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Contents

- 46 – 75 Report of the Council, Accounts and Balance Sheets
- 76 – 78 The Secretary's page
- 78 – 81 AUDREY V. BROOKS: Notes from Wisley
- 82 – 83 E. B. ANDERSON: *Iris unguicularis*
- 84 – 92 ELSPETH M. HARRIS: The Shinfield Grange Garden—University of Reading
- 92 – 95 MICHAEL A. COOLING: Peat-sand composts. Part II. The use of peat-sand composts in the production of high-quality bedding plants
- Note from Fellow:
- 96 G. H. PINCKNEY: Camellia 'Leonard Messel'
- 96 Fellows wishing to obtain plants rare in cultivation.
- 97 – 100 Book Notes

Cover picture: Camellia 'Leonard Messel'

Photo: Ernest Crowson

The Shinfield Grange Garden— University of Reading

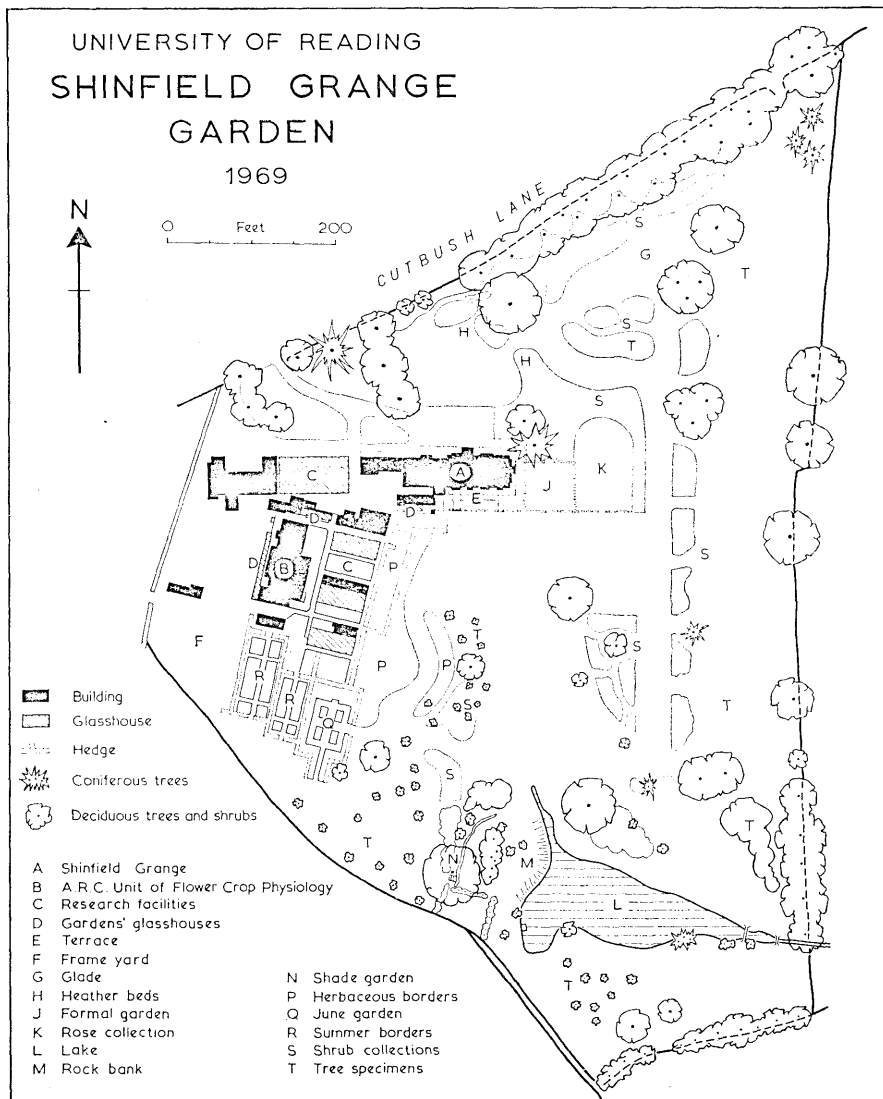
ELSPETH M. HARRIS .

