

SUMMER OUTING

Wednesday 13th July 2022

The Haslemere Gardening Society visited

Haslemere
Gardening
Society

Syon House and Gardens, Brentford, Middlesex TW8 8JF



Syon House is the last surviving ducal residence complete with its country estate in Greater London. Syon Park is a 200-acre (80 hectare) park bordering the Thames, looking across the river to Kew Gardens. Near its banks is a tidal meadow flooded twice a day by the river. It contains more than 200 species of rare trees. Although the park and lake were designed by Capability Brown in 1760, their character today is nineteenth century.

The Great Conservatory in the gardens, designed by Charles Fowler in the 1820s and completed in 1827, was the first conservatory to be built from metal and glass on a large scale. The conservatory is Grade I listed. Henry Percy, 11th Duke of Northumberland, who was head of the family from 1988 to 1995, was noted for planting many trees in the grounds of Syon.

Syon's gardens are a remarkable landscape where layers of history are beautifully overlaid, allowing the estate to be read almost like a palimpsest. For anyone interested in the evolution of garden design, Syon is a particularly rewarding site: it transitions from the formal intentions of the 18th century to sweeping landscapes shaped by Capability Brown, and then onward to the horticultural ambitions of the 19th century, all of which remain clearly visible today.

The Great Conservatory, constructed in the 1820s and designed by Charles Fowler, stands out as one of Britain's earliest large-scale iron-and-glass buildings. Inside, visitors encounter a collection of palms, cycads, and exotic plants, with displays that reflect Victorian horticultural ambitions. The formal parterre and flowerbeds surrounding the conservatory help to bridge its dramatic architecture with the wider landscape of the park.

In the mid-18th century, Capability Brown transformed the estate into a quintessential English landscape park, introducing sweeping vistas and naturalistic design. Key features created by Brown remain central to the estate's character.

The gardens at Syon preserve one of the best surviving Capability Brown landscapes in London. The estate exemplifies the continuity of aristocratic horticulture, from Brown through Fowler and on to its modern stewards. The combination of formal, picturesque, and botanical elements within the grounds makes Syon unusually rich and rewarding for study.

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For the third and last coach outing of the year members of the Haslemere Gardening Society boarded the coach for a trip to Syon House and Gardens on Wednesday, 13th of July 2022. It was a lovely Summer's Day, not quite as hot as it is at the time of writing this, and the journey was quick and without holdups. The area outside the Estate was a mass of roses in full bloom which was a nice start after driving up the motorway.

We were taken on a guided tour of the House by a very well-informed and interesting young lady who pointed out the architecture designed by Robert Adams and all the many portraits of members of the Percy Family and the many famous people who had visited there. The house is built on the site of Syon Abbey and after the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII and Edward VI the present house with its white exterior was built by Edward Seymour, the Lord Protector and when he was executed acquired by the Duke of Northumberland and it has been in the same family ever since. It was there that Lady Jane Grey was offered the crown on Edward VI's death.

After the Jacobean era and the civil war, the Estate was inherited by Sir Hugh Smithson who was created 1st Earl and Duke of Northumberland and it was then that the interior of the house was transformed into an amazing and beautiful place that we can visit today. It reflects the wealth of the leading families of the time with its Doric columns, statuary and walls adorned with so many masterpieces. After we toured the house, we had the option of walking around the acres of gardens with the centrepiece of the Great Conservatory with its lily pond and collection of exotic plants or going first into the associated Hilliers Garden Centre for refreshment.

We had missed the large wildflower meadow by one week as it had come to the time for cutting but there was a smaller area devoted to native hedgerow plants near the Conservatory which was alive with bees. It is wonderful to see so many acres of green so near to the centre of London and know that it has been like that for many centuries.

Before boarding the coach for home many of us visited the Garden Centre which had a tempting display of plants and quite a few of us went home with at least one souvenir of the visit. Our thanks to Georgina for organising another great day out and to Steve the driver for his good care of us.