

Chapter 10

Promotion, Publicity and Organisation

Nowadays we are living in an age of consumer orientated advertising when every product is promoted every second of the day, assaulting the ear, the eye, even the sub liminal mind with cogent reasons why we need to purchase something we had never even thought of. When a dexterous presentation can make the most ordinary of detergents or brand of paper appealing, flowers would seem to be the easiest and most rewarding of subjects to promote by advertising.

Sadly the flower industry has failed to promote its product as well as it should. The explanation is that impact by promotion is very expensive and it has not been possible to organise support and collect funds from thousands of independent growers with a statutory levy. Attempts over the years have been made by an enthusiastic few like Horace Braybrooks but not supported by the majority. The Flower and Plants Council formerly chaired by Bob Goemans has done a very good job with a limited budget and in a quiet way has influenced the addition of flowers in many public and media scenes. Even its poster campaigns of years ago are still being used by the trade. What better slogans than 'Flowers make Friends' or 'Flowers say I Love You'.

F.P.C. recently was appealing for subscriptions of one per cent of the wholesale value of flowers to a half-hearted response. When manufacturers of domestic goods competing for the same household spending devote ten per cent of their budget to advertising, F.P.C.'s request was modest indeed.

If the promotion of flowers nationally has not been spectacular that does mean that bulb industry has done nothing to promote itself.

The first entrepreneurs at the beginning of the century were pioneering a new industry, developing a new market and many were jealous of their own production secrets and kept their hard won markets to themselves. Gradually problems began to appear which no individual could solve

alone but jointly perhaps influence could be brought to bear to secure necessary changes in conditions or government attitudes.

This began to occur during the strictures and shortages of the 1914-18 war and local growers with some of the Dutch immigrants who had started business began to group together.

On June 20th, 1916 at a meeting called at the White Swan 'Mr. R. D. Wellband, Mr. M. Dearnley, Mr. C. Slooten, Mr. J. G. Baxter, Mr. F. Paling, Mr. E.P. Gostelow, Mr. W.W. Harrison, Mr. A.E. George, Mr. J. G. Stagles, Mr. W. Harpham and his brother, Mr. A. Parkinson, J.J. Chilvers, Mr. H. Hurling, Messre. Dixon & Smith, Mr. E.L. Ayre, Mr. B. Greenaway, Mr. J. Croxford, Mr. G.H. Smith, Mr. S. Rodwell, Mr. Patchett, Mr. A.S. Royce and a host of other gentlemen' were present. (From the Minute Book).

It was decided to form a Bulb Growers & Market Gardeners Association for the benefit of growers residing in Spalding and district. Mr. R.D. Wellband was appointed chairman, a committee elected and the annual subscription fixed at ten shillings.

The first secretary was Mr. J. J. Chilvers and immediately plans were set in motion for a 'Bulbs and Fruit Show on August Bank Holiday. Very quickly the association was drawn into discussions at the Board of Agriculture in Whitehall where A.W. (Alf) White was the principle spokesman and after a deliberation of some years the association eventually became a subscribing member of a nationally representative body-the Chamber of Horticulture-in 1922.

But first a war had to be won. Scarce shipping and the U boat attacks on convoys led to emergency control of cropping under the guidance of the War Executive Committee (Chairman H.P. Carter) appointed by the Holland County Council. Representatives of the bulbgrowers met the W.E.C. where they were courteously received 'in a gentlemanly fashion'. After discussion on the national food crisis, agreement was reached to reduce the planting of bulb acreage for 1917/18 by 25% and to 'top crop' or drill approved cereals over further 25%.

Under new chairman Alf White the association continued to thrive and handle a catalogue of business embracing transport (railways), arbitration and disputes between members, defaulting salesmen, imports, promotion and shows — a preview of agendas sixty years later.

Market gardening and fruit production was a major part of members' activities and the first post war show was a Fruit Show on 3rd November, 1919 when winning entries were forwarded to the Cambridge Show. Lectures on Fruit culture became a regular feature.

The bulb grower members were closely following J.K. Ramsbottom's work on hot water treatment of narcissus to control eelworm and in 1920

Alf White generously invited members to visit J.T. White & Sons sterilising plant at Little London and inspect growing stocks in fields at the nursery and at Pinchbeck which had been sterilised before planting.

