

SPRINGFIELDS



AS a county still of rural delights, Lincolnshire has many natural features which attract and surprise visitors. But on the eastern outskirts of Spalding, renowned as the centre of the important bulb growing area, lies a man-made spectacle — Springfields, the famous Springtime show garden.

Bulbs, both narcissus and tulip, tend to conjure up visions of Dutch clogs, windmills and flat landscapes. But the tulip originated in Turkey and it was introduced to Europe over 400 years ago. It flourished in the fertile lowlands of Holland and there it has been developed into the sophisticated flower we all know and love.

Round Spalding it all started in the 1880s with snow-drop bulbs for medicinal purposes (a salve for frostbite and chillblains). Later came narcissi (the main flower) and double daffodils for cut flowers, with the first greenhouses about 1890, and by 1892 there were 12 bulb and flower merchants round Spalding. The Darwin Tulip was introduced in 1905, but still mainly for flowers with the disposal of surplus bulbs. By the early 1930s it was reckoned that 100 tons a day of cut flowers were produced, apart from the supply of dry bulbs — in 1929, 2,500 tons were exported to Holland because of cold weather there. It was about this time that a small number of Dutchmen came to the area trading in bulbs and looking for work, bringing with them an expertise which was to help the local industry. Today the British bulb industry is firmly established (1,400 growers with 10,000 acres in this area) exporting both cut flowers and dry bulbs to many continental countries.

There have been many changes in the bulb industry and one in particular has left its mark on the Spalding area. Twenty years ago tulips were grown for the dry bulb, as opposed to the cut flower, and did not have

their heads removed until after flowering. Today it is a different story. Immediately after the tulip flowers, the head is removed to produce a first class bulb. At a stroke the famous Spalding tulip fields are but a distant memory. Gone are the days when the highways and byways of South Lincolnshire echoed to the sound of cars and coaches winding their way through a kaleidoscope of colour.

The bulb growers, proud of their unique spring spectacle, decided in 1964 to create a permanent show garden to display spring flowers in a natural setting. A 25-acre beet field was purchased for the actual site of the gardens and a top European landscape designer, Carl van Empelen, engaged to create the masterpiece and this he did. Springfields was laid out as a formal garden with a wooded area on the perimeter to act as a shelter from the easterly winds. After two years of hard work, Springfields was opened to the public in April 1966.

For those who are statistically minded, the following may be of interest: 20,000 sq. yds. of lawn, 2½ miles of paths, 8,000 sq. yds. of paved area, 15,000 sq. yds. of shrubs, plants and trees, a man-made lake covering 3,000 sq. yds. of water holding 1½ million gallons and over one million spring bulbs planted annually.

THE SOCIETY

The Springfields Horticultural Society Ltd., the body responsible for organising the annual displays in the gardens of Springfields, was formed in 1966 under the sponsorship of the South Holland (Lincolnshire) Horticultural Association, a specialist branch of the Holland (Lincs.) County Branch of the National Farmers' Union. The Society is a registered charity, its principal object being to promote the study and practice of horticulture in all its branches and in par-



Springfields now (opposite) and 12 years ago (above) with Fulney church behind.

ticular the cultivation and development of all varieties of flowers grown from bulbs and corms.

Under its constitution, the income of the Society must be expended in carrying out its objects. By organising the annual display in the gardens, the Society enables members of the public to see the wide varieties of bulbs and corms available and how best they can be used to beautify the small garden. There is in the gardens an information centre where visitors are able to obtain answers to their queries regarding the growing of bulbs, roses and bedding plants.

The Society organises lectures on horticultural topics and participates in various horticultural exhibitions and shows. The Society works closely with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries & Food on experimental programmes concerning bulb diseases and their treatment and it co-operates with other societies in running trials in the gardens. Any member of the public is eligible to apply for Associate Membership of the Society. A small annual subscription is payable by Associate Members, who enjoy certain privileges relative to admission to the gardens and exhibitions. Springfields is affiliated to the Royal Horticultural Society and close connections are maintained with other like-minded associations.

Having completed the layout of the gardens, an administrative block was constructed, together with shops and a garden centre, a 250-seater restaurant and a showhall, which is used to stage indoor exhibitions. Two large greenhouses were also built to house tulip and other displays which can be seen whatever the state of the weather.

In 1970 Springfields was approached by the Tulip Parade Committee to use the gardens as a 'half-way house' for their street procession and a five-acre site, now known as the Arena, was acquired adjacent to the gardens to enable the bands and floats to break their

journey on the way round the town. This Arena is also used to stage exhibitions within the gardens.

