price but are solid, sturdy benches. Currently they are sited along the pathway, overlooking the grassed area and winter border, etc.

We have bought a bigger lawnmower, battery operated, so can keep the grass tidier. We do still miss having the university gardeners on site, but the main grass cutting is undertaken by the university, if somewhat irregularly. Our garden waste electric shredder is not really up to the task but it was the best one we could find for our circumstances. We produce compost and leafmould to supplement bought in supplies, but most of the garden waste goes off in a skip to East Riding Council, though this is still a local resource.

If you are able to visit us, you will see that the planting has been extended significantly. We now have a second winter border bed with a grass pathway weaving between the two. The grasses bed, also extended, has become well established and is benefitting from the removal of low tree branches and shrubby weeds in the cypress area. This has also created a den area where school children can sit. We are pleased that schools continue to use our facilities.

We have decided to have our AGM on a weekend day so people can visit the gardens. This will be on Sunday 22nd October at 1.00pm, when Bob Hall will give another of his popular and amusing talks. More details anon. I hope you can come.

Annie Bourton Card, Treasurer

8.8.23

PLANT OF THE MONTH – AUTUMN CROCUS (*Colchicum* species)



We have very few of these rather splendid cormous plants at Thwaite and perhaps we should have more. The most conspicuous group grow on the corner of the Secret Garden and can be seen usually at their best in early autumn. They have flowers similar to the well-known spring Crocus but quite a bit larger of a mauve-pink colour. These emerge without leaves which somehow imparts a slightly fungal quality to them, particularly because the flower stems are pale and whitish, as if they were unused to the light. This slightly pallid, delicate look has led to a couple of their many common names – Naked Ladies or Naked Boys.

In fact few plants can boast quite so many, or so confusing a range of common names. To start with, although called ‘Autumn Crocus’, they are not a Crocus at all. As the Latin name *Colchicum* suggests they are in a different genus altogether and are not even in the same plant family. However, this name is rendered even more confusing by the fact that there are actual true autumn flowering Crocus too, for example *Crocus speciosus* and *C. pulchellus* that are sometimes grown in gardens.

One species of *Colchicum* (*C. autumnale*) is a British native plant which has long been called ‘Meadow Saffron’. Again this name arises due to superficial similarities with the true saffron crocus (*Crocus sativus*), from where herbal saffron is derived and which, as it happens, is another of the autumn flowering

true Crocus species! Once relatively widespread in old pastures, particularly in Severn valley areas, Meadow Saffron is now much scarcer as a genuine wild plant. There are records of it a century or more ago growing in East Yorkshire but it is now extinct here. It is also frequent on the continent however and I once remember visiting a campsite in France where it was in flower over the whole field. One reason for the increased scarcity, other than the fact that old pastures where Colchicum grow are general much rarer than they were, is that the plants were sometimes deliberately destroyed. This was because Colchicum is toxic to livestock if eaten. Indeed, the poison is quite virulent and has been used in plant breeding to cause mutations and create new varieties.

Colchicum autumnale and its several varieties is one of the commonest species grown in gardens. The most popular though, is perhaps *C. speciosum*, which comes from Turkey. This has slightly larger flowers, purple pink with white throat and yellow anthers making it a little more eye catching. It has a splendidly beautiful pure white form, 'Album'. There are also a number of other species though most of these are uncommon outside collections. The hybrid types and garden varieties are more frequent. 'Waterlily' is one of the most popular, with double flowers of the usual colour, though has a habit of toppling over with its own weight. Other varieties with names like 'The Giant', 'Violet Queen' and 'Lilac Wonder' speak for themselves. On the whole they are more-free flowering and spectacular than the species.

The foliage of Colchicum grows in the spring and lasts until early summer. The leaves are relatively lush and broad, though not particularly decorative and look a little unsightly when dying down. This is one factor that puts some people off growing them. It also means they then leave a space where they were growing unoccupied by other plants which may remain empty at other times, though it is not impossible to find companions for them. I find summer flowering marjoram and some ornamental grasses, placed close by, works quite well at hiding the gaps, as long as these are trimmed a bit for when the Colchicums flower. Many big gardens have displays of Colchicums on relatively bare ground where they look magnificent but this is not a luxury most small gardens can afford to allow.

Cultivation is otherwise quite easy. They look best in a sunny spot but will tolerate some shade. Not that fussy about soil unless it is very poor and are happy if it becomes very dry in summer, so no watering needed. Very few pests or diseases, though slugs may chew through the flowers in damp conditions. The corms are best planted when dormant in summer but if left unsold will often start flowering regardless, on the shelf. If happy in the garden, some like *C. speciosum* may self-seed and spread.

John Killingbeck 2023

Memorial to Pat Foreman



Annie and I placed the memorial plaque for Pat Foreman in front of her favourite rose. A fitting tribute to one of Thwaite gardens dedicated and much-loved friends and to remember her hard work and dedication in creating and maintaining the Herbaceous bed. You may have to zoom in to read the detail on the plaque.

Bob

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>

Facebook

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