FEW people travelling along Cutbush Lane in Berkshire, just south of Reading, can be aware that Saxon fortifications, thrown up in A.D. 871 against the invading Danes, were called Cutbush Moats or that the nearby village of Shinfield was then known as Selingasfeld, "The clearing belonging to Sel". Neither will the modern observer find any evidence of the common land, or "Bush Green", whereon in the eighteenth century grew a whitethorn tree trained as a Prince of Wales feather. Only a few handsome oaks suggest a probable ancestry with the trees of Windsor Great Forest, which once stretched this far west and into which SEL must have advanced to claim his land.

It is, however, much easier to trace the history of the large property known as Shinfield Grange, on the south side of Cutbush Lane. The records show that in 1655, a small, redbrick farm-house was built on this site as a tenant farm of the Manor of Shinfield (which had itself been recorded in Domesday Book as worth the princely sum of £8). From this humble beginning, the farm-house gradually rose in the social scale until, in 1857, it became the private property of the COBHAM family who enlarged it considerably. The late SIR ERIC PALMER was its last private owner and, in 1949, Shinfield Grange estate passed into the hands of the University of Reading. Nevertheless, the small mellow bricks of part of the outer walls, and the low ceiling and wide chimney of the old kitchen, now an entrance hall, still testify to its humble farm-house origins.

The acquisition of the estate by the University was destined radically to alter Shinfield Grange; its farms were absorbed into the Department of Agriculture and the house became the centre of the Department of Horticulture, with most of the 15 acres immediately surrounding it designated as the site for an ornamental, teaching garden. So in 1950 a start was made, the house being converted into laboratories and offices, research glasshouses built and the challenging task initiated of creating this garden in the grounds.

The site possessed some attractive features, most of them a heritage from the preceding century. To the west of the house was a stable block (which was converted into two staff cottages) and a partly walled kitchen-garden with a lean-to vinery. The other glass, also somewhat derelict, consisted of a small propagating house and a conservatory attached to the south side of the house. Some typical Victorian flower beds and shrubberies constituted the garden near the Grange itself but the greatest asset lay in the parkland of the remaining 12 acres. Here some fine specimen trees had been planted, probably about the turn of the century. These have been used as focal points in the design and give an unexpected air of maturity to the new garden.



Thus a *Cedrus deodora* marks the drive entrance, and its relative, *C. atlantica* 'Glauca', rubs shoulders with the north-east corner of the house—how often we have wished the planters could have visualized its mature spread more accurately and given it more breathing space, and how often have we immediately wondered if we are not now repeating their error in our own plantings! Two beautiful groups of common lime deserve notice in this context; they stand, three trees to a group, in the eastern section of the site

and dominate the skyline, whether in their red-twigged winter bareness, in the light-green flush of spring foliage or when heavy with blossom and resonant with bees. North-east of them is a fine walnut, another occurs on the south lawn and, along the boundary with Cutbush Lane, is a valuable line of oaks, a particularly large tree standing alone which draws the eye from several approach points and dominates that side of the front lawn. Apart from its turf and trees, the site also contains a low-lying wet area in the south-east angle, which drains into the river Loddon and immediately suggested itself as the place for a water-garden. In all probability this was originally a pit supplying the estate with gravel but in 1950 it presented only the appearance of a neglected swamp, frequented by moorhens and an occasional heron.

They did no damage; but it was a very different story elsewhere in the grounds where squirrels and rabbits proved a real menace and enforced the use of wire netting round any new plantings, until organized shooting and the advent of myxomatosis reduced their depredations to a tolerable level. The fact that the garden lies in a frost-pocket presents a less tractable problem; care is needed in the siting of any plantings capable of becoming barriers to air drainage and some periodic losses from early and late frosts have come to be regarded as inevitable. The whole site is underlaid by the valley gravels of the Loddon basin and the soil is a sandy, slightly alkaline loam with some clay bands. The old soil of the kitchen garden was good; elsewhere, although easy to work, it requires feeding, in particular with organic matter. Financial problems are of course always associated with amenity horticulture and the making of this garden is no exception to the rule. It is not a commercial venture and relies entirely on an annual grant from the University moneys. The garden staff have shown much ingenuity and persistence in using any facility, however antiquated, to propagate stock and turn apparently waste material to good use, so that from very small beginnings there now exists a comprehensive and continually expanding garden.

