

# TECHNICAL SESSIONS

## Inaugural Conference

September 18, 1968

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### THE GARDENING CENTRE AT SYON PARK

G. C. WILLS,  
*Gardening Centre, Ltd.,*  
*Syon Park, Brentford, Middlesex*

We are very pleased that you have decided to have your inaugural meeting here at Syon, and we wish you every success in this meeting, and sincerely hope you will enjoy your visit to Syon.

I have been asked to say a few words about the project here; The Gardening Centre is a permanent exhibition for the gardening and horticultural trade. The project is actually run as a company, The Gardening Centre Limited, which was formed in 1965 between the two share-holders — Imperial Chemical Industries Limited through its subsidiary Plant Protection Limited, and the Duke of Northumberland. The two share-holders are in the proportion of 75% Plant Protection, and 25% to the Duke — which amounts to a share capital of £100,000.

During the first phase of the project to opening day, on May 1st 1968, approximately £500,000 have been expended here at Syon. The initial preparations of the grounds entailed major engineering works. A few details of these are that about 4½ miles of paths had to be laid down; vast quantities of earth moved to prevent the Thames flooding in; and the making of the car-park, for which approximately 10,000 cubic yards of earth were moved.

Where the Garden Buildings Area now is, the ground level had to be raised approximately 8 feet for flood prevention purposes. Approximately nine acres of turf has been laid, and in the Rose Garden alone, there are some 12,000 rose bushes in about 400 varieties. In the Woodland Garden there are between 10 and 12,000 trees and shrubs in approximately 2,000 varieties.

How do we operate? The Gardening Centre itself cover about 55 acres of a total of about 200 acres of Syon Park. Of those 55 acres, there is about 44 acres here in the main gardens, and 6 acres of Rose Gardens.

The Selling Centre and the Catering services are run by concessionaires. The Selling Centre being operated by a well known local firm Messrs. Cogwells, and the Catering services

are run by Fuller, Smith and Turners Limited, through their subsidiary, Griffin Catering Limited, also well known in the surrounding area.

Within the Exhibition, there are nearly 400 exhibitors who co-operate in this project. Of these, there are approximately 70 plant exhibitors and the remainder are of what we generally term 'the hardware people', covering exhibitors of garden buildings, green houses, sun lounges, down to garden ornaments and garden sundries. The exhibitors pay a rental fee according to where their exhibition is situated and this covers the maintenance of their exhibit. As far as plant exhibitors are concerned, with agreement from the nurserymen, they supply us the planting material, The Garden Centre carries out the actual planting in relation to our overall landscaping plans and we undertake the general maintenance work. Our revenue comes basically from three sources:—

First and foremost, there are the visitors and their entrance fees, also, from the exhibitors' display fees for the privilege of exhibiting here, and thirdly from the concessionaires.

The organization of The Gardening Centre Limited comprises a board of Directors, a Chairman, two joint Managing Directors and representation from both Plant Protection Limited and nominees of the Duke of Northumberland. Incidentally one member of the board is Mr. Percy Thrower, who is well known to millions of gardeners through his T.V. gardening programmes and articles. There are the normal organisational departments covering Administration, Accounts, Exhibition Sales, Publicity and Public Relations and also the internal information service to visitors. To provide information about the tremendous range of plants and products there are information centres strategically placed in the grounds, together with a Technical Information Centre. In all, the staff required to operate the entire Gardening Centre operation amounts to some 130 people.

Now then, I will take you on a visual tour of the Grounds from this plan, with an explanation highlighting the most important sections such as the Main Entrance, the Ornamental Walk, the Gardening Products Pavilion of approximately half-acre housing about 130 exhibitors, the Machinery Hall where powered machines such as lawn mowers and cultivators are shown.

The lower area, the Garden Buildings Area, is the area nearest to the River Thames; in this area, there are approximately 40 exhibitors of greenhouses, sun lounges, sheds and garages.

Then coming back along the Perimeter Path, you come to the Individual Gardens Area which consists of various areas sponsored by the Electricity Council, Woman's Realm, Wilkinson Sword, Redland Tiles, and others. The Gardening Centre

also has its own Allotment demonstration garden which is based on a Continental allotment.

