

# Heritage Report

Refurbishment and Conservation to:

The Japanese Gateway  
Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew  
Richmond, TW1 9AE

For the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

R2/23\_082 Rev A



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ORIGINAL ISSUE DATE  
August 2023

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Revision No.	Project Architect	Checked	Date of Issue
A	Sarah Mitchell-Dolby	CF	January 2024

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# THE JAPANESE GATEWAY, ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS KEW, RICHMOND

## HERITAGE REPORT

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 SITE CONTEXT

Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, is a world-renowned global scientific institute. Founded in 1759, the gardens are now a UNESCO World Heritage Site that uses the power of science and the rich diversity of its gardens and collections to provide botanical and mycological knowledge, inspiration and understanding of why plants and fungi matter to everyone.

The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, operates two sites: Kew and Wakehurst. The land and buildings of the Kew estate are the hereditary property of The Crown, managed by Kew under the 1984 Ministerial Direction. The estate consists of 132 hectares of gardens, botanical glasshouses and approximately 200 mixed use buildings.

Set beside the River Thames' south-western reaches, this Grade I registered historic landscape garden includes work by renowned landscape designers including, in the eighteenth century, Charles Bridgeman, William Kent and Lancelot "Capability" Brown and, in the nineteenth century, William Hooker, William A Nesfield and Decimus Burton.

Alongside the botanic collection Kew is also the site of a very important collection of buildings. The Gardens has over two hundred and seventy built structures; fifty-six of which are listed buildings and monuments that reflect the stylistic expressions of various periods; six are Grade I listed, seven are Grade II\*, and forty-three are Grade II listed.

The Japanese Gateway Chokushi-Mon, which is the subject of this report, is a Grade II listed building, located close to the Lion Gate entrance of the gardens (southeast extent of the site) within Site Zone 5, Pagoda Vista Zone. As described in the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew World Heritage Management Plan 2020-2025, the historically the Pagoda Vista Zone was part of Kew Gardens and was, and still is, focused on the Grade I listed Pagoda, a significant surviving architectural element of William Chambers' design and can be seen from the Japanese Gateway.

Before the Japanese Gateway was constructed in Kew Gardens, the site was previously home to a mosque which was constructed in 1761. Interestingly, this mosque was not constructed by a Muslim community but was the work of William Chambers. The mosque served no religious function as there was no local Muslim population to utilize it. Instead, it was an ornamental homage to Turkish-Islamic architecture, a style prevalent not only in Turkey but also in vast regions of south-eastern Europe at that time.

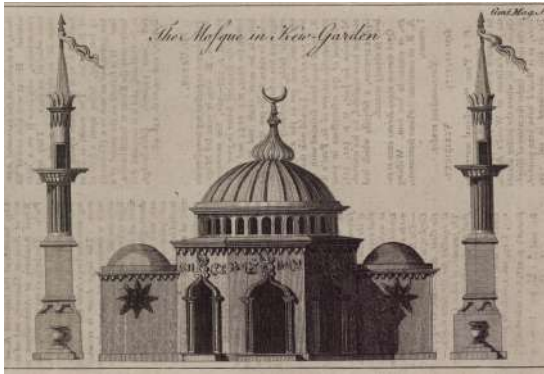


Fig. 1 The Mosque in Kew Garden

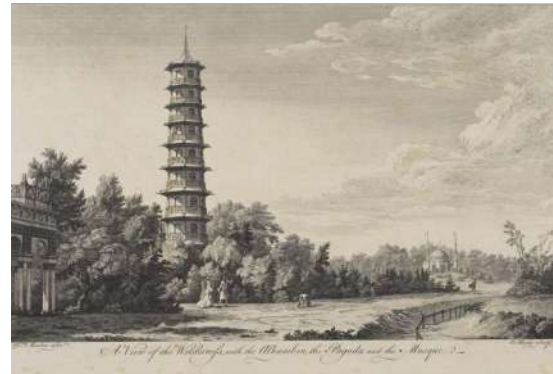


Fig. 2 The Mosque can be seen in the background of the illustration of the Pagoda

The fate of the mosque remains unknown, but it disappeared from its mound a mere 24 years after its construction. Today, the site is adorned by the Japanese Gateway, a 1910 near replica of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Karamon gate at Nishi Hongan-ji, Kyoto, Japan. The Japanese Gateway stands as the centrepiece in the beautifully landscaped Japanese gardens at Kew designed by Professor Masao Fukuhara of Oaska University in 1996. The Japanese Landscape is divided into three thematic sections: the Garden of Harmony, the Garden of Peace, and the Garden of Activity. These gardens serve to accentuate the symbolic and aesthetic significance of the Japanese Gateway, creating a tranquil environment that invites reflection and admiration.



Fig. 3 The Japanese Gateway and Landscape.



## 2.0 HISTORIC SITE CONTEXT: C17 to C18

### 2.1 LAND OWNERSHIP

In the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Kew Park, was owned by Sir Henry, Lord Capel of Tewkesbury. The Capel family lived on the 132-ha site, which had a house and walled gardens and exotic plants.