By 1922 new names began to appear taking part — G.F. Bateman, O.W. D'Alcorn, Fred Baxter, A.E. Farrow, Sid Culpin and his son Fred, Wm. Groom, Seymour Cobley and G. & Albert Elsom; in that year an exhibition of dry bulbs was held in the Masonic Hall in August, followed by a fruit show in October. The next spring the Masonic Hall was again used for the first Daffodil Show on Saturday 7th April, 1923 with G.W. Leak coming to judge, followed by a Tulip Show on the 5th May, admission sixpence.

By 1924 the support for the shows was strong enough for the association to mount the first forced flower show on 24th March.

Routine business now involved the committee in promotion of British bulbs at national and international exhibitions and in negotiations for co-operative transport arrangements and group bulk purchasing.

The settled routine was shattered by the General Strike and on 4th May, 1926 the executive committee was hurriedly called together to organise road lorries to take flowers to the markets — thus beginning the competition between road and rail which led eventually to the efficient road distribution network operating from Spalding forty years later.

By 1928 the competition of imported flowers was depressing the industry and threatening employment and representation was made for taxation on imported flowers. In 1929 and 1930 the commencement of experimental work on bulbs at the Holland County Council Farm Institute at Kirton involved delegates from the association invited to serve on the advisory committee.

The major part of the dry bulb crop was used locally at this time for forcing and planting down for flower production and only half a dozen larger growers and some merchants were selling on the dry bulb market. Typical charges for transport in 1930 per ton were:-

Spalding to London	£1.18.0.
Spalding to Manchester	£2.5.7.
Spalding to Glasgow	£4.2.8.
Spalding to Rotterdam	£1.3.6.

The rate for shipment to Rotterdam is interesting because substantial stocks of English bulbs were bought for growing in Holland for a year and then resold as Dutch bulbs.

During the next decade the association began to work closely with county branch of the Farmers' Union and eventually based its operation in the N.F.U. office.



Forcing Tulips

O.A. Taylor & Sons Ltd., Holbeach

The most dominant personality in the bulb business was Alf White for many years the president of the association and also the delegate from the county on the N.F.U. Flowers Committee in London. He in his dual role negotiated for bulb growers in publicity campaigns for British Horticulture, in the promotion of produce and direct approaches to government on applications for tariffs on imported flowers and for equal treatment for taxation on both bulb growers and farmers.

By the outbreak of war in 1939 many firm links had been established with the bulb trade in the Netherlands and Dutch companies had established nurseries around Spalding as mentioned earlier. Two local growers from Holbeach, O.A. Taylor and F.H. Bowser, begin to appear in the association's archives and began to assume responsibilities in the campaign to once more produce food for survival rather than bulbs and flowers. After the experience of 1914-18 the machinery of government control was speedily set in motion under county War Agricultural Executive Committees.

By 1940 instructions to reduce bulb planting by 25% were issued and in 1941 a further reduction to halve the 1939 acreage was ordered. Sales of bulbs were obviously reduced dramatically as plantings reduced and this was made worse by a ban on tulip forcing even if fuel shortages would have made forcing possible. War supplies had to be paid for and large quantities of tulip bulbs were exported to U.S.A. to help meet the cost of armaments.

1942 saw even further reductions to 25% of the 1939 plantings with similar restrictions on glasshouse flower production as austerity became official policy. Luxury of any kind had to be discouraged, even flowers, in the single minded pursuit of war production. This led to the destruction of surplus stocks and the banning of rail traffic for the transport of flowers threatened to stop the flower trade in its tracks. Fortunately a little persuasion was successful in allowing the use of available space on train services which had to run anyway and a system of rail coupons based on acreage of flowers planted was worked out by the bulb growers association, the N.F.U. and the railway companies. This enabled deliveries of flowers to be made to the major mainline markets and fairly rationed out transport space amongst the growers.

In the meantime the National Farmers Union representing the arable and livestock farmers of the country had been growing in influence and through its national headquarters in London occupied a special position with government ministers in discussions determining agricultural policy, arranging price reviews with the Ministry of Food and in consultation over impending legislation.

These matters were more difficult for a local association to handle on its own and in 1943 the association formally merged with the county N.F.U. and in 1947 was retitled the South Holland Horticultural Association, a specialist branch of the Lincs. (Holland) County N.F.U.

It retained its autonomy, holding its own elections to its executive committee, had direct representation to N.F.U. headquarters and maintained its particular responsibility to the bulb industry by virtue of its constitution which provided that a proportion of elected committee members must be bulb growers.

By happy coincidence the first chairman of the new association in 1947 was Willis White of the Daffodil Nurseries, Little London, a noted grower and a scion of the pioneering J.T. White.

