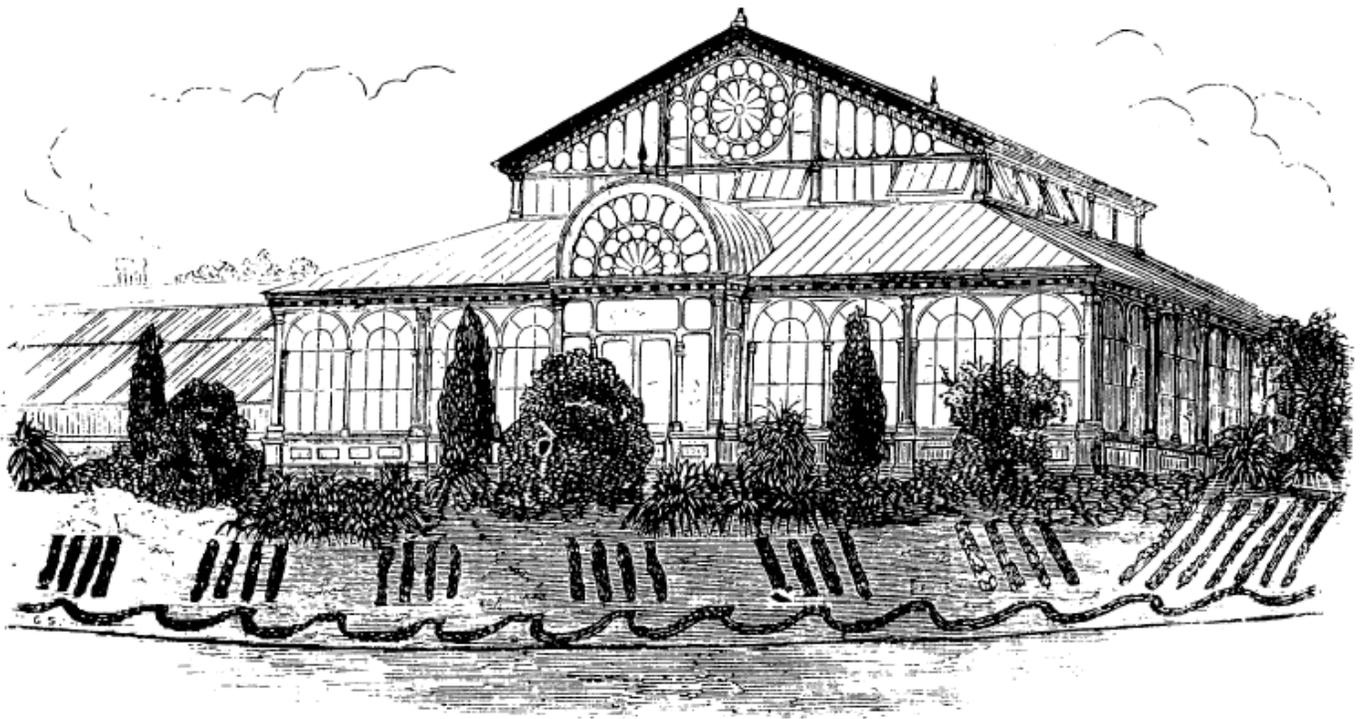


Birmingham Botanical Gardens History Pack



The Victorians

THE BIRMINGHAM
BOTANICAL
GARDENS
TURN OVER A NEW LEAF

Activities

Birmingham Botanical Gardens and Glasshouses were designed by JC Loudon and opened in 1832 – five years before Queen Victoria came to the throne. The main architectural features that we see today were built during the Victorian era: the Tropical House in 1852, the Subtropical House in 1871, the Terrace Glasshouses (now the Mediterranean House and Arid House) in 1884 and the bandstand in 1873.

These activities help pupils to discover how the Victorian era influenced the plants, grounds and buildings of the Botanical Gardens.

1. Victorian Architecture

Pupils can look for evidence of old and new parts of buildings such as the glasshouses, bandstand, cottage and gazebo. Their observations can be recorded on any of the worksheets 1A to 1D.

2. Plant Explorers

The famous plant explorer Ernest “China” Wilson worked at Birmingham Botanical Gardens. Information about Wilson can be found on worksheet 2A. With worksheet 2B, pupils can become plant explorers and hunt for some of the plants he introduced.

The boards around the grounds give information about other plant explorers, notable horticulturalists and famous garden designers, and many of the paths are named after them. Pupils can record information about these people on worksheet 2C (answers are provided on a separate sheet for teachers and other adults).

Pupils can also consider how the plants were kept alive during the long journey (mainly by sea) to Britain by viewing the Wardian Case in the Subtropical House.

