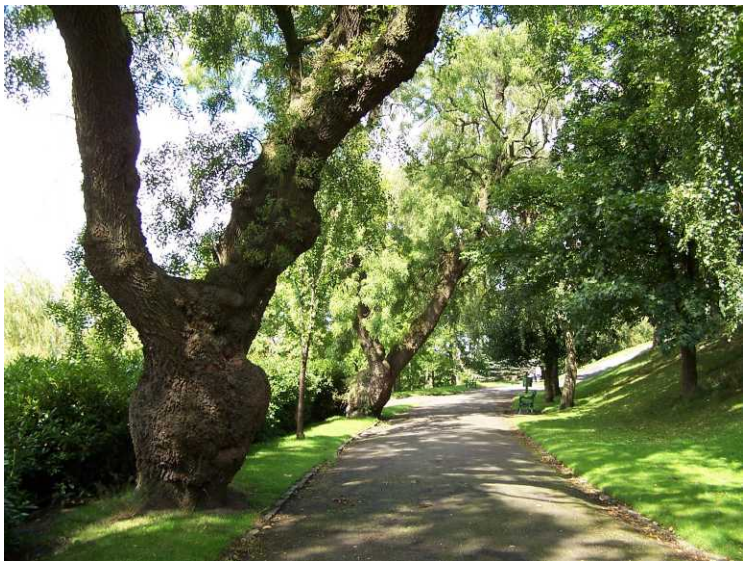
Kelvingrove Park Visit, 21st May, 2015
Bob Gray

Seven of us met at the north, Eldon Street gate to Kelvingrove Park, one of Glasgow's five City Parks and last visited by the Society in 2006. We restricted our visit to that part of the 35 hectare (85 acre) park lying to the east of the River Kelvin. The first thing we found, tucked away in shrubbery near the entrance, was a specimen of Perny's holly (*Ilex pernyi*).

The park is dominated by Park Terrace located on top of a drumlin, one of Glasgow's drumlin swarm, with a tadpole shape that protrudes into the park running from WNW to ESE and steep to the west and south. The soil parent material on the steep slope and on the flat ground to the north, west and south of the hill consists of Devensian (dating from the last Ice Age) deposits of glacial till.

The park was arguably the first purposely designed public park in Scotland and the architect, Sir Joseph Paxton, who famously designed the Crystal Palace, also designed Glasgow's Botanic Gardens, Alexandra Park and Queen's Park. The park was laid out between 1852 and 1867 though whether trees planted at that time still exist is debatable. The biggest tree in girth in the park is one of a pair of narrow-leaved ash trees (*Fraxinus angustifolia*).(1)

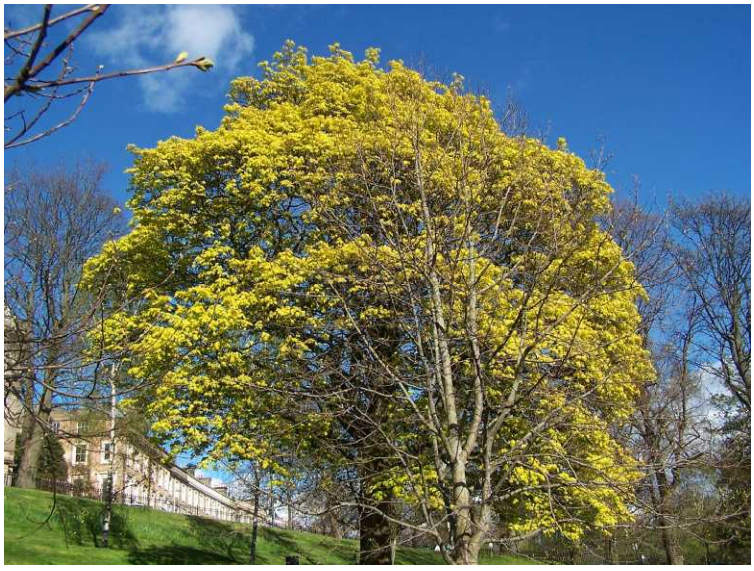


Narrow-leaved ash (*Fraxinus angustifolia*)

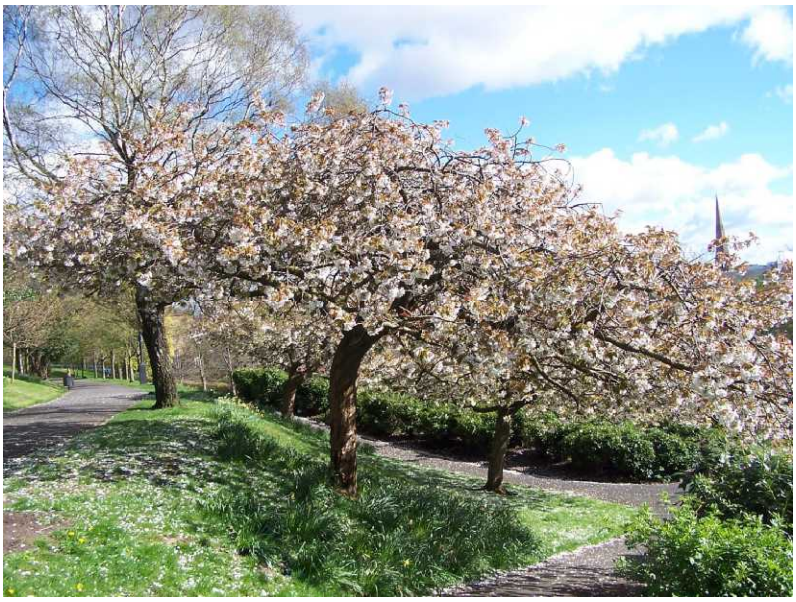
They were likely to have been planted at the same time and their average girth (according to Mitchell's 1" per year rule) suggests an age of about 157 years (2012 measurements), which indicates c.1855.

