

IPPS European Exchange 2016[©]

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Charting a career path is not always easy, but sometimes we are fortunate enough to have experiences to show us the way. In 2016, I served as the delegate from the Southern Region - IPPS for the *Early-Career Propagator Exchange Program* with the European Region. The SR provides support to attend the annual meeting in Europe and to visit nurseries and gardens in the region. The experience was one of the richest of my life. I expanded not only my professional knowledge, but also my IPPS family. The 2016 meeting was in England, and my hosts and guides treated me with thoughtfulness and generosity. At every nursery, greenhouse, and garden - they introduced me to new plants, techniques, and technologies that will benefit me throughout my career.

Edwina Biddle, owner of Godfrey and Sons Nursery, picked me up from the airport in London. We started my European tour at her nursery, where her staff cares for a broad range of perennials in a quaint and inviting retail space. After a picturesque British lunch, we toured their expansive propagation house. They produce almost all of their own material, and for the first time I witnessed nematodes being used as a biological control. Edwina then took me to meet Tim Lawrence-Owen, who was President of IPPS European Region at the time. The drive to Tim's took us to the southern edge of England and the coastal environment around Chichester.

Tim and his wife Annette were very generous hosts. They took me to several of the many nurseries the area holds. The Isle of Wight, a large island off the coast, creates a microclimate on

the mainland near Chichister, which enables a warmer milder climate. That increase makes a difference—driving around the small towns in the area, we passed one nursery after another.

Our stops took us to the Tristram Nursery Group, a partnership of three nurseries that includes Walberton Nursery, where Tim Lawrence-Owen works, and Fleurie Nursery, where Lance Russel works. Lance Russel is my European-IPPS Exchange Program counterpart, who will visit the U.S. for the Southern Region meeting later that same month. All the nurseries we visited in the Chichester area were smart and well-maintained, but I was most struck by their resourceful use of space. Unlike many U.S. nurseries, operations in the UK are typically surrounded by neighborhoods or other industries. Land is limited and expensive, which has spurred ingenuity at these nurseries.

Tim and Annette also gave me the grand tour of Chichester, a breathtakingly beautiful city. We drank coffee beside a 900-year-old cathedral and strolled around a garden that's been there since 1158. We happened on a friend of Tim's who cares for the garden, and he took time to show us the site. We also visited West Dean Gardens, which illustrated England's long-standing dedication to horticulture and garden design.

After my adventures in Chichester, I took the train to Worcester, where I was met by Ben Gregory. He's the Product Development Manager at Wyevale Nurseries and the current Vice President of the IPPS European Region. Visiting the Wyevale Nurseries was a full-day event. They have three locations, each of which has its own specialty: grounds seedling transplants, containers, and trees. At each location, I was amazed at the range of products they offered and impressed with the efficiency of their processes. It's no wonder they are one of the leading producers in the country, with more than six million plants spread over 600 acres.

Next up was Bransford Nursery. They were unique for their use of automation and efficiency. They grow in new glass houses and poly tunnels, many of which use a sand ebb and flow system for irrigation. This allows them to produce very high-quality liners and container plants. Focusing on perennials, they pot and transplant most of their plant material using automation. Only 10% is potted by hand. From shipping to propagation, Bransford Nursery was top notch, so it was a treat to see them in action.

The next stop was Frank P. Matthews tree nursery, where they grow fruit and ornamental trees for retailers and garden centers. Because I began my career in fruit grafting, this was especially fun to see. Acres and acres of rootstock waiting to be grafted, scion stock fields, and a stunning display of espaliered apple trees at the entrance let us know we were at a world-class tree nursery. Frank P. Matthews is also where I met Sophie Meddins. She is a grower for the nursery, who would later receive the exchange program spot for 2017 and attend the Dallas meeting in the U.S.

Next, we traveled northward to Shifnal to attend the IPPS European Region conference. The talks were incredible, and I scrambled to write down every word and quickly convert liters to gallons. It was eye-opening not only to learn about the unique difficulties Europeans face in this industry, but also to find issues and experiences we have in common.

Located just around the corner from our hotel, Boningale Nursery produces over a million plants a year, the majority of which are produced on site. The nursery is committed to protecting the environment through the green industry. They have worked with the University of Sheffield to develop a line of products for green roofs. The substrate includes recycled brick, which has the added benefit of conserving resources. The next stop on our tour was David Austin Roses. We visited their breeding and trials areas, retail space, and stunningly beautiful gardens. What none

of us saw coming was David Austin - inviting us into his private garden! That was an experience I will never forget.

As the conference came to an end, we began exchanging contact information and making plans to see one another again. In the mix was John Ravenscroft, a grafting legend who is the European authority on Magnolia and Rhododendron. He invited several of us to visit his home and farm, Cherry Blossom Arboretum. This is exactly the kind of once-in-a-lifetime opportunity IPPS can bring. A small group of us spent hours following him around his vast collection of Magnolia, Oak, and Whitebeam. His dedication and life's work were visible at every step. I am grateful for the time and attention he gave us.

After the conference adventures, we toured the garden at Hidcote, which offered incredible vistas and lush cottage gardens. The last stop was Kew, where they showed us the production facility and some of the rarest specimens I am ever likely to see. For someone who loves history and plants as I do - Kew was the ideal place to end my journey.

I could write volumes about what I learned on this trip. But most importantly, the experience reaffirmed this is the perfect industry for me. Spending time with new colleagues and being immersed in the field was incredibly rewarding. I feel the same way every time I attend an IPPS meeting in the States. My IPPS family encourages and inspires me to be my best and to continually learn and try new things. I am grateful to everyone involved in planning this trip and to those who hosted and spent time with me. I will never forget you. You have created an IPPS lifer!