

# It takes a village to fill a herbarium: how a small team can accomplish big things

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(LT1) Long time no see, Lecture Theatre 5, Appleton Tower, 11 Crichton Street, EH8 9LE, June 7, 2022, 9:30 AM - 11:00 AM

The Royal Horticultural Society Herbarium (RHS), which holds approximately 150,000 specimens and associated collections, had outgrown its original storage space. This necessitated a move to a new larger herbarium, located in the Hilltop building, which opened at RHS Garden Wisley in June 2021.

Despite Brexit and Covid-19, a small team of herbarium staff worked alongside a specialist removals company to ensure the collections arrived intact into the new facility. The new building not only provided the room to expand the collection, but also to expand the team to include a tremendous group of volunteers, who were generously sponsored by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

The addition of the volunteers has generated new workflows and enthusiasm across the team, as it will help the RHS to achieve ambitious growth of the collection in a way unachievable in the original building. For the initial phase of the project five plant collectors and 10 specimen preparation volunteers were coached in collecting, colour charting, pressing and mounting of specimens. So successful has the project been over the past few months the RHS now have the impetus to expand the programme to two of our other gardens.

As one of the Herbarium Curators at the RHS' newly named 1851 Royal Commission Herbarium, the last 18 months have included the re-curation of the collection, packing and unpacking of boxes, testing for the migration to a new collections management database and looking for the specimen stories that would engage the public in the new exhibitions spaces.

Whilst working in a herbarium during a pandemic has certainly had its challenges, the camaraderie and commitment of the staff and volunteers has been an unexpected highlight. This talk is less about the safe relocation of the plants, as it is about the people who facilitated the move and how we are looking to the future with renewed vigour together.

