

*Chelsea
Physic
Garden*

FOUNDED
1673



Impact Report 2023



Voices from the Garden

We received so much positive feedback from visitors in 2023; a year that saw us complete the Glasshouses restoration and celebrate our 350-year anniversary.

“The Glasshouses are astonishing! I didn’t think you could surpass their beauty. But the new labelling is excellent, accessible, and diverse – a wonderful experience to be in them – whoever repaired them is a true artist.”

– Visitor

“The collections and plant displays are far more accessible. It’s now an exciting sensory experience as well as an interesting learning one... From the incredible job done by the contractors and garden team, changes to the plant collections, and improved signage with a healthy nod to indigenous knowledge and biodiversity.”

– Volunteer

“I get to immerse myself in the wonderful world of botany and share this love with my amazing network of fellow youth panel-ers and visitors to the Garden. What’s not to love!”

– Youth Panel Member

“It has been wonderful to see how sensitively these historic glasshouses have been preserved for successive generations of visitors and learners to enjoy. Well done to the Chelsea Physic Garden.”

– Stephen Boyce, NLHF London and South Committee Member

“After a period of fundraising and meticulous planning, it was a delight to see the Glasshouses reopening in our 350-anniversary year – they are a real tribute to the sensitive and careful work of a multi-disciplinary team determined to use this project to position the Garden for the future.”

– Anna Jobson, CPG Trustee

“Amazing nature. I give it ten out of ten. I especially liked the green houses.”

– Allegra, Age 6

“The children performed a song to the tune of “I will survive”, all about plants!!”

– Teacher



2023 in summary

As we look back on the many activities that took place in our 350-anniversary year, we can be proud of all that has been accomplished by staff and volunteers, and appreciative to our dedicated Trustees.

A personal highlight of 2023 was when, on an extremely balmy day in early September 2023, we were able to welcome community partners, Friends, neighbours, and funders to the reopening of the Glasshouses. The day was filled with so much goodwill and joy with many guests, volunteers and staff getting involved in making and wearing flower crowns. We were especially honoured to have Dame Judi Dench join us and hear her speak of her love of the Garden, in particular its restorative powers.

The sense of wellbeing that flows from being in nature is one of the many reasons people come to the Garden. Our anniversary year celebrated 'Horticulture for humankind' to champion the role that plants play in our lives. People visit the Garden regularly, even daily, to enjoy the changing seasons but also for its positive effect on their physical health and mental wellbeing. Whether a casual visitor or a participant in our 'Help Us Grow' horticultural therapy, a visit can help people overcome loneliness, illness and offer space for reflection.

Our second anniversary theme, 'Unlocking our collections' gave us the opportunity to commission research into our plant collections and small archive. This resulted in the publication of four pamphlets or 'zines' on biodiversity; women's role in horticulture; hidden histories and the future of horticultural science.

Our anniversary gave us the opportunity not only to look back, but to fast forward to being 'A physic garden for the future'. This final theme allowed us to highlight the ongoing importance of plant science to our understanding of climate change and biodiversity.

The Garden's role in plant conservation and seed banking has been a continuous activity from our foundation in 1673 to this day and will become more important as plant extinction continues to be a threat.

As we look forward to the next few years, we know that botanic gardens have a significant role to play in connecting people to the natural world, to encourage discovery of the power of plants and to advance horticultural science for the benefit of the planet.

Whilst 2023 was a year of celebration and reflection our focus is firmly now on the future. The Board are committed to moving forward with plans to update our buildings and facilities to meet the needs of visitors, users, staff and volunteers. This will require a sensitive approach and careful planning to ensure that we celebrate all that is good about the Garden, remain financially resilient, increase sustainability, whilst meeting the future needs of all that come to enjoy the Garden. We will share emerging solutions as these take shape.

Without the support of our funders, the work we do today and our future ambitions, would not be fulfilled. We are grateful to all those who have invested in the Garden over 2023 – individuals, charitable trusts, and companies – and of course our volunteers who give the gift of their time.

Sue Medway

Sue Medway
Director

350
Chelsea
Physic
Garden
1673 – 2023
years of plant science



Unlocking our collections

To commemorate our 350 years of history, we commissioned new research into our non-living collection, which includes a library, archive, and herbarium, in addition to the living collections in the Garden.

The focus of this research was to curate a list of the Garden's 350 defining plants, as well as collecting stories that could be shared with our audiences.

The plants were selected based on their significance to the Garden and their place in its three and a half centuries of history. Other criteria included each plant's relevance to our mission to demonstrate the medicinal, economic, cultural, and environmental importance of plants to the survival and wellbeing of humankind.

