

**Book Review**

*Heritage Trees of Ireland* by Aubrey Fennell with photographs by Carsten Krieger and Kevin Hutchinson is published by The Collins Press with a foreword by Thomas Pakenham.

Priced: €29.99/£27.99. It is available in all good bookshops and online from [www.collinspress.ie](http://www.collinspress.ie) ISBN 978-1-84889-1593.

*Heritage Trees of Ireland* is a charming book and will enhance our knowledge of the history of individual trees which is astonishingly poor. An oak 500 years old has lived through 20 human generations – a witness to famines, wars, and revolutions. And yet no one appears to know who planted it or why or when. It is almost as if this vast creature, rising to the height of a ten-storey building, has been invisible in the midst of us, lost in a ‘mysterious fog.’ In this book, Aubrey Fennell does much to dispel some of the ‘mysterious fog’.

Trees are a precious part of Ireland’s heritage, some remarkable for age or size, location or aesthetic appeal, historical or folklore connections. Such trees are found in our native woodlands, historic parklands, along roadsides, in hedgerows, fields and in housing estates. Presented here are 150 of these remarkable trees: rag trees, hanging trees, trees at holy wells, trees of exceptional size or age, trees associated with historic events, and trees important to the community. A well-known example is the ‘Hungry’ Tree at King’s Inns, Dublin, that appears to be consuming a bench.

At Coole Park, Galway, you’ll find Lady Gregory’s ‘Autograph’ Tree – a copper beech signed by W. B. Yeats, his brother Jack, George Bernard Shaw, John Masefield, Sean O’Casey and other famous people.

Ireland’s oldest native tree is believed to be the **Silken Thomas Yew** tree at St Patrick’s College in Maynooth, with a girth of 14 metres and 700–800 years old.

Ireland’s tallest native tree is a 40-metre-high ash tree in the grounds of Marlfield House, Clonmel, County Tipperary. There is so much about the history of trees in Ireland that we do not know.

**Muckross Abbey Yew in Killarney National Park in County Kerry.** One of the most celebrated trees of Ireland, this yew grows in the ruined Franciscan Abbey at Muckross, near Killarney. Various accounts give the foundation of the abbey as 1340 and 1448, and some say that the tree was taken as a sapling from Innisfallen Island and planted at the same time. There is a legend that the tree was planted over the grave of a monk who had been absent for a hundred years and returned again to die. Another story is of a miraculous image of the Blessed Virgin Mary buried underneath, and it was believed that should anyone injure the tree, they would die within the year. This went unheeded by a soldier who hacked off a small branch, which dripped blood. He promptly dropped dead on the spot.

**Gormanston Yew Cloister, County Meath.** The castle was the ancestral home of the Preston family from the fourteenth century up to the 1940s. In the eighteenth century, a daughter of the family wished to become a nun. This request could have had repercussions for the family at a time when the Penal Laws were enforced, so Lord Gormanston was unwilling for her to join the convent. In compensation, he planted the yew walk to represent the cloisters of a

monastery, and a bee-hived shaped cell for contemplation, also in a yew. Generations of clipping has created the remarkable green caterpillar we see today.

**The Armada Tree in St Patrick’s Church, Cairncastle, County Antrim.** This tree follows the stories of the Spanish Armada and how many ships floundered off the coast from Antrim to Donegal. One such ship, *La Girona*, which sailed back towards Scotland, where they could count on the help of their Scottish allies, found themselves in trouble. The rudder broke, and the ship ran aground off Lacada Point in north Antrim which resulted in the loss of 1,300 lives and left only five survivors. Local folklore tells of the Spanish sailor being buried in St Patrick’s Churchyard in Cairncastle in an unmarked grave. One of the edible chestnuts in his pocket germinated to grow into the ancient tree that marks his grave today. If this is true, then this tree would be the oldest with a known planting date in Ireland.

Once a daredevil tree surgeon, Aubrey Fennell joined the Irish Tree Society in 1990. With many trees at risk from damage or destruction, Aubrey took up the vital task of hunting them down and listing them. Aubrey began a fifteen-year quest to try and hunt down and record the important trees of Ireland and now he writes lovingly about them.

A delightful read written in a lucid style, and brought fully to life by the magnificent photography of Carsten Krieger and Kevin Hutchinson.

John Mc Loughlin

## Aubrey’s Book Launch on November 5th

The Tree Council, largely through the efforts of John McLoughlin, succeeded in securing the dazzling surroundings of Farmleigh for the launch which was sponsored by Kerry Foods. It was a very special party in a very special place.

The book was officially launched by Matthew Jebb who was most generous in his praise of the book and also of the Tree Society’s sponsorship of the project and of the TROI programme.

The speeches were followed by a wine reception in the wonderful conservatory with delicious canapés.

Over three hundred guests attended including many members of The Tree Society from all corners of Ireland. Four hundred copies of the book were sold on the night with Aubrey signing and smiling manfully for his fans!

Farmleigh was looking its best; log fires burned in the fireplaces and we were welcomed by the staff who were arranging guided tours of the house during the event.

Philip Harvey

### Dates for 2014

26th-27th April	Kerry
17th-18th May	Northern Ireland
5th-10th June	Denmark
16th-17th August	Laois
13th-14th September	Wicklow



NEWSLETTER  
2013

## Following in the Footsteps of Mr. Hooker

Last year I had the good fortune to be invited by Seamus O’Brien to join him and a group of energetic friends on a plant-hunting trip in Sikkim. The group set off in mid-November and included four members of the Tree Society : myself, Tracy Hamilton, Robert Wilson-Wright and Helen Dillon. So I have been asked to write a brief report on the fortnight’s trip. In fact it was the second trip Robert and I had made to Sikkim in twelve months. Seamus had organised an earlier one in November 2012. Inevitably these were only brief forays into a remote corner of the Himalayas. But together the two trips opened our eyes to a botanical treasure-house.

Sikkim is a small Himalayan state, an oblong band of mountains and valleys, only 80 miles wide, squeezed between Nepal on the west, Tibet to the north and Bhutan to the east. In 1975 it lost its independence and was absorbed into India - as a result of a referendum which many Sikkimese say was rigged. The roads are stony but usually passable, although landslides are common. (We were once stopped short by one. Fortunately it had just missed us.) On both our trips we drove deep into north Sikkim, heading towards Tibet and the menacing peaks on the borders. The air is as cold and as clear as gin. Go where you will in Sikkim, you cannot escape the unblinking gaze of Kanchenjunga, 28,000 feet tall, and third highest mountain in the world.