The policy underlying the garden planning at Shinfield Grange has been to create a teaching garden which will demonstrate as wide a range of plant material as possible, used in a manner suited to the site, and providing material and areas for practical work and observation. A degree of conflict is bound to arise between the desire to landscape the grounds well and the need to amass a large collection of individual plants. The hope is that by using the site and plant materials wisely, this conflict can be minimized and that most of the various aspects of ornamental horticulture, as practised in southern Britain under outside conditions, can eventually be demonstrated in the garden in an aesthetically and ecologically satisfying manner.

In 1951 a start was made on clearing some of the poorer trees at the drive entrance and in the vicinity of the house. The stumps of two large, pollarded elms on the south lawn were dynamited, an occasion remembered for the understandable alarm of research workers in the buildings and the rejoicing of the garden staff outside as they watched the blast provide a culmination

to their labours. Apart from clearance work which, combined with tree surgery, has continued during each succeeding winter, the immediate plans of the early nineteen-fifties were centred on the old kitchen garden (B and adjacent C on the plan). Sheltered from the north and west by fine brick walls and in close proximity to the west end of the house with its yard and sheds, this garden was originally quartered by crazy-paving paths meeting at a central, brick-paved circle and had wide borders adjacent to the walls. The ancient fruit trees and bushes were grubbed, along with yards of derelict box hedging, and a hornbeam hedge was planted on the south and east sides of the garden. This served the dual purpose of enclosing it and of producing a background hedge for borders to be developed outside it later on. The south-facing border was used for semi-hardy climbers and wall shrubs, the shelter being such that *Sophora tetraptera*, *Passiflora caerulea*, *Solanum jasminoides*, *Abutilon vitifolium* and *Punica granatum* flowered and fruited well. A clematis collection covered the east-facing wall behind an early summer border of delphiniums, lupins, bearded irises and pinks, infilled with biennials such as sweet williams and Iceland poppies. Rose 'Albertine' took all the space it could find in the corner between these walls, ramping over an old tiled shed roof and resulting not only in a beautiful flowering display but some hazardous pruning operations into the bargain. The four central plots became much-needed nursery space (a propagating programme had been started in an effort to start stocking the garden largely from our own resources), and the peripheral borders carried teaching collections of annuals, tender perennials, bulbs and biennials. These collections were later moved into the Summer Border area (R) which was laid out between the southern boundary and the kitchen garden, so vacating space for climbing and bush roses in the latter. Today, little trace remains of this garden since it was required for the expansion of the research facilities of the Department and for the building of the Agricultural Research Council's Unit of Flower Crop Physiology in the period 1960-65.

Other early efforts were aimed at developing the immediate surrounds of the house. On the south and east sides construction started on a wide terrace (E), terminating in the old conservatory on the west. This building collapsed dramatically under heavy snow in December 1957 and was replaced by a pergola constructed from old oak timbers which had been salvaged from a ruined summer-house in the grounds. The width of the terrace was dictated by the necessity to get around the conservatory and the desire to place the house visually on a wide platform and so apparently absorb it into the landscape. A rough grass area, once a lawn, stretched below the south terrace and a major task in the autumn of 1953 was to lift and level the turf, the job being completed with some triumph on Christmas Eve. Two flights of steps lead on to it and, at the west end, the terrace gains this lower level by means of a slope suitable for trucks and barrows and flanked by two alpine scree beds. This lawn has since been extended and now forms a large open space contrasting well with the enclosed and planted areas on either side, and giving a view south-east across the lake to open country and the spire of Arborfield Church some three miles distant. It is hoped to keep this view

open, whereas the rest of the garden is or will be contained by boundary plantings.