After the war rebuilding of the flower industry began steadily as relaxation of war priorities evolved. It was a much slower process than expected because food rationing continued until after 1953.

For several years much of the association's business dealt with the allocation of bulb import licences and quotas which were based on imports contracted in 1938.

Efforts to resuscitate the retail business built up pre-war from insufficient stocks led to long and earnest efforts by the elders of the industry to restrain the more piratical elements. Small and inferior bulbs were finding their way into mail order and attempts were made to restrain the more lurid newspaper advertisements and to maintain the respectability of the industry by recommending minimum sizes.

Shortages of materials were hindering redevelopment and everything from wood to fuels and fertiliser was in short supply. As D. Konynenburg urged to the association, it made little sense for the government to allow the imports of thousands of tons of bulbs and not allow the import of fertilisers which could grow our own.

In 1947 the executive committee was involved in the preparation of the Agricultural and Horticultural Marketing Act which would solve producer's marketing problems for the post-war era and present day growers will be intrigued to find that in 1948 the association prepared a certification scheme for daffodils in consultation with J.O. Page, the ministry inspector for the county. After earnest deliberation it was shelved.

A new generation began to appear on the committee. Percy Taylor followed in his father's steps. and W.P. Worth, Dick Heath of Lincoln Nurseries and Horace Braybrooks of Cowbit took office, new men with new ideas, ably supported and stimulated by C.J. (Cliff) Vivian who had taken over secretarial duties in 1948, a recently returned young officer with a distinguished military career in the Far East.



Market Pack 1957 Open bloom in returnable wooden cases



Market Pack 1983 Tight bud in non-returnable cartons

The association became involved in organising a 'Tulip Week' in 1948 and planning a route through the tulip fields. The fame of the tulip fields ablaze with colour had spread far and wide and thousands of visitors were arriving in Spalding to view them. With the help of the R.A.C. a twenty five mile tour through villages and country lanes was planned to show the best of the fields and carefully signposted to avoid congestion.

So successful was this attraction that by 1950 'Tulip Time' was developed in conjunction with the Spalding Urban District Council over three designated weekends.

Such an influx of visitors not only overwhelmed the quiet country town district, but also created an opportunity. Why not put on some attraction to publicise our industry, felt some of the leading growers? We had flowers in abundance and the tulip heads had to be removed and disposed of to prevent disease spreading and to divert the vigour of the plant into making bigger bulbs. A few experiments with decorated cars showed that the tulip heads could be made into garlands and pinned on to backing materials in colourful designs and would hold their colour for a few days at that time of year.

Enthusiastically Dick Heath, the Horticultural Association chairman, Francis Hanson and colleagues backed by the persuasive administrative talents of Cliff Vivian the N.F.U. secretary and his branch secretaries Ron Hackford and Bertie Wray, set about the task of organising the Spalding Flower Parade. The services of Adrianus van Driel, experienced in designing the Dutch Corso in Hyacinths, were engaged. He showed how the concept of an artistic design on paper could be translated into reality by constructing a welded steel framework, covering it with mats of straw and then pinning on thousands of individual tulip flowers with steel hair pins to produce an eye dazzling scene on the finished float.

On a Saturday afternoon at the beginning of May 1958 the first Spalding Flower Parade passed through the streets of Spalding through crowds jostling the narrow streets in a carnival atmosphere as the bands played and has continued every year since.

Visitors come hundreds of miles by car, coach and train; even with a curtailed rail network over twenty special trains pull into Spalding station Parade Saturday morning and for miles round the town every available site becomes a temporary caravan village. Total numbers can only be estimated and the county police who have their busiest day in the county put the crowd numbers at almost 400,000 people.

In twenty five years the parade still appears to carry on exactly as before with the same style of floats, the marching bands, the good natured crowds.

Those closely involved detect gradual changes. There are less exhibitions of general interest like the veteran cars. The Tulip Queen of the past rode in an open horse drawn carriage; Miss Tulipland today is on a magnificent floral throne.

The floats themselves are ambitious, bigger and better. The expertise and finish of the dressing becomes more professional and after years of experience the floral confections prepared as final adornment by the Spalding Flower Lovers Club are perfection.

There has been a change in themes and design. From the sweeping aesthetic colour scapes of Adrianus van Driel for the first parades, the introduction of his son Kees as designer saw a greater emphasis on figures and animals translated into a fantasy world of flowers.

