

## EBHL COVID RESULTS

INTRO – EBHL is a younger organisation than CBHL, and smaller: our membership hovers in the area of 80, but that includes some booksellers and personal members as well as actual libraries. The number keeps fluctuating, not only as institutions come and go, but as nations come, go, and retrench on expenditure. At present we have as members libraries in the UK, Ireland, France, Switzerland, Spain, Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic, Norway, Sweden, & Croatia: as well as personal members from Finland, Estonia, Russia, the Ukraine, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. For some personal members we do not charge fees; as this may be a strange concept for CBHL, I will give one example. Some years ago we had a member from Georgia, from the Botanic Garden at Tbilisi; as each year, or should I say each normal year, we offer to pay the travel costs for a certain number of members from less well-endowed institutions, he was able to come to one meeting. He explained that in Tbilisi, none of the botanic garden staff had been paid for several years; they continued to work at the garden part-time as volunteers, just to keep the institution going. That should explain why we have a category of members without payment.

So: upwards of a dozen languages, several different currencies, and several different political situations to contend with. This may explain why communications, and in particular the gathering of statistics, across the membership can be difficult. So when I circulated a questionnaire asking for data on how the various botanical and horticultural libraries had coped with life under Covid, I received only around 20 replies, once we exclude booksellers and the occasional CBHL member who filled in the form. On that meagre basis I will try to give some impressions of how we have been faring.

Most libraries closed during the lockdowns. The partial exception to this rule was those libraries that are part of universities, and in several cases, while closing to external visitors, they provided limited access for staff members, and borrowing and book return services of students, though without entry to the libraries. Most botanic gardens closed their libraries to visitors, along with their glasshouses, cafeterias, and visitor centres. Some botanic garden libraries remained open in varying degrees for access by staff, among them Geneva, and the Czech Academy of Sciences; Kew and the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturel in Paris were completely closed during the first lockdown, but allowed some staff access during the second. Uppsala remained open throughout for staff, but with greatly reduced hours.

At the moment, the library of the RBG Edinburgh remains closed, their website still displaying a message that they might reopen after Easter; Teylers Museum in Haarlem, expects to reopen on 25 May. The Royal Horticultural Society is an interesting case. Its branch library at its garden at Wisley, in Surrey, has reopened for limited use by members and visitors, but its main branch in London remains closed to visitors and volunteers; the closure during the first lockdown revealed problems with the air conditioning system that meant people could not work on the lower floor, so the only place for staff to work was the reading room. The exhibition hall in the same building has become a vaccination centre pro tem., creating further difficulties for entry. It is hoped to reopen to researchers in late June or early July, “providing the government roadmap remains on track”.

In most cases, library staff could work from home, though the sudden effort of providing equipment, remote access to networks, etc was remarked on by some as having caused an inevitable hiatus of some days between the announcement of lockdown and the beginning of coordinated work. Most libraries, having now discovered the use of Zoom for remote communication, will continue to use it and explore the possibilities for working from home. (Apart from the Berlin Botanic Garden, which uses Webex – which I'd never heard of before doing the survey.)

Comparatively few institutions were making use of volunteers at the time the pandemic set in; most of those who did had to discontinue their use for the duration. The only respondents who indicated a continuing use of volunteers were the Linnean Society, where some volunteers were able to continue working on particular projects at home; and at Kew, those volunteers who were transcribing manuscripts could continue that work.

Only a few institutions operated a furlough scheme for staff, Kew and the Royal Horticultural Society in particular, and no doubt because the British government was operating a national furlough scheme. Of continental libraries, only the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle seems to have introduced furlough arrangements, and then only for a specified number of days per staff member.

No library that contributed information to us has had to cut its staff numbers as a result of the Covid crisis. The only one of our libraries that has closed down permanently in the past year is the Freshwater Biological Association Library, in the Lake District of England, which has been disbanded, but as the result of decisions taken before the pandemic: the RBG Edinburgh has taken its library, and the status of the archives is still under discussion.

Those libraries that already had functioning online services and exhibitions continued this work; others found themselves beginning. The Naturalis Biodiversity Centre in Netherlands had had to develop their digital services a few years before, when the Centre was closed for building work. Most libraries, having discovered the advantages brought about by online services and working from home, will continue to use these procedures in future.

There were few fears expressed about the effect of closures etc. on the condition of the collections. Those institutions where staff access was still barred or limited showed some apprehensions - "hard to maintain good collections care and management when you are physically distanced from the collections" – but at the Royal Horticultural Society, the turning-off of the air-conditioning system during the first lockdown reduced the temperature in the storage rooms. The staff and members might not have been happy about lockdown, but the books were enjoying it.

One gratifying thing was the number of institutions that specified EBHL facilities among the functions that they continued during lockdown, and I am sure that many institutions continued to benefit during the pandemic from the availability to beg scanned documents from their colleagues.