In the terrace borders there are some permanent features as well as the annually renewed spring and summer bedding plants: on the south side only a *Magnolia grandiflora* and *Parthenocissus tricuspidata* were left from earlier days and both benefited greatly from the remaking and widening of the borders. *Clematis armandii* 'Apple Blossom' joined the Boston Ivy with *Cytisus battandieri* and *Abutilon megapotamicum* below (through a twelve month this was hardly ever out of flower). All these flourished until over-enthusiastic sparrows defeated all efforts to evict them from the clematis—even "Scaraweb" was used for nesting material—and the result was its removal. The severe winter of 1962–63 killed the other plants as well as the *Ceanothus* and *Cistus* species in these borders. *Buddleia fallowiana* has replaced the Moroccan Broom, and *Acacia dealbata*, raised from seed, reached gutter level in four years and has subsequently flowered. Bold foliage effect is produced by a loquat, *Eriobotrya japonica*, tucked in between two bay-windows; regrettably its flowers appear too early for fruit to set. Other plants include *Myrtus communis* and its narrow-leaved form, 'Tarentina'; vigorous specimens of wisteria, *Vitis coignetiae* and *V. brevipedunculata* resplendent with lilac-blue berries, and the lovely *Hoheria lyallii* var. *glabrata* all on the pergola, whilst *Actinidia chinensis*, *Campsis grandiflora* and *Schizandra rubriflora* find space on the walls. The north side of the house is covered with *Pyracantha* varieties, *Clematis montana*, *Vitis henryana*, *Schizophragma hydrangeoides* and an extensive specimen of *Hydrangea petiolaris*. The only remnant of the shrubbery that enveloped this part of the building is a big *Syringa* 'Souvenir de Louis Späth' now rejuvenated by hard-pruning, a large-leaved yellow-variegated ivy and Virginia creeper, *Parthenocissus quinquefolia*.

An abandoned tennis court lay to the east of the house, protected from it by a thick yew hedge. This hedge line and the new east terrace wall (area K) were parallel and it was logical to conceive a small, square garden below the house level created by planting two further yew hedges at right angles to these lines. This is now the formal garden (J); it has access from the terrace and the south lawn, the drooping branches of the Atlas cedar behind act as an impressive backcloth and the 4-foot-wide flower beds form a simple circular pattern within the square. Each year a spring bedding scheme followed by a summer one is planted here and, in conjunction with any similar schemes carried out in the borders around the house, demonstrates the work involved and some of the material available for such bedding displays in the south of England. The Summer border area (R) appears in this context also; it was one of the first points of expansion beyond the old kitchen garden and now takes the form of a series of long borders and rectangular beds, divided and protected by beech and hornbeam hedges. Collections of tulips, hardy and half-hardy annuals, dahlias, fuchsias, geraniums, early-flowering chrysanthemums and michaelmas daisies are grown here. A more recent innovation has been the addition of a "tropical foliage border" (Fig. 39), devoted to a summer display of annuals and tender perennials grown



SHINFIELD GRANGE, READING

Photos: E. Harris

FIG. 32 (*above*)—Part of the herbaceous border, looking towards Shinfield Grange, taken in late June

FIG. 33 (*below*)—The island border of herbaceous plants in mid-July (see p. 89)





SHINFIELD GRANGE, READING

Photos: E. Harris

FIG. 34 (*above*)—The rock garden, beyond the lake, before planting in spring
(see p. 91).