Our leader Seamus had done plenty of homework. Our routes followed closely in the footsteps of his hero, the great Sir Joseph Hooker. It was Hooker who, as a young man, had been one of the first Europeans to explore what was then a wild independent kingdom north of British India. Hooker discovered and introduced an amazing number of plants that were new to botanists. His sparkling account of his travels, *Himalayan Journals*, was the first book to put Himalayan rhododendrons, like *Rhododendron falconeri*, and Himalayan magnolias, like *Magnolia campbellii*, firmly on the map. He called this magnolia after his friend, the British political agent Archibald Campbell. The two men were at one time thrown into a prison as a result of a rash attempt by Hooker to cross into Tibet. We saw the place where they had been locked up in 1849. Now it was no more than a heap of stones. But we found a particularly good specimen of *Edgeworthia* in the ruins, the species Hooker had named after his Irish friend (half brother of Maria Edgeworth and, I am proud to say, a cousin of ours) Michael Pakenham Edgeworth.





One of Hooker's absurdly numerous talents was a gift for sketching and making watercolours. Seamus had brought copies of several of the sketches and some of the scenes were virtually unchanged today. At the monastery of Dubdi, where the rulers of Sikkim came for their coronations, we saw the noble pair of cypresses (*Cupressus cashmiriana*) that Hooker had drawn in 1848. Of course they were a lot taller and broader now – they were the finest specimens I had yet seen anywhere – but already big-boned in Hooker's day. So perhaps they dated from the founding of the monastery in the early 18th century.

For me the highlight of our first trip was the 3,000 foot climb to the summit of Mount Tonglu, north-west of Darjeeling. The path was not too stony, with stone steps for the steep bits – and we took it slowly in the thin air. There were lines of coloured prayer flags. This was the path that led Buddhist pilgrims to a shrine on the summit. Near the top we saw three large magnolias that we were told were *Magnolia campbellii alba* (the white form of the plant, much rarer in cultivation than the ones that are knicker-pink.) But we failed that day in attempts to find large and healthy specimens of *Rhododendron falconeri*. Most of them have been cut down in this area, either by the Indian army on manoeuvres, or by the local villagers. The huge trunks, we were told, make excellent firewood.

Fortunately we found some glorious specimens of the plant on the second trip. We climbed 3,500 foot up a mountain called Mount Maenam. I can't pretend I enjoyed this ascent. The track was steep and slippery and led through a forest of oaks, which I was alarmed to learn was a nature reserve for bears and snow leopards. I enjoyed the descent even less. We had somehow mistimed it. Darkness overtook us when we were hardly more than half way down. But the rewards were wonderful: not only huge rhododendrons but an elegant hypericum (*H. hookerianum*) a towering maple, (*Acer campbellii*) – not to speak of a grove of silver firs on the summit (*Abies densa*), and a 200 mile wide panorama of the Himalayas from Everest to Kanchenjunga and beyond. For once the menace had left Kanchenjunga's face, and she looked almost benign.

Thomas Pakenham

*The mezzotint is entitled 'Dr J.D. Hooker F.R.S.', the subtitle is 'In the Rhododendron Region of the Himalaya Mountains'. It was published in London in 1854, engraved by W.Walker from a picture by Frank Stone A.R.A.*

*The fine photograph of Liam O'Flanagan on the cover of our last issue was taken by Kathleen White.*

**Editorial:** We hope members will agree that it has been a good, if sometimes eventful, year. Some ups, some downs, maybe we should have a comment box. We are grateful for remarks received even when we are ticked off for incorrect botanical spellings! Apologies for these. We hope to improve.

One important trip during the year was the trip to Sikkam organised by Seamus O'Brien, Head Gardener in Kilmacurragh. As only four members participated we thought to highlight it on the front page. Our intrepid travellers were following in the footsteps of Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker (1817-1911), one of the greatest British botanists and explorers of the 19th century.

We are continually grateful to our many contributors so gallantly responding to Peggy's requests. Our thanks are also due to the many good photographers among our members, regretting we cannot include all their photographs.

John McLoughlin of the Tree Council of Ireland has been helpful with suggestions and comments. Thank-you John. Thank-you too to Gerry Douglas for helping with botanical names.

For those who were there, many happy memories will remain of the visit to Holland, so well organised in every detail by Philip Harvey.

Finally we are indebted to Bat Masterson for his invaluable computer skills.

Time marches on and the year has seen some changes to the officers: Aidan Walsh has replaced Liam O'Flanagan as treasurer and Penelope Mahon has replaced Maureen O'Flanagan as secretary; happily Maureen has agreed to remain on the committee. Thankfully no change at the top, and Thomas is still our enthusiastic and knowledgeable chairman.

We hope to see you at all, or some of the events organised for 2014 which are listed on the last page.