Next we come to Flora's Lawn which was part of the original lawn area that was maintained by the Duke, prior to the Gardening Centre era, and its Centre of attraction is the Doric column with the Goddess Flora surmounted upon it. We always say that Syon has a 'hoo doo' on it; as a bit of interest in the early days, Flora has been knocked off her pedestal and all that was left of her was part of the upper half of the statue lying in the flower beds. However, the Shepperton Film Studios came to our rescue and remodelled Flora in fibre glass from photographs of the original statue in Rome. A few days before opening, Flora was mounted on her pedestal with a flourish of trumpets and all the press boys present using a tall crane for the operations. This was done on a Tuesday, but on the following Thursday we had a very heavy thunder-storm and poor Flora was struck! However, Shepperton Studios again came to our rescue and patched her up, adding, as a lightning conductor — a hairpin!

Henry VIII after his death, (on his way from Westminster to Windsor for burial), spent the night in his coffin in Syon House, during the night the coffin burst open and dogs mauled the body. One of Henry's wives, Queen Catherine Howard was taken from Syon House where she was staying, to the Tower for execution.

Incidentally, the whole of this Park and the Woodland Garden in particular, was originally laid out by Capability Brown. It was under his supervision that the two lakes were formed. There is the lake here, and other lake is to be found on the far side of the Main Entrance road. In the Woodland Garden there are unique trees. We believe we have the largest selection of Oak Trees to be found in the world here, and in this way we are very complementary to our neighbors across the Thames at Kew. The great thing we have tried to do here, and in which we feel we have successful in achieving, is to maintain the beauty of Capability Brown's original landscaping.

Now, we come to the Great Conservatory. This building is the high-light of the Exhibition area. It was built between 1820 and 1830 by Fowler, and is constructed of Bath stone and Gunmetal. It is said that Paxton got his idea for the design of the Crystal Palace from this particular building. In the Conservatory are exhibited house plants, orchids, cacti and fuchsias etc.

The visitors are then taken through the Conservatory Formal Garden, which is a bedding area, into the Selling Centre — and all visitors have to pass through this selling area on their way to the Rose Garden.

In the Rose Garden the Rosarium is laid out on the original Tudor Gardens of Syon House. For part of the Rose Garden area, the division between it and the Water Meadows is

by a 'ha ha' wall. This gives a most pleasant and peaceful outlook towards the Thames.

I believe you will have the opportunity of walking round the Grounds before you leave, and I sincerely hope you will be favourable impressed by our efforts so far.

Before closing, I should like to bring you up to date with what has happened since our opening day. In spite of the appalling weather this summer we reached 300,000 visitors by the middle of September, which was about a week before the budgeted time. The response of visitors has been most enthusiastic and the success of the project has been all that could have been hoped for. We now find exhibitors falling over themselves, to join the project. It is hoped that within the next year or so we shall have had about a million visitors through the gates, and further expenditure is being planned for this coming winter in improving both garden layout and providing extended amenities for our visitors.

## **POTTING AND CONTAINERISING**

DAVID N. CLARK,

*Notcutts Nurseries Ltd., Woodbridge, Suffolk*

In this short illustrated talk, I will not be able to give a comprehensive survey of the subject but a series of disjointed facts. I do, however, want to pin-point huge differences that exist from nursery to nursery and suggest a few ways in which British Chapter of the I.P.P.S. could be of benefit to the industry. Although today I am concentrating on getting the plant into the pot I would like to point out that a great deal of study is needed on the movement and handling of plants in containers within the propagation department. This is a difficult subject to tackle in existing units which frequently consist of old glasshouses and narrow paths but it is one which should be given primary consideration in the design of any future propagation unit.

Before getting too deeply involved in my subject, could I clarify that both potting and containerising refers to the same process, the former being used more widely in this country, while the word 'containerising' has been introduced from the U.S.A. and is often used when referring to potting larger subjects. I will be using both during the course of my talk.

There are three essential ingredients in any potting process: —

1. Plants,
2. Growing Medium,
3. Pots or Containers.

How do each of these influence the process?

### *Plants*

The size and stage of growth of seedlings and cuttings have a large influence on the speed of the potting process and