



PLANTS PEOPLE
POSSIBILITIES

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Architectural History of Kew's Herbarium, Library, Art and Archives

The Herbarium and Library was originally housed in Hunter House under the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew's first official Director, Sir William Hooker, in 1853. The first wing (Wing C) was built in 1877, the second (Wing B) in 1902, the third in 1932 (Wing A) and finally Wing D in 1969. The most recent addition to the building, Wing E, opens in autumn 2010.

1877 – The First Extension – Wing C

In 1875 Sir Joseph Hooker (1865-1885), son of the first Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Sir William Hooker (1841-1865), and himself Kew Director at the time, put forward a proposal for a new building to house the rapidly expanding collections. Having had an affirmative response from the Royal Commission, and having also obtained a grant of £3,000 through a Parliamentary vote, Hooker approached his First Commissioner Lord Henry Gordon-Lennox for final approval.

However, the Duchess of Cambridge, a Kew Green resident, was violently opposed to the scheme. She was a zealous guardian of Royal property and objected to any kind of building adjacent to Hunter House. The Duchess had the Queen's support, and Sir Joseph Hooker was instructed by her Majesty to find a more suitable place within the public side of the Gardens, but none could be found.

Hooker was about to abandon the project, when it was discovered that Hunter House had been sold by George IV to the Office of Woods and Forests in 1824, and was therefore no longer Royal property. The building work could go ahead, and the new two-storey building was completed in 1877.

1902 – The Second Extension – Wing B

With the collections continuing to grow rapidly, and fearing that Wing C was not properly fire-proofed, Hooker requested funds for a second wing. The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew's reputation ensured that he obtained a favourable answer. In 1902 the new wing, which conformed to the fire regulations of the time, was added. That same year, part of Wing C was gutted to make way for fire proofing; some highly ornamental iron work was probably removed and the original galleries widened by 18 inches. In 1904, electricity was installed.

1932 – The Third Extension – Wing A

Arthur Hill, who was by then Director at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, applied for and received funding for the third extension, which was completed in 1932.

1969 – The Fourth Extension – Wing D

The Queen officially opened Wing D in 1969. This new wing also provided accommodation for the Library, and for the first time, books, manuscripts and illustrations found a home in one place, having been brought together from their scattered locations in various rooms and corridors.

1989 – The Fifth Extension – quadrangle and basement

The Herbarium is further extended into the quadrangle and basement

2009 – The Sixth Extension – Wing E

In late October 2010, a new 5000m² extension will be formally opened. It will relieve overcrowding of the older wings, and provide a stable environment to protect the collections from temperature and humidity fluctuations, fire, flood and pest infestation.

The new wing provides a modern storage facility for the most vulnerable pieces of the existing collections, and will allow for future acquisitions to be accommodated. The need for a new extension was deemed vital for the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew to retain its internationally pre-eminent position as the world's leading centre for the study of plant diversity.

The wing also extends the existing main Library, providing a new reading room, rare book room and archive store where precious volumes, illustrations and original documents can be viewed in secure conditions.

The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew will also take advantage of the additional space provided by the new wing to reorganise its collection of plant specimens to conform to the DNA-based Angiosperm Phylogeny Group system of classification. This task will take some two years to complete and will align the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew with the other organisations that are part of the international Vascular Plant Classification Committee, led by Kew.

Ends

For more information please contact the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew press office on +44 (0)20 8332 5607 or email pr@kew.org

Notes to editors

- What is a Herbarium?
A herbarium (plural: herbaria) is a collection of preserved plant and fungal specimens, used as reference material, to document the identity of plants and fungi. Some specimens are 'types' – the original specimens on which new species descriptions have been based and a key reference point for the application of scientific names. Specimens will usually be in a dried form, mounted on a sheet, but depending upon the material may also be kept in boxes (eg bulky plant parts such as palm fronds) or in alcohol (see Kew's spirit collection <http://www.kew.org/collections/spiritcol.html>)
- The members of the Vascular Plant Classification Committee are the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew; Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, Natural History Museum London; Natural History Museum Paris; Geneva City Conservatoire Botanique and the Naturalis – NCB, Netherlands.
- The global effort to determine relationships between all known flowering plants is coordinated by the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew – the Angiosperm Phylogeny Group. For further information about the Angiosperm Phylogeny Group <http://www.kew.org/about-kew/press-media/press-releases-kew/easy-as-apg3/index.htm>