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February 2025

Friends of Thwaite Gardens Newsletter



Diary Dates

FOTG Spring meeting Sunday 23rd March 2025

The Spring Meeting will be held at the Botanic Gardens in the classroom with the gardens being open before and after for people to wander round and the talk will be at 1:30pm by Dr Peter Williams on Wonderful Weeds. (details below)

FOTG Open Day Sunday 18th May 11am to 4pm

There will be tree walks, a variety of plants for sale, refreshments, tombola and the 'All for One Choir'. More details to follow.

Friends of Thwaite Gardens 25years

2025 will mark the 25th anniversary of the Friends of Thwaite Gardens. In addition to our usual Open Day in May, we are planning a summer concert for July or August as part of the celebrations. We are also in the process of writing a history of the Friends set in the context of the history of the gardens.

The Speaker:

Peter Williams is a retired plant scientist with specialist knowledge of plant ecology, physiology and soil microbiology. He is a lifelong gardener and for many years ran a small nursery that specialised in the propagation of trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants, especially those for acid soils and woodland environments.

He now writes about gardening matters for the Hardy Plant Journal and gives talks both locally and nationally.

The Talk **Wonderful Weeds**



Have you ever wondered why weeds thrive despite your best efforts to kill them whilst cherished plants die even though you cosset them? This talk looks at the amazing strategies that annual and perennial weeds use in their battle for survival against the gardener. It does so by telling the stories of selected weeds (e.g. Chickweed, Rosebay Willowherb and Mare's Tail) that regularly invade the garden. It also covers plants that were initially introduced as garden plants but 'jumped the fence' to become

weeds in the general environment (e.g. rhododendrons, Giant Hogweed, Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam). Poppies are covered as a special case and their significance as a symbol of remembrance is covered. This is definitely not a dreary tale of common weeds and how to kill them but suggestions for dealing with troublesome weeds will be made if required!

Gardens Opening Times

Gardens opening times are 1pm to 3pm on Tuesdays, and 9.30am to 2pm on Fridays.

TREES OF THWAITE – LEYLAND CYPRESS (*x Cupressocyparis leylandii*)



Undoubtedly one of the most notorious and widely hated - but equally widely liked and planted trees in the UK, this species is known to nearly everyone with an interest in trees or gardening. The X at the start of the Latin name denotes that it is what is known as a 'bigeneric hybrid' (hybrid between two different genera). Hybrids are usually between two species of the same genus while hybrids between two different genera are much rarer. However, this has become

a moot point since re classification of many plants, including cypresses has thrown such ideas into confusion and hence Leyland, for the time being at least, sports a new identity: *x Cupressocyparis leylandii*.

It is however indubitably a hybrid. The two parents are Monterey Cypress (*Cupressus macrocarpa*) and Nootka Cypress (*Xanthocyparis nootkatensis*). This latter used to be classified as both the slightly weeping charm of the Nootka and the cedar-like majesty *Chamaecyparis nootkatensis* – hence the name *x Cupressocyparis* for Leyland – an infusion of *Cupressus* and *Chamaecyparis*. We have both parents at Thwaite. A golden form of Monterey towers above the alpine glasshouse, while a rather subdued Nootka lurks beneath the trees near the woodland walk. There used to be two Nootkas together but one died recently and somewhat mysteriously. The original Leyland cross occurred spontaneously in Ireland in the late C19th and elsewhere later.

It is said that Leyland exhibits 'hybrid vigour': the phenomenon whereby the offspring of a hybrid cross is stronger than either parent. It is claimed to inherit hardiness from the Nootka combined with fast growth from the Monterey. However, in this respect it seems only marginally different from the Monterey, particularly in the latter quality. Unfortunately, it does not inherit the aesthetic

qualities of either parent: lacking both the slightly weeping charm of the Nootka and the cedar-like majesty of a mature Monterey. In habit, Leyland is generally of roughly egg shaped and shaggy appearance. It is usually wind firm but sometimes topples if root development fails to support the rapid top growth. Broken branches are not unusual either, following heavy snow or wind and can make the tree rather ragged.

