

A Right Royal Day

Sandringham Flower Show July 23rd

It was one of these “normal” July days unlike those scorchers we’ve been having-it could be brilliantly warm or it could be pouring! Summer dresses were donned (Brian!) but brollies packed as insurance. We left Ruston’s at 8 30 sharp and after a short comfort break, we reached our destination-Sandringham Flower Show. The coach park was pretty full already, showing what a hot ticket event it was. Weren’t we lucky!

Now in its 142nd year, the Sandringham Flower Show is one of the leading events in the locality, enjoying royal patronage. Incredibly, the show is only open for ONE day and often sees 20,000 visitors in that time. In the month beforehand, local Estate workers, pensioners and tenants are encouraged to enter their own gardens in a competition, prizes being awarded on the day. There are categories for everything-vegetables, plants, floral displays and actual mini gardens. There are demonstrations, live music, talks by well-known gardening pundits and craft stalls everywhere. The profits go to local charities and since 1977, more than £825,000 has been donated to worthy causes, many of which had stands there themselves.

Full of excitement, we clutched our entry tickets and off we went. First on the agenda was a visit to Sandringham Church, which I had never seen inside before. It was small but magnificent, with a silver pulpit and altar gleaming under a stunningly decorated ceiling. The carved wood of the pews and the screen round the altar simply took your breath away, as did the memorials to past monarchs, reminding us of our rich cultural heritage. Outside, the WI were doing a grand job with tea and cake, so duly fortified, we headed onwards.

Suddenly a cry went round- “The King is coming!” and crowds started to pour towards two marquees, where a walkway had been blocked off and sinister looking gentlemen in dark suits patrolled the area. We joined the throng and, sure enough, King Charles and Queen Camilla came out to talk to the crowds. Suddenly their guards were all smiles as cheers went up and the royal couple talked to their eager fans. In how many countries could you be so close to such important figureheads? Some of our party got fabulous close up snaps as unique souvenirs, before Charles and Camilla rode off in their magnificent open carriage, surrounded by their liveried coachmen in dazzling scarlet. Could the day get any better?

Well it did! As if on royal command, the sun broke through and we bathed in the unexpected sunshine. Brollies? As if! Time to explore those marquees. The plants on show were gorgeous and not overpriced for such an event. I am always stunned by the floral displays and there were some fabulous entries. My friend described one winning arrangement as “all the sun’s rays in one vase.” Perfect! It was a glorious cascade of sunflowers, combined with foliage, peach roses and yellow flowers I did not recognise. Another was obviously based on minimalist Japanese creations, with lush green leaves highlighting brilliant white flowers, all set in a shallow dish of pebbles and clear water. The mini garden which deservedly won first prize was designed as a learning environment for young children and was being donated to its creator’s daughter’s primary school. It had its own Buggingham Palace as an insect hotel. Such imagination, but also testimony to the current monarch’s close involvement with charity.

Time for sustenance. What to eat? Pastries? Crepes? Sausage rolls? Ice cream? Plenty of choice. The band was playing, so what better place to sit and enjoy the music these talented youngsters provided? Then on to the craft stands, where you could see the most amazing

sculptures of wood, metal- and Christmas shopping started early for some. Carrier bags full, purses empty, we strolled to the edge of the show, where you had a magnificent view of Sandringham itself, the perfect backdrop.

All too soon it was 4pm and we had to leave. It had been the perfect summer's day out in every respect, not least being welcomed by The Royal Family in person. Even the roads were clear. Thank you to the usual suspects, Jane, Brian, Chris and Stewart our trusty driver, for another special memory to treasure.

Barbara Pearce