

Wheatley Elms



The line of trees in Braidburn Valley Park alongside Comiston Road are a prominent feature of the landscape. These trees are predominantly Wheatley Elms planted in the 1930s when the Park was created.

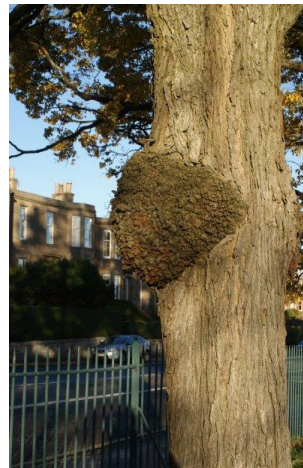
Origins

Wheatley Elms are considered to be a variety of the Cornish Elm (*Ulmus minor*). Recent work by Forest Research (see [Ecotype](#) Autumn 2013) has shown that all the Wheatley Elms in the UK are likely to be a single clone. This clone was thought to have originated in northern France but was first recorded in a description of a tree in Guernsey in 1815. A London nurseryman, George Loddiges, was the first to propagate it in England in 1836 and considered it sufficiently distinctive to warrant its own scientific name *Ulmus x sarniensis*, after Sarnia the Roman name for Guernsey. In the mid 19th century the tree was propagated by Sir William Cooke of Wheatley Park, hence the current common name. The earliest use of the name Wheatley Elm for this tree occurs in 1869. The trees were also propagated in large numbers by a tree nursery in Southampton in the late 19th century. This elm was widely planted as a street tree due to its upright habit although surviving examples are now rare.

As well as the trees in Braidburn Valley Park there are small numbers of Wheatley Elms in Princes Street Gardens and Warriston Cemetery.

Characteristics

The Wheatley Elm is a tall pyramidal tree of very even shape with ascending branches tapering to a distinct pointed top. The trees come into leaf very late compared to other trees (sometimes as late as June) and hold onto their leaves into December. The leaves are small relative to other elm leaves and turn a glorious golden yellow before they fall.



The tree frequently develop distinctive burrs on its trunk. Several of these are visible low down on the trunks of the trees alongside Comiston Road and are of a considerable size. They do not appear to affect the trees vigour.

Dutch elm disease and management

The Wheatley Elms have slowly been succumbing to Dutch Elm disease. The City of Edinburgh Council has an active management programme for this tree disease; the trees are inspected annually and any showing signs of infection are felled. This management has helped preserve this fine stand of elms and over 40 trees remain. The Elms trees that have been removed are being replaced with trees of a different species mostly Red-twigged lime (*Tilia platyphyllos* 'rubra') due to the high risk of infection of Dutch Elms disease if new elms were planted.