Leyland is easy to propagate, and this combined with heavy marketing by the nursery industry as 'the fastest growing conifer' suitable for quick screening has made it very common indeed. But it can grow very big (20m and more) as well as fast and has been the cause of many neighbourhood disputes. It can make a good hedge but only if trimmed regularly, though sometimes suffers from sudden severe dieback and in spite of these potential problems it continues to be widely planted in small gardens.

We have several Leylands at Thwaite. The ones towards the back of the garden are of the commonest clone 'Haggerston Grey', which despite its name is dark green. Three very obvious big specimens, however, dominate the centre of the garden. These are the clone 'Castlewellan Gold' which as the first golden Leyland available in the trade, has inevitably become almost as common as the green forms. Described memorably by the late, great tree connoisseur Alan Mitchell as "bilious yellow", Castlewellan is a dull object and does not deserve so prominent a position in our garden. Thwaite's specimens appear to be the largest in East Yorkshire and photos from the '90s suggest they have at least doubled in size since then.

Few clones of Leyland are widely admired except by roosting birds. However, by chance visiting a garden in the West Riding, I noticed a row of superb slender cypresses lining the edge of a cricket field nearby. From a distance they resembled fine Italian Cypress (*Cupressus sempervirens*) but turned out to be Leylands of some sort. Reporting them to the national Tree Register, they caused consternation and could not be precisely identified, though one contributor claimed to have seen similar ones once before. These at least might be worthy of wider planting but do not seem available commercially and their origin is a mystery. John Killingbeck Jan. 2025

Fungi

Just for interest and for those of you that enjoy seeing and identifying fungi (mushrooms/toadstools), below are a few photos of fungi that I have taken in Cottingham, Skidby and Beverley area.



Fungi are a huge and fascinating kingdom. There are over 140,000 species distributed worldwide that have been identified but that is just the tip of the iceberg. In the UK there are over 15,000 species.

Fungi differ from plants in that they do not have chlorophyll so are unable to photosynthesis so must lead a parasitic or saprophytic existence relying on dead and decaying organic matter or from living cells of other plants and animals.



Mushrooms or toadstools is a term used for the fleshy spore bearing fruiting bodies of some.

August onwards to late October and later depending on weather conditions is the main season to see these in their natural habitats.





Fungi can either be good or bad for us. We use them for food, making bread, cheese, alcohol and medicines such as antibiotics. They can also be bad for us as some are poisonous; others infect our bodies and some attack our crops and plants with disastrous results.





There are quite number of fungi that are toxic to humans and should not be eaten. One example of a poisonous mushroom is the yellow staining mushroom (*Agaricus xanthodermus*). When you see it in the field it looks just like an ordinary wild field mushroom but if you bruise the stipe/ flesh, it stains yellow, hence its name. Unless you are proficient at identifying mushrooms it is best to leave them alone and enjoy them in their natural habitats.



Stick to the shop bought ones. These days there are quite a number to choose from.

Vic. Swetez

Autumn 2024

We had our AGM as planned in the classroom, in October, with an interesting and amusing talk by our own cactus man, Bob Hall, on the subject (loosely) of wild orchids. He both fascinated and amused us. People departed with smiles on their faces.

The weather, unfortunately, did not encourage gentle ambling around the gardens either before or after Bob's talk.

Throughout the autumn and into early winter various things have been happening, not least that we have been told by the university that we must vacate the brick buildings for health and safety reasons. Despite our efforts to improve things, mending holes and repairing parts of the roof, the buildings have become very delapidated and repair has become too expensive for the university, who, of course, have insurance liabilities. Our "tool room" will move to a shipping-type container, with our electricity supply in the classroom, to recharge the batteries for our lawnmowers, etc.

We have yet to work out how we will provide over 1000 cups of tea and coffee at our Open Day in May, but I'm sure we will think of something. Unfortunately the one-door classroom is too small nowadays for the numbers of visitors who come, especially as the choir alone number 130 or so, and in the years since we did use the classroom, pre-Covid, the very small plants surrounding the classroom have grown very large, restricting access considerably.

Meanwhile, Steve Howe, our chairman, has been pursuing links with the Children's University in Hull, with the university education department (who have plans for projects at the gardens for inner-city children and young people), with Forest School (teacher training and other projects) and has made links with other local groups and plant nurseries.

