

Report: Research Trip to the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University Archives May 2023

Funding: RHUL Doctoral School Research Award

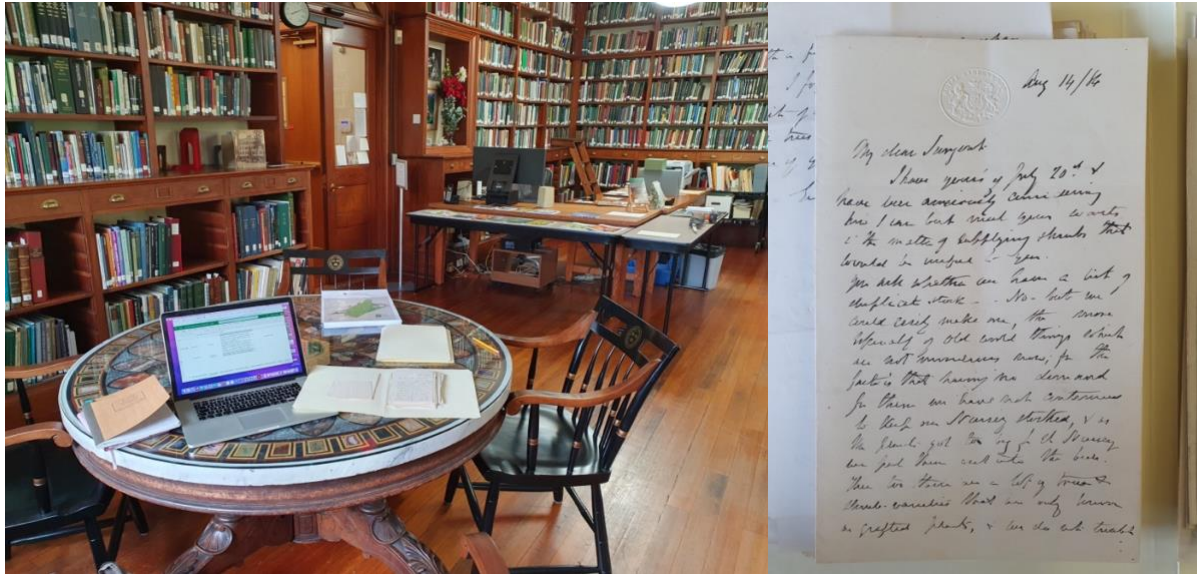
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Thanks to funding from the Doctoral School RHUL I was able to spend three weeks in May 2023 at the Arnold Arboretum, Jamaica Plain, Boston, USA. Here I had access to their extensive archive and library collection, living collections and herbarium, as well as the staff based at the Hunnewell Building at the arboretum. This access to undigitized and sometimes uncatalogued collections has been invaluable to my research. It has allowed me to gain insights into the exchange of views, materials, knowledge and people across the Atlantic between RBG Kew and the Arnold Arboretum - two sites of world-renowned arboreal excellence. My research questions for this trip focused on uncovering detailed links and networks between RBG Kew and the Arnold Arboretum in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that facilitated the growth and design of the living collections and influenced the making of place at both sites. I also aimed to research individual trees that linked both gardens, with the aim of completing a 'tree biography' on one individual.



Hunnewell Building, Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University, Boston © C Hourigan

The first two weeks of the trip was spent reviewing undigitized correspondence between Kew and the Arnold by a variety of correspondents across the late 19th century and early 20th century. Research into the correspondence between Kew director **Sir Joseph Hooker** and the Arnold Arboretum director **Charles Sprague Sargent** was particularly revealing as to their exchange of views on plant collecting, the designs of the arboreta they were each creating, the desire for constant exchange of knowledge, plant material and museum objects to ensure they both had 'complete' and representative collections that were of use to science, the economy, and to public education. This directors' correspondence revealed their focus on taxonomy in this age of botanical discovery but also how a network, and the circulation of knowledge and plants, was built across the Atlantic through friendship, trust and mutual respect between 'men of science'.



The main library room at the Hunnewell Building, and correspondence between Joseph Hooker and Charles Sprague Sargent © C Hourigan.