In the early parades most of the floats were built and dressed by local firms and villages. I well remember A. van Driel, a wonderful character bubbling over with enthusiasm, sitting in my kitchen with a bunch of dour horny handed growers, and convincing us that we of all people could actually make one of these floats — and we did for many years. Everyone in the village took part, building the frame in winter, stitching on the straw and finally putting on the tulip heads and floral displays. On the great day Ted Sneath drew the float through the streets with a team of fine Percheron horses from Money Bridge and on it were the pretty or lucky boys and girls of the village.

Of later years more floats are being sponsored by national companies and some of the old voluntary spirit has been lost — but that is all behind the scenes.

The lasting impression of those early floats was that they were marvellous — marvellous that they actually completed the course because I knew that this wheel could go flat or that piece of welding would barely stand the weight of flowers and riders or that the driver could only see a few inches of his course through a narrow peephole and was liable to pass out anyway from the built up of exhaust fumes! It was crazy but it was fun.

For the 1982 parade the organisation behind the scenes began immediately after the last parade. Parade chairman Rob Teeuw and Kees van Driel proposed a topical theme 'Maritime England' to fit the programme of the English Tourist Board. Float designs were prepared and approved by sponsors.

Building of the floats commenced by late October with an intricate outline of steel tracery welded by blacksmith Geoff Dodd on a more solid base carefully measured to admit a tractor to carry it a few days before the parade. Throughout the winter the work goes on with each float passing from steel fabricator to the hands of Pete Bell who covers the

framework with mats of straw, cut, shaped and carefully stitched with sack needle and string. There are no shortcuts on stitching for the 600 imported mats of rye straw though one year two floats were tried covered with sprayed polyurethane to find an alternative should the supply of mats fail.

Building and covering the twenty or more units (some floats comprise two sections) takes the teams until a day or two before the parade. In the meantime arrangements are made for a dozen marching bands to intersperse the floats, for the provision of the particular tractors required, for printing, catering, crowd control and policing requirements, programme selling, car and bus parking, and the thousand details requiring preparation. Key workers are briefed and extra staff earmarked until mid April when Rob Teeuw the chairman of the Flower Parade committee assesses the development of tulip heads in the fields. One week of hot weather could 'blow' too many or a cold spring could hold back the flowers and not open enough to dress the floats. Every year the weather gives this last minute uncertainty but after once having to postpone for a week the organisers have gained enough skill to choose the right date a year in advance. They have experimented with holding early flowers in cold store and tried using late daffodils if necessary, to gain flexibility.

Every year certain colours will be in short supply and an appeal to growers is launched for supplies of tulip heads, particularly white and very dark colours.

Eventually supplies come in on the Wenesday before the parade from growers all over Lincolnshire and even surrounding counties in support and early Thursday morning armies of workers arrive at the Bulb Auction Halls to pin on millions of fresh tulip heads in a hectic forty eight hours. Each float has a supervisor to check the colour scheme and organise the sequence of work, the whole operation still under the patient eye of Bertie Wray, the veteran, as keen and painstaking as ever since the very first parade.

By late Friday night every head is pinned into place, last minute drapery and flags are fixed in position and the floral decorations prepared by the Flower Lovers Club are mounted. Weary, Bertie and his team retire to the nearby Chequers for a sandwich and a libation to the gods of the weather for the morrow.

Early Saturday morning the floats move across the road to the football field for assembly into parade order and the halls are cleared ready for the buses bringing the bands.

For the next few hours Miss Tulipland and the girls and children to ride the floats don their costumes, drivers are briefed and bands assembled

while programme sellers dressed as nigger minstrels move among the crowds on the route. Car and bus parks fill to overcrowding and the streets become impassable.

At last Miss Tulipland and her deputy are rushed with police escort from the civic reception, lifted on their float by young willing hands and fork lift and by half past one, proud horses of the mounted police lead out in the four and a half mile route round the town.

Progress is at walking pace with occasional holdups at difficult corners. The market place is solid with spectators many of whom have been waiting patiently for hours. Ripples of applause and cheery shouts greet every float and band but many gaze in silence perhaps overwhelmed and unwilling to relax concentration, trying to absorb every feature, sight and sound of the spectacle.

Steadily the mile long procession moves out to the show gardens at Springfields, reforms there to close gaps and comes back on the circular route to the Sir Halley Stewart field where the floats are put into position for display for the following three days.

