

National Trust Press Release

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IMAGES CAN BE FOUND: [Calke Herbarium May 26](#)

National Trust's Calke Abbey's 19th century herbarium in the spotlight for the first time

- Calke Abbey's herbarium will be brought into the spotlight this summer through a major conservation and cataloguing project.
- A herbarium is a collection of dried plants and flowers collected for scientific interest.
- Conservation will include examining and cataloguing the historic specimens, alongside the creation of a modern 'digital herbarium' to find out what's growing in Calke Abbey's meadows today.
- Visitors will be able to see conservation in action and attend a programme of botanical-themed events.

This summer, a new aspect of Calke Abbey's extensive collection takes centre stage. The herbarium – made up of dried and pressed plants and flowers - has been largely kept in store for decades, but as part of a new project to connect nature and history, conservation work will begin in July. Visitors will be able to see conservation in action, and learn about the 'digital herbarium' being created by the ranger team alongside the historic collection.

The specimens in Calke's herbarium date from the 1830s all the way to the 1920s. Some were collected and mounted by members of the Harpur Crewe family themselves – particularly Sir Vauncey – while others were acquired through wider botanical networks. Notable botanist Rev. Andrew Bloxham, tutor to the family in the 1830s, is also represented in the collection, with several bound folios believed to date from his time at Calke. The folios reference a wide range of locations, from nearby Calke, Foremark and Dovedale to further afield, including Jersey, Scotland and the Isles of Scilly. Many specimens are labelled with other botanists' names or marked 'ex herbaria', which suggests they were exchanged, gifted or acquired through collectors and dealers, reflecting the active networks of 19th century botany.

From geraniums to brambles, all manner of plant species can be found within the herbarium. The project aims to create a formal, detailed record of its contents and digitise each specimen, making the collection more accessible for research and public engagement.

Julie Griffith, Property Experiences Curator at Calke Abbey, says: "We're really excited to be revealing more of the herbarium to visitors. Calke is known for its extensive natural

history collection, but this is an aspect many visitors won't have encountered before. This conservation work will help us catalogue the collection, improve how it is stored, and open up future opportunities for display.”

Contrasting with the dried and pressed specimens, Calke's rangers, along with a team of volunteers, will be creating a 'digital herbarium' in the meadows surrounding the house. Rather than disturbing the ecosystem by picking live flowers, they'll be using images to record their findings. By carefully photographing and documenting each specimen they encounter in the meadow, including its exact location and identifying features, the team will build a detailed contemporary record to compare with the historic collection.

Alice Hedges, Ranger at Calke Abbey, says: “By recording what's growing in the meadows today without picking the plants, we can build a picture of how the landscape is changing while protecting it at the same time. As biodiversity changes in response to climate pressures, this work will help identify which species have endured at Calke and which have appeared or disappeared since the 19th century.”

Julie Griffith adds, “The digital herbarium will allow us to compare biodiversity at Calke from the 1830s to today, helping us better understand environmental change and the future of the estate's plantlife.”

A programme of themed events will invite visitors to engage with the herbarium and the natural world in creative ways. Photographic artist Dean Leivers will be running free drop-in Cyanotype printing sessions on Saturday 20 June and Thursday 16 July, and local illustrator Kate Dawes will be hosting botanical watercolour workshops on Saturday 27 June and Thursday 2 July. Wild Minds, a local CIC, will be offering a 'Create your own herbarium sheet' workshop on Wednesday 22 July, with exclusive after-hours access to the house, and they'll also be running a Plant Prints and Hapa Zome session on Thursday 6 August.

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For images:

[Calke Herbarium May 26](#)

Image credits: National Trust/Milly Haire

Notes to editors

More information about the herbarium project can be found here, including links to themed events and conservation in action : [Discover Calke Abbey's Herbarium | National Trust](#)

About Calke Abbey

With peeling paintwork and overgrown courtyards, Calke Abbey tells the story of the dramatic decline of a country house estate. The house and stables are little restored, with many abandoned areas vividly portraying a period in the 20th century when numerous country houses did not survive to tell their story.

The Calke estate spans more than 600 acres and is managed with a dedicated approach to conservation. It contains such features as a [walled garden](#), with a flower garden and kitchen garden. The ancient deer park of the Calke Abbey Estate is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest and national nature reserve. Recently, Calke Abbey was used as a filming location in 'Peaky Blinders: The Immortal Man' and 'Outlander' Season 8.

About the National Trust

The National Trust is an independent conservation charity founded in 1895 to preserve historic and natural places in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and open them up for everyone to enjoy. 131 years later and that mission is still at the heart of what we do.

Over the next decade, our cause will be delivered through our [People & Nature Thriving strategy](#). We have three ambitious goals: to restore nature - not just on National Trust land, but everywhere; to end unequal access to nature, beauty and history; and to inspire millions more people to care and take action.

With our 5.3m members, 40,000 volunteers, and our supporters, partners and communities, we collectively represent a cause that's bigger than just ourselves: it's about caring for nature and heritage everywhere, for everyone, for ever.