Barbara FitzGerald

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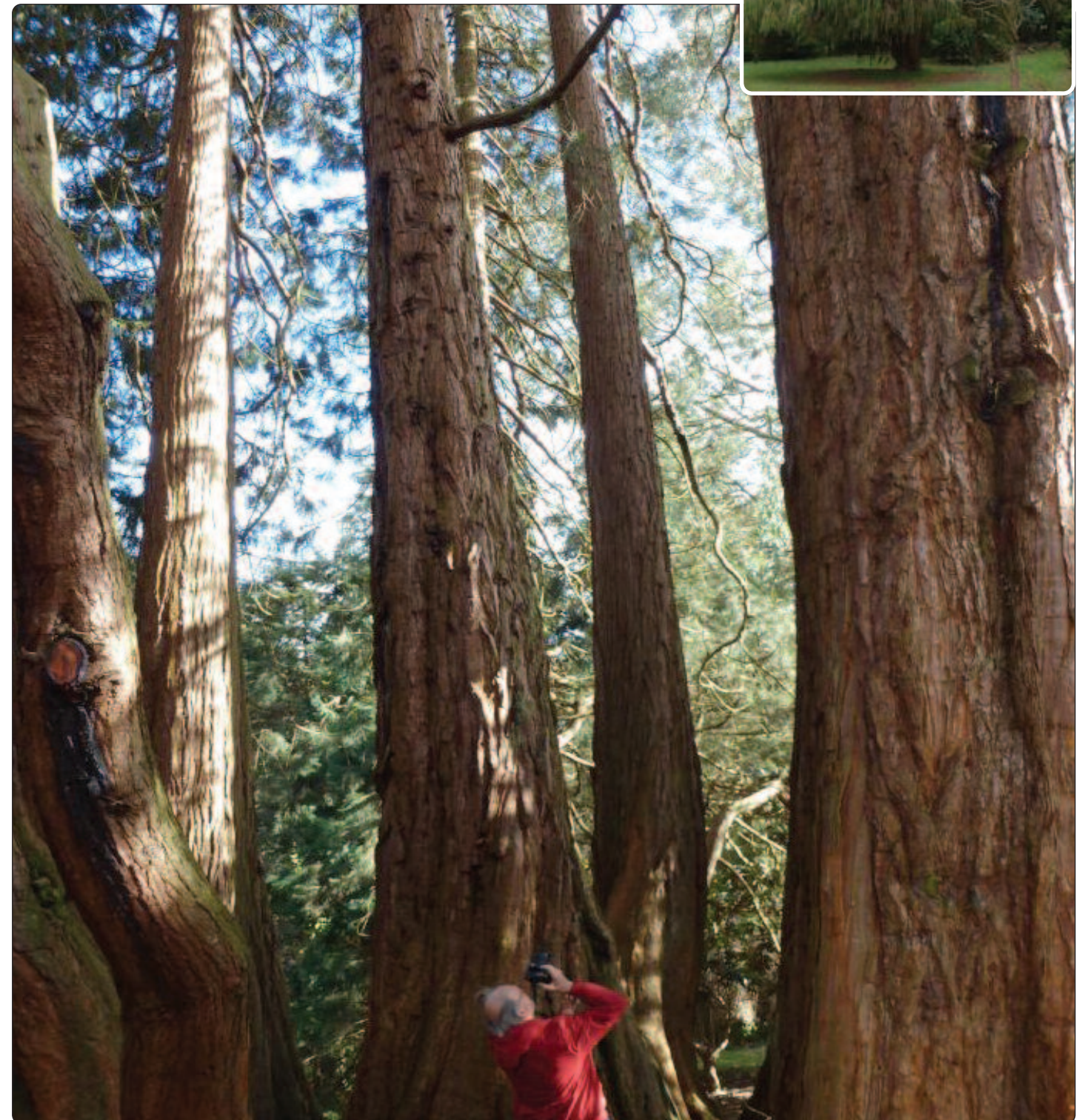
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## Castlewellan

The 40 ha arboretum at Castlewellan has the finest collection of specimen conifers anywhere in the world. It was established by several generations of the Annesley family from the mid 19th century onwards. The entire estate of 460 ha was purchased by the Forest Service of Northern Ireland in 1967 and now serves as a forest parkland. Many important ornamentals have been introduced to the nursery trade

from Castlewellan including: *Juniperus recurva* 'Castlewellan', *Prunus laurocerasus* 'Castlewellan', *Pittosporum* 'Silver Queen', and the golden *Cupressocyparis leylandii* 'Castlewellan'. The arboretum has remarkable specimens of multistemmed *Thujaopsis dolobrata*, and a *Sequoiadendron giganteum* (planted in 1857), both of which had naturally layered themselves.

Gerry Douglas





## Thornville House

Aubrey Fennell most kindly took the Society around his garden and arboretum in September 2013. Development of the arboretum started in 2001. The land here has a pH of about 7. There has been great emphasis on encouraging all sorts of wildlife by avoiding sprays (including glyphosate), retaining old tree stumps and encouraging meadows. There is an excellent population of ringlets and meadow browns. We admired a magnificent row of mature thorn trees of about 105 years old, that produce exceptionally large nuts. Below the walnuts is a fence composed of long horizontal lengths of granite on two



levels. It is unique in Ireland, maybe confined to Co. Carlow, but is also to be found in Gujarat!

The collection includes many trees of special interest to be listed here, many of them with exceptional autumnal colour, of particular note being a bright yellowwood tree *Cladrastis*. We should also mention a most unusual hornbeam dense with witch's broom. Aubrey's arboretum has many gems such as *Sophora japonica*, *Prunus padus*, *Magnolia macrophylla*, *Carya ovata*, *Tetracentron sinensis* a *Pseudolarix*, and a beautiful young specimen of *Parrotia persica* 'Vanessa' with glorious red coloured leaves.

Many trees were lost during the very cold winter and had to be replaced. But many that were thought to be dead have come back from the roots. One Myrtle did so after two years!

An interesting topic was raised by Thomas Pakenham, who emphasised the desirability of acquiring trees of Asiatic origin. This is because the majority of new diseases currently



endangering our trees have originated in Asia, probably having arrived in Europe in Chinese packing material. Whereas European species have little resistance to these exotic diseases, Asiatic species have well-developed resistance. The Indian chestnut tree was especially mentioned as it is exempt from the canker that is afflicting European chestnuts. Aubrey pointed out that Ash, where Ireland is of world importance, is now threatened by Asian disease.

Peter Peart

## Johnstown House

On the last day of our season we went to Johnstown House in Carlow, the home of Mary and Johnny Couchman. This charming house was built in 1290 by the De Vale family and, after changing hands several times and some renovations, was bought by Johnny Couchman's father, over a hundred years ago.

On the approach to the house there is a fence made entirely of granite posts, beautifully constructed and quite unique. At the entrance to the house are two stone pineapples that symbolise welcome and are 600 years old. This, as well as a warm reception from our host, added to the pleasure of going to see his young arboretum.

After some consideration and a present of five oak trees from his wife Mary, Johnny decided to fulfill an ambition to plant his own arboretum, starting in 1983 on fourteen acres of his land. His collection numbers 326 trees of which 280 are different varieties, too numerous to list all. However, the



*Quercus robur* range comprises: 'Sarvas', 'Koster', 'Lobata', 'Raba', 'Variegata', 'Pectinata', 'Fastigiata', 'Aurea', 'Haas Kankiri', 'Zeeland', 'Hentzii', 'Cristata' and the *Quercus petraea* consists of: 'Cochleata', 'Mespilifolia', 'Hartwissiana', 'Schocensis', and 'Purpurea'. The trees come from America, China, Mexico, different parts of Europe and even as far afield as Afghanistan. These young trees are about a foot high when they are planted on Day 1 in their final position and are not overly protected from the elements.

