

Elder Park Visit, 3rd July, 2014
Bob Gray

We started at the St. Kenneth Drive gate near the southwest corner of this relatively small park of 13 hectares (32 acres). The weather remained dry (just) but the temperature dropped noticeably as the evening progressed. A guide board at the entrance summarised the park's main architectural features and its history. The park was given to Govan in 1885 by Isabella Elder as a memorial to John Elder her shipbuilding husband whose firm took over the Fairfield yard. Statues of both stand in the park. Other statues include the K13 memorial,



in memory of those lost in this steam-powered submarine which sank on sea trials in the Gareloch in 1917, and the memorial to SS Daphne lost at its launch at Linthouse in 1883 with the loss of 120 lives. (A similar memorial exists in Victoria Park as so many men from Partick were involved in the tragedy).



The soil parent material consists of freshwater alluvium in the northwest of the park and a late Devensian (late Ice Age) raised beach in the southeast. It is suitable for hardwoods. Indeed the only conifers in the park are a few pines that have been recently planted.

Four manna ash trees (*Fraxinus ornus*) is quite a number for such a small park and one of these is probably the biggest in Glasgow. They are however clearly susceptible to wind damage which has caused branches to break. The bark has been tapped for the monosaccharide sugar, mannose. Their bark, smooth

into old age, is often vertically fissured, possibly caused by frost susceptibility.

In common with quite a number of common ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) park trees bark has been gnawed away by some unknown predator. On two manna ash trees Roger Griffiths found many scale insects (coccids of the order Hemiptera) on the bark as well as long slug trails leading high into the canopy. Ironically the excreta of these insects on the tamarisk (not the manna ash) tree is



considered to be the source of manna in the Sinai desert. The manna ash is native to S. Europe and Asia Minor and not found in Sinai. These cultivated specimens are grafted onto a common ash rootstock producing a conspicuous graft union.



Another form of damage encountered was that of fire at the base of a Turkey oak (*Quercus cerris*), near the John Elder statue at the east side of the park. The tree is managing to survive although much of the bark has been removed and the fungus, *Stereum hirsutum*, is growing on it. The leaves and twigs are reasonably healthy on the side away from the fire but less so above the site of the vandalism.

Lime tree flowers were much in evidence: the upturned bracts of small-leaved lime (*Tilia cordata*) and the flowers of Crimean lime (*Tilia x euchlora*) north of the pond and the very floriferous large-leaved lime (*Tilia platyphyllos*) west of the Linthouse portico. We were too late to see the flowering of the insect pollinated manna ash and the many thorns in the park, including Grignon's (*Crataegus grignonensis*), the double crimson sport of midland hawthorn, Paul's Scarlet (*Crataegus laevigata*) and the hybrid thorn (*Crataegus x media*) with its two colours of flower. We also missed the flowers on horse chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) and red horse chestnut (*Aesculus x carnea*).

Instead we saw a few fine green samara (keys) covered Norway maples (*Acer platanoides*) and an unusual red samara covered sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus* f. *erythrocarpum*) (keys - left) as well as the normal green keys.



We encountered the occasional sycamore bearing small leaves, probably caused by path induced root stress. The park contains occasional purple forms of sycamore (*A. pseudoplatanus* f. *purpureum*) and beech (*Fagus sylvatica* f. *purpurea*).



A very large variegated sycamore (*A. pseudoplatanus* f. *variegatum*) was found which could be a Glasgow record. Despite the low altitude and nearness of the river, the park possesses only two white willows (*Salix alba*) (on which James Milner-White found many leaf galls – probably caused by the gall midge *Iteomyia major*) which, although nicely shaped, are not nearly as big as those on Glasgow Green. There is, however, a very big, leaning grey poplar (*Populus canescens*) (left) which also may be a Glasgow record holder.

A leaning small-leaved lime (*Tilia cordata*) near the west Govan Road gate (10) means that this small park contains two stunning leaning trees. The small number of other parks that contain such specimens are much bigger in area.



Almost all the hollies in the park are Highclere hollies (*Ilex x altaclarensis*), a cross between the Madeira and Common hollies that is a female clone ('Hendersonii') with matt, often spineless leaves forward pointing when they occur. Of some interest was a newly planted Norway maple 'Princeton Gold' having striking yellow foliage – a pity about the minor, avoidable stake damage. Finally, in view of the park's origin and name it was felt it would be appropriate for a few elder tree species (*Sambucus* spp.) and the lovely box elder (*Acer negundo*) to be planted.