S.H.E.

The most well-known of these is the Springfields Horticultural Exhibition known as S.H.E., which is



Right: The Duchess of Gloucester with Mr. Leonard van Geest, Chairman of Springfields, at the opening of the Rose Gardens in July 1976. (Photo by Les Prudden).

held annually in late February. The exhibition consists of Britain's largest forced flower show and a display of machinery, chemicals and services for the horticultural industry. The forced flower show is staged indoors and covers 6,000 sq. ft. of landscaped beds, pools, cascades and fountains, with trees and forsythia in bloom. Within these beds, boxes of tulips, daffodils and other flowers are brought in from the forcing houses and arranged in peat to give a foretaste of spring in the depths of winter. Amaryllis highlight the beds with their large but delicate trumpet-like flowers. Roses, orchids, freesias and carnations are also displayed and the visitor can be forgiven if the seasons appear to have turned topsy turvy.

In early April each year, to coincide with the opening of the gardens, the indoor Daffodil Show is held where dozens of varieties of narcissi in vases catch the eye and herald the joy of Spring. It is hoped to introduce autumn bulb fairs and dahlia shows later in the season.

Springfields, having reached its tenth birthday and close on two million visitors, was ripe for further development and 1975 saw another spectacle in the gardens. The British Association of Rose Breeders (B.A.R.B.), the secretary being the famous rose breeder Jack Harkness, agreed to supply some 7,500 rose bushes in mainly new varieties. On 15th July 1976 Her Royal Highness Princess Alice, Duchess of Gloucester, formally opened the first summer season. Since 1976 further plantings have been made and there are over 10,000 rose bushes in the gardens, including a beautiful orange floribunda appropriately named 'Springfields', which incidentally will be featured at the Chelsea Flower Show this year.



Encouraged by the interest shown by our summer visitors, displays of dahlias and clematis have been introduced into the gardens. A further step in the future development of the gardens is the news that the Bedding Plant Association have agreed that for the 1978 Summer season they will provide over 20,000 bedding plants of many varieties to fill the gardens with colour from June to October — Ageratum, Alyssum, Begonias and Lobelia will compete with French Marigolds, Pansies, Salvias, Cineraria and Kochia for the attention of the admiring visitors.

An interesting use for the fast growing conifer *Cupressa leylandii* has been found in the construction of the Jubilee Maze, which was planted to commemorate Her Majesty's Jubilee year. This maze, which should grow three feet per year, by 1979 should lose the most energetic of children and will rival in popularity the famous Hampton Court maze.

The lake, which has recently been restocked with water lilies, contains carp which were introduced ten years ago and have grown into fine ten-pound fish. In the period from April to September, these fine fish can be seen feeding from the hands of the visitors, emulating their French cousins at Fontainebleau and, nearer home, Elsham Hall near Brigg. The smaller goldfish have not fared so well, in that the heron, which must surely be one of our most graceful native birds, makes regular sorties to the gardens in the summer, biding his time before swooping down to make his kill.

Man has created Springfields for his own pleasure, but the wild life of the Fens appreciate his efforts in that rabbits and foxes inhabit the garden, starlings roost in woodland areas and butterflies and moths proliferate in their new sheltered environment. Tree thinning and replanting is being carried out with expert guidance from the Lincolnshire County Council, and flora and fauna is being encouraged by a careful selection of new trees.

GARDENERS' WORLD

These exciting developments at Springfields have not escaped the attention of the BBC and the highest accolade will be the visit on 3rd May of the BBC 2 'Gardeners' World' programme with presenter Peter Seabrook, who will be recording two programmes on that day. With a weekly viewing audience of four million gardeners, this programme will firmly attract their attention to the delights of Springfields.

The TV documentary film 'Tulip Fiesta', in 16 mm sound and colour and running for 28 minutes, of the 1977 Spalding Tulip Parade with scenes from the gardens is now available on hire from Guild Sound & Vision Ltd., Woodston House, Oundle Road, Peterborough at a cost of £3.80.

