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**The Royal Horticultural Society's Lindley Library:
Safeguarding Britain's Horticultural Heritage**

Dr Brent Elliott

The Royal Horticultural Society is the world's largest horticultural society – membership passed the 400,000 mark this year – and it also has the world's largest horticultural library. This would be the case even if we took only the principal branch, at the Society's offices in London, into consideration; but there is also a major collection at the Society's principal garden at Wisley, and smaller collections at its three other gardens. In 2011 the Lindley Library was given Designated status by the Museums and Libraries Association as a collection of national and international importance.

This is the first of 13 pages of an account by Dr. Brent Elliott in which he describes the collections and the work of the RHS Lindley Library. It shows that the Library plays a key role in the preservation and study of the UK's horticultural heritage. It is the primary collection for the study of garden history in all its aspects.

See his Conclusions on the next page ...

In the course of this work, I am proud to report the Library's role in pioneering a contribution to the protection of antiquarian antiquarian books. As with any collection of early printed books, the Library contains a variety of types of early paper, in many cases with watermarks. At the end of the last century, the Library sponsored a project on the imaging of watermarks, conducted by Dr Ian Christie-Miller. The analysis of the paper and watermarks in early English and French books resulted in the discovery that the older the book, the more disparate the sources of paper: since there were no paper mills in Britain in the 16th century, British printers tended to stockpile paper wherever they could find it, and upwards of fifteen different types of paper could be used in the production of a single book. In the course of this research Dr Christie-Miller developed his system of "Paperprint" identification for books printed on handmade paper. Take the title-page, and one or two other pages selected at random (so a thief does not know what to remove); photograph them using both reflected light (for easy identification) and transmitted light (to show the paper structure). Handmade paper always had imperfections and inclusions, and in no two copies will these be in exactly the same places on the page; in no two copies will the pieces of type occupy exactly the same positions in respect to the chain-lines in the paper. The result is, for an antiquarian book, the equivalent of a fingerprint: if the book ever disappears, and there is uncertainty over whether a recovered copy is the correct one, the paperprint will allow for an unambiguous identification.

This has been a brief and inadequate account of the collections and the work of the RHS Lindley Library – but, I hope, sufficient to demonstrate that the Library plays a key role in the preservation and study of this country’s horticultural heritage. It is the primary collection for the study of garden history in all its aspects.

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