A sigh of relief for no serious downpours, no breakdowns, no problems or traffic snarls worse than usual and no crisis in the first aid services. At last everyone makes towards home, happy, tired but fulfilled. The 1982 parade has been a success.

The discussion heats up. What were the highlights? The giant double floats of Geest and Adams. . . the neat trim spectaculars of Oddfellows and Mayflower or Miss Tulipland . . . what about the eye-catching formation of the counter marching bands or the carnival Romsey Cadets? Everyone sees a different impression and right away Chairman Teeuw and his team get together with Kees van Driel to hold post mortems, pinpoint improvements and begin to plan for next year.

The display on the football field continues until the Tuesday before being taken away for stripping down to the base for rebuilding. It is surprising how well the colours have held and how the shades can still be distinguished as the flowers dry and wither over the coming weeks.

Behind the scenes the honorary treasurer Alan Bellamy calculates the receipts from the exhibition and the sale of programmes shared with local charities. Fortunately he reports the takings to be on target. Inflation has begun to hit the cost of mounting the parade. The grand total involved is almost £100,000. Much is covered by the sponsors of the floats; the hiring of bands, equipment, field rent, services and labour has to be met by gate money and programmes and there is a huge contribution made by growers who give flowers and equipment, by local firms, societies and voluntary helpers. The parade depends enormously on this goodwill freely given to break even and any surplus is carefully

saved to finance the coming year. The whole year's preparation is dependent on that one fine weekend as was shown in 1981 when bad weather, high petrol prices and recession left Alan nursing a hefty loss.

Springfields

The success of the Tulip Parade, the only display of floral floats in the world using tulips brought Spalding and its horticultural industry to the notice of the country. As a spectacle it is unique, the colours are more vivid than the Dutch parade in hyacinths, and the carnival atmosphere more tangible than the motorised Dutch corso or the American Rosebowl parade at Pasadena and unlike the Jersey Battle of flowers it is free.

During the early parades many visitors toured the fields of the Tulip Route and in spite of careful planning there were disappointments. Rotational needs found tulips planted far away from the roads; good husbandry demanded the removal of flower heads to create better bulbs and even the hospitable grower was reluctant to allow countless visitors with excitable pets or inquisitive children to roam uncontrolled through his fields and premises.

Sightseers could come miles only to find that later in the season the majority of the fields had been topped.

If visitors' interest was to be maintained and the image of this colourful industry was to be restored something had to be done.

Leading growers and the Horticultural Association began to explore the possibilities. Eventually it was decided to lay out a show garden where bulb growers and merchants could plant a growing catalogue of their wares and give visitors an opportunity to wander round at leisure and view the blooms at close quarters in a series of attractive settings.

The organisers were fortunate to have Cliff Vivian the N.F.U. Secretary already experienced with overall responsibility for the Flower Parade to act as lynchpin, administrator and zealous propounder to co-ordinate the support of all — growers, trade, local government and Ministry of Agriculture.

Step by step a site of twenty acres was acquired at Fulney, a skilled landscape architect, Carl van Empelen was engaged, support promised from exhibitors, equipment inveigled from supporting industry and finance arranged by interest free loans from growers, merchants and well wishers, bank loan and a grant from the Ministry under A.M.D.E.C. for marketing promotion.

A muddy beet field was landscaped, dells and a lake excavated, three miles of footpaths laid down, trees shrubs and lawns planted to give a changing pattern of settings broken into a variety of nooks and colonnades interspersed with shrubbery backdrops and sweeps of water



The Tulip Queen, Jill Whitehouse and attendants on her float in the first Flower Parade, 1959.

Photo: Springfields Brochure

and lawn. The plots of bulbs were planted and in spring 1966 Springfields Garden was open and has continued to mature in its own way to this day. It provides interest in its plantings to everyone from ideas for the casual home gardener to the botanical specialist and for the devotee of wild life it provides one of the few woodland areas of Holland Lincs.

If the birth of Springfields owes a lot to Cliff Vivian, the success of the actual creation and development owes even more to Leonard van Geest. The South Holland Lincs. Horticultural Association had set up a company in April 1964, Publicity for British Bulbs Ltd., to own the property and provide items of capital equipment and in 1966 the Springfields Horticultural Society was created to be responsible for the day to day administration of the gardens. A Council appointed by the Association to administer Springfields chose as its chairman Len van Geest who gave it solid unwavering support until his death, in time, wise counsel and by the kind of leadership which inspired us lesser mortals to follow. In spite of his many responsibilities he had always a moment to spare for the current tribulations of Springfields; it was near to his heart and in a sense the gardens themselves are as much a memorial to his life interest as the specially designed sundial designated to him. It was typical of him that after a severe illness one of his last outings was a quiet look at the gardens one morning alone with his wife.

