

Festival days

Once the Garden Festival was under way, staff fell into a regular schedule. The day would begin early, as maintenance gangs roamed the site, tending the plants (both indoor and outdoor)¹²⁰, irrigating the site from the huge reservoirs and generally tidying up. The trains, trams and other attractions also had to be maintained and any damage to exhibits made good. These tasks had to be completed by 9:30am to keep absolutely clear of each day's 10am opening time. Also arriving in time to be ready for that hour were the hundreds of catering, ticketing and shop workers, train and tram drivers, stewards, water and other safety personnel as well as those attending to each staffed exhibit.



A member of the Natural Theatre Company of Bath out for a stroll - Allan Harris

Entertainment

A kaleidoscopic array of entertainers graced the Garden Festival over its 152 days. Michael Dale had promised nearly 60 events every one of those days and – though some of these were regular features, others (particularly international acts) took short ‘residencies’ before moving on and some made one-off appearances.

Some of the regular acts have become firmly embedded in memories of the Festival. Best remembered is probably Big Rory, the kilted stilt walker responsible for the Alpine ski stunt mentioned above. Mike Rowan, originally a social worker, played the part of Big Rory. At the Festival, and throughout his career, his collaborator John Brown would join him as a ‘Wee Malky’, a baby in a huge pram. Rowan – who first assumed the role of the ten-foot-tall Scotsman to help out a friend ‘putting on a show’ in Tel Aviv – ended up playing the part around the world for 42 years, only retiring at the age of 76. (Another passion project has been his restoration of Mains Castle, the oldest building in East Kilbride¹²¹ with the help of Brown, an architect¹²².) During the Royal Opening Rory pushed the pram up to the official carriage so that Wee Malky could hand a bunch of flowers to Charles with the words ‘these are for your lady’; it is a blessing that the royal security detail must have been in a relaxed frame of mind. Rowan and Brown – who worked five hours a day, six days a week throughout the Festival – for variety deployed some of their other turns, as Egyptian ‘sand dancers’ and a pair of bothersome seagulls¹²³.

The Natural Theatre Company of Bath were another resident act. The ‘Naturals’ emerged at the start of the 1970s from the fairly anarchic Bath Arts Workshop to become an international street theatre company. Their surreal and sometimes slightly confrontational walkabout antics were helmed throughout most of a career – which continues to this day – by the larger-than-life Ralph Oswick. Highlights have included being company in residence at the Millennium Dome's 1999-



Big Rory and Wee Malky entertain visitors - Marjory Horne



Street theatre at the New Zealand Friendship Garden - Donald McCrae



Glasgow's legendary Robert the Robot at the Eye Garden - Ruth Duncan



'A day out of this world' - Donald McCrae



The Daily Parade of Performing Artists at the High Street - Donald McCrae



All the way from Nice: the Air France Heads - Stewart Russell

2000 celebrations. Visitors to the Garden Festival will recall the flower-pot-headed men that they set to stride purposefully around the site. Other regular performers included the Tony & Derek Theatre Co. from Edinburgh (‘consummate masters of disguise and drama!’)¹²⁴ and the performance artist Alistair Snow who provided an underwater percussion band, a ‘concerto for nine mountains and a horn’, edible versions of prized works of art and a vintage lawnmower ballet¹²⁵. The blank-faced robotic dancer ‘Robert the Robot’, recalled by generations of Glaswegians from his perennial (and to some then-youngsters rather unsettling) presence on Argyle Street also made appearances.

West Germany's The Crazy Idiots appeared on an initial two-week contract as three giant penguins who confronted or hassled anyone they could find, flicking toupees from the heads of balding men, blocking phone booths whilst queues built up and even beleaguering Sergeant Macdonald, one of the onsite police officers. This antisocial behaviour was frequently raised at the morning management meetings, but when they left the site Michael Dale began to receive letters from the public demanding their return, which he duly arranged¹²⁶.

