



Restoring the Glasshouses, the Final Stage of the Project Funding Report September 2020



Your gift enabled an amazing transformation

In 2019 The Stanley Smith (UK) Horticultural Trust generously donated £3,000 towards our final Glasshouse appeal, to complete the restoration of all of the Victorian Glasshouses situated within West Dean's Walled Garden. The grant has now been spent and I am delighted to provide an update on the status of the restoration project.

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 and are often cited as 'the jewel in the Garden's crown'. Today the Kitchen Garden and Glasshouses continue to provide 26 different growing environments that demonstrate a huge range of plant varieties. Our new Head Gardener, Tom Brown, who has been leading the gardening team since April 2019, is passionate about retaining these historic structures and showcasing awe inspiring horticultural displays within them.

Your help achieved so much

Over the past 18 months, in excess of £100,000 has been raised for the Glasshouses. This has been a huge success due to our supporter's love of the heritage behind these beautiful buildings, and their enthusiasm for what our amazing Gardens team grow inside them.

The completion of Glasshouses 15 and 16

The finished Glasshouses are stunning structures, taking up two walls in the Walled Cutting Garden, a spot within the Gardens that is much favoured by the visiting public for its colourful seasonal displays. It is one of the most visited areas of the Gardens.

The Fern Glasshouse and Glasshouse 16 are two of our 'lean to' houses, and have now been fully restored with new planting and invigorated displays are now flourishing in these Glasshouses. The Fern House (number 15) is for a fern display showcasing non hardy ferns and also tree ferns to add some height. It is a north facing glasshouse and heated to 16-18 degrees, which is ideal for that type display. The fern collection is staying as it is as we have a comprehensive collection and always ensure we have two of each plant.

Before, during & after restoration



Glasshouse Number 16, the other 'lean to' house, is not a heated glasshouse and is quite cold in the winter. It has been overwintering the primulas and there is a planned spring and summer display comprising of primulas, standard fuchsias, pelargoniums and heliotropes.

Before, during & after restoration





The completion of Glasshouses 4, 5 and 6

The largest Glasshouse in the Walled Cutting Garden is the Peach and Tomato House, numbers 4, 5 and 6. This Glasshouse was completed just several weeks ago.

These are south-facing three-quarter-span houses glasshouses, which were positioned to ensure maximum light and heat penetration, the large back wall storing solar heating during the day and releasing it overnight.

Before & after restoration





Recently our two Garden Trainees, planted around 2,000 hyacinth bulbs, in the beds, large pots and hanging baskets. They came into bloom in February and gave a wonderful colourful display and the most fragrance. Following the hyacinths, there will be sweet potatoes, apricots, peaches, sweet peppers, basket tomatoes and strawberries. Newly planted apricot and peach trees will stay all year, the others are seasonal and will be cleared out at the end of the season. The displays will show an evolving Walled Garden with refreshed displays.

The early season hyacinth display



You helped us learn

The appeal to our supporters to help preserve the extraordinary collection of Glasshouses was launched in 2014, we have now raised all the money required to complete the restoration work in the next 12 months, to bring the Glasshouses back to their former glory. Your support helped us significantly in reaching this tremendous milestone.

Restoring a glasshouse is painstaking work. The timber frames are tailor-made by our joiners in our workshops to replicate the Victorian design. Specialist, durable paint is used on the timber to give the longest lifespan possible with a specified maintenance schedule. Once erected, the frames have been finished by hand with panes of beaver-tailed glass hand-cut by our experienced team on-site to ensure they fit perfectly. 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 a tremendous visual display and learning environment for our many thousands of visitors.

Thorough research of materials and painstaking restoration work will ensure that the glasshouses, with a minimal maintenance programme, can withstand the elements for at least another 50 years.

Over the years our team of craftspeople, led by our Clerk of Works have been on a journey to ensure the highest quality restoration, whilst adhering to best conservation practice and also seeking the best materials sympathetic to the project whilst also giving long lasting results.

