Encyclopedia of World's Fairs and Expositions

Edited by
JOHN E. FINDLING and
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Foreword by
Vicente González Loscertales

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Foreword
by Vicente González Loscertales

In the 21st century, while world expos continue to display an impressive power of attraction for both visitors and participating countries, the global context requires a continuous effort to maintain their relevance in a rapidly changing world. This is why the publication of the Encyclopedia of World’s Fairs and Expositions is particularly timely and important.

The Encyclopedia of World’s Fairs and Expositions is an impressive endeavor that matches the scale of these great events. The dictionary is both a tool for understanding the historical roots of expos while giving readers a map that helps them see how they have been able to capture the mood, the innovations, and the specific visions of their time.

Through the gathering of the international community, world’s fairs attract millions of visitors around a theme. No other human event has the same force of involvement. Today, when we refer to the international community, we do not mean just countries or governments, but also civil society, corporations, and ordinary citizens.

Expos are platforms for innovation and for showing citizens the problems that the global society faces in different cultures and different latitudes. Expos also show the effort made by corporations, governments, and nongovernmental organizations in order to to meet the challenges for the day-to-day life of the citizens. This is what expos are about and their great value lies in their power to gather around a relevant theme all of humankind.

The first decade of the 21st century has brought two contradictory phenomena into the forefront. On the one hand, there are discussions as to the value and adaptability of expos to the needs of the 21st century, and on the other hand, there is a steady increase in the number of visitors at expos and a growing number of candidate countries bidding to host future exhibitions.

This situation obliges the Bureau of International Expositions and both present and future exhibition organizers to carry out a thorough reflection, in order to give expos of the 21st century the value and usefulness that public opinion demands. The globalization of political, economic, and social exchanges as well as the increasing value given to the respect of cultural diversity proves that civil society, corporations, cities, and regions all find themselves in a key position for national presentations at world’s fairs.

The economic and political opening of new regions such as Asia, Latin America, and the Pacific in the last twenty years has transformed the international scene and brought new actors into the world of expos. The 140 nations that comprise the BIE reflect this new reality, which requires that these great events be taken into new geographic areas to ensure a greater equality in the distribution of future expos. Article 7 of the BIE Convention, therefore, acquires, in the 21st century, a role which had not been available throughout the 20th century.

From the very beginning, world expos have had a tremendous impact on their host cities. Although most large events tend to impact one particular sector of a city, expos
British Exhibition held in such in London during this period, the medium one. While there were no great exhibitions as 1924 and repeated in a year later, the British Empire Exhibition Agriculture and War departments. There were nation from the exposition on September 7, 1922, one to Brasilia in 1960. Brazilian President Epitacio Pessoa opened the exhibition on September 7, 1922, one hundred years to the day after the Portuguese empire was split in two and an independent Empire of Brazil established under the rule of Dom Pedro I. Admission was free on opening day. The opening also marked the first significant radio broadcast in Brazil, as proceedings were broadcast from a tower at the top of the Corcovado hill and heard in Niterói, Petrópolis, and in São Paulo. For Pessoa the exposition was a way to reinforce centralization in the face of regional conflicts that were threatening the country. Notable visitors included the U.S. Secretary of State, Charles E. Hughes, who visited in part as a gesture intended to reciprocate the visit of a Brazilian delegation to Philadelphia in 1876. Though initially scheduled to close on March 31, 1923, the exposition was extended to run through July 2, 1923.