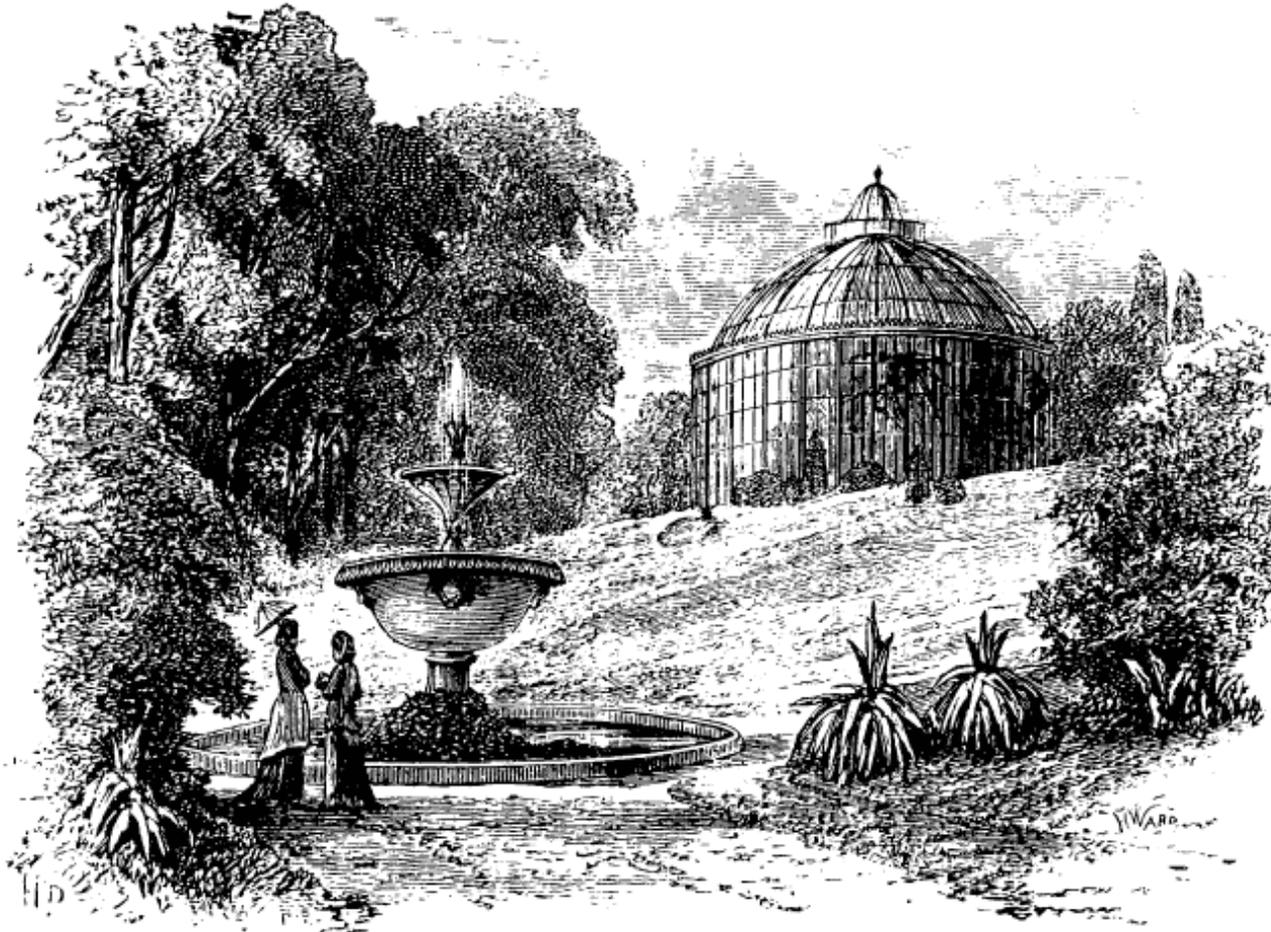
3. Art and Design

Pupils can study the use of plants as the basis for designs, e.g. William Morris wallpaper and textiles, through sketchbook activities. They could collect (Autumn) leaves to create their own William Morris style collages.

Please note: plants can change due to seasons etc., so you may not find all the plants mentioned on the worksheets on the day of your visit.