FIG. 35—Rose 'Rambling Rector' in June





SHINFIELD GRANGE

Photos: E. Harris

FIG. 38 (above)—Border of half-hardy annuals in early August, with *Antirrhinum* 'Crimson Frontier Hybrid', *Petunia* 'Pale Moon' and *Salvia farinacea* (see p. 88)

FIG. 39 (right)—Foliage border of sub-tropical bedding plants, including *Ricinus communis* 'Sanguineus', *Eucalyptus globulus*, and *Kochia scoparia* 'Childsii' (see p. 88)

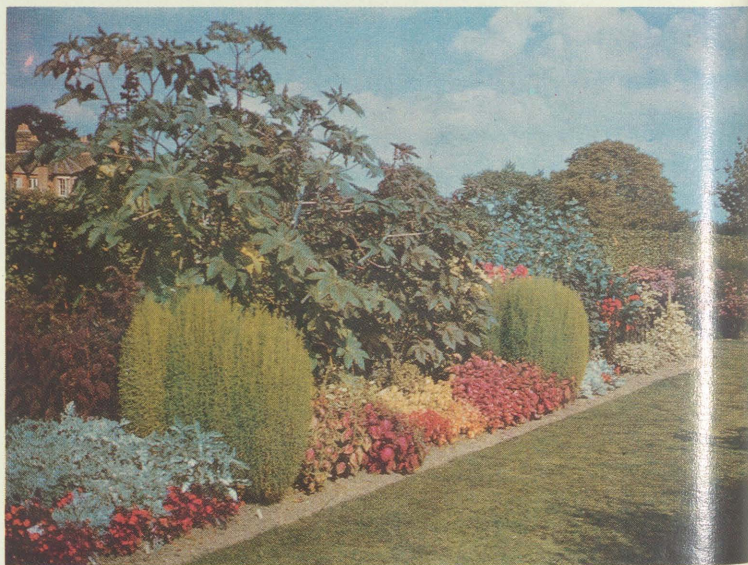


FIG. 40 (left)—A camellia flower converted to a gall by *Exobasidium camelliae* (see p. 78)

chiefly for their foliage effects. These borders are of considerable value in the teaching programme and also maintain stocks of plants not in current use in the displays around the house.

Hardy herbaceous perennials were represented early in the collections, a start being made in 1952 on a wide herbaceous border to the south-east of the house and backed by one of the newly planted hornbeam hedges (P). Opposite is a new island border (Figs. 32, 33) which follows similar curves, thus partly enclosing a wide grass walk between the two borders. The walk itself leads to a junction from which it is possible either to turn east towards the lake or west, in which case a surprise awaits the visitor for, partially hidden behind a spreading American red oak, is a small garden of peonies, irises, pinks and rambling and climbing roses. This is the June garden (Q) which serves the dual purpose of completing the formal series of summer borders with a quiet, self-contained garden and also demonstrates planting for a one-season effect. To the purist the herbaceous borders may cause a qualm because shrubs have been admitted, among them *Buddleia alternifolia*, *B. globosa*, *B. davidii* cultivars, *Sorbaria arborea*, *Cornus alba*, *Perowskia*, *Caryopteris*, deciduous *Ceanothus* and a number of spreading junipers. The annual spring pruning required by all but the first and last allows for some control of growth, besides which they create both winter interest and background shelter and reduce the views of glasshouse roofs beyond. A handsome Irish yew had survived by the old conservatory and stands sentinel at the north end of the main border, its dark accent being enhanced in autumn by the brilliant colouring of an adjacent *Rhus typhina* whilst a young baytree thrives in its lee. At the other end are Japanese cherries, moved successfully as mature trees from the Department's previous garden; when in flower they are colourful above the emerging foliage of the perennials and serve as a visual link with other *Prunus* varieties beyond.

Of course, the establishment of woody plants called for much longer-term planning and many of them are only yet in their infancy or have still to be obtained. They have been used chiefly in one of two ways, either as individual specimens (and this is naturally the case with most of the trees) or in generic groups where representative species and cultivars are grown in close proximity. The plantings are all informal and at present occupy much of the land to the north and east of the house. It is here that some of the best old trees already mentioned occur, notably the cedars and limes, a line of hornbeams, a fine copper beech and the walnut. The disposition of the lower branches of the large oak on the north lawn partly dictated the shape of the heather beds (H) when they were laid out early in the life of the present garden. The positioning of this collection of *Erica* and *Calluna* cultivars was guided too by the knowledge that here the soil was more acid than elsewhere in the grounds and the existence of a wind-break of old rhododendrons behind these beds has provided a suitable background.

