Collection policy and history of the Library

Collection policy

Under the Morton Agreement of 1962 between the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and the Natural History Museum, the Kew Herbarium concentrates on the floristics of non-temperate parts of the world, British and world non-lichenized fungi, grasses and orchids. The Natural History Museum concentrates on the flora of Europe (including the UK), Central and North America, together with British and world lichenized fungi, algae, mosses and liverworts. The effect of this is that the Kew Library does not normally collect European or North American material of a purely regional nature: certainly not below state or province level. Kew does collect UK regional floras and this policy is now essential in support of the Seed Conservation Department's work at Wakehurst Place. Departments other than the Herbarium are not covered by this agreement and consequently the library does buy across all subject areas at the request of its staff.

Materials are acquired by gift, exchange or purchase: incoming items are screened before accessioning takes place. We have exchange arrangements with 263 institutions in 70 countries. Materials are generally postgraduate level or above. There are no restrictions on language or country of origin and items are collected in whatever format they are issued: books, serials, microforms, CD-ROMs and other electronic media, videotapes and audiotapes. Antiquarian materials are purchased only to fill gaps in the collection and are subject to funds being available. The Library maintains a list of booksellers specialising in botany and horticulture. If you would like a copy, please send an email with the subject heading 'Booksellers list' to Fiona Ainsworth (f.ainsworth@kew.org).

History of the Library

Early history

Until 1852 there was no formal Library at Kew although from 1846 the Treasury allowed an annual grant of £10 towards the purchase of books for students. Before that time the first unofficial Director, Sir Joseph Banks (until 1820), and later William T. Aiton (until 1841) and the first official Director, Sir William Hooker (from 1840), made their own libraries available for use.

In 1852 the Reverend William A. Bromfield bequeathed his herbarium and well-chosen library of about 600 volumes and accommodation was made available on the ground floor of Hunter House at the front of the present complex of herbarium and library buildings. In 1854 George Bentham presented his library of 1,200 standard texts and in 1866 (following his death in 1865) Sir William Hooker's library and correspondence were purchased for £1,000.

Hooker's library was a particularly fine one with many items purchased by him during his lifetime as diverse as Ruiz's *Flora Peruviana et Chilensis* (Madrid, 1794) and Besler’s *Hortus eystettensis* (1613) although many of those with illustrations are uncoloured working copies. Additionally, there were many items presented to him by contemporaries such as John Lindley, Robert Brown of the British Museum, Carl Blume of Leiden, and Augustin and Alphonse de Candolle of Geneva.
Expansion

From the 1850s the Treasury increased the annual grant to £100 and during the 19th century many exchange agreements with the major botanical institutions were established which were consolidated with the use of the journal *Kew Bulletin* from its inception in 1887. These brought a full range of scientific journals to Kew - a number of these agreements (such as with Paris, Leiden, New York and others) are still in force today.

An impetus for the acquisition of finer volumes in the Library which were beyond the purchase grant provided by the Treasury resulted from the establishment of the Bentham-Moxon Trust founded initially with money bequeathed by George Bentham in 1884 and augmented by funds from Miss M. L. Moxon and A. E. Moxon in 1931. The Trust purchased extensively on behalf of the Library including:

- Edouard Morren’s Bromeliaceae drawings [1887]
- Mycological works from the Library of M. C. Cooke [1894]
- Fuch’s *De historia stirpium* (1551) [1898]
- Redouté’s *Choix des plus belles fleurs* (1827-33) [1909]
- Lady Barkly’s Orchidaceae drawings [1918]
- Tankerville collection of flower drawings including some by G. D. Ehret and Margaret Meen [1932]