We were given a detailed map before we started and were able to wander around on our own or with Johnny to identify and pick out some of the various species. One of Johnny's favourites is a *Q. velutina* 'Rubrifolia' which produces astonishing yellow leaves at a particular time of year.

This wonderful arboretum has such a future for both the environment and the oak trees in Ireland. It was a most interesting afternoon, ending with a delicious tea provided by Johnny's wife Mary. A memorable end to the season of 2013.

Anne Martin



## Ringdufferin

On a beautiful spring morning in late April we arrived at Ringdufferin, between Killinchy and Killyleagh, Co Down, home to Martin and Tracy (nee Mackie) Hamilton and their two sons Lance and Jack. Ringdufferin, with its late Georgian house, parkland and walled garden, is situated on the western shores of Strangford Lough, and is part of a wildlife reserve. Since 1948 it has been home to three generations of the Mackie family. In 1996, on the death in her 97th year, of the artist Kathleen Mackie, Ringdufferin had passed into the care of Tracy, her granddaughter, and husband Martin, who run a successful vegetable growing business on their main farm in Comber.

After welcome refreshments at the old boathouse by the Lough shore, Tracy's father, Paddy Mackie, gave an interesting talk on the history of Ringdufferin, which dates back to the 16th Century. Incidentally, the boathouse had been home to a racing boat named the 'Royal Oak', built of oak from the Estate in 1812. It had won every race in which it had competed. Having retired from racing, it had hung for a hundred years on the ceiling of the old boathouse. In 1970 it was moved to the world's first museum of rowing at Henley.

Led by Tracy and her father, we strolled back along the avenue where we stopped to admire the majestic proportions of a *Macrocarpa cypressus* (girth 12.65 m, Ht. 31 m), planted in the late 19th century. This champion tree has been included in Aubrey Fennell's beautiful, recently published book *Heritage Trees of Ireland*.



Continuing on through the parkland, we viewed a variety of trees; a multi stemmed *Fagus sylvatica asplenifolia* (cut leaved beech), *Quercus cerris* (Turkey Oak), *Metasequoia glyptostroboides* (Dawn Redwood), *Eucalyptus globulus* (Tasmanian Blue Gum), *Pinus radiata* (Monterey Pine), a golden ash *Podocarpus andinus* (Chilean Yew) and many others. Under a canopy of mature oaks was an under-planting of camellias, rhododendrons, Hollies intertwined with *Clematis armandii*, a pink flowered *Magnolia campbellii mollicomata* planted in 1960, and *Hoheria sextylosa*, the latter appearing to flourish particularly well in this sheltered location. Down in a wetter area of the meadow, the New Zealand tree fern and the Japanese maple were thriving, as well as moisture-loving plants like the Skunk Cabbage, *Candelabra primula* and the ground covering Polygonums.



Following a curving gravel path we viewed a mature *Myrtus Luma*, and by the gate leading into the walled garden the beautifully scented *Rhododendron fragrantissima*. Traditionally planted as a working kitchen garden, this acre and a half sheltered haven now had a deep and long – 125 metres – herbaceous border containing a large variety of plants. At the top of the border were sun lovers and down towards the bottom, plants preferring moisture.

Fuscias, Peonies, a collection of Myrtle and the Ailanthus (Tree of Heaven) were here, and espaliered fruit trees and flowering plants and shrubs were planted against the old brick walls. In the centre of the garden were four Florencecourt Yew, which according to faithfully kept planting records, were planted circa 1820/30.

What a lovely space this must be in the height of summer, a wildlife tranquil heaven for birds and bees and a sanctuary for all, with its beehives and many bird boxes, both in the parkland area and in the walled garden. A large variety of birds from the Lough, situated just over the wall, come here to nest and feed. A sanctuary indeed.

Thank you for a truly enjoyable spring morning at Ringdufferin.

Valerie Grant





## Mahee Island, Strangford Lough



An impressive item of the paperwork, supplied in advance by Paddy Mackie and Tracy Hamilton, was a coloured aerial photograph – reduced to A4 size – of Mahee Island, taken in 1964. It shows No 20 as a fine single-storey house perched on 37 acres of a bare and windswept drumlin. Since then, it is evident that planting has not ceased and seems set to continue indefinitely. The large, fresh-water loughside pond is shown, but not the smaller pond beside the house. Both are refuges for waterfowl and but also provide staging-posts for Greylag geese, redshank and black-tailed godwit, among other species. For ornithological purposes, these can be netted, recorded, ringed and released. We also saw a field, close to the entrance, planted with triticale for the benefit both of resident species and migrants passing through. This had been particularly valuable, indeed a substantial lifesaver to many visitors including yellowhammers, during the exceptionally hard 2010 winter.



In fulfilment of the Chinese proverb about a garden being a source of happiness for life, Paddy and Julie are remarkable examples of the health benefits, physical, mental and one guesses spiritual also, of a lifetime's compulsive designing, planting and maintaining a large garden. As Thomas Pakenham and Robert Wilson-Wright remarked, in their expressions of thanks at the conclusion of our visit, it was heartening to see the Mackie family's creation and conservation of outstanding new gardens when other famous Irish gardens, for various reasons, were in evident decline.

Paddy led us about his property with a characteristic energy and speed that would have been impressive in a person half his age. Some of us, including your note-taker, found difficulty in keeping up the pace let alone recording the narrative. It was helpful that "around eighty percent" of plants were labelled. From time to time, Thomas supplemented the flow of our host's information with arcane and often humorous pieces of knowledge and advice, also providing practical experience of the survival, or its lack, of the same varieties of plants in the Irish midlands, in comparison with the gentler climate of a sheltered garden on Mahee.

As with the famous Inverewe gardens in the west of Scotland, the first task at Mahee in the 1960s was to establish shelter, using "one-hundred percent" Black Pine and later Corsican Pine, for the benefit of their resistance to wind-borne salt damage. In later years, on the western edge of the property, seed-

grown Eucalyptus and Monterey Pine have proved their worth, given their ability to bend rather than break in high winds, and to filter rather than attempt to block the gales. Other species, planted in early years, included Beech, at Paddy's insistence but contrary to expert advice at the time, which has since proved to be unfounded. Under-planting started in 1997.

