

Thank you for your gift

We have been delighted by your generosity in helping to restore our wonderful Victorian glasshouses. We hope you have been able to see the progress on your visits to the gardens.

There has been a working kitchen garden at West Dean for over 200 years. In the garden's heyday these glasshouses supplied the house with lavish delights for entertaining, from exotic pineapples, aubergines, melons and nectarines to sweet grapes from the vines. Though these days are over, the walled garden and glasshouses still offer a plentiful supply of produce for visitors to admire and enjoy. Today the kitchen garden and glasshouses continue to provide 26 different growing environments that demonstrate a huge range of plant varieties. Our wonderful gardens staff and team of over 30 volunteers tend a wide and ever-developing range of plants, including 250 chilli varieties and 50 varieties of tomatoes.



Our specialist works and maintenance team have spent tireless months, weeks, days and hours in all temperatures to restore two major glasshouses this year. Originally made from Baltic pine today we can now take advantage of new timber treatments that increase the lifespan of the glasshouse frame, through an innovative process for treating wood called acetylation. It forms an effective barrier to insect attack; it is indigestible to microorganisms and insects and therefore more durable to wood-destroying fungi and it's virtually rot-proof. This makes it incredibly durable, lasting for 50 years or more with minimal maintenance requirements. We are proud to have used this innovative approach to conserve two more glasshouses this year and preserve our horticultural heritage.

The Mid-Season and Early Vinery



This glasshouse was closed in the summer of 2015 when work started to completely restore it. The glasshouse was cleared, the scaffolding erected and the damaged glass and timbers were removed. Over 130 panes of glass were hand-cut and rotting timbers replaced and painted.

We had planned to re-open them to visitors by the Summer of 2016. Unfortunately this was not possible due to other urgent demands on our staff team, including work on our state-of-the-art biomass heating system to ensure it was completed on time



to benefit from the Government Renewable Heat Incentive. Once this deadline was met and the heating system was up and running, including the provision of heat for the hot glasshouses, our skilled maintenance team were able to re-focus their attention on our precious glasshouses. The spring and summer months were spent completing the Mid-Season and Early Vinery glasshouse and the Fig House. We were delighted when the Mid-Season and Early Vinery re-opened to visitors in September 2016 and our gardeners were once again able to nurture the vines housed inside.

The Fig House, Nectarine and Late Vinery



These glasshouses were the focus of our appeal launched in spring this year. Glasshouse 25 and 26 are linked together and form the Nectarine and Late Vinery glasshouse, whilst the Fig House is glasshouse 24 next door. The glasshouses were closed in late spring as concerns grew over the safety of the structures, with panes of glass already missing. As the initial work began to strip back the structures for restoration, the initial assessments revealed that glasshouse 24 was in far worse condition than initially thought and it was vital to prioritise works on this house ahead of glasshouse 25 and 26, which will now be completed in spring/summer 2017. They will remain closed over the winter to ensure we can keep visitors safe and the condition of the glasshouse is kept as stable as possible.

Restoring a glasshouse is painstaking work. The timber frames are tailormade by our joiners in our workshops to replicate the Victorian design. Over £900 of specialist, durable paint was used on the timber. Once erected, the frame was finished by hand with 264 panes of beaver-tailed glass hand-cut by our experienced team on-site to ensure they fit perfectly. Each pane was installed in a brass-cut brad, fitted into the wooden frame and sealed. Once completed the original ironworks inside the glasshouse were cleaned and re-painted. The result is the preservation of these Victorian feats of engineering, which, when combined with the horticultural genius of our gardening team, creates an abundance of delicious produce.

Our appeal also focused on the wonderful contribution that our Head Gardeners, Jim Buckland and Sarah Wain, have made to the gardens over the past 25 years. This inspired many of our visitors and supporters

to make a gift in thanks and acknowledgement of their dedication and hard work. Following a successful appeal to our wonderful West Dean supporters, West Dean College and Garden Friends, visitors and charitable trusts and foundations; you have helped us raise over £33,000 this year - a fantastic achievement. This contribution has made a significant impact and has enabled us to complete the work on glasshouse 24 and prioritise glasshouse 25 and 26 for renovation following the winter. **Thank you so much!**

The difference your support makes



Sarah Wain, our Gardens Supervisor is the glasshouse queen and her expertise in cultivation and display delights and enthralls visitors to the gardens daily. To find out exactly how your support has helped, we asked Sarah what difference it makes to have these glasshouses back in full working order.

“Conserving these glasshouses is central to our vision – it’s what we do. West Dean Gardens has a unique range of Victorian glasshouses that are part of the fabric of the place. By conserving them we are able to ensure their continued use and future enjoyment by the next generation. It also makes a difference in the day-to-day running of the gardens.

