

# A CEMETERY TREE TRAIL

The Grange cemetery trees contribute much to its character and atmosphere, even though they may not be an outstanding collection. When the cemetery was established it seems that little or no tree planting was anticipated. There are beech trees, limes and sycamores that probably date from the mid nineteenth-century but they are scattered at random. More recent planting (20-30 years ago) has sought to conform to more of a pattern, following the layout of graves and walkways. But single trees have evidently been planted throughout the cemetery's history, no doubt some as memorials.

It is very likely that the cemetery was formerly managed to maintain the open appearance of a graveyard, with the fear that it might otherwise look unkempt. Almost all the larger trees show signs of having once been pollarded, perhaps repeatedly, no doubt for this reason. Past pollarding is easily recognisable: a single substantial trunk divides at around 12-15ft into (usually) six or more strong stems growing more-or-less vertically.

Some of the trees are certainly self-sown, particularly the younger birches. There are many instances of young trees growing on or beside graves, sometimes damaging or displacing the monuments.

## THE TRAIL

(see map on centre pages)

There is no logical sequence to the order of the trees and there is more than one example of many of the trees featured. I have tried to space the stops evenly, but it is by no means necessary to follow the trail as set out here. Numbers in brackets are the numbers of the trees from the 2020 survey (marked on the map).

The map (centre pages) is a tracing of the Google Maps aerial image. All the trees are marked and you can find your position with reference to the positions of the trees.

Peter Pitkin, July 2021

Photos: David Watson

[www.grangeassociation.org/cemetery-trees](http://www.grangeassociation.org/cemetery-trees)



The Grange Association

# Tree trail

## Grange Cemetery



Beaufort Road, Edinburgh EH9 1TT

## THE FOUR MAIN KINDS OF TREES

The cemetery contains around thirty species of trees and several botanical or horticultural varieties. The most abundant are the birches (65) and the sycamores (roughly 27); apart from these the most conspicuous are the limes and the copper beeches. These are not included in the trail because you will have no difficulty finding and recognising them.



Sycamores

There are large mature **sycamores** in the cemetery, and many younger self-sown ones. The only large tree that shows no sign of having been pollarded is the isolated one halfway along the south wall. There are variegated sycamores near the west gate and in the far south-west corner of the extension, and an impressively large one with less clearly marked leaves in the NE section. A tree in the south-west corner of the main cemetery has reddish undersides to its leaves.



Limes (linden)

All the mature **lime** trees are the hybrid *Tilia x europaea* and all were once pollarded, which limes seem well able to withstand. One of its characteristics is the tufts of pale brown hairs in the angles of the main veins on the underside of the leaf. Many, but not all, have dense clusters of twigs arising from the trunk. Abundant scented flowers in July/August are followed by winged fruits, which spin helicopter-like to the ground. The hybrid is largely sterile, so almost no seedlings are produced.



Beeches

There are thirteen **beech** trees altogether, all except one with purple leaves - probably planted because they create a sombre setting. There is a line of substantial trees beside the N-S drive on the E side of the cemetery. The purple-leaved form is commonly called the copper beech – the newly-emerged foliage in spring is very convincingly copper-coloured.

**11. Norway maple (173):** Norway maples are common in the public spaces of Edinburgh, but this is the only mature one in the cemetery. In spite of having been pollarded, it is an attractive, well-shaped specimen. From a distance, Norway maples look like sycamores and their leaves are much the same shape, but their leaf-lobes terminate in very fine, spiky points, and their bark is quite different – being finely ridged and furrowed rather than developing into flakes and scales. There is a young purple/black-leaved specimen in the NW corner of the W extension.

**12. The Corstorphine sycamore (164):** This sycamore is the variety 'Corstorphinense', which is supposedly descended from a tree brought to Corstorphine by a monk in 1429. It has smallish, yellowy-green leaves that emerge bright gold, making the tree very conspicuous in spring. The second Lord Forrester was murdered allegedly beneath the Corstorphine tree by his sister-in-law, Christian Hamilton; she was beheaded. The original, haunted tree blew down in 1998.