Spot the difference

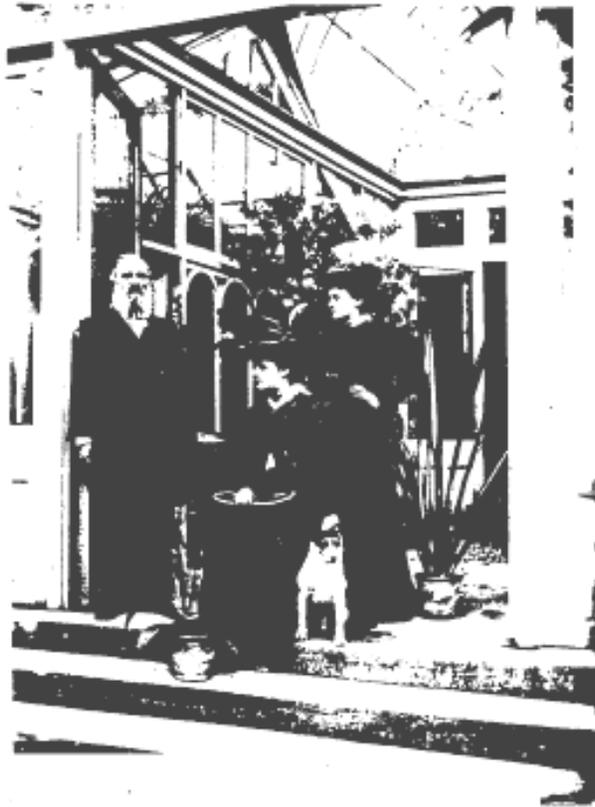
Go to the Main Lawn and try to find the place in the Gardens where you can see a view like the one in the picture, which was drawn in 1875. Label **five differences** between this picture and the view you see today.



Worksheet 1B

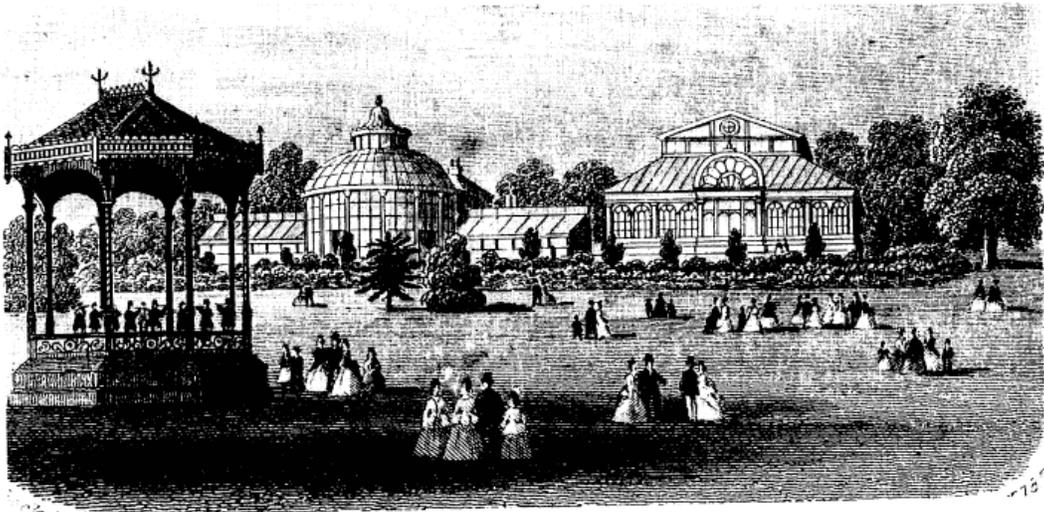
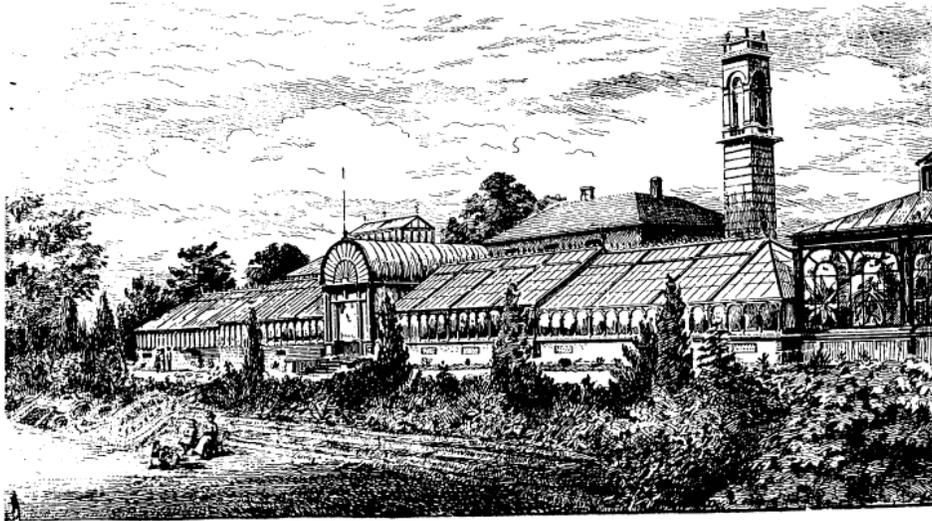
Name: _____

Look at this photograph, which was taken in the space between the Arid and Mediterranean Houses in 1890:

**Date:** 1890**Date:**

Ask three of your friends (and maybe an extra person to be the dog!) to recreate this pose for modern times. Draw them in the second box.