**Bibliography**


**Wembley 1924–1925**

*Alexander C. T. Geppert*

### British Empire Exhibition

The British Empire Exhibition, held in 1924 and repeated in a year later, was neither the first nor the last imperial exposition in Great Britain but certainly the most important one. While there were no great exhibitions in London during this period, the medium had established itself with the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886 as the first British exhibition exclusively devoted to imperial themes and had developed into a spectacular exposition type, as seen in Imre Kiralfy's large-scale Franco-British Exhibition held in Shepherd's Bush in West London in 1908 and its annual sequels through 1914. Wembley's continental counterpart, sometimes dubbed the "French Wembley," was staged seven years later in the Bois de Vincennes in southeastern Paris. As the first Parisian exposition solely devoted to French overseas possessions, such as a scale of the Exposition Coloniale et Internationale of 1931 corresponded to Wembley in many ways. Like its Parisian counterpart, the Wembley exhibition was planned to take place long before the outbreak of World War I. Initial proposals by the British Empire League and other similar organizations for holding an imperial exposition dated back to 1902. They were again put forward by the Canadian high commissioner in London, Lord Strachton, influential international exhibition impresario Imre Kiralfy, and the South African Commissioner Sir Pieter C. Van B. Stewart-Barn in November 1910. Together, Strachton and Kiralfy had been involved in organizing events of a comparable kind before, and Stewart-Barn had served as the chairman of the General Executive of the 1907 South African Exhibition. In 1910, the Wembley project still figured under the heading "Imperial Exhibition" and was intended to be held in 1915 to coincide with the Prince of Wales' coming of age. Yet, the realization of these plans was delayed, first, by organizational difficulties and then by World War I, but similar proposals continued to be made.

Once the war was over, a provisional committee was appointed, and the project eventually launched by the Prince of Wales—the future King Edward VIII—at a meeting held under the auspices of the Lord Mayor of London at the Mansion House on June 7, 1920. The motives for reviving these pre-war plans were twofold. The exhibition was intended to ensure the empire's stability after World War I had led to an increased awareness of its domestic significance and, at the same time, of the fragility of the empire's precarious maintained unity. At the same time, such a large-scale endeavor could help the process of postwar demobilization and was envisaged as a means to counter wide-scale unemployment and the threatening economic decline. More than a year later, a second meeting was organized, this time with the colonial secretary and future prime minister, Sir Winston Churchill, and the mayors of numerous provincial towns present. As the president of the exhibition's General Committee of Exhibition of Wales as announced that the exhibition would include a "great national sports ground" as its center-piece. In 1923, businessman and public servant James Lord Stevenson was appointed chairman of the Board of Management, with Lieut.-Gen. Sir Travers E. Clarke as deputy chairman and chief administrator.

In the meantime, the scheme had also been approved by the Board of Trade whose newly established Department of Overseas Trade under civil servant and diplomat Sir William Henry Clark was to become directly involved in the organization. The government arranged for a special guarantee fund by passing a special Act of Parliament on December 23, 1920, to facilitate the private financing of the endeavor. Otherwise, however, it proved reserved in its support. Except for contributing $100,000 to the guarantee fund, the government did not at this time provide for any direct subventions or subsidies. Therefore, the British Empire Exhibition was neither state-initiated nor state-sponsored, even if the government increased its financial contribution several times and eventually participated more actively than before. This came about as a consequence of a new policy formulated by the Board of Trade's Exhibitions Branch, set up permanently on the recommendation of a 1907 survey committee, and because the idea of colonies and dominions had unanimously agreed to partake with their own displays. Finding and eventually choosing the venue had proved far less controversial and intricate than in previous cases. Faced with the alternative of either re-using an existing site—such as the Crystal Palace in Sydenham or Kiralfy's White City—or creating an entirely new one, the latter option was chosen, first and foremost for financial reasons. Although it would have been possible to make use of pavilions already built for the largely unsuccessful Festival of Empire held in 1911 at the Sydenham site, the palace itself had already been in decline for some years. With trees and water left over from its previous function as a park, Wembley in North London seemed a much more suitable alternative, and was, in 1921, selected as the future exhibition venue. Although it had previously been earmarked for development as an upper-class garden suburb, Wembley was chosen mainly for reasons of its size and accessibility by rail. Work on the exhibition grounds including the stadium began in early 1922.
The Empire Exhibition, with the white twin towers in the foreground, remained in use long after the exhibition, hosting a variety of international sporting events (Larson Collection, Special Collections Library, California State University, Fresno).

