

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS, KEW

Auteur(s) : Historic England <https://historicengland.org.uk/>

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Name: ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS, KEW

County: Greater London Authority

District: Richmond upon Thames (London Borough)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.471466
Longitude: -0.30337721
National Grid Reference: TQ 17937 76087
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: I
List Entry Number: 1000830
Date first listed: 01-Oct-1987

Details

A botanic garden established in the early C18 and increased in size under Sir William Hooker in the mid C19. The gardens were set within a royal park and remodelled periodically by leading designers.

NOTE This entry is a summary. Because of the complexity of this site, the standard Register entry format would convey neither an adequate description nor a satisfactory account of the development of the landscape. The user is advised to consult the references given below for more detailed accounts. Many Listed Buildings exist within the site, not all of which have been here referred to. Descriptions of these are to be found in the List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest produced by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The new Palace of Sheen surrounded by a new royal park was created under Henry V and Henry VI c 1414-54, the palace being rebuilt for Henry VII after a fire destroyed it c 1499. A new and larger royal park, known as the New Park, was created by James I in 1603, on former Charterhouse lands and the site of the earlier royal park. It is thought that Solomon de Caus may have worked on the gardens of Richmond Palace between 1603 and 1612 (The Old Deer Park 1990). A hunting lodge, Richmond Lodge, was built for James c 1605-6. The park became known as the Old or Little Park when, in 1637, Charles I (1600-49) created his New or Great Park (now known as Richmond Park qv) c 1km to the south.

In c 1721 the Richmond Lodge estate was acquired by George Augustus, Prince of Wales and became the centre of the Royal Court. Five years later, after his accession to the throne, George II gave the estate to Queen Caroline and it became the favourite residence of the royal family. By 1727 Caroline had already made several embellishments to the grounds, employing Charles Bridgeman (d 1738) in favour of Stephen Switzer (1682-1745). William Kent (1684-1748) was also employed at Richmond from c 1730 and designed first a Grotto or Hermitage and by 1735, Merlin's Cave.

In 1731 Frederick, Prince of Wales acquired White House, Kew, to the north of Richmond Lodge and employed William Kent to work on the house and garden. Frederick indulged in his taste for exotic buildings which included Chinese and Indian houses and in the last years of his life began a collection of exotic plants at Kew. Under the care of the Dowager Princess the gardens

at Kew developed and were extended. The Princess used Sir William Chambers as her architectural advisor, with Lord Bute providing advice on the botanical collection.

Richmond Lodge estate was inherited in 1760 by George III and became the summer residence of the King and Queen Charlotte. In 1764 George III appointed Lancelot Brown (1716-83) Royal Gardener, and one of his first tasks was alterations to the Richmond Lodge estate. By 1767 the ha-ha had been constructed and by 1770 most of the works of Bridgeman and Kent had been removed, as had the village of West Sheen which stood in the Old Deer Park. The Lodge was found to be too small for the royal family and they moved to the White House. Although members of the royal family had lived in the neighbouring Dutch House (built 1631 by Samuel Fortrey) from 1734 onwards it was not until 1781 that George III bought the freehold of it. After 1802 when the old White House was demolished, Kew Palace, as the Dutch House was now called, became the principal royal residence.

Sir Joseph Banks (1743-1820), President of the Royal Society acted as botanical advisor to George III and with William Aiton (1731-93) as Head Gardener the botanical collection at Kew expanded rapidly. In 1802 the lane that divided the Richmond Lodge gardens and the Kew Palace gardens was closed and the gardens became one unit. By 1841, when the botanic garden was taken over by the state, it was already semi-public. Visitors were admitted daily between 1pm and 6pm, except for Sundays, and there were no admission charges. Under the first Director, Sir William Hooker (1785-1865), the size of the botanic gardens increased to over c 100ha. From 1843 they were relandscaped by William Andrews Nesfield (1793-1881), the architect Decimus Burton (1800-81) working on the buildings.

The C19 saw many changes at Kew. In 1848 the extension of the London and South-Western Railway from Richmond was built along the south-east boundary of the Old Deer Park. In 1876 the Jodrell Laboratory was founded by the then director of the botanic gardens, Sir Joseph Hooker (1817-1911), son of Sir William Hooker. In 1885, Richmond Town Cricket Club and Athletic Association secured a lease from the Crown of c 3.5ha of land on the south-east side of the Old Deer Park and the Royal Mid-Surrey Golf Course a lease of c 92ha in 1892. In the 1850s the responsibility of Kew passed from the Commissioners of Woods and Forest to the Commissioners of Works and Buildings and in 1898 they instructed the director to extend the opening hours for visitors in the summer.

As a prominent public space, the Gardens became the focus of women's rights protests in the early C20. Kew Gardens was the site of militant protests by the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), a suffrage organisation formed by Emmeline Pankhurst in 1903. Its members used direct action to get the vote, starting with civil disobedience and progressing to more militant acts including criminal damage and arson. Criminal damage was carried out in secret, but clues would be left to link the attack to suffragettes. On 10 February 1913 three of the Orchid Houses at Kew were attacked overnight; many windows were smashed and flowers were scattered onto the floor. An envelope reading 'votes for women' was left at the scene. Two weeks later a fire was started in the tea pavilion in the early hours of the morning. Olive Wharry and Lilian Lenton were spotted running away from the scene carrying bags containing paraffin, a hammer and a saw; both women were imprisoned for the attack.

