

M25 SpeedMeet July 2024



Questions

- **Who are you, where are you based and what do you do?**

Hello, I am Fiona Ainsworth, Head of Library and Archives at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

I am responsible for the paper-based collections of RBG Kew, which comprise the library, illustrations and archives. Our collections span 700 years of knowledge about plants and fungi, with our oldest item (a manuscript about natural history) dating to ~1370. In total we hold about 7.6 million items or 10km of linear shelving. Library and Archives complements Kew's other collections which include the Herbarium and Fungarium (7 million dried plant and 1.25 million fungal specimens respectively), the Economic Botany Collection (of 100,000 objects made from plants or fungi) and of course the ~22,000 species growing in the gardens!

- **What do you most enjoy about your job?**

As well as the amazing gardens and my colleagues, the wonderful depth and breadth of our collections which date back hundreds of years but still remain scientifically important.

- **What motivates you in your work?**

Knowing that the work we do today in curating our library, illustrations and archives collections will be useful to researchers in the future, hopefully hundreds of years in the future.

- **How can/has the M25 Consortium supported you in your career?**

As well as colleagues from institutions similar to Kew, M25 gives me the chance to meet with peers working in the academic sector and I really value the opportunity to get their different perspectives. I also appreciate that the training events on offer are aimed at different career stages, from those very new to those at senior levels.

- **What would it surprise people to know about you?**

I love Jane Austen's books and have been a member of the Jane Austen Society for more than 30 years (<https://janeaustensociety.org.uk/>). I've served on the committee for almost as long!

- **Complete the sentence: If I wasn't working in a library I would be..... because**

My ideal answer is: retired! (Because I've got lots of things I want to do besides work)

In the spirit of the question though, I guess my answer would be working in a people facing role in a museum or perhaps running my own secondhand book shop (I have far too many books).

Fiona Ainsworth, Head of Library and Archives at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, July 2024