The arboreal Rhododendrons form a collection of their own, many from the late Patrick Forde and the recently-retired John Gault. It was encouraging to see a very large *Eucalyptus Johnstonii* (Yellow Gum) with a notable spiral bark, which with other tender species (including two Embotriums – Chilean firebush) survived the winters of 2010 and 2011. Sadly, Montezuma Pines, which survived the 2010 and 2011 prolonged frosts, succumbed to easterly gales with torrential rains in January 2013. Members will have their own catalogue of plant losses in those two disastrous winters and this year's gales, and of temperatures that were well below Mahee's lowest of minus 7 deg. C in 2010. In a particularly well-sheltered spot, locally rejoicing in the Viking title of The Scrogg, there were vigorously healthy tree ferns, B & Q's ballast logs from New Zealand being cited as particularly suitable for growing-on.

As a contrast to the self-denying ordinance, banning members' dogs from TITS visits, it was cheering to see the family's black-and-tan terrier in attendance, enjoying our company and, it seemed, the abundance of fir-cones for chewing.

At the conclusion of our visit, we were treated to tea and delicious scones, in the 20 Mahee Island residence. Thomas presented Paddy, Julie and Tracy, as a token of our appreciation, with copies of the monograph, "*Flora of County Fermanagh*" (authors Forbes and Northridge, recently published by the Ulster Museum).

Richard Scott



## Ballynure



In 2006 I was given the enjoyable task of laying out and planting a new arboretum for David Reid Scott and his wife Clare at Ballynure, Grange Con, in County Wicklow, a collection now approaching a total of 600 accessions. It was rewarding to be able to show over seventy members of the Society the fruit of these first eight years on a perfect autumn morning, with the sun raising the temperature to 20°C or more.

The collection comprises a wide range of species, selected for their interest botanically, but with aesthetic considerations to the fore. The planting reflects this; trees are arranged to contrast with neighbours and create a pleasing picture. There are a number of collections within the arboretum, principally *Acer*, but also *Betula*, *Magnolia*, *Tilia* and *Quercus*, as well as many species of rhododendron.

I explained that there had been a worrying number of losses over the 2010 – 2012 period, both from severe frosts and snow, and wet cool summers. Many trees had died, others still bear the scars. The ground around the majority of plants is kept clear with herbicide, and those on lawns are top dressed with composted bark-mulch to preserve moisture and for aesthetic reasons.

We saw a mature pink Horse chestnut, *Aesculus x carnea*, suffering from disease which had affected half of the structure, leaving little alternative to felling. There had been evidence of bleeding canker in the last few years.

Three rare Pocket-handkerchief Trees, *Davidia involucrata* were added in 2011, which are probably unique in Ireland; 'Lady Dahlia' and 'Lady Sunshine', both variegated, and 'Sonoma' which flowers from two years old, so should flower in 2014.

Along the drive we stopped to identify a tree with 70 cm-long compound leaves, what was it? Aubrey Fennell was called in to take advantage of his great experience. The answer, after some discussion, and checking of reference books, was a rare Chinese walnut, *Juglans cathayensis*. Walnuts can be recognised by the 'ladder steps' in the twigs which are revealed when split open.

The lakeside has some trees chosen to reflect their beauty in the lake; birch, Swamp cypress, *Taxodium distichum*, *Liquidambar* 'Lane Roberts' and *L. 'Worpelsdon'*. A *Parrotia persica* was beautifully coloured.

The lower woodland area is in fact the original area selected for the arboretum, and comprises three main sections. Here, oaks enjoy the conditions; some with un-oak like foliage, such as *Quercus myrsinifolia* the Chinese evergreen oak, and *Q. acuta*, the Japanese evergreen oak are doing well. We saw also a very good example of *Q. dentata* 'Karl Ferris Miller', with its huge woolly deeply indented leaves.

Robert Myerscough

## Altamont Gardens

We met at Altamont Gardens in Carlow on Saturday 28th September. The original shape of these gardens was laid out in the mid-18th C with walks of trees, along with spaced specimen trees. A large lake was also dug at this time by about 100 men as a special famine relief project.

After WW1 Fielding Lecky Watson started making a wonderful collection of plants and this work was carried on after WW2 by his daughter Corona North, who was responsible for the present planting. She left it to the state and the OPW took over the management after her death in 1999.

On our way to the lake, covered with water lilies, we passed a huge *Cedrus deodara* (22 metres) with at least 50 noisy rook nests on the top. A woodland path took us down to the Rocky Valley where the tree mix included hazel, oak and holly. One

holly tree was growing with a huge root pad moulded to the shape of the rock in search of earth.

At the bottom flows a lovely stretch of the Slaney, along which we walked to the bottom of the 100 granite steps back up again. Then we drew breath and set off to the Temple of the Four Winds erected by Corona North.

Rain did not deter us entering the beautiful Nuns' Walk of huge beeches with cyclamen carpets at their base where we glimpsed the great multi-stemmed *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* between the trees. The rain stopped and we finished up in the walled garden with its magnificent herbaceous borders opened in 2000 to commemorate Corona North. A wonderful garden, still so well maintained.

Maureen Goodbody & Coreen Marten



The Society Goes Digital

In the last year we launched our website – [www.irishtreesociety.com](http://www.irishtreesociety.com). We also have an email address [info@irishtreesociety.com](mailto:info@irishtreesociety.com), which enables members of the public to contact us easily. Only a few years ago these developments would have seemed remarkable, especially for the I.T.S., but today the majority of us use a selection of the latest gadgets; smart phones, tablets, laptops, you name it, so going digital is a natural step to take.

The website is easy to navigate, although you will need a password to access the ‘Members Only’ pages (this will be sent when you register your address with us). The Gallery area is under development; we aim to add more photos to record tour, outings, and other noteworthy events. From this record it is possible to select and print pictures that interest you.

Another aim is to provide more news and articles, including published papers of interest to dendrologists, and those that we have supported financially. Information about alarming spread of diseases threatening trees would also be valuable, but it takes a little trouble to select articles and post them to the site. Such information can be forwarded to our email address for attention.

The website is for our members; the more we members participate actively in providing interesting articles and information, the more valuable it will be. If anyone is willing to assist with this please contact us at the Society’s email address above. Ideally, we need a small group to monitor [www.irishtreesociety.com](http://www.irishtreesociety.com), to ensure the information is always relevant, accurate and up-to-date.