Between 1903 and 1984 the gardens were administered by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Under the National Heritage Act 1983 a Board of Trustees were appointed to manage the gardens, an arrangement which continues today (1998).

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

The Royal Botanic Gardens are located in outer south-west London on the south bank of the River Thames c 500m south west of Kew Bridge. Richmond Park (qv) lies c 1km to the south-east with the town of Richmond on the south-east boundary of the Old Deer Park. To the east lies the dense residential development of North Sheen. The River Thames provides the boundary to the west and Kew Green to the north. To the east the grounds are bounded by Kew Road and to the south-east by the railway line. The Old Deer Park (139ha) is separated from the Botanic Gardens (128ha) by the C18 ha-ha. The fairly level ground of the Old Deer Park is screened from the river by thick boundary plantings.

The main approach to Kew Gardens is from Kew Green to the north-east through iron gates (listed grade II*) designed in 1848 by Decimus Burton. Numerous other gates provide entrances around the site, most dating from the mid C19 (and most listed grade II).

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The botanic gardens contain many areas of different horticultural and botanic interest. The gardens contains over fifty thousand taxa of living plants from all parts of the world, used for research and education. In addition there is an Herbarium of about six million specimens, an extensive collection of anatomical slides, about one million specimens of plant products, and a comprehensive reference library. The Jodrell Laboratory, nursery, and lecture theatre lies in the north-west corner of the site and provides extensive educational facilities.

A network of paths provide access round the gardens. Five major features dominate the gardens: the Palm House by Decimus Burton with Richard Turner, c 1844(8 (listed grade I), to the east; the Temperate House by Decimus Burton, c 1845-6 (listed grade I) and the Pagoda by Sir William Chambers, c 1761 (listed grade I) to the south; the lake excavated c 1845 to the west; and Kew Palace, formerly known as the Dutch House, c 1631 (listed grade I), to the north. A number of other buildings of historical importance, many from the C18 by William Chambers for Princess Augusta, survive within the botanic gardens.

To the north of the lake a vista extends from the iron and glass Palm House across the river to Syon House (qv), horticultural interest in this area including the Rhododendron Dell, and the Bamboo and Azalea Gardens. To the south of the lake the paths lead past land set aside for a conservation area, to The Queen's Cottage (listed grade II*) built 1772. The path system continues in a south-easterly direction towards the Temperate House, extended 1898(9 and restored 1978-82, and the Pagoda from where there is a vista north-north-west to the Palm House.

The perimeter path on the east side of the garden leads under the arch (listed grade II*) designed as a ruin by Chamber c 1760, past the Marianne North Gallery (listed grade II), by James Ferguson c 1882, to the Palm House and Palm House Pond. The Pond, remodelled by Nesfield in 1847, is all that remains of the great lake made for George III which covered the area now occupied by the Palm House and beyond.

From the Palm House the Broad Walk leads north-west back towards the main gate passing to the east the Orangery (listed grade I), by Chambers c 1761 and now (1998) used as a shop and restaurant. Kew Palace (refurbished late 1990s) stands to the north-west flanked on either side by C20 service buildings, laboratories, and a nursery.

Loss and damage to trees caused by the storms of 1987 and 1990 was considerable but between the Orangery and the Pagoda to the south examples of planting of c 1760 survive.

To the south of Kew Gardens lies the Old Deer Park, physically separated from the botanic gardens by the mid C18 ha-ha and formally separated in 1841 when Kew Gardens was taken into state control. Much of the parkland to the north is used by the Royal Mid-Surrey Golf Club (founded 1892); the remainder is divided up between the Athletic Ground, open grass recreation ground, tennis courts, and the public swimming pool first opened in 1966. The Royal Observatory (listed grade I) built for George III in 1768-9 to the design of William Chambers lies within the golf course in the north-west part of the park. The Observatory, which maintained its scientific role under a number of owners, closed in 1980. The building continues to be used as offices following its restoration in 1983. The three obelisks or meridian marks (listed grade II), erected in the park in 1778 to enable observation instruments to be adjusted, survive, one near the river bank to the north-west and two near the river bank at the southern tip of the site.

In c 1930 the new Twickenham Road was made, cutting across the south-east corner of the Old Deer Park. A strip of parkland, now (1998) used for car parking, is separated from the main body of the Old Deer Park by the dual carriageway. Access over the road to the park is via a C20 footbridge.

This list entry was amended in 2018 as part of the centenary commemorations of the 1918 Representation of the People Act.

This list entry was subject to a Minor Enhancement on 01/06/2018

REFERENCES

Note: There is a wealth of published material about this site. The key references are listed below.

B Cherry and N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: London 2 South* (1983), pp 506-12 R King, *Royal Kew* (1985) *The Old Deer Park, Richmond*, report produced by the Old Deer Park Action Group and The Friends of Old Deer Park, (1990) [copy on EH file]

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Maps Richmond and Kew, Works 32/99, 1637 (PRO) [copy on EH file] J Rocque, Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster and Borough of Southwark and the country near ten miles around, surveyed 1741-5, published 1746 R Greening, Richmond Lodge Estate and Kew, 1748 (London Metropolitan Archives)

OS 60" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1864 2nd edition published 1897

Description written: June 1998 Register Inspector: LCH Edited: November 2001

Legal

This garden or other land is registered under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 within the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens by Historic England for its special historic interest.