Some of you may have seen Steve featuring in the two YouTube videos produced by "Jungle George" about Thwaite Gardens, one on the greenhouses, one on the outside areas. For those of you who have not seen

these, they can be found easily on our social media site, our website or directly from YouTube. Each lasts about 20 minutes.

Christmas has come and gone (with an enjoyable “pot luck” lunch party in the classroom – everyone brings a contribution) and we now look forward to spring, to the bulbs appearing and signs of other plants regrowing. Where the rose arch used to be there are still some roses but also laburnham, eventually to make a laburnham arch, intermingled with clematis,

We currently have 29 volunteers, some coming twice a week, for anything between two and eight hours. This enables expansion as well as maintenance. When I started in 2011, there were only seven or eight of us, coming for a mere two or three hours once a week so any progress beyond maintenance was limited. It is lovely that it is so different now.

Maintenance itself has expanded to include some of the structure, given the financial constraints faced by the university. One newish volunteer, Roger, had approached us tentatively to ask if he could be of any use. Use? He was a civil engineer in his previous life. We now have “Roger’s gate” and “Roger’s linked water butts” as well as repaired windows and ventilation systems, signage round the garden (written by John K, laminated by Annie, erected by Roger). Vic Swetez has been spotted up a ladder on several occasions, helping to repair or replace windows in the glasshouses. All hands on deck.

The gardening volunteers continue to garden: to weed, to plant, to rearrange planting. Everyone brings their different skills and abilities. The committee and indeed all the Friends, remain indebted to you all. Thank you.

Annie Bourton Card

January 2025.

Tree Recording with TROBI

For those who have never heard of TROBI (or Tree Register for short) the title means the Tree Register of Britain and Ireland. It is a huge database covering virtually every species of tree grown in the British Isles recording their height and girth and locality and searching for "Champions" of each species. A "Champion" is the largest known individual by girth, height or both. There are local (by county) champions and national (by each country) champions as well as any that are overall champions.



**John Killingbeck recording a massive Japanese cedar (*Cryptomeria japonica*) in Scotland.
Photo by Alan Hunton**

to measure them and sent him the records. He was impressed and from there I went on to measure many local trees for a couple of years or so and eventually composed a fair-sized register.

I first became interested in tree recording in the late 1980s, stimulated, at the time by TROBI founder Alan Mitchell. He wrote an article in a garden magazine about Ginkgo trees which suggested that large specimens were hardly known outside southern England. I thought - I know of some fairly big ones round here (East Yorkshire); went

Thwaite Botanic Garden became by far my richest hunting ground as it contained many locally unique species and it was then that I first became involved with the garden, an involvement that has continued to this day. However, many specimens were found elsewhere, including sometimes, in ordinary private gardens. Most householders are surprised when you knock and ask to measure one of their trees, but only once have I been refused. Some people already know something about their tree, but others have no idea at all of its value.

You might ask - what is the value of all this? Well, very early on it proved extremely useful with regard to Thwaite Gardens, because in 1990 a proposal was put forward to sell the botanic garden and build houses on the site. At the public enquiry the following year I produced my data as evidence of the value of the site. Alan Mitchell himself also wrote a letter in the garden's defence. I am sure that our contribution helped tip the balance in favour of refusing planning permission and saving the garden, because of which, it continues to this day.

Once I had compiled my local register, I stopped recording trees regularly but took it up again once I had retired. I joined up with Alan Hunton, whom I met through the 'Ancient Tree Inventory' (another allied database focused on very old trees). We started recording more widely in Yorkshire and have made pretty thorough surveys of places like The Yorkshire Arboretum at Castle Howard, Thorp Perrow Arboretum, Harewood House and many lesser-known collections - sometimes unearthing previously unnoticed champion trees. Since then, we have spread more widely into Lincolnshire, Lancashire, Cumbria, Durham and this year, a week's expedition to Argyll in Scotland. So far, my personal furthest flung records are from the north-west corner of Skye, and with Alan - the Isle of Gigha. All our records are verified by Dr. Owen Johnson, the TROBI registrar.

Doing this job, you get to visit some fabulous places, see many wonderful trees and often meet very enthusiastic people who are extremely keen for you to do the surveys. Almost in a mirror of the Thwaite story, our work has sometimes been used to help save 'lost' gardens like Kilmory near Lochgilphead, Scotland, where they are trying to revive a wonderful old walled garden. It is very overgrown but contains some magnificent trees and Rhododendrons. These overgrown gardens are the ones I like surveying best of all!