If you have not already sent your email address to the Hon. Secretary, Penelope Mahon, [penelopemahon@gmail.com](mailto:penelopemahon@gmail.com) please do so now, as it greatly facilitates speedy communications. For any lingering Luddites we will continue to use ‘snail mail’!

Robert Myerscough

Presentation to Maureen and Liam



To mark their retirement from ITS office and their long service to the Society, your committee arranged the presentation of gifts from the Society to both Liam and Maureen O’Flanagan on the occasion of Liam’s 80th birthday. Watched by our chairman, Maureen holds her book tokens while Liam poses in front of a case of wine which will no doubt be enjoyed by both! While wishing them a happy “retirement” we look forward to seeing them both regularly at ITS events in the coming years.

Myra Castle

We drove down a quiet Beech lined avenue of trees on the road leading to our parking field – which the film crew of “The Game of Thrones” had recently vacated – and were warmly welcomed by our hosts – David Good and his son Michael – and by warm spring sunshine.

After a brief insight into the history of the planting, we were led up the main drive towards the castle where we found a great backdrop of shining Holly on one side setting off a collection of various Tillias, with *Tillia brabantica* being commented on – while on the opposite side we enjoyed *Quercus gilva* with its purple stems, a perfect specimen of *Picea smithiana* and then the Spanish Hedgehog Fir *Abies pinsapo*, which originates from one small forest in the Rhonda area of Spain.

David explained how there had been a dearth of tree planting since the 1840s, when the present house was built. Previous owners had thought that “trees just grew like hens laid eggs”! However, he has planted a wonderful collection in the past forty years – mainly conifers – to emulate the Victorian plantings, but with many deciduous varieties including a collection of most unusual Oaks.

We walked gently over the daffodil-strewn lawns past the house, to look at the very rare *Cryptomeria fortunei* from China, and on via an *Abies bracteata* and a *Castanea green spire* to another rare specimen, the *Cupressus lusitanica glauca pendula* and a *Fagus sylvatica rohanii* (copper cut-leaf Beech), all leading us to the Wellingtonia and thence to lower levels where once there had been a lake. Here we marveled at the avenue of *Castanea*, which David had grown from his own



seeds to replace the original avenue of Elms which had succumbed to Dutch Elm disease. Over a small stream, the soft mossy ground took us to a more recently planted glade, where a high canopy of Beech and Pines sheltered the rhododendrons *Betula alba sinensis*, *Pinus montezumae* and *Zelkova serrata*.

We then climbed gently, past the Victorian Indian summer house, up the tiered backdrop of the castle, stopping to discuss both *Nothofagus fusca* and *N. antartica*, and past a large *Magnolia Star Wars* before entering the recently restored pony walk with its working mechanism intact – which had been used to churn butter for the household until the turn of the century.

Then the treat of meeting the largest *Liriodendron tulipifera* in Northern Ireland with its huge gnarled and burred

girth of almost six metres, before encountering the giant *Eucalyptus globulus* (second-largest in Northern Ireland) and spying a *Corylopsis* in its Spring plumage. Thus, via the great damage caused by recent gales and yet more re-planting, to the field in front of the house where we passed a fine Monkey Puzzle tree (from 1850) showing its splendid shape, and thence to a giant Sycamore with a girth of five and a half metres, relishing its last upright days in such splendid parkland.

Paddy Mackie thanked our hosts and summed up the visit by saying it was a real treat to meet such a variety of different species, and Thomas Pakenham presented the Goods with Seamus O’Brien’s book on Augustine Henry, as a memento of the Irish Tree Society’s visit.

Leslie Mackie



## Von Gimborn Arboretum

We arrived by coach from Amsterdam airport a trifle weary to a magical venue, the Von Gimborn Arboretum, an unique green treasure with many thousands of trees and shrub species. The arboretum is now part of the Botanical Gardens of the University of Utrecht. The 23 hectare arboretum is named after its founder Max TH Von Gimborn, a German ink manufacturer, who started it in 1924 as a private collection of conifers and ericaceous plants. Unfortunately it seems he was a victim of the 1929 crash. The landscape-style garden was designed by Gerard Bleeker, with winding paths, meandering water features, and incredible vistas. The thousands of trees and shrub species were collected over the course of many years during expeditions or seed exchanges with other arboreta and botanic gardens. The arboretum was acquired by the University in 1966, and it is managed by them, although we were informed by our guide that funding is very scarce and upkeep has become a very serious problem in recent times.



We were very lucky to have as our guide, Dr Piet C de Jong, an acclaimed dendrologist and author of 'Maples of the World', who gave us a fascinating tour of the arboretum. Our guide pointed out the many outstanding trees, but an underlying theme was one of sadness at the many aspects of neglect as we walked around. The Arboretum still holds the largest collection of conifers in Western Europe, although it now contains many other trees and shrubs as well. It holds the national plant collections of conifers, particularly Tsuga, Ericaceae (Rhododendron in particular), Aceraceae, Betulaceae, Euonymus, Fraxinus, Magnolia and Syringa, and a number of cultivars of woody plants originated there. Among the memorable trees noted was a *Sequoiadendron*

*giganteum glauca* up to 30 metres high. Other memorable trees included *Quercus rubor fastigata*, *Corylus fargessii*, *Juglans cinerea*, and *Pinus parviflora*. We also came upon a very fine *Liriodendron chapel hill* planted in 1980, while nearby there was a sensational clump of magnolia. There seemed to be unexpected delights in store around every bend in this amazing arboretum.

Our guide, being an Acer expert, pointed out many and varied interesting specimens including *Acer rubum*, *Acer Nipponicum* and *Acer lacinum*, and these generated a very interesting discussion with Paddy and Julie Mackie on pollination. Paddy explained that pollination can be by insects or by the wind or both. I was curious to explore his theories, and my research discovered a fascinating article entitled "The Sex Life of the Red Maple" by Richard Primack (Arnoldia: 2004, 63, (1), 28-31) for the Arnold Arboretum – a recommended read!

Thomas thanked our guide Dr Piet de Jong for an excellent tour, and suggested that the Gimborn Arboretum has one of the finest collections in the world, but is badly in need of funding for its upkeep. He went on to say that perhaps members should contact the university or other appropriate bodies to appeal for better funding. On a positive note, the lack of funding has galvanised a group of volunteers who now give their time to help the upkeep and raise funds. Their endeavours include a cafe and a shop, and we enjoyed a very nice lunch prepared by the volunteers seated amidst a glorious canopy of trees. An amazing beginning to our trip to Utrecht.