The new sports arena was placed on the exact site of the so-called "Wren's folly," London's notorious imitation of the Eiffel Tower, and in itself a direct conceptual transfer from the Parisian 1889 Exposition Universelle. Begun in June 1893, construction was never completed due to structural defects and the fragment of a tower was demolished in September 1907. Erected in less than 300 days to hold more than 125,000 spectators, the so-called Empire Stadium— as it was known well into the 1950's— opened to the public a year before the exhibition itself with the Football Association Cup Final in 1923. This game, later known as the legendary "White Horse Cup Final," attracted an estimated crowd of 150,000 spectators. Soon, the stadium was not only described as the central focus of the British Empire Exhibition but also became to be seen as a national landmark and genuine lieu de mémoire.

While taking the form of a city within a city, the venue in Wembley, although well connected to public transportation and within a quarter of an hour's distance from Piccadilly Circus, was some way out of London. After the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886 held in the Royal Horticultural Society Gardens in South Kensington, London exhibitions were increasingly driven out of the city center, and thus by and large suburbanized. It was only on the occasion of the Festival of Britain in 1951 that town planners and urban designers realized the enormous possibilities for redevelopment connected with the holding of such a mega-event and decided to bring the spectacle back into the city center. Hence, Wembley could be interpreted as a further attempt in a long line of comparable urban development projects at permanently imperializing London's character, and thus lessening its inferiority complex with regard to competing cities such as Paris.

Although the original intention was to open the Empire Exhibition in May 1921, the date had to be postponed several times, first to 1923, and, in the summer of 1922, once more to 1924—mainly for organizational reasons and to allow the participating dominions and colonies more time for preparation. Finally, King George V opened the British Empire Exhibition on April 23, 1924, St. George's Day, and it was to remain open through November 1, 1924. The final words of George V's speech—"I declare this exhibition open"—was the first sentence by a head of state ever transmitted live on radio. Simultaneously a cablegram was sent around the entire world and arrived back in Wembley eighteen seconds later.

Wembley's spatial structure was strictly symmetrical and, just like any other exhibition, this one tried to create an imaginary structure by assigning both objects and people their "right place." However, the entire world on display at the Wembley site was reduced to its British imperial variant, i.e. the British overseas dominions, colonies and possessions. There were no attempts to include other foreign countries. The exhibition's two architectural directors, Sir John William Simpson and Maxwell Ayrton, and its principal engineer, Sir Owen Williams, applied the standard pavilion system, widespread in the international exhibitionary system since the 1880s, to the explicit and officially exclusive subject matter of this exposition, i.e. the entire British Empire. Thus each colony was assigned its own pavilion. The largely triangle-shaped venue was 216 acres in size (400 ft. x 3000 ft.), divided by a double axis shaped like St. Andrew's cross—with a huge garden and the main entrance at its northern apex, the Empire Stadium at its southern, the pavilion of New Zealand at its western, and the Indian pavilion at the eastern end. Still further to the east, this rather "serious" part, including a special building for the British government, together with pavilions devoted to Fiji, Newfoundland, the West Indies, and British Guiana, was supplemented by a 47-acre amusement park. The two largest buildings on the site were the Palace of Industry and the Palace of Engineering, at that time the two largest buildings in the world. A number of lakes, connected with each other, and various parks divided the northern and southern parts of the venue. Situated around these lakes and other gardens were exhibition complexes of the four most important territories of the empire—New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and India. Of the 58 countries which comprised the empire at that time, 56 participated with displays and pavilions of their own, with only Ireland and Gibraltar missing. The majority of these colonies were located in the southern part of the venue. They included, from west to east, Malaya, Southern Rhodesia, Bermuda, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, the Gold Coast, Palestine, South Africa, West and East Africa, Burma, Ceylon and Hong Kong. They were all considered "representative of the characteristic architecture of the different countries," although their architects and designers were more often than not of British rather than indigenous origin. All the roads on the site were named by Rudyard Kipling, Britain's foremost author of tales of the empire.

