

## **Impact Report** 2024

#### Welcome

I was honoured to join the Garden as its new Chair early in 2025 and have been warmly welcomed by the present-day custodians of this special place, a talented leadership team and an ambitious and committed board of Trustees.

I would particularly like to thank Andrew Woodward who stepped up to chair the Board for much of 2024, and who will now be supporting us as Deputy Chair.

Over the course of more than 350 years, successive custodians have safeguarded this remarkable garden as a place of study of useful plants. Thanks to them it remains a haven of beauty, biodiversity and discovery.

Together, we are shaping the Garden's most ambitious plans yet, ensuring even greater access to, and enjoyment of, its unique collections. It is a privilege to play a part in this next phase of Chelsea Physic Garden's story.



Sarah Flannigan Chair



### 2024 in summary

In September 2024, we began our first study of the Garden's abundant biodiversity. Over the course of twelve months, we are surveying the numerous species of fungi, animals, insects and non-vascular plants that coexist in the Garden's small four-acre ecosystem.

Visitors, volunteers and staff are being encouraged to get involved in the study by recording the wildlife that they see in the Garden and taking part in 'citizen science.' Our team of volunteers are helping with official counts and surveys; visitors are urged to use the iNaturalist app to record their personal discoveries. These results will inform our future horticultural practices, ensuring that our collections remain resilient to our changing climate so that we can maintain biodiverse-rich habitats. The work has been made possible with the generous support of charitable trusts and individuals, as shown on the last page of this report.

The changing climate and unpredictability of the weather presents a constant challenge for outdoor venues like ours and can affect our in-year performance. 2024 was no exception; the wet and warm spring and the winter storms were hard on many gardens, with the loss of a significant numbers of trees. We were fortunate – Storm Bert merely buffeted the Garden's Christmas Fair – however many outdoor attractions were forced to close.

The weather data we collect from our own monitoring station records the daily conditions in the Garden, offering us an insight into the environmental changes impacting our horticultural site. The Garden's proximity to the river Thames and its encircling walls create a special microclimate, and are the reason that so many plants flourish far from their native habitats.

The changing climate means that some plants which favour cooler climates are no longer viable here. Visitors will notice how we are adapting to these changes, with two new drought-tolerant beds near the Glasshouses. In 2024, the team created a xerophytic garden for drought tolerant plants adjacent to the Pit House and shade-loving plants underneath our iconic Cork Oak. Both newly planted areas are highly sustainable, needing far less irrigation and maintenance. We are thankful to the Stanley Smith (UK) Horticultural Trust for kindly funding this initiative.

Innovation and adaptation run through the Garden's history and contribute to our contemporary purpose. In May, we came together as a Board and Executive team to discuss and shape the Garden's future. This has culminated in a new vision for the Garden, supported by a ten-year strategy. We are excited to be unveiling this later in 2025.

Putting aside the many challenges, the heritage sector remains vibrant and robust. We have built new partners and collaborated with other gardens throughout 2024, creating networks and sharing practice. Having worked in the charitable sector for much of my career, I was delighted to be notified, late in 2024, that I would be honoured with an MBE. By accepting the honour, it was as much for the Garden and organisations of which I am a Trustee. It made 2024 a memorable and special year.



Sue Medway FLS MBE Director

### Hidden library treasures

The Garden's remarkable library is a relatively unknown treasure – even to the Garden itself. With help and expertise from a volunteer, historian and archivist, Rosalind Lintott, we now have a full and detailed audit of our important library collection.

Rosalind's experience of sixteenth and seventeenth century manuscripts and books has added a layer of knowledge to our understanding of the small collection. The audit has given us a deeper insight into our books, many of which have a direct connection with the Garden. Some books and manuscripts are particular to the Garden's history and reveal aspects of its development since its foundation in 1673. Many belonged to and were annotated by the Garden's historic curators, and amongst them are printed and hand-written lists of plants, some with illustrations of the Garden.

The library is well-represented by female gardeners, including Gertude Jekyll and Mrs Earle, and botanical artists including Elizabeth Blackwell. The collection also reflects the Garden's colonial legacy and demonstrates the ways that botanical texts were written with the engagement of Indigenous contributors, acknowledged or otherwise. There are several 'plant-hunting' books including Robert Fortune's 1852 'Visit to the Tea-Districts of China and India.'

The audit, which involved hours of painstaking research through 2024, will hopefully help generate interest and potentially lead to further research or academic studies. Another direct impact of the audit is the overview it has provided of the books' state of repair. This will help prioritise those books requiring conservation, the focus of future fundraising activity.



### Mezzoprint artwork 'Banked'

We were delighted to accept an important artwork from one of our loyal supporters through the UK government's 'Cultural Gifts Scheme'.