The magnificent oak-leaved hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus* 'Incisa') to the east of the Stewart Fountain is about 96 year old. The red maple (*Acer rubrum*) southwest of the pond works out at c.88 years old, the silver pendent lime (*Tilia tomentosa* 'Petiolaris') just west of the Stewart Fountain c.92 years old and the big hornbeam (*C. betulus*) near the northeast boundary by St Andrew's Building of the University c.83 years old. So most of the sizeable trees in the park were planted in the years following the 1st World War.

Other sizeable trees we encountered included a big sycamore (*Acer* pseudoplatanus) beside the northeast boundary and a large manna ash (*Fraxinus ornus*) beside the path not far south of the Park Terrace entrance gate half way down the steep slope referred to above. At the top of the slope, above and southeast of the manna ash and northwest of the Park Gardens staircase, grows a wonderfully contorted and old willow-leaved pear tree (*Pyrus salicifolia*) which the author was fortunate enough to see in full flower a couple of weeks before our visit.

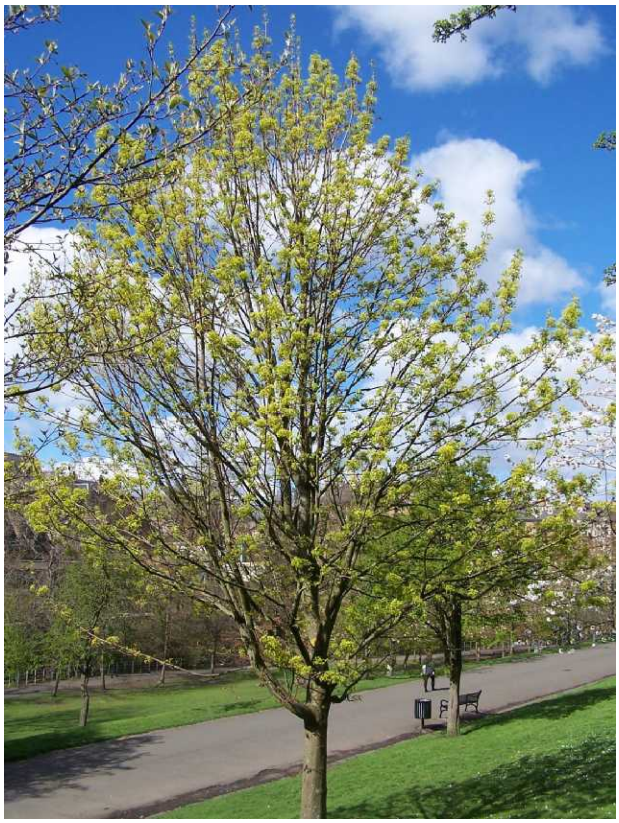


Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*)



Prunus 'Shirofugen'

Spring is the best time of year to view the park's many different flowering cherries, tree flowers and leaf flushing colours. Examples of cherry flowers include Japanese cherries such as the double pink *Prunus* 'Kanzan' and *Prunus* 'Shirofugen' the last to flower, with double white flowers under maroon fresh leaves; hybrid flowering cherries such as *Prunus* 'Spire' and *Prunus* 'Accolade' and the wild cherries *Prunus avium,* both single and double flowered.
Amongst other distinctive tree flowers found throughout the park are the bright lime green flowers of Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*) and, occasionally, the impressive crimson or purple and yellow flowers of purple Norway maples such as *A. platanoides* 'Goldsworth Purple' (8) or 'Crimson King'. These and other purple leaved Norway maples are not easy to distinguish from each other.
Also conspicuous were the bright yellow young leaves of the red oak (*Quercus* rubra) near the oak-leaved hornbeam and of the flushing variegated sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus* f. *variegatum*) (9) near the east end of the perennial border. We came across a fair amount of natural regeneration during our walk, particularly in the uncultivated areas along the steep slope and also along the banks of the River Kelvin. Norway maple was particularly noticeable and many sycamore and ash and occasional beech seedlings were found with occasional elm coppicing from the stumps of trees felled owing to Dutch elm disease.



Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*)

On the riverside, as well as the above, several horse chestnut saplings occur. It was interesting to find some lime seedlings (10) in the vicinity of the big, flowering silver pendent lime. However a broad-leaved lime (*Tilia platyphyllos*) nearby was also flowering and it is more likely that this was the parent tree. These seedlings are very palatable to small mammals such as voles and so a seedling is being grown on in order to ascertain its parentage. Another example of vegetative reproduction was found amongst the boundary plantings just north of the bowling greens - the distinctive suckers of the Cappadocian maple (*Acer cappadocicum*).

Lime seedlings (Tilia) regeneration

Finally reference needs to be made to the two mature single-leaved ash trees (*F. excelsior* f. *diversifolia*) (11) growing near the east side of the Prince of Wales bridge. One produced an offspring that grew from near the base of the grade A listed bridge. This had to be felled recently. It had 35 annual rings.

The park contains a few younger specimens of tree species unusual for Glasgow such as Indian bean (*Catalpa bignonioides*), varnish tree (*Rhus verniciflua*), False acacia (*Robinia pseudoacacia*) 'Bessoniana' - spineless – and Chinese persimmon (*Diospyros kaki*). The climate at this latitude is a bit harsh for these trees but they have survived thus far for quite a few years. They add biodiversity to the array of different tree species already growing here. In fact Kelvingrove park contains probably a greater number of different deciduous tree species than any other park in Glasgow other than the Botanic Gardens.

Amongst species that have been "lost" since 2006 are tree of heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*) and a group of blue Colorado spruce (*Picea pungens* f. *glauca*).

An updated map and tree list is available on request.