



Royal  
Horticultural  
Society

Sharing the best in Gardening

# RHS Libraries Update 2017



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## Bringing our collections to life

The reopening of the RHS Lindley Library in London following its refurbishment in early 2016 has provided a wonderful opportunity to bring our collections out into the new display area and to share some items that have never been exhibited before.

In 2017 we staged three exhibitions: 'Pigments and Petals' (paintings by 19th century artist Caroline Maria Applebee), 'Potted' (an exhibition of ceramic pots for houseplants staged in partnership with Central Saint Martins), and 'Gardeners' World at 50'. We have staged a touring version of 'Gardeners' World at 50' in the four RHS gardens and mounted a display entitled 'The Language of Flowers' at RHS Garden Harlow Carr. The Library team also staged a display of orchid portraits at the RHS Orchid Show and ran popular curator tours of our collections during each of the RHS London Shows.

To further share our collections and events with new audiences, we have set up a new Lindley Library facebook page ([facebook.com/LindleyLibrary](https://www.facebook.com/LindleyLibrary)). We also regularly post blogs on the RHS website at [rhs.org.uk/education-learning/libraries-at-rhs](https://www.rhs.org.uk/education-learning/libraries-at-rhs).

## About us

Since 2014 RHS Libraries have been part of RHS Science and Collections. The Library collections, together with other collections and information resources held within the department, make up a unique Global Knowledge Bank for Gardening.

RHS Libraries' lively exhibition and events programme is key to achieving theme four the RHS Science Strategy 2015–2019 (Plant Science for all: people, plants, planet). By offering new opportunities to view our collections, we hope to give people a window into the knowledge, research and passion for plants that continue to shape all our gardens.

In December 2016 a new RHS Libraries Strategy was launched to further extend the reach and impact of our amazing collections and the knowledge within them.



The libraries in London, Wisley and Harlow Carr, along with reading rooms at Hyde Hall and Rosemoor, hold the world's finest collection of material on gardening and garden plants, with literature and artworks dating back over 500 years. *Tropaeolum majus* 'Nigricans' (above), a nasturtium cultivar painted around 1834, was recently shown in our 'Petals and Pigments' exhibition, which featured the work of Caroline Maria Applebee.

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## RHS Libraries in numbers

**80,000**

library users a year

**16,500**

general enquiries

**400**

researchers accessing  
specialist collections

**11,500**

book loans to RHS members

**90,000**

books...

**29,000**

artworks...and

**250,000**

photographs in the  
RHS Lindley Library



Above left.  
Conserving 19th  
century Chinese  
artworks.

Above right. Pencil,  
ink and colour  
designs from Gertrude  
Jekyll's  
scrapbook (c.1875).

Below. Artist Olwyn  
Bowey with her  
pencil and pastel  
painting of the  
Greenhouse at West  
Dean Gardens,  
acquired by the RHS  
in March 2017.

## Preserving our gardening heritage

Our historic books and manuscripts are under constant threat from the ravages of age, the jaws of the biscuit beetle and the natural degeneration of paper, vellum and other materials. It is therefore crucial that we do everything we can to preserve our rare and unique items for future generations.

Gertrude Jekyll's scrapbook, the papers of plant collector Hartweg, plantsman E.A. Bowles' scrapbooks, and six albums of 19th century Chinese paintings have all received extensive conservation work this year.

We are working hard with the support of our fantastic volunteers to sort and catalogue our large collections of periodicals and nursery catalogues.

Significant acquisitions in our collections this year have included:

- ◆ *Fritillaria gibbosa* by Rory McEwen, watercolour on vellum
- ◆ Greenhouse interior (left) by Olwyn Bowey, pencil and pastel
- ◆ Postcard from Gertrude Jekyll to Mrs Maynard Proud

## Advancing learning and research

As well as supporting horticulture students and researchers with access to our collections, the RHS Lindley Library runs popular short courses for gardeners and garden enthusiasts. Over six weeks this year, students worked through over 500 years of garden history, looking at original materials from the historic collections with the support of specialist library staff. Such courses enable us to offer students a more in-depth insight into our unique collections, and are a great opportunity to experience our horticultural heritage first-hand.



In spring 2017, fashion brand Coast launched its limited edition Flora collection of clothing and accessories in partnership with the RHS. These beautiful dresses, bags and separates feature designs inspired by the Library's floral art and will bring the treasures within the collections to a wider audience, as well as providing income to support our charitable work.

Right. This design was inspired by an album of watercolours and drawings attributed to August Wilhelm Sievert, dating from c.1730.



## Looking ahead

In May the RHS Wisley Garden Library moved temporarily to Gardiners' House by the Wisley garden entrance. In 2020, some 10,000 items (including 8,000 currently in storage) will move to the new Centre for Horticultural Science & Learning at the Wisley Hilltop. With bespoke accommodation that will help keep these collections in the best conditions to ensure they survive, the new building will also provide the public and researchers with greatly improved facilities for visiting and using the collections.

## Informing and inspiring all gardeners

Our garden libraries are a great way for gardeners and visitors to feel inspired, but with so many books and other items available, where do you start? The Garden Library teams at Wisley and Harlow Carr have taken this on with a series of themed book displays designed to provide an insight into what's available with a focus on a particular topic.

Right. RHS Libraries events during 2017 have included a display on spring bulbs at RHS Garden Harlow Carr, a celebration of *RHS Plant Finder's* 30th anniversary at Wisley, and a retrospective of *BBC Gardeners' World* at the RHS Lindley Library, Vincent Square.



**rhs.org.uk**

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