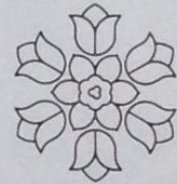
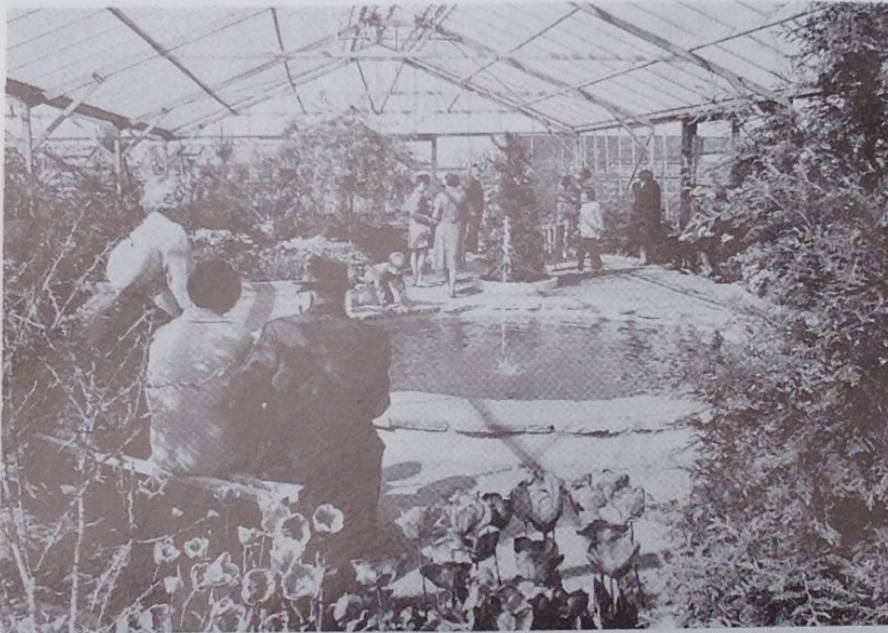
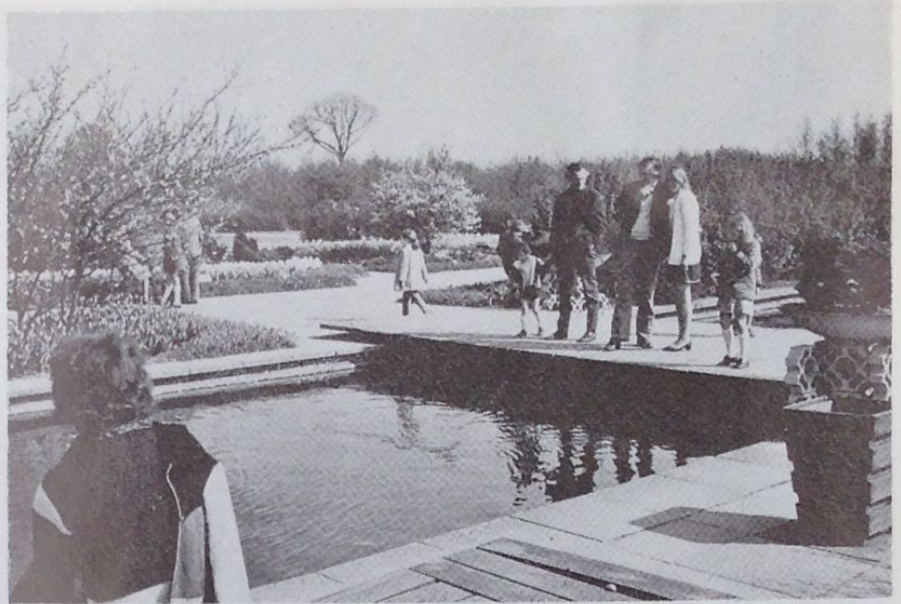
May 6th is, of course, Tulip Parade day and the famous procession will pause in the gardens on its route round the town.

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Left: Admiring the dazzling display of forced spring flowers at S.H.E. 1978 are (left to right) Peter Atkinson (General Manager), Mrs. L. van Geest, Lady Plumb, Sir Henry Plumb (President of the N.F.U.) and Mr. Leonard van Geest.