A series of anniversary blogs was published on our website to share a selection of previously untold stories. The themes crossed biodiversity, herbal medicine, economic botany and the British Empire, curious pollinators, plants of Black resistance, and botanical art.

Our 350-year anniversary visitor trail featured plants from the monthly blogs. This bank of research will be drawn on for future blogs, learning and engagement programmes, as well as talks and tours, creating a rich legacy of content.



Insight: zines of the times

In addition to our in-house research, we worked with a series of guest authors to create a four-part publication series to celebrate 350 years of plant history. The zines reflect the diversity of the people and plants within the horticultural sector and focus on four topics:

- Biodiversity in Horticulture
- The Role of Women in Horticulture
- The Future of Horticulture and Science
- Hidden Histories in Horticulture

Our guest authors included Dr Chris Thorogood, Deputy Director and Head of Science at Oxford Botanic Garden; Sue Minter, professional horticulturalist, and first female Director of Chelsea Physic Garden; Professor Mary Gibby, retired Director of Science at Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh; and Pippa Pemberton, Heritage Consultant and Plant Humanities Researcher at the University of York.

The zines help us to reflect on the past and look ahead to the future. The booklets are available individually and as a collection from our shop.

“We have an opportunity to look forward to reimagine conservation in the 21st century. Perhaps by inspiring budding new generations who care deeply for our biosphere – that thin layer of life we call home.”

– Dr Chris Thorogood,
Biodiversity in Horticulture

“The Garden and many of its ‘useful plants’ – often plants in our own gardens and homes – are living memorials to the ‘unknown collector’. Through the Garden, the stories told about the Garden and the plants it contains, we can honour and remember them.”

– Pippa Pemberton, Hidden Histories
of Chelsea Physic Garden



Life under glass

In September 2023, we celebrated the grand reopening of our restored range of historic Glasshouses, a project that we started planning in the summer of 2018.

Built in the early 1900s, our Glasshouses were showing signs of age, which caused the plants to suffer and meant they were not fit to welcome visitors.

Chelsea Physic Garden is famous for its horticultural innovation and history of growing under glass. To honour this and retain the Glasshouses' heritage value, significance, and spirit, much of the original material was saved. UK grown sweet chestnut was used to repair original teak timbers and the cast iron window winding and door mechanisms were refurbished.



The project has done much more than restore our buildings. Our horticultural team have developed a better understanding of our plant collections; new interpretation was installed across the Glasshouses; and over 13,000 people were engaged across our schools, families, public, and community programmes. In addition, many jobs and volunteering opportunities have been created, especially for young people, to encourage them to gain experience and understanding of horticulture.

Our continued thanks go to the National Lottery Heritage Fund, and to all the individuals, trusts and foundations, who supported the project.



The power of partnerships

Chelsea Physic Garden works in partnership with many local charities, schools, organisations, and community interest groups to bring people together to experience the Garden.

The nature of the Garden, both in terms of its flora and fauna, and its small and sheltered size, make it an ideal environment to nurture a connection with the natural world.

By working in partnership with others, we engage many different groups of people who might not otherwise visit, who face barriers and social exclusion. People can engage directly with our diverse, and global plant collection, discover our rich horticultural heritage and find something meaningful to them. This includes tours, talks, workshops, and longer interactive courses.

Around 2,000 people visited the Garden, from partnership organisations such as community centres, women's groups, refugee charities, schools with a high pupil premium, community gardens, the carers network, English as a second language groups, GP surgeries, and charities supporting young people or vulnerable adults, or those that provide services to the elderly. This helps increase our ability to provide opportunities and access. We know this is appreciated and has an impact on people's lives:

"I felt privileged to see the archive and be really welcomed into the heart of things."

– ESOL

"I attended the session this morning and thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience, the lovely gardens and interesting guiding. It's an unintimidating way to meet other people for an introvert like me."

– Tea Talk and Walk

"It opened new horizons and started new conversations."

– Tea Talk and Walk



"I love plants! There are so many cool species and varieties. I could spend all day just looking around."

– Community Garden Group

If you know a group who would benefit from a visit to the Garden, please do get in touch: learning@chelseaphysicgarden.co.uk



Horticultural highlights

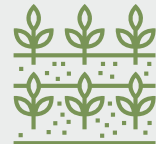
Whilst 2023 saw our Glasshouses collections receive a lot of care and attention, there were plenty of changes and new growth across the remaining 4 acres of the Garden.

The bed on the main lawn, known as the Summary Bed, was replanted according to a design developed by acclaimed garden designer Lady Arabella Lennox-Boyd. Central to this bed is our *Rosa brunonii*, which received a new sculptural support funded by an individual donor and the Ironmongers' Company Charity. The double helix sculpture features the names of the Head Gardeners and Curators from the Garden's first 350 years of history.

