

Archives Research Guide: Sources for the History of the Gardens.

This Guide provides a detailed list of sources in the Archives relating to the history of the Gardens which are held in our collections.

Not all material has been catalogued; in this case, every effort has been made to give a general description of the collection, but only a closer perusal of the papers will reveal the extent of their usefulness.

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Brief History of the Gardens

There has been a garden at Kew since at least the early 17th century. However, it was Prince George, with his wife Caroline, who developed a garden and landscape park next to the river. In 1727 they were crowned George II and Queen Caroline. In the early 1730s their son Frederick, now Prince of Wales, bought Kew House and began to lease lands to establish an estate that ran parallel to his parents' grounds. These two estates are the basis of Kew today and are the reason why Kew is still known as the 'Gardens' (plural).

Prince Frederick set about transforming his garden to include a large lake, follies, and the planting of many hundreds of interesting trees. Frederick died in and his widow Princess Augusta decided to carry on his ideas. She founded a botanic garden in 1759 on nine acres of land with advice from her gardener William Aiton, her botanical adviser Lord Bute, and architect Sir William Chambers.

George III, son of Frederick and Augusta, inherited both the Kew and Richmond estates and merged them in 1802, he handed over unofficial charge of the Gardens to Sir Joseph Banks. The subsequent fame of the Gardens is largely down to Banks' vision. Under his direction

collectors travelled all over the world in search of plants of economic, scientific or horticultural interest and Kew became a centre for botanical study.

When both George III and Joseph Banks died in 1820, the Gardens fell into decline and in 1840 they were adopted by the nation. In 1841 Sir William Hooker was appointed the first official Director of the Gardens.

Under the Directors, Kew experienced a renaissance. The two now-iconic glasshouses, the Palm House and the Temperate House, were built; the National Arboretum was laid out and the Herbarium collection was founded. The Gardens were extensively restructured. Scientific research expanded and Kew became essential to the developing Empire, supplying seed, crops and horticultural advice to the colonies. Under Queen Victoria's patronage the Gardens flourished and with the arrival of the railway Kew's role as a public attraction also grew.

1/ Sources before 1841 (Royal Period):-

We have few sources for the Royal Period in the Gardens from the mid 18th C to 1841, what we hold is listed below. The Royal Archives hold some documents, but their collection is not extensive, some records are also found in the National Archives.

- **A colour map of the Royal Gardens**, drawn by John Rocque showing the buildings in existence at that time.
- ***Hortus Kewensis*** by William Aiton, is a catalogue of the plants in cultivation at Kew including their provenance and descriptions of new species published 1789 available in the Library. A second edition updated by his son, William T Aiton, was published in 1810-1813.
- **Goods Inwards/Outwards**: A manuscript record of plants coming in and out of Kew; the first few volumes, called 'Kew Record Books' cover both plants in and out, and later separated in two separate series, covering the early period from 1793 onwards.
- **Gardener's Magazine** extracts relating to Kew (1826-1843) (1 volume): this consists of various press cuttings from this publication and is particularly good for the transitional history of the Gardens; between the end of the Royal era and up to the beginning of the appointment of the first formal Director.

2/ Sources Post 1841:-

Most of the sources we hold for the History of the Gardens are for the period 1841 onwards, except for a few exceptions when the Gardens became officially public.

2.1 Sources for General Garden History:

- **Annual Reports (1844-)**: The Directors sent to the Government Department the Gardens came under, a yearly report detailing the work carried out and the costs incurred, plants coming in, number of visitors and other information. They start in 1844 (with gaps) and are still produced today. The volumes for the early period have been microfilmed.
- **Pleasure Grounds (KPG)**: contains various correspondence, memoranda, printed notices and other material on subjects related to the Pleasure Grounds at Kew. Subjects include: general management and administration of the Grounds, such as the transfer of the Pleasure Grounds in 1845; public opening, the removal of busts and a Marble Tablet commemorating British victories over Napoleon in Egypt from the

Temples; the erection of the Japanese Gateway; meteorological experiments on the Pagoda; the flagstaff; the development of the new arboretum, and the use of sections of Kew Green for allotments during World War I.