We were pleased that he had the satisfaction eventually of passing a resolution to repay the original loans to the supporters of the project (except our bank) even though inflation had eroded the value. He felt more than anyone a debt of obligation to some very public spirited people quite outside the industry and here I must mention the Earl of Ancaster in particular.

The gardens opened as a spring flower season for six weeks under the first head gardener Jim Jack, with the administration looked after by Jean Pamley who was already involved with the Flower Parade office.

In spite of difficulties of flooding and severe frost killing many trees, 30,000 trees, shrubs and plants were established and over one million bulbs. There were fifty exhibition plots allocated to growers, wholesalers and retailers who could label their varieties and offer catalogues. In addition to the 3,000 varieties planted in the gardens some 300 varieties of tulip were planted in a 10,000 sq. ft. glasshouse to provide colour during the earlier weeks of opening.

Amenities provided from the beginning included a garden centre, a souvenir shop, photographic kiosk, a refreshment room for light refreshments, a first class restaurant and ample free car parking.



The Day Before. Decorating the Floats for the Flower Parade in Spalding Bulb and Produce Auction Hall

Photo: Springfields

Springfields Gardens



The existence of a permanent office at the gardens led to the absorption of the administration of P.B.B., Springfields Horticultural Society, the Flower Parade and eventually the forced flower show into that office with the responsibility for each project resting with Springfields Council which now has separate sub-committees to look after the Flower Parade and the flower show which has been renamed S.H.E. — Springfields Horticultural Exhibition.

The merger of these activities had one happy outcome when Jean the administrator became the wife of Kees van Driel the parade designer and they jointly managed affairs until Jean retired to bring up her family.

The gardens continued to improve as the rapid growth of trees and shrubs changed the appearance year by year but in spite of excellent attendances in the spring, the full potential was untapped. The scope of the horticultural 'shop window' was enlarged to include a summer season. Planting of trees and shrubs were modified to create year round interest, special plots of nursery stock were laid out by specialist exhibitors, summer bedding plants were introduced in the newest strains, Ayletts contributed a new feature in dahlias and the British Association of Rose Breeders collected from the breeders all over the U.K. specimen plantings of the newest rose varieties, a magnificent display of 10,000 rose bushes.

In 1976 the Duchess of Gloucester launched the summer season by naming one of the new roses and the summer season now gives the gardens ever changing attraction from the end of March until October every year.

The Springfields Horticultural Society has been registered as a charity since 1967 and continues a range of educational as well as promotional activities with a membership of some 500. The present energetic manager, Peter Atkinson, has now welcomed the two millionth visitor to Springfields and is heavily involved in developing tourism within the region.

He has been especially active in extending the success of the forced flower show.

From the earliest days of the Spalding and District Bulb Growers & Market Gardeners Association produce shows had been mounted. At first the main interest was in fruit shows, vegetable classes being poorly supported and soon dropped.

In 1923 bulb and daffodil flower shows commenced and the following year the association began a show for forced flowers. The shows were accompanied some years by trade stands and the occasion was often embellished by technical and scientific lectures. This pattern continued with breaks during the war years and after the association became a

specialist branch of the county N.F.U. its magnificent silver trophies were handed on for use at shows. The venue changed to the Corn Exchange in the town centre from the original setting in the Masonic Hall.

Regrettably the spring daffodil show has not survived. It is difficult to see why growers who have developed the most important centre of daffodil production in the world have not insisted that a daffodil show must be held and be the biggest of its kind. Perhaps a look into the history of the spring show will give us some understanding if not an acceptable excuse. As far back as 1924 negotiations took place with the Lincolnshire Daffodil Society about taking part in a show. Behind the brevity of the minuting one can sense that these commercial men had very different views from the 'amateurs' of the Society and it was decided not to be involved with the Spilsby show and to go it alone.

Even then the course did not run smoothly. Cold frosty springs led to last minute postponements with all the chaos entailed. Planning ahead in our capricious climate is still as difficult and today I notice that the optimum date for the most daffodils to be near their peak condition for showing is one week later at Spilsby than at Spalding just over thirty miles away. The 'commercial' growers too during those few weeks of April are under the greatest possible pressure working long hours to cover spring planting of other crops and to keep on top of huge volumes of cut flowers dealing not only with a volatile market but with acres of bloom whose condition changes daily and sometimes hourly.