On a practical level, these glasshouses are now safe to use, don’t leak and are easier to keep clean and keep pests at bay. We can open the vents again now that the original mechanisms are fully functional. This ensures that the growing environment can be controlled to provide the best atmosphere for the plants.

Now that the Vineries and the Fig House are restored they will continue to house the vines and the fig tree as they were originally designed to do. These glasshouses will also be used as a temporary home for any plants that need to be moved from other glasshouses that are in a state of disrepair and need restoration work.”

Over the past four years you have helped raise vital funds to restore 6 of the 13 glasshouses. With careful maintenance these works will ensure the survival of these glasshouses for another 50 years or more. We are over half way to being able to restore the complete Victorian set and we will continue to fundraise to ensure the rest survive. After work is complete on the Nectarine and Late Vinery house, restoration of the Tomato and Peach glasshouses is planned, including the replacement of a temporary top that has since blown off. This will be followed by works on the leaking Fernery and repairs to the timber frame of the Aubergine House and the Cherry Tomato glasshouse which is slowly rotting. Despite their deteriorating condition they continue to play a vital role in the workings of the Walled Garden and we are keen to restore them to perfect working order. We will continually assess their condition to help prioritise the renovation work.

Supporting the next generation of Head Gardeners

West Dean Gardens is proud to be a host garden for the Historic and Botanic Garden Training Programme (HBGTP) that enables passionate and committed horticulturalists to develop their career. Learning glasshouse cultivation is a crucial part of that training. On completion of the two year programme trainees are awarded the prestigious Royal Horticultural Society Level 3 Diploma in the Principles and Practices of Horticulture. The scheme provides 50% of the salary costs for a trainee to undertake a full-time placement within a historic garden, where they work alongside the permanent Gardens team. The host garden provides the remaining 50% of their salary. Trainees learn about all aspects of managing a historic garden, developing their plant knowledge and identification and other technical skills. Participants need to identify

10-15 new plants each week! Since 2006, the scheme has provided garden placements for over 140 trainees.

Barry Straker is a trainee on the scheme and has been working with us since September 2015. He joined us with a varied environmental and horticultural educational background including mixed-production organic agriculture and horticulture, environmental conservation and permaculture. He is half way through his training programme and we caught up with him to find out how he's getting on.

What made you choose to do your training at West Dean Gardens?

I first visited West Dean Gardens in April 2015 having selected it as the base for the trainee programme. I wasn't the first (and I certainly won't be the last) person to lose the ability to articulate sheer delight when being transported through the multi-faceted and pristine West Dean Gardens landscape. Not only the variety in garden elements, but the fastidious and meticulous approach to its management and maintenance made me at once set my heart on the site. It was no doubt this difficult-to-contain attitude to the gardens (along with recorded evidence of hard work and a veritable struggle to get into the coveted profession of horticulture) that paid dividend in influencing Jim and Sarah to select me, among many other eager candidates, as the future trainee at their venerable masterpiece of a garden.



What area of West Dean Gardens is your favourite – to work in and for leisure?

This is a difficult question to answer, simply because my feelings in this respect are as capricious as the weather in early springtime. Each area of the garden has its moment throughout the change of the seasons - the wild garden in winter with its evergreen and architectural composition, followed so gratefully in spring with a cacophony of wild flowers; the walled garden in summer bursting with colour and yield, and the Spring Garden (named for the river springs it contains) in autumn crowded with plump fruits and rich foliage. And I've not even mentioned the evocative majesty of the arboretum! So it's difficult to say, and I honestly cannot pinpoint a favourite place in the grounds simply because I take so much varied pleasure from being around all of it (which thankfully I have also worked amongst).

What are the key things that you have learnt during your time here that you'll take with you?

I think fundamentally, the unbounded creativity and rich freedom of opportunity we have as stewards of the land. West Dean Gardens has provided a platform for me to absorb some of the potential available to horticulturalists, along with being a substantial place to refine environment management skills in the broad sense. Before starting at the gardens, I was an amateur wishing for greater things. I'm now well on my way down a very long road to professionalism. Very much like the journeymen gardeners in times long passed, I have ambition and drive compounded by desire to learn and understand that will no doubt introduce me to exciting and new opportunities. Thanks to Jim and Sarah's vision, expertise, and tireless hard work, along with the overly modest but comprehensively talented gardens team, my time at West Dean Gardens will propel me down this road like nothing else before it.

What do you hope to do next?

Keep on keeping on. I've got lots to do and see, learn, absorb, implement and improvise. I'm beginning to envision having space to define and grow my so-far accumulated experience, throw myself in at the deep-end so to speak, and take on a modest private garden. But who knows, I've still got a year to go before I'm let out into the wide world and so plenty of time to re-evaluate!

Thanks Barry and good luck with the rest of your training!