

The Sackler Crossing

Opened in May 2006, this elegant walkway spanning the Lake is the work of London-based architect John Pawson. Its graceful design complements the natural forms of its setting and continues the English landscape tradition espoused in the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew for nearly 250 years, while bringing a contemporary aspect to Kew's World Heritage Site.

Inspirations

Kew has played an important role in the history of landscape design, with leading figures including Charles Bridgeman, William Nesfield, William Kent, Lancelot 'Capability' Brown and Decimus Burton all contributing to the Gardens' evolution. The Sackler Crossing embraces the ideas of two great but very different 18th century

designers. Landscape architect William Kent (1658-1748), responsible for some of the earliest follies here, felt that objects and buildings should be 'stumbled upon as if by accident'. Landscape designer 'Capability' Brown (1716-1783) expressed a preference for undulating curves and for what he called the 'sinuous line of Grace', as echoed in the serpentine path of the Crossing.

Design

The Sackler Crossing is designed to foster clear visual links between the man-made structure of the bridge and the natural contours of its setting – the gently rounded shoreline, the smooth expanse of the Lake and the powerful verticals of trees. The deck is formed of rhythmic bands of black granite laid horizontally. Cast bronze vertical cantilevers rise between the granite treads to form simple balustrades, the top of each upright smoothly contoured to fit comfortably in the hand. Both stone and bronze will acquire a rich patina with use and the passage of time.

Set low and close to the lake's surface, the Crossing is designed to give an illusion of walking on water. Depending on the angle of viewing, the spaces between the bronze fins appear and disappear, giving the structure an intriguing ambiguity between solid and transparent.

The attraction of water

While water features have figured strongly in Kew's history, until now there has been no permanent passage over water, despite the importance of such structures in the English Landscape Garden.

There have been two major lakes at Kew, both artificially created. The first lake was created in the 1740s and was an important part of the design of the old Kew Gardens. It was flanked by several follies and for a short time featured a wooden bridge which led to a central island. But when King George III, known as 'Farmer George', wanted more arable land in his garden, a large part of the lake was filled in. The remnant of the first lake was reshaped by Decimus Burton in the 1860s to form the current Palm House Pond.

The present two hectare (five acre) Lake lies in a clearing created by 'Capability' Brown and was commissioned by the Director, Sir William Hooker, in the late 1840s





Autumn colour reflected in the Lake

to provide an 'open flow of water through a portion of the pleasure grounds'. Situated toward the Thames in the west of the Gardens, the Lake was formed by extending and filling the gravel pits excavated to provide spoil for the foundations of the Temperate House. The Sackler Crossing is the first walkway across the Lake. It provides a new route through the Gardens and allows a closer appreciation of the lakeside planting and wildlife as well as the surface of the water itself.

Planting and the landscape

The plantings around the Lake have been planned so that the islands blaze with colour in autumn, reflecting with spectacular effect in the water. *Nyssa sinensis*, cloned from trees in Windsor Great Park but originally from China, turns deep red, while *Nyssa sylvatica*, from North America, turns red, orange and yellow. On the north side, new Swamp Cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) have been planted. Other moisture-loving trees and shrubs around the banks include collections of willow (*Salix*) and dogwood (*Cornus*).

New ways of seeing the landscape

In spanning the Lake, the Sackler Crossing opens up new ways of looking at the landscape and gives visitors another viewpoint from which to appreciate Kew's historic geometry.

Sir William Hooker appointed the landscape designer William Nesfield in 1855. Among Nesfield's extensive designs was a classic *patte d'oie* or goosefoot pattern of three broad vistas radiating from the rear door of the Palm House: Pagoda Vista leading to the Pagoda, Syon Vista framing Syon House on the other side of the river, and a third short vista highlighting a Cedar of Lebanon near the site of the present Brentford Gate. Although many of Nesfield's formal beds have long since vanished, the impact of the grand plan remains.

The Sackler Crossing creates an intermediate route through the Gardens spanning Nesfield's great vistas and allowing visitors to reach the river more easily from the popular south side of the Gardens. An arc-shaped route through the heart of the Arboretum leads from the Marianne North Gallery by Kew

Road to the Temperate House with views each way along Pagoda Vista, across the Lake over the Sackler Crossing and onwards across Syon Vista, to the Bamboo Garden and Minka House, Rhododendron Dell, Riverside Walk, and Brentford Gate.

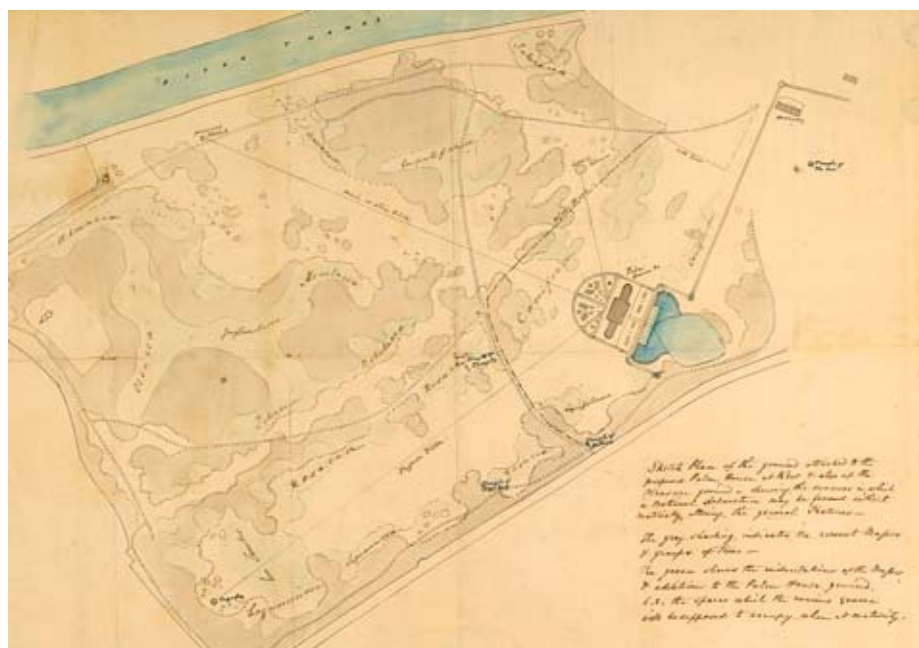
What's in a name

The Sackler Crossing is named in honour of philanthropists Dr Mortimer and Theresa Sackler, whose generous gift, through their Foundation, ensured the success of this imaginative and inspiring project.

John Pawson

John Pawson is closely identified with the search for simplicity that has been characterised as Minimalism. His designs 'seek to explore fundamentals – space, light and materials – and avoid stylistic mannerisms'.

His career to date has spanned a wide variety of scales and building types, ranging from private houses worldwide to Calvin Klein's flagship store in Manhattan, airport lounges for Cathay Pacific in Hong Kong, and the new Cistercian monastery of Our Lady of Novy Dvur in Bohemia.



Nesfield's sketch plan of the Arboretum, 1845