

# PhD placement/PIPS: Documenting Kew's Archive Collections

## Placement supervisor:

Kiri Ross-Jones

## Placement department:

Library and Archives

## Placement overview and objectives:

Library and Archives hold RBG Kew's paper collections. We collect and provide access to knowledge about the diversity and uses of plants and fungi in written and artistic formats spanning 700 years. Our core strategic aims include opening all our collections to research, through documentation, cataloguing and digitisation.

We are currently offering two placements documenting Kew's Library and Archive collections, with this placement focusing on Kew's Archives collections. Details of a parallel placement documenting Kew's South Asian Botanical Illustrations held in our Library collections will be found on our website.

The 7 million collections items held within the Archives comprise an estimated 2 kilometres of shelving and date from the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century to the present day. As well as documenting the history of botany, the Archives document the history of the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew as an organisation and both our sites, at Kew and Wakehurst Place. The collections are currently mostly uncatalogued, although several significant collections have been catalogued via project funding and their catalogues are available in our on-line Archive Catalogue (see [Kew Archive Catalogue \(calmview.eu\)](http://calmview.eu) ).

We have recently taken into the archives at Kew a newly discovered collection of papers relating to Kew's site in Sussex, Wakehurst Place. We believe the papers relate mostly to Gerald Loder 1<sup>st</sup> Baronet Wakehurst, owner of the site (1903-1936). There is no listing of these papers, but they appear to be estate papers for the site e.g. accounts, correspondence, maps, photographs and also include items relating to Loder's personal interests.

It is particularly timely that work is carried out on these papers, as next year is the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Millennium Seed Bank at Kew, which will bring about renewed interest in the history of the site. These archives have huge research potential and will be able to provide material for interpretive and engagement work, plus provide a key resource for research into the history of the site and its conservation. Research will allow the links between collections relating to Wakehurst already held at Kew to be re-discovered, but more widely, to better understand and increase knowledge of the site at Wakehurst.

However, in order to open up this newly-discovered collection to wider audiences, the collection needs to be accessioned and catalogued onto a catalogue that is accessible to everyone. The placement offers an opportunity to learn about and work closely with these important and historic archive collections. You will assist with initial documentation of the collection, including research to identify the documents and their provenance, and undertake preparatory tasks to support future cataloguing, helping to open up access to wider audiences and research.

### Tasks to be undertaken/possible projects:

The project will include undertaking the following tasks:

- Researching the provenance of the collection, in preparation for accessioning and cataloguing.
- Research into the documents to identify them and create arrangement in liaison with Kew's archivists.
- Box listing: creating new text-based data for collection items at box level directly from the collection objects. This may include entering data into spreadsheets.
- Checking and editing existing records and box lists, updating and adding detail.
- Collections rehousing: working alongside Paper Conservators to remove archives from current unsuitable storage and rehousing them into new purpose-made, conservation-grade packaging, folders and boxes, ensuring that the correct housing is used and new housing is labelled correctly.
- Undertaking wider research into the collection and related subject area(s), applying your own knowledge and skills to direct areas of research and outputs, with opportunities to input into departmental-wide activities including social media, visits and tours etc.
- Working in an interdisciplinary team including library, archive, records, museum and conservation professionals, with our paper collections – illustrations, printed books and archives - attending relevant meetings and assisting with day-to-day administrative tasks as appropriate.

### Required skills and experience:

- Demonstrable interest in working with RBG Kew's Archive collections.
- Ability to read late nineteenth/early twentieth century handwriting (or willingness to learn)
- Study in any relevant Science or Humanities subject, for example history, botany/plant science, archive/records management, plant humanities, museum studies.
- Ability to work collaboratively as part of a team, with excellent interpersonal skills and a demonstrable willingness to listen and learn.
- Methodical approach and excellent attention to detail.
- Interest in documentation and/or collections work and knowledge of, or willing to learn, documentation and collection handling best practice.
- Good manual dexterity.
- Ability and commitment to perform routine and repetitive tasks.
- Ability to handle large objects and boxes and to work at height to retrieve collection items (training will be provided).

### Skills and areas of knowledge that can be developed:

The placement will offer induction, training, support and shadowing to support development of knowledge and skills including:

- Knowledge about archive collections, including how to identify documents and handwriting

- Introduction to archive cataloguing, the international standards used, archive arrangement and provenance research
- Collections research skills using a range of printed, online and local sources.
- Collections research experience using printed and archive collections.
- Knowledge of collection care best practice.
- Collection handling skills.
- Practical experience of collection documentation to the ISADg (ii).
- Using a collections management system for data retrieval.
- Skills in using archive and library collections to develop engaging content for social media and/or visits and tours.
- Experience working in an interdisciplinary team alongside library, archive, museum and conservation professionals, with paper collections.

#### Location of work:

Kew, onsite. But there will be the opportunity to visit Wakehurst.

#### Length of placement:

Usually, 3 months, with some flexibility to discuss shorter/longer placements.

#### Provisional start date:

February 2025, and ongoing start dates in 2025

#### Deadline for applications:

15 November 2024 for February 2025 start, and ongoing for future dates.