- **Printed Guides (1841-):** These were devised for the public, and give information on the plants and buildings in the Gardens, some include drawings, as well as general rules to be followed. Some of the Guides relate specifically to the Museum and its collection and some to the Marianne North Gallery.
- **Press Cuttings (1841-1900):** There are two volumes containing press cuttings relating to the Gardens, and covering a variety of subjects. See also the volume of Gardener's Magazine extracts mentioned in part 1.
- **Maps and Plans (19th-20th C):** There is a large collection of maps and plans covering the whole Gardens as well as specific areas; some show only buildings such as the Palm House and Temperate House.
- **Kew Guild Journal Volumes (1893-):** The Kew Guild is an organisation which was formed by members of staff for the staff; from 1893, they have published a yearly journal which contains printed material and photographs, recording events relating to staff and Gardens in general and is available on open access in the Library.
- **Kew Guild Archive Collection (1893-):** These are the papers of the organisation and contain mostly records relating the organisation itself. However, they will also contain information on the development of the Gardens in general and also include a collection of photographs of staff from the 19th to 20th Century.
- **Accounts and Visitors Records:** The Archives hold various financial records recording part of the whole of the Gardens starting 1845- c 1980s. Financial information can also be found in the Annual Reports cited above. Visitor records usually consist of statistical information recording visitors coming in arranged by gate name. However, some of the early records also mention their names.

2.2 Sources for Plants in the Gardens:-

- **Goods Inwards/Outwards:** These volumes are a continuation from the ones cited above for the early period. One Record Book covers both the Royal era and the beginning of the public one (1828-1847).
- **Trees and shrubs:**
 - Catalogue of Trees and Shrubs at Kew 1773 - 2 vols
 - Trees and Shrubs hand list (excluding conifers) cultivated at Kew 1934- 1 vol
 - Arboretum manuscript list of plants c.1870s-1890s - 1 vol
 - Arboretum record Book c.1880 - 1 vol
 - Arboretum records 1891-1925, by Bean, Dallimore et al. Includes a loose insert about bomb and war damage to the Gardens, 1940s.
 - South Arboretum: records of seeds collected and other records 1966-1969.
- **Herbaceous Department:-**
 - There are a few documents for the Herbaceous Department, mainly for the 1950s-1960s, consisting of planting records and seeds sown as well as plants in flowers.
- **Fauna of Kew Gardens 1930s-1950s:-**

- Consists of one file of observations of wildlife in the Gardens.
- **QG Registered Files:-**
 - This is a series of registered files covering the Gardens, Library and Herbarium from the 1950s till today. They are about very specific subjects.

2.3 Sources for Buildings in the Gardens:

- There are numerous **plans** for the buildings in the Gardens, most are from the 19th century, with some for the 20th century. For **drawings** of the 18th century Chambers buildings in the Gardens (Pagoda, Orangery etc..) see the published version of these in the Library '*Plans, elevations, sections and perspective views of the Gardens and buildings at Kew in Surrey*' by Wm Chambers published 1763.
- **Registered files** on the subject of Buildings: These bear a KEW reference and mostly date from the 19th century; they contain documentation on the erection and the history of various buildings in the Gardens such as Palm House, Temperate House, Herbarium and other buildings (19th and 20th Century).
Herbarium: We have numerous sources, mainly contained within bound volumes, concerning the various wings which were added to the original building in the late 19th and 20th Century.

2.4 Sources for Staff:

- **Gardens staff:** There are numerous sources for Gardens staff, starting with Gardeners in the 1840s.
- **Other staff:** There is a comprehensive guide to staff sources which is used by Archives staff for family history enquiries; these include Constabulary and Herbarium staff.
- **Photographs;** We also have a photographic collection of ex members of staff starting in the 19th Century in the Kew Guild Collection, of Kew Guild members, an Association run by staff for staff. Our Illustrations department also hold some group and individual photographs from the 19th to 20th centuries.

2.5 Historical Photographs of the Gardens

- The Archives hold few historical photographs of the Gardens; most were taken by ex members of staff or visitors and date from the 1920s to 1940s. The best source for more formal photographs of the Gardens is the Kew Picture Index, available in the Library, consisting of a large collection of black and white and colour photographs, divided into subjects.

2.6 Other Archival Sources:

- **The Archives at Kew** also hold sources which relate to very specific aspects of the Gardens, such as: Customs and Excise Records of Plants and Seeds from abroad for Kew (1879-1927); Accounts and Financial records (19th-20th centuries), Opening Hours (19th century) and Visitors in the Gardens 19th-20th centuries.
- **The National Archives** hold many sources relating to the history of the Gardens, including maps from the Royal period (early 19th century). See their on line catalogue for more details. <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>

2.7 Published Sources:

- The most comprehensive book written on the history of the Gardens is Ray Desmond's 'The History of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew' second edition 2007, Kew Publishing, covering the Royal period up to the 21st century.