During its 150 days of existence, the exhibition featured numerous spectacles and attractions, such as the first-ever complete church to be built in an exhibition in order to display ecclesiastical art, a lavish Queen's Doll's House, a replica of the recently discovered tomb of Egyptian King Tutankhamen, a mock-up of an entire coal mine and, in the Canadian pavilion, a full-size model of the Peace River Valley, notably the Dawson Creek coal mine, as well as a great deal of speculation about whether the exhibition would reap in 1925, with the intention of reducing the deficit suffered during the first year. Although always having insisted that the exhibition was run by private enterprise, the government eventually decided to assume more responsibility. In consequence—and most unusually—the exhibition reopened the following year for another full season (May 9–October 31, 1925), with slight conceptual changes, some new pavilions, and a number of
The pavilions of East and West Africa at the Wembley 1924–1925 exhibition (Larson Collection, Special Collections Library, California State University, Fresno).

James Elvin had assumed control and turned the whole complex into a national sports venue where, in 1948, the first Olympic Games after World War II were held. As the venue of the 1966 World Cup, numerous concerts and music festivals such as Live Aid in 1985 and the European Championship in 1996, this world-famous sports ground with its prominent white twin towers developed into a veritable icon of Englishness—until Britain’s Sports Council decided in 1996 that the “most spectacular stadium in the world,” in the words of Prime Minister Tony Blair should be erected in its place, a new “superstadium,” designed by the renowned architect, Lord Foster, and more expensive than any other sports arena in the world. With the demolition of the original Wembley Stadium in the fall of 2002, the final remains of the British Empire Exhibition were irretrievably swept away.

Wembley’s overall significance was ambiguous. On the one hand, the exhibition certainly served to renew and perpetuate the importance of empire to the British in the interwar years. Never before had the imperial theme been so central and dominant in a European exhibition on such a scale, and—as official and semi-official publications did not tire of repeating time and again—never before had an area as large as this been given to the dominions, colonies and “dependencies” to present themselves in the metropolis. Yet, neither the exhibition’s prevailing language nor its specific modes of representation were as original and innovative as its promoters took pleasure in claiming. Indeed one could even diagnose a formal, both representational and discursive “hangover.” On the other hand and in complete contrast to all expectations, Wembley also epitomized the symbolic beginning of the empire’s end. Since the British Empire Exhibition had originally been planned to take place in a pre-war setting it was not altogether appropriate when it eventually came about, with a time-lag of almost a decade and a half, to the first global war in between. The first signs of dissolution in both the exhibitionary complex’ and the exposition’s subject could no longer be overlooked. From such a perspective, the British Empire Exhibition of 1924–1925 represented another attempt at reinventing the empire. Simultaneously, however, it foreshadowed the empire’s subsequent political disintegration.

The most convenient route to study any exhibition is not through its ephemera but rather through its official publications. In this case, the exhibition authorities did not produce a comprehensive official report after the event but issued an official catalogue, British Empire Exhibition: Official Catalogue 1924 (1924), an official guide, Lawrence, George Clarke, ed., The British Empire Exhibition 1924: Official Guide (1924) and a handbook, British Empire Exhibition 1924 Wembley, London April–October: Handbook of General Information (1924) before or throughout its duration.