An events sheet for every day was available to visitors, and together these provide ample evidence of the sheer quantity and variety of the acts that Dale and his team had been able to book and organise over each of the Garden Festival's 152 days. A huge effort was required to keep the Festival's ten official Events Areas occupied, in addition to the various roving attractions. One day – the 13th of August, for example, and chosen at random – saw robotic dancers, a comedy multi-instrumentalist, road safety training, an introduction to knitwear design, chainsaw sculpture, pottery and woodcarving demonstrations, a rose, carnation and sweet pea show, a Q&A with staff from the Royal Botanic Gardens of Edinburgh, sub-aqua dive training, ‘short tennis’ training, Andy Cameron's Saturday Club broadcasting from the BBC Pavilion, Leith Community Concert Band, a celebration of the 100th birthday of John Logie Baird, a steel band, a dramatic presentation of the Scots Gospel, the chance for children to feed baby lambs and calves, a demonstration of life in a tipi, the Clyde Model Boat Cup competition, the pipes and drums of the 51st Highland Volunteers, the Kings Park Brass Ensemble, the Priesthill Marionette Puppet Group, folk musician Michael MacBean, sailing and rowing schools, a pro-celebrity gardening quiz, music and dancing from the Kurdistan Ensemble, Scottish country dancing, a ‘twirling team’, the Dunbartonshire Concert Band, a jazz quartet, a saxophone quartet and a barbers' shop quartet¹²⁷. In addition, a full-sized church organ mounted on a trailer was available to entertain across the site, as it was every day. This is not an exhaustive list and omits repeat performances and the regular performers mentioned above.

The Festival design avoided formal concert halls or proscenium arch stages to favour instead a more open and integrated events programme. Every day the Daily Parade of Performing Artists processed down the Festival High Street, led by a pipe band and followed up by a marching brass band (the programme ensured that there



Under construction - Iain Bruce



Michael Gannon

“I went to the Garden Festival with friends and family. It was quite nice to actually walk across the bridge and see what we did. I never went on the Coca-Cola ride though. It would have probably turned my stomach inside out.”

Iain Bruce, Crystal Pavilion architect, Bruce, Patience and Wernham

The **CRYSTAL PAVILION** – which occupied the eastern half of this combined garden – remains one of the most remembered Garden Festival pavilions, largely due to the dramatic impact of its radical design; its shining, other-worldly blue-glass form could be clearly viewed from the north side of the Clyde. The genesis of the pavilion lies with the Hunterian Museum’s dynamic Curator of Mineralogy, Dr Graham Durant. Durant had long considered the possibilities of popular science communication and upon the announcement of the Festival identified an opportunity to take his ideas forward²³. Another man who spotted an opportunity was Iain Bruce of the fledgling architects Bruce, Patience and Wernham; recent work with Ian Linn of the Stirling contractor Capital Aluminium Systems using novel structural silicone glazing techniques had given him the idea for an entirely glazed building based on the forms of copper sulphate crystals. Upon seeing an article of Durant’s proposing a new public centre for science, he cold-called the Hunterian and suggested a meeting. The SDA, still nurturing a wish to establish a long-term science centre by the Clyde, were highly receptive to the proposal. Actually designing a structure of this complexity before the widespread adoption of Computer Aided Design (CAD) brought its own challenges. However, Dakers Fleming of the Strathclyde School of Architecture – an early adopter of CAD – did help with some visualisations and that exercise also confirmed that the risk of solar heat gain would not be a significant issue within what was an unprecedented context. Linn spent a whole year working out the specifications of the 500 panels (in three different shades of blue) involved²⁴. In this way the Festival acquired a mini science centre whose design itself explored a range of innovative possibilities, being the first building in the UK constructed using glazed structural silicon panels with a self-cleaning finish.. Ove Arup provided a completely-demountable framework to support the 13.5 tonnes of glass involved²⁵. As well as its educational role, the pavilion