A natural glade area (G) lies away to the east of the heather beds, hidden from the house and formed by the pre-existing boundary oak and scrub to the north and the large walnut to the south. Careful extraction of some lofty

but poor Lombardy poplars, Norway spruce and sycamore allowed the oaks to stand free so that they are now the protective background for borders flanking this glade. The plantings are varied and include small groups of rhododendrons and azaleas at the east end (difficult subjects on this cold site and basically alkaline soil); further up the accent is upon woody plants happy in partial shade and giving good autumn foliage colours. *Sorbus*, *Acer*, *Betula* and *Cornus* species have all been planted in this capacity with associated shrubs; the trees should mature to form a light canopy over the plants below, and the heathers planted on the sunnier border margins provide continuity with the north lawn beds. Conifers find a home in the glade too, used as accent plants and with some of the larger species, e.g. *Sequoiadendron giganteum* and *Thuja plicata*, sited as eventual replacements for existing trees such as the walnut and limes. As a teaching aid an attempt is made where possible to group the conifers generically, *Chamaecyparis* species and cultivars on the south side, *Thuja* and *Thuyopsis* on the east and free-standing specimens of *Libocedrus decurrens*, *Cryptomeria japonica*, *Pinus*, *Picea* and *Abies* species within and around the glade. Deciduous conifers (*Larix* species, *Taxodium distichum* and *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*, and *Ginkgo biloba*) appear elsewhere near the lake and the junipers occupy sunny sites amongst the heathers and other shrubs.

A wind-break proved essential on the east boundary and within the garden itself. In the latter case, it was decided to use a collection of *Crataegus* species in conjunction with an old red hawthorn that stands on a slight ridge below the south lawn. These trees have grown slowly but are already a good wind-filter and visual separation. This is intensified by the rapid growth of a collection of *Hebe* and another of leguminous shrubby genera (*Cytisus*, *Genista*, *Ulex*, etc.) placed on this ridge to obtain full light and good drainage. The south garden boundary, below the summer borders, is a thick old barrier of Lawson's cypress, cherry laurel, lilac and elm. This has been preserved and flowering cherries established in its shade, the turf beneath them being gay in spring with narcissus planted to demonstrate the classification of the genus. Further from the boundary is a group of *Sorbus*, a few magnolias, a *Syringa* collection and a large *Catalpa bignonioides* raised in 1954 from a root cutting. Back on the east boundary, groups of Leyland cypress, Portugal and cherry laurel and hazel have been planted to thicken up the thorn and field maple already there. Little planting has yet taken place immediately within this belt apart from some specimen trees. However, nearer the house, the bush rose collection is now housed in a horseshoe-shaped area (K), and the main collections of shrubs are being established in borders flanking a wide grass walk, which leads south to the low-lying lake area and is terminated visually by a massive Lombardy poplar. *Forsythia*, *Berberis*, *Deutzia*, *Weigela*, *Philadelphus*, *Escallonia*, *Viburnum* and *Cotoneaster* are all represented. In order to avoid monotony these borders are broken by cross-paths leading into other plantings and one contains shrubs grown for their foliage effect. Nevertheless the avenue effect is strongly maintained in order to draw the visitor on to the south-east corner of the garden.

Here is the most recent development, still far from complete. The site contains the lake (L) and the old game covert (N), the plan being to convert the latter into a shade garden and the former into a water garden with associated rock banks and tree and shrub plantings. Several good oaks give protection from the north; a large elm towers over the shade garden and has been preserved for its beauty despite its drawback as a garden tree. In the north-east corner a boggy patch is home for a *Salix* collection whose bark coloration is good in winter, and on the south, where the ground is raised well above water-level, a collection of *Malus* is attractive in flower and fruit as long as bullfinch attacks can be discouraged. Groups of *Liquidambar styraciflua* and a specimen *Liriodendron tulipifera* stand well back from the water's edge. Further trees and shrubs will be planted for autumn colour; this should maintain seasonal interest in the area and will complement the autumn colour in the glade.