Kew's connection with the Royal Family has its origins with 'Dutch House,' now known as Kew Palace, which was built by Sir Hugh Portman, a merchant trading with Holland. The red-brick Jacobean building replaced a former house belonging to the merchant Augustine Hynde and was sold by her son, Rowland, in 1594 to Sir Hugh Portman. In 1631 Samuel Fortrey of Richmond, the son of a merchant, acquired the property, and this is the date above the door.

In 1728 the 'Dutch House' was leased to George II's wife, Queen Caroline. Their son, George III, and his wife Queen Charlotte, who was a botanist enthusiast, inherited the lease on the house in 1760 and it was purchased by George III in 1781 for Queen Charlotte. The building has been referred to as Kew Palace since the demolition of Kew House in 1789. Kew Palace was occupied by the Royal Family until the death of Queen Charlotte in 1818. The property was empty for almost 80 years and gradually fell into a state of neglect.

Under the ownership of the Capel family, 170 acres of land within Kew Gardens was leased in 1731 to Frederick, Prince of Wales, son to George II and father to George III, who began extensive alterations and improvements to create a pleasure-grounds. The site was also developed within the grounds of a royal Thames-side estate, Richmond Park; a hunting ground created by Charles I in 1637 for the royal palaces at Richmond and Hampton Court.



Fig. 4 Map of London, John Rocque, 1754  
Bibliographische Beschreibung



Fig. 5 An Extract of the Royal Palace Gardens and Park at Richmond, John Rocque, 1754  
RBG Kew

## 2.2 THE ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS, KEW

The first physic garden was established at Kew in 1759 when Princess Augusta of Saxe-Gotha, Princess Dowager of Wales, mother of the Prince of Wales (later King George III), founded a nine-acre botanic garden within the pleasure grounds of Kew Palace. In 1772, King George III inherited Kew estate and joined it with the royal estate in Richmond.

The nine-acre garden was superintended by William Aiton, who had been trained by Philip Miller in the Apothocaries' garden at Chelsea, established in 1673, which was considered the equivalent to the present Kew at that period. By the end of the eighteen century, under Aiton's management and with the aid of Sir Joseph Banks, botanist and patron of the natural sciences, the Gardens at Kew was famed throughout Europe for the great collection of plants it contained.

### 3.0 THE JAPANESE GATEWAY



Fig. 6 View looking north west

The Japanese Gateway was created for the Japan-British Exhibition held at White City in London in 1910, the Japanese Gateway is built in the architectural style of the late-16th century Momoyama (or Japanese rococo) period. The following description of the original gateway are extracted from The Exhibition Guide:

*"The gate called Chokoshi Mon, or Royal Gate, is a representation of the sacred gateway to one of the temples in Kyoto. Through the doorway only the Emperor, the members of his family, or his representatives are allowed to pass. The original is to be seen in the Temple of Higashi Hong-wauji—the largest Buddhist temple in Japan, and one of the most magnificent. It is rightly called the St. Peter's of Japan, having been erected by the people at a cost of £1,600,000."*

Several known restoration works have been carried out on the building, including the following:

- i) 1910: Constructed for the Japan-British Exhibition in London
- ii) 1936: Restoration by woodcarver Kumajiro Torii
- iii) 1956: Restoration by woodcarver Kumajiro Torii (*Shillito, S. (2023) Hello Kew. Royal Botanic Gardens Kew*)
- iv) 1994(Nov) – 1995(Oct): Restoration project



### 3.1 THE NISHI HONGANJI TEMPLE AND THE ORIGINAL KARAMON GATE, KYOTO, JAPAN



Fig. 7 Inside the temple compound of Nishi Honganji

Founded by monk Shinran (1173-1263), the Jodo Shinshu sect of Buddhism propagates the belief in the vow of Amida Buddha to save all seekers of his aid. This doctrine, simplistic in nature, garnered widespread acceptance, making it the most prevalent form of Buddhism in Japan today. Post Shinran's demise in 1272, the first Honganji Temple was erected to preserve his teachings. However, societal, religious, and political instability over the next three centuries necessitated several relocations of the temple. It finally found stability in Kyoto in 1591, where the present Nishi Honganji Temple stands. Unfortunately, a 1617 fire razed many original structures, necessitating replacements with structures from the dismantled Fushimi Castle.

The existence of two Honganji temples in Kyoto is political. To prevent the consolidation of power within the Honganji lineage, Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu instigated a split in the early 17th century. This led to the establishment of Higashi Honganji, or Eastern Honganji, to the east of the original, hence the name Nishi Honganji, or Western Honganji. In 1864, a fire largely destroyed the eastern temple, requiring most of its buildings to be rebuilt in the late 19th or early 20th centuries. However, Nishi Honganji was spared significant damage, preserving its older structures. Many of its buildings are listed as National Treasures, and the temple is recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



Fig. 8 The Karamon Gate at Nishi Honganji, from inside the temple grounds



The Karamon gate at Nishi Hongan-ji, originally constructed around 1598 for Toyotomi Hideyoshi's Fushimi Castle, was relocated to its current location in 1632 following the castle's dismantling in 1623. This move was in preparation for Tokugawa Iemitsu, the third shogun of the Tokugawa dynasty's anticipated visit to the temple. It is one of only six structures designated as a National Treasure in Japan.