The willingness and desire to share plants was particularly notable, while the two directors also shared books and herbarium specimens, discussed botanical articles, the purchase of new plants, travels, work in their arboreta (what had grown and what had failed), as well as current research they were undertaking. The two institutions also shared staff, with Kew recommending several key appointments to the Arnold Arboretum. It was clear that this sharing of knowledge, information, and opinion – both on paper and in person - was key to the shaping of both arboreta at this time. Both sites were part of a greater global botanical network, and their arboreta were moulded by global exploration and encounter.

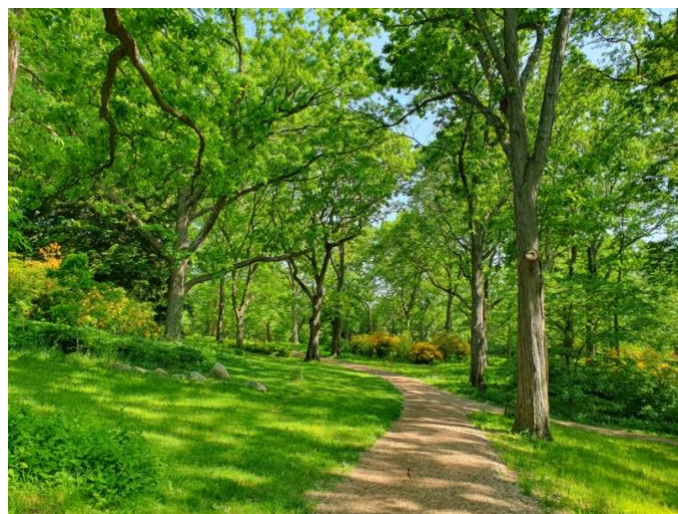
While I conducted this research, I was grateful for access to key staff members at the Arnold, most notably Lisa Pearson – head of Library and Archives – whose knowledge of the history of the arboretum is unparalleled, Dr Michael Dosmann - Keeper of the Living Collections - whose arboreal expertise and insights into the collection are profound, and Matthew Battles, editor of *Arnoldia*, whose interest in trees within object biography was very helpful. I am extraordinarily grateful for their time, interest and thoughts on my research. From interviews with them, the parallels and differences between the creation and collections of Kew and the Arnold became clearer, and they also pointed out several new valuable sources (on- and off-site) including the correspondence of other key players in the global botanical network at this time, the unpublished diaries of William Judd, and archive material at the RHS in London.

My third week of research focused around the archival materials on William Purdom, an ex-Kewite and important plant collector for the Arnold in China. Viewing his correspondence, expenditure lists, original contract etc., was very revealing and having access to the arboretum to visit the still-living trees which he sent to the Arnold as seed – either directly or via the Veitch nurseries in England – was highly rewarding and a highlight of this trip. Research using the Arnold's living collections database in this third week allowed me to understand the scope of the living collections remaining of Purdom's China expedition and witness them up close. This research will allow me to complete a specific piece of writing (a tree biography) on one of Purdom's tree introductions for my thesis.



Left: William Purdom, plant collector for the Arnold Arboretum.
Source: *On The Eaves of the World*, Reginald Farrar (1917). E Arnold.
Right: *Pinus tabulaeformis* in the Conifer Collection at the Arnold Arboretum.
These specimens were collected by William Purdom in China. © C Hourigan.

Spending time within the landscape and living collections has given me a new appreciation of the differences that landscape design can make to an arboretum and how its collections can be understood. It has also revealed that personal design preferences, topography, climate, visitor numbers, focus of scientific research and types of public education, as well as their involvement in wider botanical networks, have all shaped the two arboreta and how they are experienced as places and 'living museums'. During my visit I was also able to undertake visits to other Olmsted-designed parks in Boston (known as the Emerald Necklace) as well as other collecting institutions of the same era such as the Harvard Natural History Museum and Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, which allowed me insights into the science, collecting and design cultures of the period in Boston. I am extremely grateful to have been granted the funding to undertake this research, which is already providing many new resources and will play a key part in my thesis.



The Oak Path, Arnold Arboretum © C Hourigan