The creation of the lake proceeded somewhat haphazardly until the autumn of 1962 when the presence of a machine preparing for the A.R.C. Unit foundations presented the opportunity to re-dredge the old gravel pit (it had been partly cleared and shaped in 1952 and a dam built at its eastern end but further work had to be abandoned for lack of staff). All the spoil was painstakingly removed to the north-west bank and there, beside a ditch which carries water into the lake from the rest of the grounds, an enlarged bank was built, shaped into the surrounding contours to disguise its artificial nature (M). This happy idea (the brain-child of the Head Gardener, MR E. P. SAVAGE) was to produce in one stroke a south-facing slope for rock plants and a raised platform from which the lake could be viewed, approach paths being designed to lead to this vantage point (Fig. 34). The realization of the project was considerably aided by the accidental discovery of a quantity of excellent limestone on another University site and the granting of permission to remove it before it could be used for hard-core and lost for ever. This rock bank was completed in 1963 and it is hoped to extend it on the opposite side of the ditch as time and materials allow. Meanwhile, at the other end of the lake, the original dam was rebuilt and a bridge constructed over it. Once again fate took a hand through the discovery, on the same site as the rock, of some heavy pitch-pine timbers from the roof of a house recently destroyed by fire. These now carry the oak superstructure of the bridge and are strong enough to support a tractor and trailer. The lake banks will be kept open (apart from the establishment of two small weeping willows, an alder, a group of swamp cypress, a large *Gunnera manicata* and stands of *Cornus alba*); this allows extensive reflections and creates a feeling of spaciousness similar to that of the large lawn area around the house. However, the planting to north and west will delimit the site and partially screen it from the rest of the south garden, whilst fleeting glimpses of the water, seen from the approach paths, should hint at interesting features to be discovered there.

The making of the shade garden, to accommodate primulas, astilbes, hostas, ferns and other damp-loving subjects, followed the re-dredging of the lake and is still incomplete. It involved the removal of most of the game-

covert trees, all of them poor, although it was possible to keep a line of larch and thus a screen from the lake on the east. An old ditch was filled in, the ground area to a large extent re-shaped and another ditch opened up to bring water through the garden. The approach to this planting from the west passes under the elm and down a flight of log steps, giving a framed view of part of the lake beyond.

Little has been said of the day-to-day garden work; this is carried out by a small staff of Head Gardener, one or two men and one or more apprentices. Much hand-labour is still called for although machinery is now used more than in the early years. Plant raising is carried out in the three, small, lean-to greenhouses (D) and the frameyard (F), whilst reconstructed sheds provide steam-sterilizing and pot-washing facilities for the whole Department. Hopes are still entertained for an irrigation system covering the whole garden; to date this has only been possible in the terrace, herbaceous and summer border areas. Much remains to be done in the development of the garden and the results so far could not have been achieved without the willing enthusiasm of the garden staff, some of whose ideas are incorporated in the designs. The site still contains much untapped potential and each year educational possibilities are increased as further development takes place and plantings begin to mature. The prospect continues to be horticulturally most exciting and for students and staff alike the future holds considerable challenge.

N.B. Fellows who wish to view the gardens are welcome to do so provided they first make an appointment with The Secretary, Horticultural Research Laboratories, Shinfield Grange, Shinfield, Reading RG2 9AD.

Peat-sand composts. Part II.

The use of peat-sand composts in the production of high-quality bedding plants

MICHAEL A. COOLING

(Cooling's Nurseries, Chislehurst, Kent)

As specialist producers of bedding plants for our retail business the location of our nurseries in the centre of Chislehurst, only 9 miles from the heart of London, has been a great advantage from the sales point of view, but it was this geographical location which caused us to look at peat-sand composts as an alternative to John Innes loam-based mixes. Situated as we were in the late nineteen-fifties, we were finding that with the "urban sprawl" sources of good loam were increasingly difficult and