A comprehensive assessment of the wood options available for repairs within our budget, led us to choosing Accoya wood, which is excellent for the humid environments typical in our Glasshouses. The wood is treated by a chemical modification process called acetylation, which removes all water from the timber and replaces it with an acid to make it rot and pest resistant.

The paint system is carefully matched to the wood to give the longest lifespan. The team have also become expert at working with the design of these buildings and how the structures fit together, including the careful placement of each individually cut piece of glass.

Everything that we have learnt will be so valuable in our continuing work with other heritage buildings at West Dean. The skills and knowledge the team have acquired will go on being used for years beyond the end of this Glasshouse restoration project.

Where the money went

As we are well into the restoration project of all of our Glasshouses the costing of the works and budgets have become an exacting science and project spend was within budget. As most of the skills labour work is undertaken by our in-house team of carpenters and painters, these costs associated with these elements are fixed and easy to work out and keep within budget.

The materials, wood, paint, replacement glass and thousands of nails and brass tacks are the other main component of the expenditure budget.

The Future

It is wonderful news that we have secured enough funding to complete the Glasshouse restoration project in full, thanks to donors like you. The Melon and Cucumber Houses are still to be restored, along with work on the Aubergine, Chilli, Cherry Tomatoes and Orchid Pit Houses. Before Covid 19 we had hoped that the work would be completed by September 2020, it is now likely that the completion date will be pushed back into 2021.

The scaffolding was due to go up in March 2020, now with the amended timetable we can hope that the scaffolding will go up some time in 2020.

We have implemented a maintenance schedule for the Glasshouses, to ensure that they remain in tip top condition and are given the best chance of surviving for the next 50 years.

We have recruited for the new post of a Glasshouse Gardener, this is a new full time post which has been created from a slight restructure of the Garden's team roles and responsibilities. This role was due to start as the pandemic hit, but will start as soon as the lockdown is over. The ambition for the glasshouses is for each one to have a distinctive look with more artistically led displays and this new post will be vital in delivering that project.

Our Head Gardener's ambition is for each Glasshouse to have a distinctive look, with more artistically led displays. To be more artistic and more emotionally driven, we look forward to sharing images of the new displays as they unfold over the coming months and years.

Your support makes so much difference



Tom Brown, Head Gardener not only leads the dedicated and talented gardens team and volunteers, but also has daily interaction with the many visitors to the gardens. Tom and his team can often be seen deep in conversation with garden enthusiasts, answering their questions about the Gardens. All part of the education work that the team are delivering to the public.

We asked Tom, what it means to have the Glasshouses back in full working order. *"The Glasshouses are often the highlight of people's visit to the Gardens, they are very much the jewel in West Dean Gardens' crown. West Dean has built a reputation for excellence under glass and I look forward to sharing with the public new displays from this spring. I feel that*

there is room for a move towards artistic and contemporary displays whilst remaining true to our horticultural heritage for excellence. The good thing about glasshouse displays is that they are ever changing, it is an exciting type of gardening, and where you effectively start with a blank canvas each year allowing for gardening with is showy, dramatic and theatrical."



Some comments from our Garden Friends to share with you

They are a wonderful work of art.

Facilities here for glasshouses are so good, just wonderful to have walled garden with as many glasshouses as we have. It would be criminal to let them fall apart.

Without the glasshouses I don't think there would be as many visitors to the gardens.

Seeing all of the workmanship is important, how the shutters and mechanics work. Before the restoration it was untidy and messy.

It is important to restore them properly and not do too cheap a job.

The glasshouses are the real draw for me. I come a couple of times a month.

I like to admire something that is done so expertly.

I sense a wonderful atmosphere in the fully functioning glasshouses. There is a special feeling within them.

Thank you

We are incredibly grateful to the Trustees of the Stanley Smith (UK) Horticultural Trust for their generous and ongoing support towards the Glasshouse Project. You are truly guardians of these precious historical horticultural buildings. Thank you for breathing new life into them for the thousands of visitors and future generations to enjoy.