Here are three views of the Botanical Gardens during Victorian times. For each one, list the things that have **changed** on the **left** and things that have remained the **same** on the **right**.



Worksheet 1D

Name: _____

Find a building – for example, one of the glasshouses, the bandstand, the gazebo or the cottage – and complete this table:

Name of building:	
Use:	
Date of building (if known):	
Draw and describe parts of this building that you think are original.	What materials were used to build the original parts of this building?
What evidence do you have that these features are original?	
Draw and describe parts of this building you think were added later.	What materials are these new parts of the building made of?
Why do you think these new features were added?	

Ernest “China” Wilson

Ernest Henry Wilson was a Victorian botanist who began his career as an apprentice gardener at Birmingham Botanical Gardens. Before he was 40, he had become famous for his travels in the Far East, especially China. What did he do in China? He hunted for plants. Before he died (in a car crash) in 1930 he had found 3000 new species, 1000 of which he brought back home to be grown in the gardens of Britain.

In 1899, Wilson travelled to China in search of the Handkerchief Tree, *Davidia involucrata*. People had seen pressed examples of the leaves and the flowers. Now they wanted the real thing. They wanted leaves to plant in their gardens. He returned, not only with the Handkerchief Tree, but 400 other plants as well.

Since he had been so successful, he was sent off again in 1903. Once more he was successful. New roses, new rhododendrons, new primulas and new poppies were all brought home. He was now becoming famous.

His fame even spread to the USA. The Arnold Arboretum in Boston, America’s greatest collection of trees, also wanted new plants. They sent Wilson on his travels again, this time not just to China, but to Japan, Korea, Australia, New Zealand, India and Africa as well. Although his job was to look for trees, he also found, in Tibet, a lily (*Lilium regale*) that has been grown in British gardens ever since.



Lilium regale

This lily nearly cost him his life. The only way to where it was growing was across a narrow gorge. While trying to get across, a rock fell and crushed his leg. An English doctor would probably have amputated it and his travelling days would have been over, but a Chinese doctor managed to save it.



This picture shows Wilson (centre) taken at Birmingham Botanical Gardens around 1894.

Worksheet 2B

Name: _____

The Wilson Walk is a path at Birmingham Botanical Gardens named after the great plant collector, Ernest Henry Wilson. He trained at Birmingham Botanical Gardens before travelling to the mountains of China to look for plants unknown in the West. The border contains some of the many plants he found and introduced into this country.



*Handkerchief
Tree*

Look for some of these plants and record information about them below: the Handkerchief Tree (*Davidia involucreta*), the Hupeh Crab (*Malus hupehensis*), Chinese Witch Hazel (*Hamamelis mollis*), the Wilson's Magnolia (*Magnolia wilsonii*), *Lilium regale*.

Name of plant:	Name of plant:
Country of origin:	Country of origin:
Interesting features:	Interesting features:
Name of plant:	Name of plant:
Country of origin:	Country of origin:
Interesting features:	Interesting features:

Victorian Plant Hunters and Gardeners

Many of the paths around the Botanical Gardens are named after famous plant hunters, gardeners or garden designers, such as Ernest Wilson and JC Loudon. Find the information boards on the paths and use them to help you answer the questions below.

David Douglas (a pre-Victorian plant hunter)

Walk to the end of the terrace (towards the aviary) and then turn left onto Douglas Way. Stop when you find the information board about David Douglas: a plant hunter who travelled the world to discover new plants and bring them back to Britain. Look for a Douglas Fir that is named after him.

Many plant hunters came to a grisly end. How did David Douglas die?

Gertrude Jekyll (1843-1932)

Walk down the path towards the fountain, and just before you reach it, turn right onto Jekyll Walk. This path is named after a garden designer named Gertrude Jekyll, who always insisted on peace and quiet. In fact, visitors to her home said that the only sounds allowed were bird songs!

Why did Gertrude Jekyll give up painting and start designing gardens?

Reginald Farrer: the intrepid Yorkshireman

Return to the fountain, walk along Wilson Walk and turn left onto Farrer Walk. Make your way down there until you reach the information board about Reginald Farrer, a plant hunter who often put himself into dangerous situations in order to find what he was looking for.

Which place did Farrer describe as *"this flowery adorable stinking city"*?

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Many plant hunters came to a grisly end. How did David Douglas die?

Snow blindness led him to fall down a pit used for catching wild boar and he was gored to death by a wild bull.

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Why did Gertrude Jekyll give up painting and start designing gardens?

She had poor eyesight.

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Tokyo, Japan