

Palm House History

The history of Gliwice Palm House goes back to the year 1880 when in the newly created city park the first exhibition greenhouses were constructed. However, the dynamic development of the facilities did not happen until 1924. It was then that the Palm House became the venue for the first great exhibition of exotic plants. Among them there was presented a collection of palms. Three of them, being representatives of the species of *Phoenix Canariensis* (Canary Island Date Palms) have been growing in the Historical Pavilion ever since. In 1925 the first huge pool having the volume of 120 cubic metres was opened in Silesia region. It was destined to hold one of the biggest water plants in the world, the largest water lily, namely *Victoria regia*. Since that time people could admire various plant species from the Amazon area. There were terrariums built and cages installed to keep exotic animals. What delighted the audiences was the aquariums holding colourful fish, frogs and turtles. Similarly, in the aviary among many birds it was the Brazilian parrots that reigned supreme. A rapid multiplication as well as growth of the palms urged the extension of the Palm House. In 1935 a new 12-metre high greenhouse was constructed. That new facility having the surface of 504 square metres became the main exhibition pavilion. The Cacti Pavilion was also extended and new aquariums were added. It was thanks to the-then Director of the institution, Mr Riedel, that the Palm House thrived and developed. He was an extraordinary plant lover, botany expert but at the same time a very good manager. The investments having been made, the turnout of visitors increased greatly. In 1926 around 8000 people visited the Palm House exhibitions, while in 1936 that number soared dramatically reaching 30 thousand visitors. The Palm House along with the surrounding park, pedestrian zones and city avenues (at present Aleja Przyjaźni) as well as former Wilhelm Park (at present Chrobry Park) made the green island or 'the lungs of the city' among coalmines, steelworks and many other industrial plants. The Second World War did not spare the Palm House. In January 1945 the facilities were almost completely devastated. The panes of glass were broken, the boiler house was out of order and the biting frost did away with almost the whole plant collection. Thanks to the Palm House workers the institution was open again to public in October 1947. It covered the surface of 1400 square metres, had around 600 plant species, 28 aquariums, one pool with water being warmed up all year round and a big alpine rock garden. At that time some specimens were brought to Gliwice from land estates and mansions in Lower Silesia region that were deserted after the war. A lot of specimens were purchased or received as gifts from private growers and farmers. In the 70s the plant collection already amounted to 8000 pieces. However, the deterioration of the facilities technical conditions and the fact that it posed a threat to visitors forced a decision to close the Palm House in 1985.