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### Plants and the Paranormal

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# KEW GARDENS, LONDON, ENGLAND

NATALIE AIRD -AND- ELLIE WIGGINTON

## BRIEF HISTORY

Kew Gardens is located in the borough Richmond upon Thames. The site was originally a royal estate acquired by Frederick Louis, Prince of Wales, in 1731. His wife, Princess Augusta established an exotic plant garden in 1759. Over time, it grew into a center for scientific research of plant species from around the world. In 1840, the gardens opened to the public after it was transferred to the government. After its opening, Kew expanded with new additions such as the Palm House in 1848, the Waterlily House in 1852, the Herbarium in 1853, and the Temperate House in 1863. New additions include the Princess of Wales Conservatory in 1987 and the Treetop Walkway in 2008. In 2003, Kew Gardens became a UNESCO World Heritage Site (History of Kew, n.d.).

## PALM HOUSE

The Palm House was designed by architect Decimus Burton and built by engineer Richard Turner. Ship building techniques were used due to the size of the glasshouse. The Palm House is home to many tropical plants found all over the world, some being rare or old. For example, the world's oldest potted plant can be found in the Palm House. This particular plant, the *Ecephalartos altensteinii*, dates back to 1775 (Avis-Riordan, January 2019).



## TEMPERATE HOUSE

The Temperate House was also designed by Decimus Burton. This glasshouse is more than twice the size of the Palm House and is the world's largest surviving Victorian glasshouse. The Temperate House recently reopened in 2018 after a five year restoration project. Today, this glasshouse holds more than 1,500 different species from around the world. Among these species, six are "considered Extinct in the Wild." The Temperate House also provides a place of research for DNA sampling of plants, as well as research for plant use in medicine (Avis-Riordan, June 2019).



## SUPERNATURAL OCCURRENCES

According to an article on Kew's website, there are several supernatural things that have happened at the Royal Botanic Gardens. There are three main areas where ghosts have been spotted. The Temperate House, the Herbarium, and Kew Palace. Along with the occasional ghost sightings, the appearance of crops circles have also been reported (Mackay, 2017).

## GHOST IN THE TEMPERATE HOUSE

The ghost of the Temperate House is assumed to be the former assistant curator, Charles Raffill. There were reports of random doors opening and closing, and taps turning on and off at random.



## GHOST IN THE HERBARIUM

The resident spirit at the Herbarium is said to belong to the deceased botanist, George Bentham. When he was alive, he worked at the same time as Darwin. Bentham is thought to have haunted the room where he worked in the Herbarium. There have been reports of fire irons rattling against the fender in the fireplace.

## GHOST IN KEW PALACE

The palace was under renovations, and there were two supposed sightings within two weeks of each other prior to the reopening of the Palace. They were both spotted by builders working on the Palace. One of the sightings was described as a 'something white' and the second was described as 'somebody quite small dressed in a long dress who appeared to be holding a candle.' It was assumed that the spirit was Prince Octavius who died very young at Kew Palace.



retrieved from <https://www.kew.org/kew-gardens/whats-in-the-gardens/kew-palace-and-queen-charlottes-sottage>

## ALIENS AT KEW

In 2002, a giant crop circle in the center of a wheatfield appeared. It was perfectly symmetrical and roughly 60 feet wide with a floral design in the center. It was unique because the wheat around the circle was completely intact, and the guards reported that the eight feet tall walls had not been breached. Apparently, the mystery of the crop circle at Kew has never been solved and still remains a part of their history.



retrieved from <https://s1.lbtimes.com/sites/www.lbtimes.com/files/styles/2/public/2012/10/04/2011/08/01/141517-londons-kew-gardens.jpg>

## SKEPTICS

Since the mystery of the crop circle was never solved, many people believe that it could've just been a prankster. There isn't a lot of evidence for crop circles, so a lot of people think they are a hoax.

Kew Research Associate Robert Sealy is skeptical of the ghost in the Herbarium. All things in Kew are very old. The Herbarium was founded in 1853. Sealy blames the sound of fire irons rattling on the actual fire irons. With all old buildings, they settle and things move when the wind blows. He believed that this was probably the cause of the ghost stories.

This reasoning is similar to Dr. Chris French. He is also a skeptic and seems to have an answer for most things supernatural. There have been instances when people think they are hearing a ghost sneeze, and he kept saying it was something else. A few days later, they found out it was the automatic air freshener spray out, and in fact, it wasn't a ghost.

## KEW GARDENS, A STORY BY VIRGINIA WOOLF

*Kew Gardens* was written in 1919 by the very talented Virginia Woolf. The story is set in the Royal Botanic Gardens. It follows the day of four pairs of people as they pass a specific flower bed in the gardens. The story follows a married couple, an elderly man with a young man, two elderly women, and a young couple. Woolf uses detailed imagery and description of flowers to symbolize decisions humans make in life. The story was originally only 24 pages long and was the first commercial success of the publishing company, Hogarth Press (McManus, 2016).