In other areas of the Garden:



The Dicotyledon Order Beds were audited



Over 184 new taxa were added and 200 plants were propagated



A new weather station was installed enabling careful monitoring of extreme weather events



24 tonnes of gravel was added to level our pathways



The *Puya chilensis* in our South African Beds flowered for the first time since 2015



The Forest Garden was replanted by our Horticultural Trainee



The British Native collection was developed, including the cutting and laying of the native hedgerow



and we planted 17 trees.

"I won't see these trees grow to maturity, but I will get to help them on their way. I like that idea, that in the same way I benefit from the trees that previous custodians planted (such as the Ginkgos or the Holm Oaks and the Manna Ash), people in the future will benefit from the trees I plant."

– Nell Jones, Head of Plant Collections

2023 Highlights

350
years of history



46,280
visitors



11,718
learners



8,992
tour participants



97
schools' workshops



343
new plants



6
glasshouses restored

“The guided tour was very informative and engaging, the blooms were lovely – I could have stayed all day! It was a special treat to be introduced to so many plants that have been of use in my family treating disease.”

– Visitor

“So enjoyable! Enjoyed the tranquillity of the garden walk around. The pond. A frog. Food for the soul.”

– Horticultural Therapy Participant

“I love how all the plants are different. ALL OF THEM!”

– Year 3 Pupil

Financial summary

In 2023 we welcomed 46,280 visitors, a little down on 2022 figures and still below pre-pandemic levels. The number of UK visitors decreased, many citing pressures due to the pressure of the cost of living. However, we were encouraged to see USA visitors return to the Garden.

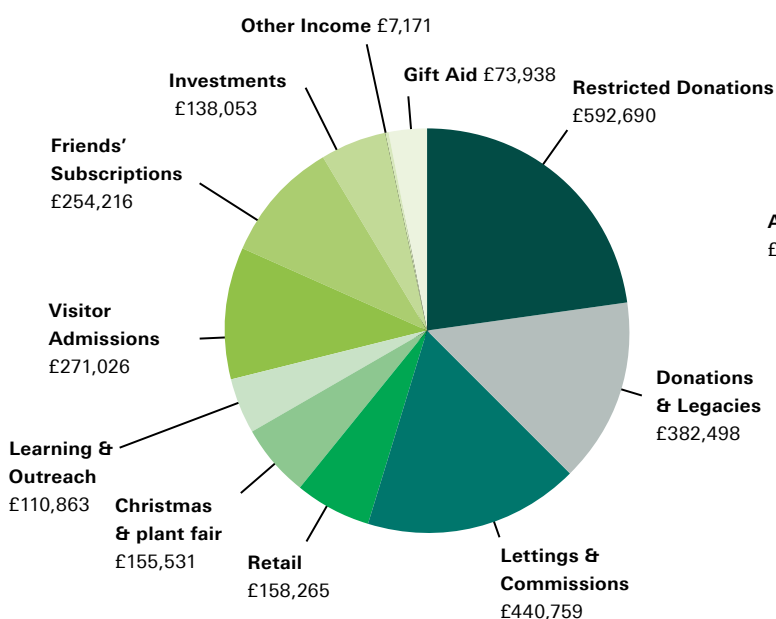
Friends' membership remained at a steady level of 6,001 subscriptions compared with 6,262 in 2022, and these account for many of our regular visits.

The Garden is a favoured venue for parties, weddings, and corporate events and this accounts for a significant proportion of the charity's earned income. In 2022, the income was higher due to a backlog of postponed events as a consequence of the pandemic.

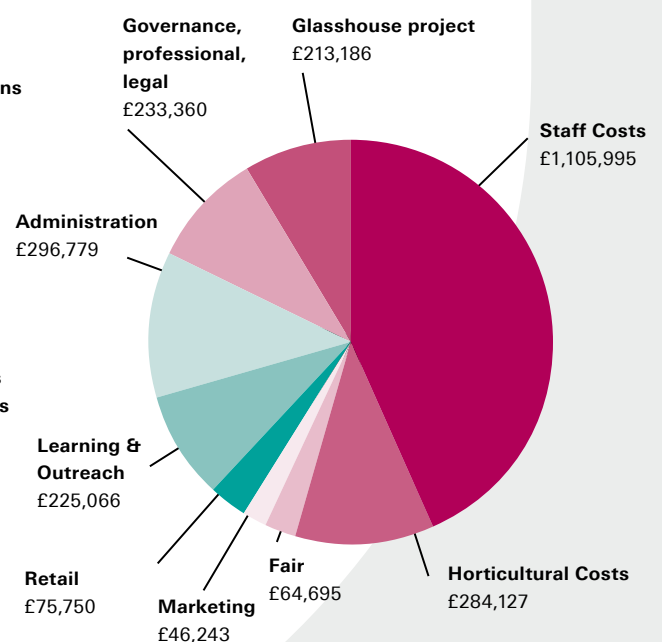
We are working with an increasing number of community partners to reach a wider diversity of people. In 2023 we engaged with 5,038 schools and community participants and welcomed a further 6,680 participants to our public programme. Activities ranged from outdoor music, interactive theatre, family activity days, workshop, to herbal remedies courses.