Attempts to revive the spring daffodil show as a competitive event were made in 1980 but failed to generate enough support. At present the flame is being kept glowing by Arthur Exton and a few enthusiasts who display ranges of new and choice varieties of daffodils during April in a section at the Spring fields Gardens.

The show for forced flowers has stood the test of time much better. As a straight forward flower show it had never attracted much more than local interest and lapsed in 1966 at a time when a lot of the local energy was devoted to launching the show gardens. However the vacuum left was felt and in 1972 the show was revived with a different format. Instead of competitive classes of cut flowers, the main attractions were to be plots of growing forced tulip and daffodils displayed by leading firms. The new format was an instant success. Progressively the other ingredients were added; trade stands increased; a wider public was drawn along and competitive classes won back the support of growers large and small. The bulb packing halls loaned by Messrs. Geest were superseded by marquees at Springfields where February gales and blizzards began to bring an atmosphere of insecurity and imminent disaster. For the past few

years the courtesy of the Bulb & Produce auctioneers has provided a safer home, better access for traffic and warmer conditions for visitors. With 140 trade stands, seven thousand visitors and an ever increasing display of flowers, the Springfields Horticultural Exhibition has become an important event in the national horticultural calendar.

An important aspect of the tulip time activities is the support given by local clubs and societies. Rotary and Round Table play a big part in helping with car parking and programme selling and thereby fund many worthy causes. The Photographic Society were heavily committed in the production and sale of pictures, slides, postcards and films and eventually set up as Spring Photographic Ltd. to handle this business.

Village groups from Long Sutton and from West Pinchbeck entered floats for several years and the Oddfellows Society regularly decorate a neat entry in the parade; but when so many local institutions tend to refrain from direct support for tulip time and use the occasion to fill their coffers, the activities of the Spalding Young Farmers' Club deserve a telling

During the early post war years the Young Farmers noted the crowds of visitors for whom little preparation had been made. It seemed a good opportunity to put on a small show depicting the story of the tulip. A display of stands was prepared showing the journey of the tulip bulb from Turkey to Holland, models of field growing, gardening hints on the use of bulbs; and the tools and machinery used in the industry were all set out in the first of the Bulb Auction Halls in May 1951. The centre piece was a giant mosaic of tulip heads set out in a bed of sand edged with green turves cut from the river slipes at Tongue End (because strips of artificial grass matting would cost too much). Weary but confident as is the young prerogative the group prepared an explanatory leaflet, fixed an encouraging door charge of about 3d. and awaited results. Among them I recall Peter Scarr, Alec Garfoot, Margaret Culpin, Maxine Holmes (Mrs. E. Jessop), Ina Rowell, Paddy Sheehan, Michael and John Richardson, the Fletcher brothers and some irrepressible young Tidswells.

The story of the Tulip exhibition was well received by visitors of all kinds offering education to those who wanted to learn and a spectacle to those who came for a show. The show continued for some years and perhaps triggered their elders into launching the more ambitious ventures to follow.

New generations of the club have supported the parade and annually enter a float. The organisers wait for the Y.F.C. entry some years with trepidation. They know what it will be but never how. The club has abundant enthusiasm but little funds and construct their framework

from scrounged materials; the fabrication depends on the current complement of welders and, if they are in short supply, of carpenters. But come the day, the Y.F.C. float joins the column accompanied by an escort of clowns or comic costumes full of the spirit of carnival. At a time when the elaborate, custom built floats become very expensive, up to five thousand pounds each, the happy Y.F.C. float is an example of what can be achieved with little money and lots of teamwork.

As if taking part in the Parade is not enough the club then spends four days providing tea and refreshments for visitors to the display of floats on the Sir Halley Steward Field or as it used to be called the Black Swan football field.

The local activities depend on attracting visitors to Spalding, yet the health of the industry is dependent on a steady overseas trade to absorb a proportion of the bulbs and flowers produced. Rapid expansion twice before and after the 1939-45 war had shown that the home market could not absorb all the crop and several firms established firm contacts abroad and took part in selected overseas trade fairs and international horticultural exhibitions.

British Bulb Exporters

It seems a good idea to Arthur Moore, the Ministry of Agriculture National Bulbs Advisor, to launch a 'British' promotion for bulb exports and what better place than in Holland, the centre of Europe's bulb industry. In 1979 under Ministry backing and organising an exhibition of British daffodils was mounted in Hillegom, a gesture which confirmed Britain's place as a major factor in the international market and surprised the visitors with the range of varieties available.