The 1988 Glasgow Garden Festival

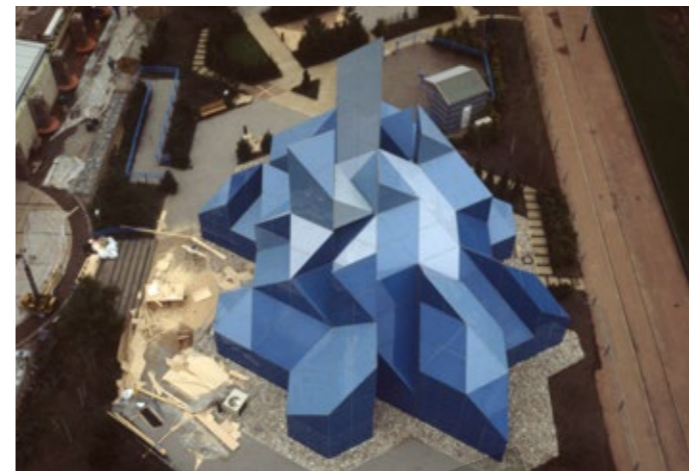


As seen from the Environment Show - Richard East

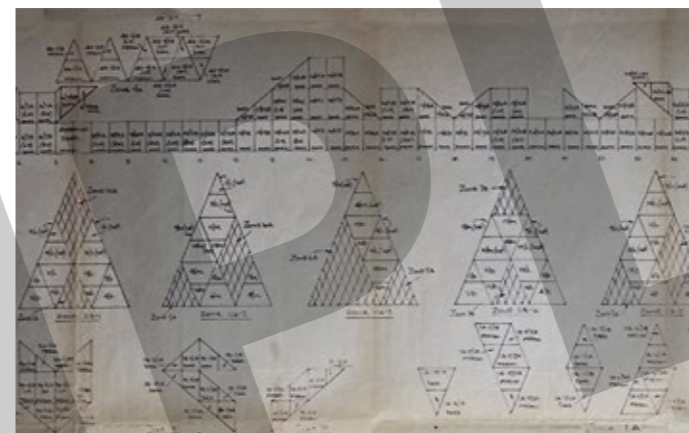


Allan Harris

Gazetteer of the Garden Festival



Under construction - Richard East



Detail of Ian Linn’s layout drawing for the Crystal Pavilion - Ian Linn/ Capital Aluminium Systems



Esplanade mounds with the Crystal Pavilion beyond - Tommy Quinn

was a shop window for many technology companies, and their financial engagement made the pavilion possible – the involvement of Michigan’s Dow Corning, pioneers of structural silicone, was particularly vital. An early appeal to a whole swathe of commercial and research organisations²⁶ bore fruit and the project went ahead with a long and impressive list of contributors ranging from Caithness Glass to NASA²⁷. Within, a glittering array of interactive exhibits, holograms and lasers as well as gems and crystals of all kinds made good on the promise of the building itself. Growing crystal gardens created a neat counterpoint to the growing flora of the rest of the Festival, the Garden Festival logo was depicted in coloured gemstones, and the industrial applications of crystals were explained²⁸. One particular diamond was accompanied by 24-hour security and withdrawn from display shortly after the royal visit²⁹. Following the closure of the Festival, the next step in Graham Durant’s mission of popular science education was the Dome of Discovery, which he set up along with former Science Museum curator Stephen Pizzey and Tom Johnston of Barr & Stroud³⁰. This occupied the South Rotunda from 1990-92³¹; Pizzey’s 1988 travelling science show the ‘Discovery Dome’ provided a useful precedent for the project³². In turn, the Dome of Discovery acted as a precursor to Glasgow Science Centre, a project in which Durant took a leading role both in establishing the Centre and in the creation of its exhibitions. With the opening of the Science Centre in 2001 it finally came about that the ‘Omnichentre’ envisaged in the earliest Festival plans and schedules appeared by the banks of the urban Clyde. In 2003, Durant, then Deputy Director of the Hunterian, was appointed Director of the National Science and Technology Centre (now Questacon) in Canberra, Australia³². He retired from this position in August 2022³³.



Iain Bruce



The Garden Festival logo rendered in gemstones - Fiona Langston

The Crystal Pavilion was always intended to be demountable, and various speculations had been made about its reuse. However, in the end these were scaled down (at one point it may have been headed for a garden centre in Perth) and finally abandoned after it was badly damaged during dismantling. Presumably the parts were scrapped thereafter.

After the Garden Festival