Peggy Masterson

## Het Loo Palace Gardens

Het Loo formal garden, situated behind the Palace, is a magnificent restoration of a late 17th century garden.

The fabulous arabesque parterre is planted with box hedging, and the beds were filled with very colourful and clever herbaceous plantings together with lots of tulips and lilies. There were a few specimen trees including a couple of ancient tulip trees. There were wonderful water features including fountains and statuary in the French style.

The gardens were designed by Daniel Marot, a French Huguenot refugee who had fled France, and was commissioned by William of Orange and his wife Mary to give them a mini-Versailles in Holland.

Also worthy of note is a hornbeam cloister or berceau, where the ladies walked when it was raining; unfortunately it was out of bounds during our visit. After leaving the formal gardens we walked along a stunning avenue flanked by carefully trimmed enormous beeches to the park.

The vast park is laid out in the English style with mixed deciduous plantings, including many enormous oaks. There is a very early Dutch house surrounded by a moat containing black swans, which we were told is a favourite summer residence of the royal family. The park created a beautiful contrast to the formal gardens, a totally magic place.

Grainne Langrishe

## Tomies Wood



..... Finally – measuring Queen Victoria's Oak.



## Muckross Estate

We were very lucky in our guide for the day, Cormac Foley, who surely knows more than anyone about the arboreal treasures of Muckross – he is now retired after working there for the OPW for many years.

The tour had three parts: the gardens, the arboretum, and the Muckross peninsula.

### The Gardens

On the way from the car park we noted the memorial to Billy Vincent, whose father had donated the house and estate to the State in 1932. Carved by German sculptor Rolf Hook from an enormous piece of Killarney oak weighing 3 tons, it had been unveiled the evening before.

The mature planting dates from the 1840s when the house was built. On the terrace we noted a magnificent Monterey Cypress *Cupressus macrocarpa*, with a remarkable root system, apparently flourishing despite evident mower damage. A Lawson Cypress *Chamaecyparis Lawsoniana* ‘*Erecta Viridis*’ close to the house was not so happy and very sparse. An odd young whip-cord *Cryptomeria japonica*, probably ‘*Viminalis*’ aka ‘*Lycopodioides*’, was spotted on a natural limestone outcrop made into a rock garden, alongside the spiny shrub *Colletia cruciata*. A lovely young Drooping Juniper *Juniperus recurva* v. *coxii* f. *Castlewellan*, reminded this scribe of the wonderful Cashmere cypress we saw on Isola Madre in Lake Maggiore.

### The Arboretum

Cormac Foley had been largely responsible for planting the arboretum with rare and interesting trees, many supplied by Hillier’s nursery in England, and well labelled. Among the unusual things I noted were: 3 antipodean podocarps, *Podocarpus totara* (rather overgrown by other things), *P. alpinus* and a group of three *P. cunninghamii* (aka *hallii*) ‘*Aureus*’; asiatic birch *Betula ermanii* with lovely shaggy brown bark; a Chinese tulip tree *Liriodendron chinensis*; a lovely pink and green variegated beech, possibly *Fagus sylvatica* v. *Purpurea Tricolor*; and several Southern beeches, *Nothofagus procera*, *N. nervosa* and *N. cunninghamii*. As we admired a young Indian horse-chestnut *Aesculus indica*, our Chairman noted that it was not subject to either leaf-miner or canker and suggested it should be planted in place of common horse-chestnut *A. hippocastanum*. More generally he opined that far eastern species should be preferred to European or American since they have evolved immunity to so many of the diseases endemic in their homelands now ravaging our trees. Sadly, little effort has been put into tending this fine arboretum in recent years and it badly needs some sensitive thinning and TLC – OPW please note!



### The Muckross Peninsula

On the way out to the peninsula after lunch we walked through an older landscape, originally pleasure grounds surrounding an earlier C18th house built by the Herberts who made a fortune from copper mines on the peninsula. The Chestnut Walk, named for several massive Sweet Chestnuts *Castanea sativa*, is also home to a magnificent and shapely Cedar of Lebanon *Cedrus libani*, the finest specimen tree of the day in my opinion. The Reenadinna yew wood (native *Taxus baccata*) is a magical place – dark and quiet, with sound muffled by the mosses growing on shattered limestone pavement. A very rare habitat, it is now believed to have developed relatively recently, perhaps after C18th clearance, from a handful of matriarch trees. We carried on through the gigantic oaks of Camillan wood, recorded back to 1780. And finally we were shown a grove of the rare native Killarney strawberry tree *Arbutus unedo*, mature specimens much larger than I had expected, with evidence of some natural regeneration – another magical place. On the way back Thomas boldly decided to strip off and swim at a sandy beach – shades of Phillipa at Luggala!

Joc Sanders

## Visit to Het Loo Palace

In spite of this being booked two months in advance, the powers that be did their best to cancel our visit, but Philip was not for turning and it was finally agreed to admit us via the staff entrance! The reason for this was because there was an exhibition within the palace of the regalia worn at the recent coronation of King William-Alexander and Queen Maxima and, it being a Bank Holiday weekend in Holland, hundreds of locals were queuing to gain entrance. While most of the group went with the guides to view the gardens and the parkland, others queued to view the regalia and the interior of the palace.

Het Loo Palace is a National Monument and reflects the historical ties between the House of Orange-Nassau and the Netherlands. In 1984 the palace and gardens were re-opened to the public after a seven-year restoration programme. The palace was built between 1684 and 1686 for King William III (known as King Billy) and his wife Queen Mary II of England, and continued in use as a royal residence until 1962.

Having seen the regalia and rooms filled with beautiful furniture, paintings and other artifacts, we re-joined the rest of the group for lunch at the Prins Hendrick Garage – some garage!

Margaret McDonnell and Patrick Carty



## Belmonte Arboretum

After expensive soup and sandwiches (says Maureen!) at the Prins Hendrick Garage, we boarded the bus, with Dirk the driver waiting cheerfully to drive us on to our next adventure at the Belmonte Gardens (Wageningen).

