

Press information 2010

How the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew Grew

- 53 BCE** Julius Caesar is thought to have crossed the Thames at Kew on his first visit to Britain
- Early Medieval Times
12th – 14th Centuries** The first reference to a settlement is in 1313 and by 1483 the hamlet of Kew was of taxable size.
- 16th and 17th Centuries:
Royal Roots** In the 16th century, Henry VII built a Palace in the royal hunting park at Richmond, moving his court there for the summer months and changing people's perceptions of the area. The presence of the court drew nobles and influential courtiers to the area, and the nearby village of Kew grew rapidly over the next 100 years. By the 17th century Kew's place as a hub of power and political intrigue was firmly established.
- The 18th Century:
Foundation
of the Gardens** For London, the early 18th Century was a time for blossoming culture, with writers, artists and musicians being drawn to the capital for access to aristocratic patronage and a growing commercial market. Some of the aristocracy moved out of the teeming city, and Kew became a popular enclave. The Royal Family used Kew Palace, purchased from a wealthy merchant, as their summer residence. Prince Frederick and Princess Augusta, parents of the future George III, started a garden around Kew Palace, adjacent to the Royal Park. In 1759 William Aiton was recruited from Chelsea Physic Garden to manage the small "Physick Garden" at Kew. This garden grew in size, absorbing in stages land from the Park, and became a place for the Royal Family and a succession of gifted gardeners and scientists to experiment with plants and garden landscaping.
- 1820-1841:
Gardens in Decline** During these 20 years, the Treasury's economies and lack of royal interest and the increased competition from other horticultural establishments brought about the decline of the Botanic Gardens. Kew was left adrift while other royal gardens were redesigned.
- 1841-1855: The Gardens
revive** These 45 years saw the renaissance of Kew. The famous Victorian glasshouses, the Palm House and the Temperate House were built; the new Arboretum was laid out and the Herbarium collection was founded.
- Scientific research expanded and Kew became essential to the developing Empire, supplying seed, crops, personnel and horticultural advice to the colonies. Under Queen Victoria's patronage the Gardens flourished and with the arrival of the railway in 1869 Kew's role as a public attraction also grew.
- 1885-1945:
War and Change** Significant expansion of the scientific collections took place during these years. Despite this the two world wars brought change and disruption to the Gardens. With men conscripted into the army the

number of women gardeners increased and 'Dig for Victory' vegetable plots were planted on many of the historic lawns.

1945 to Modern Kew

Post-war Britain saw hardship, rationing and a degree of privation. Initially Kew relied on grants and gifts for capital projects. As time passed, funds became available for major restorations as well as some new works.

A welcome expansion came in 1965 with the lease and management of Wakehurst Place in Sussex, Kew's sister estate in the country.

Wakehurst Place is home to Kew's Millennium Seed Bank, established in 2000 on land purchased by RBG Kew. By 2010, Kew and its partners in the Millennium Seed Bank partnership will have collected and conserved seed from 10% of the world's wild flowering plant species (c.30, 000 species). The aim is to conserve 25% by 2020 and funds are being actively sought to continue this vital work.

Kew has increasingly taken a leading role in action on habitat and biodiversity conservation worldwide. In 2000, Kew joined with botanic gardens across the globe to sign the Gran Canaria Declaration, calling for a global integrated plant conservation plan. In 2002, The Global Strategy for Plant Conservation was adopted by 190 countries across the globe. Kew's research today is closely aligned with the Strategy, working with governments, companies, organisations, communities and researchers across the globe.

In July 2003 Kew Gardens was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

New buildings have taken their place, as the landscape constantly evolves at Kew. Recent additions have included the Sackler Crossing and the Davies Alpine House in 2006; and the Xstrata Tree Top Walkway and The Shirley Sherwood Gallery in 2008.

2009

The Gardens welcome over 1.35 million visitors a year. The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew marks its 250th anniversary, with highlights of the year including a visit from the queen.

Kew's Millennium Seed Bank partnership celebrates collecting and conserving seed from 10% of the world's wild flowering plant species (c.24,200 species). The aim is to conserve 25% by 2020 – one in four of the world's plants.

2010

The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew marks the UN's International Year of Biodiversity with a year long programme of festivals, events and scientific announcements celebrating the importance of plants and highlighting the organisation's biodiversity conservation work around the world.

For more information
visit

www.kew.org/heritage/timeline

Ends

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