**13. White cedar - Thuja occidentalis 'Lutea' (100/101):** This is an ornamental variety of the North American white cedar, although it's not really a cedar at all and is more closely related to the cypresses. Its foliage is conspicuously yellow-gold in winter. The species is widespread and common in the eastern half of Canada, extending S into the US as far as Tennessee and North Carolina. In N America it is commonly called the arborvitae, valued by Native Americans for its medicinal properties. There are dozens of horticultural varieties – these two trees might eventually reach 50ft (although there is a dwarf form 'Lutescens'), but they will retain their narrow conical shape. Its small, upturned young cones look like miniature sticks (chicons) of chicory.

**14. Field maple (111):** Like the hornbeam planted just to the W of it, this is not thought to be native in Scotland – occurring naturally only as far N as Durham. It is less commonly planted than hornbeam, but is a frequent component of hedges planted under agri-environmental schemes on farmland. There is a surprisingly large tree of some age in a garden on Whitehouse Loan.

**15. Hornbeam (112):** This, like the field maple is a common hedgerow tree in the SE of England. It probably only occurs naturally, however, as far north as Peterborough although it is frequently planted in England and Scotland as a street tree (e.g. in Newbattle Terrace) and as hedging. The pleated appearance of the young leaves is distinctive. The flowers (April-May) are in inconspicuous catkins – the male and female separate but on the same tree. The female catkins grow to c. 10cm, with each seed attached to a three-lobed wing-like bract.

**16. Scots pine (83):** This tree was planted for the Grange Association in 1999 to mark the millennium. There are ten pine trees in the cemetery, none of them of any great age. Five are Scots pines. The Scots pine is the only pine native to Britain but it is the most widely distributed pine in the world, occurring in forests across Europe and northern parts of Asia as far as the Pacific coast of Russia. Scottish Forestry's Caledonian Pinewood Inventory lists 84 remnants of native pine woodland, most of them very small. The nearest substantial one to Edinburgh is the Black Wood of Rannoch (Perthshire). The Scots pine is easily distinguishable from the Austrian pine (the only other kind in the cemetery) by its shorter (5-7 cm), grey-green needles, smaller cones (usually 4-5 cm) with no spines, and the orangey-brown bark on the upper trunk and larger branches.

**17. Dawn redwood (78):** *Metasequoia*, for a long time was known only from fossils, and was thought to be long extinct. But in 1941 this species (*M. glyptostrobooides*) was discovered growing in China. It was brought to Cambridge in 1948. There are several trees in gardens in the Grange, and one in the Astley Ainslie grounds. It is one of the few deciduous conifers, shedding its leafy side-shoots intact.

**4. European white lime (40):** This young tree is the only specimen of *Tilia tomentosa* in the cemetery. It is native to SE Europe, eastwards from Hungary to the Ukraine. It differs from the common lime in its sturdier, downy twigs and its larger, more complicatedly toothed leaves, which are pale and downy beneath. Its nectar (flowers July–August) is said to be toxic to bumblebees.

**5. Cherry (Gean) (56):** There are four large white-flowered wild cherry trees in the cemetery, which make for a very beautiful display in spring. The name ‘gean’ seems to be more widely used in Scotland than in England, and although it is the same in Scots Gaelic, it seems to be derived from the old French ‘guine’. The cherries are almost black when fully ripe, small and not very sweet, but birds seem to find them very palatable. There is a fifth tree at the E end of St Giles church that has white-scarlet fruits like the French Napoleons or the American Reniers. They are larger and sweeter than the others, but are still smaller than modern fruit varieties - so the tree might be an old cultivated variety or one that has grown from a pip.

**6. Downy birch (see also notes above) (124):** This is one of the more convincing specimens of the downy birch. Note the distinctly downy twigs and the twiggly, non-weeping branching pattern.

**7. Beech (see also notes above) (128):** This is one of the stateliest trees in the cemetery - nevertheless it shows clear signs of having been pollarded. Like the field maple and the hornbeam, the beech appears not to have extended into Scotland after the last ice-age without human help. It is very common both in the city and in the surrounding countryside, where it seeds itself - but is far less of a weed than the sycamore. This tree fruits abundantly.

