John Simmons OBE, VMH
(1937–)

John Simmons was Curator of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew from 1972 until his retirement in 1995. Amongst many other offices he was also President of the Institute of Horticulture, Chairman of the National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens, a Royal Horticultural Society judge and served on the advisory boards for several gardens including the Westonbirt Arboretum and the National Pinetum at Bedgebury. He also became a widely travelled advisor to other botanic gardens overseas.

At Kew all areas of the Gardens were enhanced by his drive for quality underpinned by conservation and educational objectives. The great glasshouses, the Palm, and Temperate House were restored and the Princess of Wales Conservatory created, but most of all he sought to increase professional and scientific standards, and greatly expanded the collections through many joint field-collecting programs, such as those with Quarryhill. John also had the pleasure of leading the development of the garden at Wakehurst (Kew’s Sussex garden) by enriching its collections and landscape, and taking it from a few thousand to a quarter of a million visitors, a figure that is now approaching half a million.

In 2000 he survived a near fatal accident in the mountains of western China, and though slightly slowed by head damage, his interest and enthusiasm has not dimmed. A popular speaker and frequent writer John has just completed a book for Timber Press on the management of wet gardens and their plants, inspired by his experiences with his own rather wet garden in north Norfolk - a total contrast to the sand dry soil of Kew.