Engraved by John Raphael Smith, the mezzoprint portrays naturalist and botanist, Sir Joseph Banks (1743–1820). The original portrait was made by Benjamin West shortly after Banks's return from James Cook's 1768 scientific expedition to the South Pacific. It shows Banks wearing an Indigenous cloak made of flax, surrounded by objects brought back from Polynesia and Aotearoa New Zealand, where he documented many species of fauna previously unknown in Europe.

Banks supported many expeditions, some of which supplied Cheslea Physic Garden with seeds and plants. The Garden's rockery features a bust of Sir Joseph Banks to mark this association, as well as basalt stones carried as ship's ballast from Banks's return trip from Iceland.

Richard Mansell-Jones, Garden Patron and supporter, purchased the mezzoprint for his late wife who had family connections to Sir Joseph Banks. He approached the Garden about gifting the artwork and worked with the Garden's Development Director to apply to the Arts Council. The expert panel considered the mezzotint to be pre-eminent and eligible to be gifted under several of its criteria.

The artwork now forms part of the Garden's permanent collection to be used for the benefit of the public. Currently, the mezzoprint is hanging in the Garden's meeting room, until such time as space can be created for public exhibitions.



#### As right without rain

The project to restore the historic Glasshouses involved the temporary relocation of plants, resulting in an empty bed by our newly restored Pit House. With the bed's south facing aspect and distance from our irrigation system, it seemed the ideal location for a xerophytic garden.

The new planting area was enabled by a grant from the Stanley Smith (UK) Horticultural Trust, a long-standing supporter of the Garden, as well as a gift from an anonymous donor. The funding helped us sow seed, purchase annuals, plan succession planting and obtain sandstone rocks and boulders from a quarry in Wealden, Sussex. The excess soil and rubble from the Glasshouses project was used as growing medium for plants and as substrate for the bed.

Our horticultural team were inspired by the xeriscape dry gardening movement from the western and southwestern regions of the United States, such as the Great American Desert and the Rocky Mountains. The plant families from this region - endemic deciduous and thorny shrubs, herbaceous plants and wildflowers, yuccas and agaves and Californian and Mexican poppies – are underrepresented in our collection.

There was sufficient stone left over to create another display, so the team set about building a further bed under the Cork Oak. This will be planted in a similar way using shade-loving Mediterranean species. The project will allow us to test xerophytic planting as part of a longer-term sustainable solution, avoiding the use of chemicals and irrigation systems. The beds were designed and managed in-house by the horticultural team with invaluable support from our volunteers.



#### **Tried and tested**

The Garden's horticultural traineeship programme supports people entering gardening as a career and helps reduce the national skills shortage in heritage skills. As part of their study programme Garden Trainees each work on a student project.

Ivo was funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund as part of the Glasshouses restoration project and chose to grow a variety of sweet peas for his study. In May 2024, he planted out 22 different cultivars into two central beds, constructing different sized stakes and supports. The result was an abundance of flowers in a rainbow of colours, providing scent and joy for several weeks.

Jen, our Rick Mather David Scrase Foundation funded Trainee, was interested in using a technique advocated by Philip Miller, Garden curator from 1722 to 1770. She adopted the hot-bed method to test whether she could grow melons outdoors without an additional heat source. Jen constructed a 'hot box' using fresh horse manure, planting a Citrullus lanatus 'Sugar Baby' watermelon inside. As a control, she used another box with no manure and another in a more open, unprotected position as a further control. The hot-box melon grew stronger and more quickly than the controls but did not produce fruit as hoped. These projects contribute to our history of continuous horticultural innovation.

Both Trainees have been successful in securing fulltime roles in horticulture, at Kew Gardens and as Head Gardener at a woodland school.







### **Digital tools for schools**

Sharing knowledge and inspiring wonder is at the heart of what we do. Our learning team strive to engage people of all ages with the Garden, regardless of their background or horticultural experience. Our programme of activities offers a 'way in,' for people to learn, grow and experience the health and wellbeing benefits that come from access to nature.

In September, we launched new online resources to engage teachers in our schools' programme and support classroom teaching. Trips out of schools have noticeably decreased (Sutton Trust 2023), so these free-to-use resources offer a route to learning and connection with the natural world, independent of a site visit.

The materials were supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and developed in consultation with teachers. Aimed at young people aged between 3 to 16 years, the downloadable resources should help instil a love and understanding of nature in future generations. The resources support educational key stages of different subjects including Science, History, Geography, Art and English.

https://www.chelseaphysicgarden.co.uk/schoolslearning/latest-school-resources/





#### Forget-me-nots

A programme of dementia-friendly events, 'Forget-me-nots' was piloted in 2024, designed in consultation with people with early-stage dementia and their carers. The sessions drew on our horticultural therapy approach with quarterly rather than weekly sessions to better suit the needs of participants.

The quarterly sessions took place in February, May, August and November, regularly attracting fifteen people. The pilot proved a success, and we are delighted that funding from the National Lottery Community Fund and the D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust has allowed us to offer the programme in 2025.

