

WSY HERBARIUM- OUR DIGITAL FUTURE

Mrs Mandeep Matharu¹, Mrs Lydia Walles¹, Mrs Sian Tyrrell¹

¹*Royal Horticultural Society Gardens, Surrey, United Kingdom*

In 2011 with a capacity of 60,000 specimens, a herb scan and one staff member, the Royal Horticultural Society's herbarium (now known as The 1851 Royal Commission Herbarium, and with the official abbreviation WSY) started its digitisation journey with the goal of creating a 'Virtual Herbarium'. In the Winter of 2020-2021, amidst a pandemic, the team moved the collection to a state of the art facility based in our new building 'RHS Hilltop – The Home of Gardening Science'. The new facility includes a space for 400,000 herbarium specimens in a temperature and humidity controlled environment and a digitisation suite with a high spec camera. All rooms within the herbarium suite have windows through which our visitors can glimpse into our fascinating collections and the herbarium's curation and research work.

With around 90,000 (and growing) digitised specimens, thanks in part to sponsorship by the Society's members, the 1851 Royal Commission, the Mellon Foundation and the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the herbarium is ready to share the world's largest ornamental plant collection with a wider audience through the Libnova Open Access online portal. The RHS has adopted the Libsafe digital preservation platform for the long-term preservation and public sharing of its digital herbarium and library collections. This new platform will safeguard the digitised herbarium specimens and their metadata in a cloud based solution whilst allowing the team to share specially curated collections and themed sets with the public alongside items from the RHS's botanical art, photography and library collection