The new ground had been broken and a group of growers and exporters was gathered to form British Bulb Exporters under the chairmanship of Rob Teeuw with Peter Atkinson and the Springfield office shouldering the administration. Growers subscribed funds, prepared flowers and with expertise of ministry specialists, backed by an excellent collection of varieties from Kirton and Rosewarne stations a large exhibition was put on again in Holland in 1981. The exporters group continues in being and aims to promote British bulbs where ever an opening is presented.

Tulip Time and Tourism

The influx of thousands of visitors from all over the U.K. and overseas for three or four weeks in Spring has brought fame and added trade to the area, extra business and income which spreads over the year far beyond the hectic weeks of tulip time. The very presence of large

numbers of people in a country market town also posed problems not previously encountered — traffic, parking, accommodation, food and by no means least the problem of providing adequate toilets in the right place at the right time.

Before long the local authorities had to get involved. At first feelings were mixed. Councillors represented shop-keepers whose tills were silent during the passage of the flower parade or residents whose mobility was hampered by all these foreigners crowding the streets and roads. After decades of diffidence, the whole community accepts that spring time in Spalding is unique and a source of pride and benefit to the area as a whole.

Even the most diehard reactionary Spaldonians have grown tolerant and in the eighties the industry of growers and the community and councillors are working closer together than ever before.

The first attempts at organisation for visitors came with the mapping out and signposting of the tulip route by the R.A.C. under Superintendent Hewison. The town council of the Spalding Urban District set up a Tulip Time Committee, inviting along representatives of the Rural Districts and was soon arranging the planning of the most suitable route with buses bypassing the narrowest country lanes.

The Tulip Time Committee generated fresh ideas and soon sponsored competitions to brighten the town — with competitions for the best dressed shop window and most attractively decorated house frontage and the best mosaic.

The decision in 1950 to appoint an annual Tulip Queen brought closer involvement in the activities. The most beautiful of the candidates was selected at a Tulip Ball and reigned for a year in great demand for appearances at local functions. Eventually invitations further afield suggested that the Queen needed to be able to converse about tulips and flowers or at least handle such questions with charm and led to the title being changed to Miss Tuli-land. The judges were instructed to choose an ambassadress rather than a beauty which makes it more bearable for those who are not chosen.

A public crowning by a celebrity gave a special cachet to the Queen's transformation to regal status until show business priced its celebrities out of the market.

The chief one of her many public duties is to ride round the route in the Tulip Parade to greet the crowds. For some years she was drawn by horses in an open landau with her deputy in attendance, but now the Tulip Time Committee provide her with a decorated float much more in keeping with the occasion of the Parade.



Tulip Mosaic at Holbeach

Photo: O.A. Taylor & Sons Ltd.

Forced Flower Show 1957, Spalding Corn Exchange. Horace Braybrooks and his display



The original Tulip Time Committee of 1949 was set up by the Chairman of the Spalding U.D.C. In 1952/3 it was widened to include joint membership from the three District councils concerned and the South Holland Horticultural Association. Since the reorganisation of local government the function of the committee has been widened to include both tulip time and tourism. A small staff headed by Barbara Moore, now a veteran of many tulip times, co-ordinates the many activities. The town is decorated with bunting and flags; the parks department prepare special bulb plantings and erect figures in the streets decorated like the floats in tulip heads. Mosaics are encouraged. Traffic plans are prepared in advance with the police and even the repair of roads on the route itself have to be arranged to be completed or deferred to miss the beginning of May.

On parade day itself the district council holds a civic reception to which the Worshipful Company of Gardeners are invited. After lunch Miss Tulipland has to dash hurriedly away to take her place in the parade and after the Master of the Company has made an award to the person making the greatest contribution to Tulip Time, those present view the passage of the parade from a specially erected grandstand.

For the rest of the year Barbara Moore's office is busy with tourism duties, preparing leaflets, organising special information centres, collating and publicising the efforts of clubs and societies which put on demonstrations of their arts and skills and listing the many churches specially decorated for the occasion. Enquiries for accommodation have to be dealt with and the extra arrangements for feeding the multitudes have to be listed. Every available site in the town is earmarked for parking and temporary caravan parks are organised on spare council sports fields and on sites for several miles round the town.

Future plans include the organisation of a comprehensive spring festival for the whole period embracing music and the arts.