Meanwhile, back at Thwaite, do we have any champions? Yes - many local ones as might be expected but also one or two national ones. The most remarkable is perhaps the English champion Japanese Wingnut (*Pterocarya rhoifolia*), though unfortunately, this and most of the others are on the part of the estate that was recently sold off.

You can read more about TROBI here: [The Tree Register](#), although to access the data or record you have to become a member.

John Killingbeck

PLANT OF THE MONTH – WINTER FLOWERING HEATHER/HEATH (*Erica carnea*)



Since we extended the Winter Border last year these plants have become particularly noticeable because many new ones have been planted. Much older plants of about 15 years of age also grow in the original half of the Winter Border and give some idea of potential size in that time period.

From this it is possible to see that *Erica carnea* is never a big plant but that it is capable of spreading quite a bit and does not forever remain the demure little mound that many people who plant it expect it to, or as it often appears in garden centres. Some people prefer tidy little blobs, in which case to keep it so the plant must be trimmed regularly after flowering – though not severely, from which treatment it may not recover. Left to its own devices a single plant can easily cover a square metre or more and a group can combine to make decent extensive ground cover. Erica spreads by layering and forms a fine rooted dense mat. Most attractive of all is perhaps when it scrambles through other shrubs, and this can be seen to fine effect at Thwaite with purple heather erupting from golden leaved *Euonymus fortunei*

Erica carnea has long been a garden mainstay of winter colour. The cheerful flowers seem immune to frost and will usually last for weeks, even months. There is a vast range of varieties and new ones are constantly being added, though one sometimes wonders why. Some of the old ones like ‘Winter Beauty’ and ‘Springwood White’ have been around for decades and are as

good as any other. All varieties are in the colour range of white, through pink to rich rosy purple, with some having a subtle bicolour combination. Habit and flowering time will also vary a little. Foliage colour varies too, from very dark to mid green and there are a number of 'golden' leaved types, though to my eye these tend to look a little sickly.

A widely grown close relation is *E. x darleyensis*, a hybrid of *E. carnea* and *E. erigena*. Also winter flowering it is very similar to its *E. carnea* parent though a little more robust and taller. It comes in a similar pink/white colour range and the classic old variety, 'Darley Dale', has been popular for over a century. The other parent, *Erica erigena*, is one of the smaller "Tree Heaths" so called because many of these grow rather taller; in a few cases into small trees. We have planted a few at Thwaite (still small), though they do not flower in mid-winter and overall are a little trickier to grow well in the climate of East Yorkshire, some being quite tender. Another local difficulty with heathers is that they mostly prefer acidic soils - ours being predominantly alkaline. However, here again *E. carnea* and *x darleyensis* triumph as being pretty tolerant.



Heath/Heather

is often used interchangeably but in fact properly refers to different plants. The only true "heather" is *Calluna* – the Ling Heather (*C. vulgaris*), of which there is only one species. This plant covers vast areas of moorland in the UK and famously turns entire landscapes purple in late summer as well as yielding exceptional honey. All *Erica* species are properly termed "heaths" and there are a great many species of these. Although there are quite a few native to Europe, their world centre of diversity is South Africa, where forms with strikingly large flowers including scarlet and yellow colours grow. Very few of these are hardy in Britain unfortunately, though we have at least one growing in the South African bed under glass at Thwaite that has eye catching almost lipstick red blooms.

For those keen on wildlife, *Erica carnea* is top notch and a favourite flower of early bumble bees and the first butterflies of the year like Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock, though some varieties seem more attractive to insects than others.

John Killingbeck January 2025

Keep in touch.

Website

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

Facebook

Friends of Thwaite Gardens

<https://www.facebook.com/FOThwaitegardens>

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Membership renewal Reminder

Just to remind you that those who have not yet renewed their membership for 2024/2025. If we have not heard from you by 1st March, we will remove your name from our database. Please check the expiry date on your membership card. If you are not sure if you have renewed your membership please contact either myself vic.swetez@outlook.com or Annie Bourton Card card33690@hotmail.co.uk

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