## UK

RBG Edinburgh – 5 staff, 30 volunteers; closed completely, and still (website says may reopen after Easter); online services, EBHL facilities; staff could work from home; no cuts [5 sites]; staff allowed brief visits to monitor collections; click & collect services; flexible hours &c probably in future

Linnean Society – 6 staff; closed during both lockdowns; online services, EBHL facilities, online exhibitions; staff created an online bibliography and electronic resources list for members; no furloughs; most volunteers couldn't get in, but a few continued with project work from home; contact maintained with weekly virtual staff meetings, this will continue

Freshwater Biological Association Library – 10 staff, 3 volunteers, no librarian; closed; email or online services to visitors; most staff could work from home, except essential staff; furloughs, no staff cuts; but library will probably close as institution moves to different quarters

Cory Library, Cambridge BG – closed

RBG Kew – 20 staff, 2 libraries; both closed during 1<sup>st</sup> lockdown; reopened August 2020 for “virtual services” (enquiries, digital delivery, click and collect); access to stacks for staff January 2021, reading room & enquiry desk for staff & students from April 2021, visitors expected from June; online services, EBHL facilities, online exhibitions; “enhanced e-books offer” during lockdown; furloughs; no cuts, but one voluntary redundancy which remains unfilled until year end; volunteers discontinued except for those doing transcriptions remotely; Teams &c, will continue; a year without conservation work on books

Royal Horticultural Society, Lindley Library – 12 staff (London) + other branches – London branch closed since beginning of lockdown, hoped to reopen this summer; Wisley and Harlow Carr libraries operate lending and enquiry services, but no reading room access; email and online services to visitors, online exhibitions; no staff cuts; furloughs; volunteer access in London suspended; enhanced e-books offer during lockdown

## IRELAND

National Botanic Garden Library – 2 staff, 2 volunteers; closed; online services to members, EBHL facilities, online exhibitions; staff worked mostly from home; no furloughs, no staff cuts; “hard to maintain good collections care and management when you are physically distanced from the collections”

## FRANCE

Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle – 60 staff; closed during 1<sup>st</sup> lockdown, partially open during 2<sup>nd</sup>; during lockdown offered online services to members, EBHL facilities, online exhibitions; most staff could work from home; some furlough days compulsory in first lockdown; no staff cuts; normal research for public severely disrupted

Bibliothèque Botanique et Phytosociologique de Bailleul – 2.5 staff; library closed during lockdown; during lockdown offered online services to members, EBHL facilities, online exhibitions; staff could not work from home during 1<sup>st</sup> lockdown, but could during 2<sup>nd</sup>; no staff cuts; no impact

## BELGIUM

NBG Meise – open by appointment - garden closed during 1<sup>st</sup> lockdown; library staff working from home

## SWITZERLAND

Conservatoire et Jardin Botaniques de Genève – 8 staff; library closed to public but BG staff could maintain access; online services, EBHL facilities, online exhibitions; no furloughs, no staff cuts; staff could work from home after a short interval; home working 1-2 days pw will continue

## SPAIN

Madrid BG – library closed during lockdowns; all services continued which didn't require use of premises; staff could work from home after some difficulty; no furlough, no staff cuts; working from home will continue in longer term

## GERMANY

Botanischen Museum und Botanischen Garten, Berlin-Dahlem – 9 staff; reading room closed; online services to members, EBHL facilities; no cuts, no furlough; webex & telephone contact

Botanischer Garten Kiel – glasshouses closed;

## AUSTRIA

Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna – closed during lockdowns; currently open

## CZECH REPUBLIC

Botany Institute, Czech Academy of Sciences - closed to external visitors, but accessible to staff; all services for staff continued, no new digital services introduced; staff worked from home as much as possible; no staff cuts, no volunteers anyway;

## SWEDEN

Uppsala University Library – c.200 staff; did not close library, but visitor hours reduced and only necessary enquiries allowed, fetching services limited; online services to members, EBHL facilities, online exhibitions; no furloughs, no staff cuts; staff now used to Zoom

Gothenburg University Library – remains open but limited access, pick-up & return of books only

## NORWAY

University of Oslo – library closed to external visitors, but accessible to students & staff

## NETHERLANDS

Wageningen University, Special Collections Library – 2.5 staff; library closed; online services to members, EBHL facilities, online exhibitions; no furloughs, no staff cuts, no home working; Zoom

Naturalis Biodiversity Centre – (state), 8 staff, 2 volunteers; library closed to visitors, limited access for staff; online services to members, EBHL facilities; had already closed before for building works, so had already built up good digital services; staff working from home, no furloughs, no staff cuts

Teylers Museum, Haarlem – closed until 25 May