Adorned in an intricate Chinese style and topped with a cypress thatch, the Karamon, also known as the "Chinese Gate", graces the southern region of the temple compound. It bears an affectionate nickname, the *higurashi-mon* or "Twilight Gate", a testament to the entrancing beauty of its carvings that can engross onlookers until dusk.



Fig. 9 A fictitious animal *Kirin* carving.



Fig. 10 A fictitious tiger carving.

Hongan-ji's Karamon makes abundant use of colour and metal fittings. There are also several animal carvings on the front and backs of the doors. The architectural traits of the Karamon are the main inspiration of the Japanese Gateway replica in Kew Gardens.

### 3.2 HISTORICAL PURPOSE OF THE JAPANESE GATEWAY AND THE 1910 JAPAN-BRITISH EXHIBITION

The Japan-British Exhibition of 1910 served as a platform for Japan to showcase its modernization and readiness to join the global economy as a viable trading partner to a British and international audience. Alongside projecting a status equal to the British Empire, it was necessary for Japan to include representations of its colonized populations, the Ainu and Formosan peoples.

The exhibition did not just feature high-quality fine art objects but also offered immersive presentations of Japanese settlements, architecture, and gardens. These spatial components offered visitors a tangible insight into daily life within modern Japan and rural indigenous villages. These diorama-like constructions offered an experiential view of Japan, bridging the gap between the international audience and the spaces where art was produced.



Fig. 11 The Japan-British Exhibition Wood Lane entrance

The splendid gateways of the Japanese Exhibition served as ceremonial entrances, creating a distinct boundary between the external world of London and the exhibition's inner realm. The Ro-mon of the Kasuga shrine, located in Nara, graced the Wood Lane entrance of the exhibition.



Fig. 12 The relocated Japanese Gateway, The Kew Guild Journal, 1911

The Chokushi-mon (the Imperial Messenger's Gate), another intricately carved gateway, was commissioned by the Kyoto Exhibitor's Association. Constructed at a scale four-fifths of the original size, it was prominently displayed in the Textile Palace, a stark contrast to other models typically built at around one-twentieth scale. This gateway mirrors the design of the west gate of Kyoto's Nishi Hongan-ji. Later, the Chokushi-mon was gifted to King George V who then bequeathed it to Kew Gardens, where it stands to this day. Wada Ganyemon is credited with the impressive wood carvings, completing the task in just 45 days.

The meticulous authenticity of these reconstructions, inclusive of whole buildings, gardens, (complete with genuine trees, shrubs, and stones imported from Japan) and urban landscapes, countered the perception of Japan as an underdeveloped nation. By showcasing intimate glimpses of public spaces and traditional architecture, the exhibition emphasized Japan's advanced artistic capabilities, high craftsmanship standards, and unique aesthetic culture.

### 3.3 EXTERIOR



Fig. 13 Japanese Gateway looking North West

The 1910 Kew Guild Journal contains an excerpt which reads:

*...It is an exact copy (four-fifths natural size) of the Chokushi-Mon or Gate of the Imperial Messenger of the Buddhist Temple of Nishi Hongwanji at Kyoto in S. Japan, and was executed by the famous wood-carver Wada Genyemon of Kyoto. Like the original, it is constructed of the close-grained Hinoki wood, obtained from Cupressus obtusa, several trees of which have been planted close to it, and is roofed with a thick layer of cedar-bark shingles and sheet lead...*

The Japanese gateway is a softwood timber framed construction with elaborate carvings and copper repoussé details. It has six posts and mid-height rails on its north and south sides. Gablets on the north and south show iconographic carvings above a timber sill. The roof features small copper shingles and metallic glazed terracotta ridge tiles.

Except for minor changes to the roof covering, features like the terracotta ridge, finials, white-painted corbels, and carpentry remain as they were in 1910.





Fig. 14 South elevation



Fig. 15 High level carvings and copper detailing on south and east elevations





Fig. 16 Carving on east elevation



Fig. 17 Doors on north elevations

#### 4.0 THE JAPANESE GATEWAY'S LISTED STATUS

Historic List Entry Number: 1251790. The Japanese Gateway Chokushi-Mon or Gate of the Imperial Messenger is listed Grade II and described in the Historic England Listing:

*A replica of the famous gateway in Japan. It was made for an exhibition in London in 1910, and presented to the Gardens. Six piers in rectangular formation, with gates hung within centre pair. Timber, with traditional copper roof (which replaced the original made of cedar bark as part of the 1995 restoration works), gabled on all four sides. Rich carving within gables, and to screens and corbels below.*

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