

A Look Back at the Southern Symposium

Listening, Questioning, Discussing and Learning

In the Summer of 2014, after 7 years in Kells Bay, Billy Alexander reached the “End of the Beginning” of his work at Kells. The mammoth task of reclaiming the Gardens and restoring the House was in hand and it was now time to celebrate and publicise the achievement. A Who’s Who of Irish horticulture assembled at Kells Bay heard talks from Seamus O’Brien of the National Botanic Gardens and the legendary Roy Lancaster.

The weekend of discussion, food, wine and fun in the gardens was such a success it was instituted as an annual event to celebrate gardening, plants and landscapes. Since then, the event has become fixed as a highlight of Munster’s horticultural calendar. Its roll-call of speakers is a list of the horticultural Pantheon.

The wonderful hospitality, relaxed and friendly atmosphere ensure delegates return annually to renew, refresh and learn.

Guest Speakers Over the Years

The first nine years of the Southern Symposium has seen a diverse range of topics, wonderful guest speakers and expert advice, with lots of new friendships made along the way. Here’s a look back at the guest speakers and themes during that time:

2014

Roy Lancaster CBE Former Curator of the Hillier Arboretum, England
"A Plantsman’s Garden"

Seamus O’Brien National Botanic Gardens of Ireland, Kilmacurragh
"A Journey to the Antipodes– in search of Southern Hemisphere Treasures"

2015

Thomas Pakenham Tullyally Castle & Gardens, Co. Westmeath
"The Company of Trees"

Mike Nelhams Curator Tresco Abbey Garden, Isles of Scilly
"The Tresco Abbey Years"

Seamus O'Brien National Botanic Gardens of Ireland, Kilmacurragh
"Sikkim in Colour"

2016

Richard Baines Curator, Logan Botanic Gardens, Scotland
"Logan Botanic Gardens, Scotland's Most Exotic Gardens"

Neil Porteous Head of Gardens, Mount Stewart Gardens, Ards, Co. Down
"Travels in North East India for Mount Stewart"

Neil Armstrong Tremenheere Sculpture Gardens, Cornwall, England
"Tremenheere, the Ideas, Artwork and Plants"

2017

Nick Macer Pan Global Plants, Gloucestershire, England
"Plant Exploring around the World"

Tony
Kirkham Head of the Arboretum and Horticultural Services at the Royal
Botanic Garden, Kew, England
"Wilson's China - A Century On" Stepping in the
footsteps of Ernest Henry Wilson the great plant collector

June Blake June Blakes Garden, Tinode, Blessington, Co. Wicklow
"Painterly Planting with June Blake"

2018

Matthew
Pottage Curator, RHS Garden Wisley, England
"A new chapter for the RHS Flagship Garden"

Ken Cox Glendoick Gardens, Scotland
"Woodland Gardening in Europe, America, Japan, Australia
and NZ"

Seamus Galvin Gar Inish Island, Co. Kerry
"Gulf Stream Gardening"

2019

Tom Hart-Dyke World Garden of Plants, Lullingstone Castle, England
"Plant Hunter & Gardener with Passion"

Jimi Blake Hunting Brook Gardens, Co. Wicklow
"A Beautiful Obsession" A plantsman journey in his own
garden

Adam
Whitbourn Blarney Castle Gardens, Co. Cork
"Bringing Back Blarney"

2022

John Anderson Keeper of the Gardens, Windsor Great Park, England
"A Head Gardener's journey from Mount Usher to Windsor"

Alasdair Moore Lost Gardens of Heligan, Cornwall, England
"Tresco and Heligan: plants, history and meaning"

Robert Wilson-
Wright Coolcarrigan House & Gardens, Co. Kildare
"Isle of Bliss The remote island of Socotra"

Darach Lupton National Botanic Gardens of Ireland, Dublin
"Hop, Skip and Jump – the Curious Distribution of some of
Ireland's most Enigmatic Native Plants."

2023

- Daniel J. Hinkley Windcliff, Washington State, USA
1st Talk "From Shadows to Sun; Making Windcliff"
2nd Talk "The Treasures of Vietnam".
- Bleddyn & Sue
Wynn-Jones Crug Farm, Wales
"Seed and plant collecting in the mountains of Colombia"
- Seamus O'Brien National Botanic Gardens of Ireland, Kilmacurragh
"Van Diemen's Land's wildflowers: The British-Irish
Botanical Expedition to Tasmania"
- Ken Cox Glendoick Gardens, Scotland
"100 Years of Glendoick talk, 1919-2019"
- Jack Aldridge RHS Garden Wisley, England
"The Woody Plant Wonders of Wisley and Beyond"

2024

- Scott
McMahan Atlanta Botanical Garden, Georgia, USA
1st Talk "Plant Exploration in Vietnam and N.E. India"
2nd Talk "Ex situ Plant Conservation at The Atlanta Botanical Garden"
- Adam Frost BBC Gardeners World
"For a Love of Plants"
- Derry Watkins Special Plants Nursery, Chippenham, England
"Breathless - Plants of the Andes, Himalaya and Alps"

Jimi Blake

Hunting Brook Gardens, Co. Wicklow

“A Deep Dive into the Woodland plant Collection in Hunting Brook”

Neil Armstrong

Tremenheere Sculpture Gardens, Cornwall, England