## OUR TIME AT KEW GARDENS

We visited Kew Gardens on Sunday, June 16th. Fortunately, we were able to enjoy a sunny day at Kew! Our first stop was the Palm House. The plants in this glasshouse were organized by continent. While walking the grounds, we found the Treetop walkway where we were able to get a bird's eye view of the Temperate House. Another impressive glasshouse was the Waterlily House!



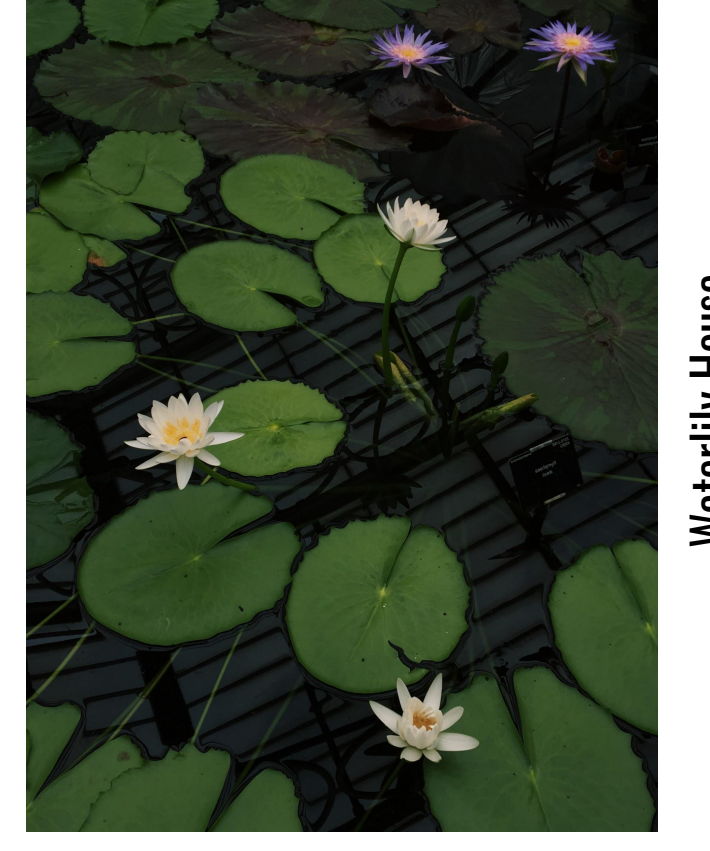
Palm House



Aerial view of Temperate House



Palm House



Waterlily House

## DALE CHIHULY EXHIBITION

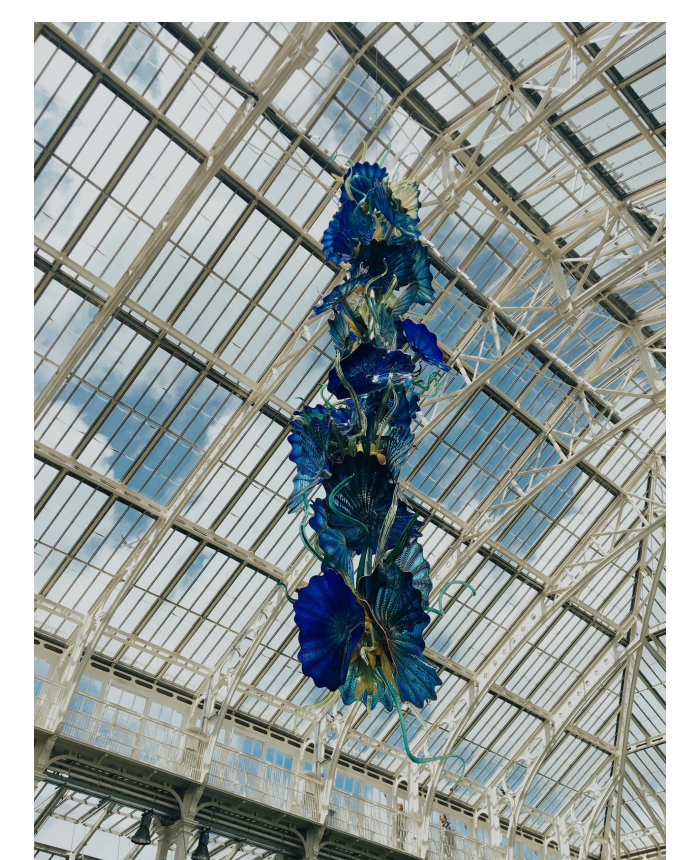
Currently, Kew Gardens is an exhibition, *Chihuly: Reflections on Nature*, by the artist Dale Chihuly. The title is evident in all the glass sculptures. Some of the work displays this title in its appearance, such as *Summer Sun* (2010) or *Temperate House Persians* (2018). Others were incorporated into the landscape of the grounds and glasshouses, such as *Neodymium Reeds and Turquoise Marlins* and *Ethereal White Persian Pond* (2018).



Summer Sun



Neodymium Reeds and Turquoise Marlins



Temperate House Persians



Ethereal White Persian Pond