### 2024 in numbers

Chelsea Physic Garden's 3.8 acres of gardens, ponds and Glasshouses are home to a range of wildlife from springtails, newts, jays, woodpeckers to solitary bees. In 2024:



### Financial Summary

In 2024 we welcomed 43,499 visitors, contributing to an overall footfall of 56,340 people visiting the Garden. This figure includes attendees to the Chelsea History Festival in partnership with Chelsea Heritage Quarter, the Garden's annual Christmas Fair and Garden Lates programme. It excludes the many attendees to private hire, from corporate dinners, 'celebration of life' events and weddings.



#### Total Income £2,479,979

- C Lettings & Commissions £590,644
- Restricted Donations
   £430,451
- Friends' Subscriptions
   £302,831
- O Visitor Admissions £291,967

- O Retail £174,776
- Christmas & Plant Fair
   £174,280
- O Investments
  £167,722
- O Education Activities £121,653
- O Donations & Legacies £113,510
- Gift Aid
   £111,920

### Total Expenditure **£2,628,733**

- Staff Costs
   £1,169,505
- Administration£340,271
- Governance & Legal £244,048
- Horticultural Costs
   £279,886
- Glasshouse Development
   £222,111
- Education Expenses£175,476
- O Retail & Purchases £78,342
- Fair £60,584
- O Marketing £58,510

Income generated from commercial lettings represents a significant part of our revenue. Activity was higher than in 2023, in part due to care of the lawn and the Garden's 350-year anniversary celebrations taking precedence.

Friends' membership saw a slight increase to 6,094 from 6,001 subscriptions in 2023. The learning and engagement team work with a diverse range of people, delivering activities at the Garden, through offsite visits and through online resources.

In 2024, the number of participants increased, helped by partnerships with other charities and service providers. Our team welcomed 4,160 schools and community participants. A further 7,145 people enjoyed one of our many programme offerings, for example, a summer outdoor music session, interactive theatre, a family activity day or a chocolate making workshop.

# Looking ahead to 2025

#### Pathways to knowledge

We are grateful to the Julia Rausing Trust for a generous grant of £190,000 towards our new project, 'Pathways to knowledge'. With this support we can replace existing gravel pathways with a new resinbased surface, as well as develop, design and deliver new information panels about our plant collections.

The project has accessibility at its heart and creates opportunities for discovery and learning. New interpretation will reflect a multitude of voices, highlighting the impact of climate change on plants, celebrate the power of plants for health and wellbeing and reinstate Indigenous plant knowledge and contextualise the Garden's role in the colonial trade of plants.

The project builds on the Garden's recent project to increase access to the historic Glasshouses, which reopened in 2023 following major restoration.

The new pathways work begins in April 2025 and is phased to avoid impacting visitors and plants.

#### **Inspiring Wonder**

The Garden's emerging vision and strategy for the next ten years is emboldening the organisation to plan out an ambitious future. Our vision statement reflects the ethos and spirit of the Garden.

#### Our vision is to inspire wonder, wellbeing and discovery by uniting people with plants that heal.

Our five development goals each address a strategic area and represent our aspirations for horticulture, the visitor experience and learning, and address cross-cutting themes of regeneration, resilience and sustainability.



#### Garden accreditation

Emily Hazell joined as the Garden's new Head of Plant Collections in September 2024. She will be leading us through accreditation to meet standards set by Botanic Garden Conservation International. This brings us in line with other worldwide Botanic Gardens, increasing our compliance and helping us to develop practices to protect our plant collections. We hope to achieve this by 2026.



### **Major Funders & Governance**

The Garden is fortunate to have support from grant-making trusts and foundations, together with gifts from individuals who generously fund our capital works and charitable activities. In 2024 notable grants and donations were received from:

Ancaster Trust Auriens The Estate of Peter Barclay **Belmond Management Limited Centurion Management Limited** Craig Swick Eddie Dinshaw Foundation Prof Dianne Edwards The D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust The Golden Bottle Trust John and Diana Kemp-Welch Charitable Trust The John Armitage Charitable Trust The Estate of Jane Langley Lord Leverhulme's Charitable Trust New to Nature (Groundwork UK) **Rick Mather David Scrase Foundation** The Pamela Matthews Charitable Trust National Lottery Heritage Fund Julia Rausing Trust Christine and Stefan Riesenfeld Joseph Rochford Gardens Ltd Leslie Rogers The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Dr Martin Schoernig

Stanley Smith (UK) Horticultural Trust Sloane Stanley Peter Stormonth Darling Charitable Trust R.U.B. White Charitable Trust Our Garden Patrons and all 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 2024 were:

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

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With thanks to Laura Stoner New and Jon Baker for the photography

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

A list of staff is available at: www.chelseaphysicgarden.co.uk/about/trustees-staff