Originally planted by Baron Constant Rebeque de Villars in the 18th Century, this arboretum now has the biggest and best documented collection in Holland of two genera: *Malus* and *Sorbus*, which are not popular in Holland as the trees get canker. Sadly now the University of Utrecht thinks there is no need any more for botanical gardens, and there is little or no money to keep it suitably cared for.



Our colourful guide, Theo Damen, who works in the National Herbarium and has just returned from Gabon, informed us the collection is mostly Rosaceae, and that the Japanese *Prunus* collection is the largest in the world, excepting Japan. Re-planting started in the 1950's after all the damage of World War Two.

Here is the real *Rhododendron Ponticum* - bigger leaves and a different blue colour - and not as invasive as the *R. Super Ponticum* so prevalent in Ireland. We saw numerous blue rhododendrons including a lovely *Augustinii* for Augustin Henry. Nearby was an *Acer Griseum*, with its flaking bark revealing rich mahogany-coloured bark underneath. But in a precipitous valley - not very deep, but slippery with a deep carpet of golden autumn leaves – there were many more rhododendrons, and this as legend has it, is the slope where Roman soldiers rolled their chariot wheels down. If they fell to the right it was war - to the left - no war!

Phillippa Quinlan



## De Wiersse

A fairly long journey to De Wiersse was enlivened by Thomas’ and Philip’s banter regarding which respective ancestor had the longest funeral procession. It took Philip’s mind off the fact that we were, for the first time, running a little late and he was nervous about the welcome we would get from the chatelaine. In the event our visit was sublime, and the welcome by our hosts Peter and Laura Gatacre, warm.

The De Wiersse gardens have been owned by Peter’s family since 1678 and there is an interesting Irish link and influence, as both Peter and Laura have Irish connections - Peter’s with Woodbrook House, Co. Wexford and Laura’s Abbeyleix House, Co. Laois.

The 74 acres of landscaped parkland and 34 acres of garden have been impeccably managed over the years, and beautifully restored following World War 2. During the war the property was requisitioned by the German High Command who lived in the Stable Block - mercifully not in the Manor House as The Stables were blown up following the surrender in 1945. The family silver survived, having been carefully hidden by the estate manager.

We had an excellent guide who started our tour by explaining why a large tulip tree had been planted so close to the house, giving the reason that because of its



very high water content it acted as a lightning conductor. She described the landscape as being Watteau-esque with its 'misty melting landscape and dreamy parklands'. The combination of the formal and informal was achieved by the delicacy of a meadow garden leading to bridges and parterres with fountains and statues along the way and with clever optical illusions adding to the overall subtlety of the planting. A dramatic serpentine tunnel of beech was one of the delights, and an inspiration to many in the group, and the sunken garden a grand finale.

Following an elegant and, as always, a very convivial lunch (the silver just possibly might have been the aforementioned cache), we bade farewell with grateful thanks to the Gatacres who had made our visit so memorable.

Julie Mackie

## Van den Berk Nurseries

Those of us on the trip to Holland should know all there is to know about this amazing nursery. Philip gave us an excellent print-out in our schedule, we were shown a short film about the company on our arrival, and on leaving we were given a recently-published Tree Guide for the whole nursery.

Jan Van Vechel showed us around, and we saw some very big trees and smaller ones - in fact all sizes. Pruning was very evident; the trees were pruned from an



early stage. This made them well shaped and the trunks mostly kept bare and straight. Many of the trees we saw were orders ready to go. Trees were for town planting, formal gardens and parks.

I feel sure some of our members have seen trees from this nursery some ten or twelve years ago, while we were staying in Dieppe, France! We went to a spectacular garden in the style, and probably the size, of Versailles. The garden was still in the process of planting. Some members may remember the visit also by the fact that we saw some beautiful black swans. It was something new, to me certainly, to see these trees coming in such a big size, and looking so much part of the scheme.

To continue with what we saw in the nursery – it is hard to imagine the size of the trees being prepared for sale. The root ball was bagged in hessian and some of these kept for maybe two or three years, needing watering and



continuous pruning. All this meant a huge amount of machinery for lifting, bagging, moving and loading.

There were some large quince prepared, pruned and trained as espalier, with bamboos and rods holding them in shape, and also Gleditsias for streets, prepared in bags, tall and perfectly straight, by the hundred.

One could order any tree, any shape, to be delivered - maybe anywhere in the world - and all that would be required would be a good bank loan.

Rita Craigie

## Hortus Botanicus Leiden

This botanical garden is famous for its founder Carolus Clusius (1526-1609) who was the first to recognise the ornamental value of trees and shrubs rather than their traditional medicinal values. He popularised tulips and fritillaries via his collections at Leiden, thereby founding the bulb industry in the Netherlands. Its other famous contributor to popularising ornamentals was Philippe von Siebold (1797-1866). In the 1830s he introduced hydrangeas, azaleas and camellias for the first time from Japan. His notable tree introduction was *Zelkova serrata* which he shipped to Leiden in 1851.

Leiden has one of the oldest specimens of *Ginkgo biloba* in Europe with a planting date of 1785. It is a male tree



in fine health and had a female branch grafted on to it in 1935 to ensure a supply of seeds. The Ginkgo is remarkable in many respects. Like ferns, mosses and algae, Ginkgos have motile sperm. They take a swim for 3-4 months which leads to the ovules and fertilisation. The pulp surrounding the Ginkgo seed is akin to the fleshy red pulp which surrounds the seed of a yew. Other notable specimens at Leiden include a ragged Laburnum planted at the gate in 1601, and a Wisteria pergola from 1856. Leiden also has a series of very informative, themed garden areas on: systematic, ferns, archaeology, bible plants, a winter garden and a rosarium. We were fortunate to be there for the display of Trilliums and Pleiones.

I noted a nice specimen of *Cercis chinensis* in full flower and the spiny multistemmed shrub *Sophora davidii*. The yellow flowered *Magnolia X brooklynensis* 'Canary Bird' is unusual; the flowers are attractive up close but, overall, the tree is not very impressive.

Gerry Douglas



From the book *Hawker Dragonflies*: "Their characteristic hawk-like habit of restlessly patrolling a territory gives hawker dragonflies their name. The hawker's territory is a stretch of river or lake, which the male defends against intruders, jostling with rival males and other species, and courting female hawkers which enter it."

Perhaps it was "jostling with a rival male" when it spotted the best moustache in the I.T.S.