Among the numerous catalogues and guide books specifically published for many of the sections and features, see in particular F. A. Chetwynd Jessett, British Empire Exhibition: What You Want to Know about the Exhibition (1924); Harras Moore, The Marlborough Pocket Guide to the Empire Exhibition at Wembley, 1924 (1924); The Wonders of Wembley, and Souvenir Guide to London (1924); Daily News Souvenir Guide to the British Empire Exhibition: With Maps and Photographs and Complete Train, Tram and Bus Guide (1924). Special issues of newspapers such as the Times (see in particular the four supplements published on April 23, May 24, July 29, September 30, 1924) or of the Illustrated London News (May 24, 1924) appeared on the occasion of the exhibition. A year and a half before its opening, the exhibition authorities also launched a newspaper of their own, the Empire Exhibition News: The Organ of the British Empire Exhibition (1924), Wembley (1922–1924), to create the necessary degree of long-term publicity. For a critique of the exposition’s architecture see Hubert C. Corlette, “The British Empire Exhibition Buildings,” Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects 31, 20 (Oct., 18, 1924); 653–665. From the experience gained during his involvement with the exposition as director of United Kingdom exhibits, Sir Lawrence Weaver later pub-
lashed two influential volumes Exhibitions and the Arts of Display (1925) with numerous illustrations of the various British stands and posters, and The Place of Advertising in Industry (1928).

The correspondence and papers of the Board of Trade's Department of Overseas Trade are held at the National Archives in Kew. Further archival material can be found in the records of the Colonial Office, the Dominions department, and the India Office. Issues discussed include government participation, financial arrangements, negotiations with the colonies and dominions in regard to subsidies for their participation, the reopening of the exhibition in 1925, and its final winding-up. Additional archival sources are available at the Victoria and Albert Museum, Archive of Art and Design. The papers of Lord Stevenson are kept at the University of East Midlands History Archive, Centre for Urban History, University of Leicester. Last but not least, large quantities of contemporaneous newspapers and other film footage are available at the British Film Institute National Archive in London.


The entrance gate to the Place de la Concorde shows clearly the influence of Art Deco architecture that this fair helped popularize (editors' collection).

Along two perpendicular axes: west to east from the Champs-Élysées to the Place de la Concorde and north to south from the Grand Palais to the Place de l'Hôtel des Invalides. This project was financed by the sale of 50 franc bonds each equal to 20 admission tickets, hefty subsidies from the Ministry of Fine Arts and the France's national manufactories (Sèvres, Gobelins, and others) as well as a 3 million franc grant from the city of Paris. Inspired by the futurist orientation of the Turin International Exhibition in 1902 and the Decorative Arts Exhibition in Munich in 1910, the Society of Artists-Decorators planned a decorative arts exhibition for Paris in 1915. The Paris exposition overcome substantial delays in its efforts to reclaim France's desired position as center of fashion and arbiter of refined taste. French organizers sought international cooperation and conceptual unity by showcasing contemporary works "original in conception and modern in design" Disrupted by World War I, it could only be scheduled after the Marseilles Colonial Exhibition in 1922, the Franco-Belgian Fashion Exhibition of 1922, and the Spanish Interior Decoration Exhibition of 1923. Inaugurated by France's President Gaston Doumergue on April 30, 1925, the Paris decorative arts exhibition welcomed an estimated 14 million visitors before closing on October 15, 1925.

A total of 13 different monumental gates set the tone for the exposition's fairy tale landscape. The Gate of Honor (Porte d'Honneur), designed by Henri Favier and André Ventre, ran between the Grand and Petit Palaces. Bronzed geometric grillwork hung between polished columns that supported neon lit bas-relief metal panels depicting artisans making decorative products. Another entrance, the Gate of Concord, was noteworthy for its 10-meter tall allegorical female figure surrounded by ten massive 22-meter high concrete pylons. Once through, fairgoers entered a "glittering fairyland" that they remembered with delight.

If the Paris exposition's ephemeral landscape "made no heavy intellectual or moral demands on the visitor," it amused, dazzled, and overwhelmed visitors' aesthetic sensibilities with obtrusive radiance, extravagant luxury, cheeky sumptuousness, and occasional austerity. The exhibition's director of landscaping, Louis Bonnier, transformed pre-existing