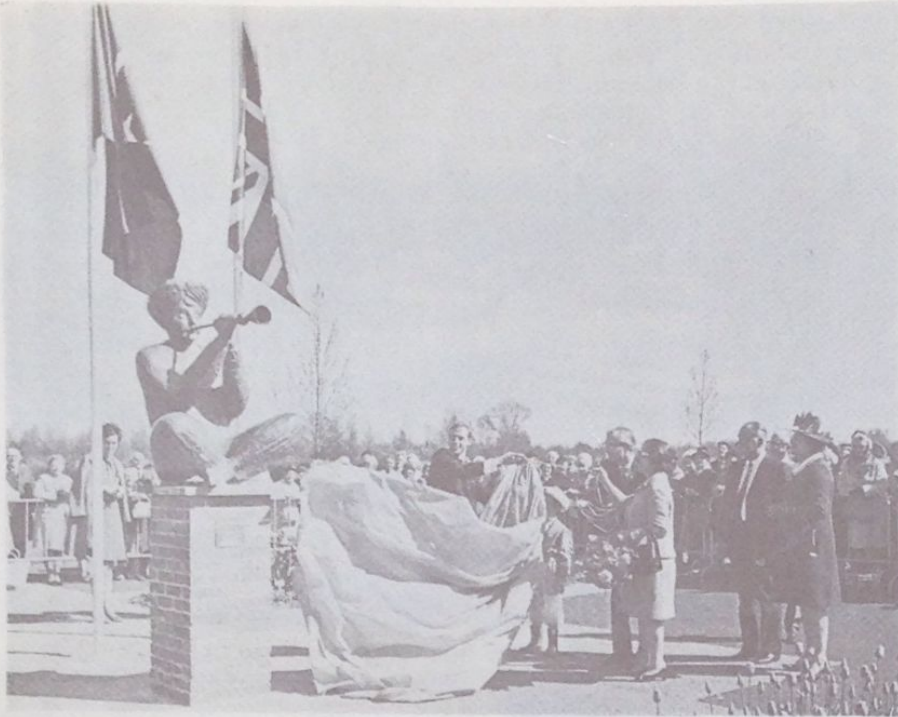
Can you see those magnificent carp?



Rain is no problem at Springfields with indoor gardens such as these.

An admiring visitor pauses to take a closer look at one of the flower beds in the now mature gardens.





The unveiling of the statue 'Tulipan the Tulipman' by the Turkish Ambassador to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the introduction of the tulip bulb from Turkey to Europe.

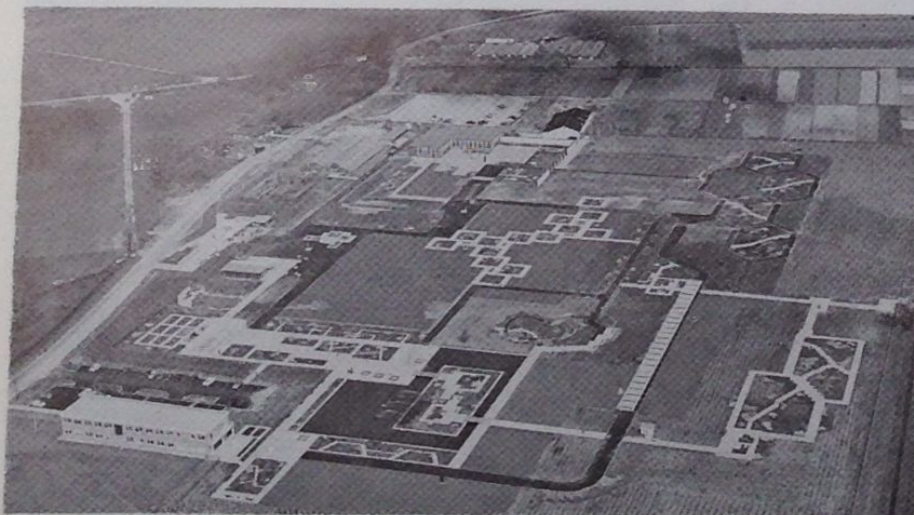
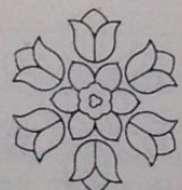
(Photo by courtesy
Lincolnshire Free Press)



The first planting in autumn 1975 by the British Association of Rose Breeders of 10,000 roses in mainly new varieties.
(Photo by Les Prudden)



An early aerial view of Springfields shortly after the opening in 1966.





Above: Twelve years on — a secluded woodland walk at Springfields. (Photo by Les Prudden)

Left: John Noakes of BBC 'Blue Peter' with the Tulip Queen at Springfields. (Photo by courtesy Lincolnshire Free Press)



Both the East Midland Tourist Board and the Lincolnshire and South Humberside Tourist Association take a great deal of interest in the success of Springfields, which has now become a major attraction in the region. Many visitors to Springfields are paying their first visit to Lincolnshire and it is encouraging to learn that many return for a longer stay in order to visit the northern parts of this largely unspoilt country.

The sponsors of Springfields must be proud of the achievements of its short history. In twelve years the gardens have matured and grown from a brief spring spectacle to a truly horticultural exhibition centre with its theme—

Springfields — synonymous with all that is good in gardening.

**Next month :
LINCOLN CASTLE**