**8. Whitebeam (132):** Whitebeams are not easy to identify. Around fifteen ‘micro-species’ occur in Britain, of which three are native to Scotland. Several kinds from other parts of Europe are commonly planted in towns and gardens. This one is *Sorbus mougeotii* which occurs quite widely in the mountains of Europe: the Alps, the Pyrenees, and the Vosges. On the other side of the Catacombs, along their length, there are about twelve specimens of *Sorbus intermedia*, the Swedish whitebeam, which has more deeply incised leaves and which fruits less abundantly, the fruit being duller than the bright scarlet of *S. mougeotii*. And close against the N wall is a single tree of the native whitebeam, *Sorbus aria*, which has leaves with no indentations.

**9. Austrian (black) pine (133):** There are four young Austrian pines in the southern half of the cemetery, planted with the oaks around 20 years ago in ‘+’ formation. They are very distinct from the Scots pines in their blackish-green, densely bunched needles, 10cm or more long. The cones are longer (5-9 cm) and their scales often have small sharp spines. *Pinus nigra* is very variable; the one near the W gate is somewhat different from the other four and a little more like a Corsican pine.

**10. Crab apple (140):** There are three crab apple trees in the cemetery. This one is perhaps the most attractive through the year, having abundant bright pink blossom, green leaves with a reddish tinge, and yellow to red crab apples. The other two, which differ slightly from each other, have dark purple foliage and deep crimson flowers and they can look quite spectacular in the spring, but their leaves often turn brown, shrivel and fall in mid-summer. Their apples are uniformly dark reddish-black. I hesitate to put varietal names to any of these trees.

This tree and the one in NW section have several mosses (*Hypnum* and *Orthotrichum*) growing on their trunk or branches. The latter also has orange-brown patches of the filamentous alga *Trentepohlia*.



Birches

The **birches** in the cemetery come in various shapes and sizes. Most are silver birches (*Betula pendula*) and there are some nice ‘weeping’ examples and trees with striking white trunks. The tall narrow-crowned tree on the N wall is probably the variety ‘Tristis’ and in the SW section there is a young tree, struggling rather, of an ornamental variety with deeply cut leaves.

The birches are less likely than other trees to have been pollarded - they don’t respond well. Male catkins, similar to hazel catkins, are conspicuous in early spring. The female, on the same tree, are small, stubby and green. From mid-autumn they disintegrate, shedding scales and myriad small winged seeds.

There are rather fewer specimens of the downy birch (*Betula pubescens*) the other native species. Its twigs are usually minutely downy - at least when they are young - and the tree is not usually noticeably pendulous (‘weeping’). The bark on the trunk of older trees lacks the deep vertical fissures characteristic of silver birch. The two are often not easy to tell apart, and there are trees here that are intermediate - very likely hybrids.

**1. Oak (49):** There are no mature oaks in the cemetery but there are nine young trees, probably planted 20-25 years ago. Six of these, planted in a ‘+’ formation, are in the NW section. Five are clearly English oaks (*Quercus robur*), which in spite of the name occur naturally in the south-eastern half of Scotland. They are distinguished from the sessile or durmast oak (*Quercus petraea*), which favours the N and W, by their stalked acorns and the small lobes (auricles) at the base of the leaves, the point where they join the stalk. The tree at the intersection of the walkways is more like the latter, although its acorns (which may be distorted by galls) are stalked.

**2. The ornamental cherry ‘Kanzan’ (42):** This is probably the most commonly planted ornamental flowering tree in the urban landscape (as in the Meadows), and is unmissable when in flower in late April - early May. It was introduced into this country from Japan in 1913 and is variously alleged to be named after a Chinese mountain or a Chinese poet (perhaps both). Its pink flowers are among the most densely double of any of the hundreds of ornamental cherry varieties, each flower having around thirty petals.

**3. Yew (36):** More than any other tree, yews are associated with churchyards. The oldest tree in Scotland is a yew in the churchyard of Fortingall (Perthshire) which is reckoned to be somewhere between 1500 and 3000 years old. There are four yews in the Grange cemetery, none of them either very old or statuesque. Three of them, which were clearly planted, are ‘Irish’ yews, descended from a tree in Co. Fermanagh and brought into cultivation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They are characteristically ‘fastigate’ having multiple, densely crowded, vertical stems rather than a single trunk. The fourth tree, growing against the N wall, is the wild type, and may well be bird-sown. Although the leaves and seeds are poisonous, birds feed on the red fruits, appearing to suffer no harm, and seedlings are frequent well away from any parent tree. Fruits are only borne on female trees.