Total Income: £2,585,010



Total Expenditure: £2,545,201



Looking ahead to 2024



Bugs, birds and (mini)beasts

Largely unchanged for 350 years, our walls are home to a rich tapestry of lichen. Our log piles harbour woodlice and beetles, while the hedges and trees offer nesting sites for birds. Our ponds provide habitat for at least three species of amphibians. On a summer's evening, bats feed on flies buzzing over the lawns, while pollinating insects are drawn to the array of flowering plants.

In 2024 and beyond, we will take a more active approach to understanding the Garden's plant and animal life, through surveys and habitat audits. This will result in a detailed analysis of the Garden's wildlife, highlight key species and hopefully lead to discoveries. All of which will support a future biodiversity action plan to enhance and protect the Garden's wildlife.

Sparking curiosity

Our visitor information and plant interpretation will be refreshed and updated in the same style as those in the recently reopened Glasshouses. With funding from generous individuals and charitable trusts, we have mapped out key areas and locations in the Garden for the new signage.

The first areas of the Garden to receive new interpretation will be the World Woodland, followed by the Garden of Edible Plants and the Compost Yard. We hope to engage and spark visitor curiosity by communicating complex science and new stories in an inclusive and engaging way.



A green laboratory

The Garden regularly partners with plant scientists, universities, and research facilities on projects to further our understanding of the plant kingdom.

In early 2024, the Biomolecular Technology group at De Montford University will be DNA sequencing our Pelargoniums to help us confirm the species and cultivars we have in our collection. Pelargoniums are one of the oldest of our collections dating back to the 1720s.

We will also be working with the Imperial College to conduct research into biopesticide use at Chelsea Physic Garden. We use Integrated Pest Management (IPM) which uses biological control; insects that prey on other, undesirable, insects.

Ground xero

To increase plant biodiversity and as part of the evolution of our living collection, we will plant a xerophytic, or dry, garden with species from the western and southwestern regions of the United States including prairie grasses, daisies, and flowering plants like mints and lavenders.

These plants have adapted to dry habitats and need less water. The xeriscape will create interest and information for visitors, encouraging them to explore larger ideas about climate change and biodiversity.

Major funders & governance

Chelsea Physic Garden is fortunate to have the support of a number of charitable trusts and foundations together with many individuals who make donations to help us care for and share the Garden. Our thanks go to all supporters who make our work possible.

Major Donors included:

Auriens
Barbara Whatmore Charitable Trust
Cadogan Charity
Ironmongers' Trust Company
J Paul Getty Jr Charitable Trust
John Armitage Charitable Trust
John Swire 1989 Charitable Trust
Joseph Rochford Gardens Ltd
The Lohr Family DAF
National Lottery Heritage Fund
New to Nature
Peter Stormonth Darling Charitable Trust
Rick Mather and David Scrase Foundation
RUB White Charitable Trust
Sloane Stanley
And the Chelsea Physic Garden Patrons,
as well as our donors who wish to remain
anonymous.

Governance

The Directors and members of the Board (who also act as Trustees for the charitable activities of The Chelsea Physic Garden Company) who served during 2023 were:

Dr Helen Charman
Colin Chisholm
Alan Dempsey
Anna Jobson
Tony Kirkham
Dr Todd Longstaffe-Gowan
Simon Major
Michael McGonigle
Dr Philippa Simpson
Dr Paul Thompson
Anna Valle
Andrew Woodward
Sue Medway (Company Secretary)



The Garden is supported by a dedicated team of staff and an active growing cohort of volunteers.

A list of staff is available at:

www.chelseaphysicgarden.co.uk/about/trustees-staff

The contribution to Chelsea Physic Garden by its staff and volunteers is immense. Their enthusiasm, engagement, and active support is greatly appreciated.

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Limited Company registered in England Number
01690871 Registered Charity Number 286513

With thanks to Laura Stoner New, Fikayo Adebajo, and Mark Bothwell
for the photography