

Plants and People, c.1600–1800 (Cambridge, 8–9 Jul 25)

University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK, Jul 8–09, 2025

Deadline: Mar 14, 2025

Zara Kesterton

Plants and People: the cultivation and propagation of botanical knowledge among non-professional communities, c.1600–1800.

This interdisciplinary conference will examine botanical knowledge exchange among early modern individuals at the periphery of professional science. We will focus on women, domestic workers, artisans, merchants, and enslaved and indigenous naturalists who used plant knowledge in their everyday life, yet did not (or could not) derive a living primarily from botany.

Over the course of this conference, and a subsequent publication, we intend to address the following questions:

1. What kinds of people and spaces fostered botanical knowledge outside of traditional institutions of learning?
2. What role did embodied experience play in the acquisition of botanical knowledge?
3. What did the social networks of these practitioners look like, and how did this overlap with or differ from the networks of professional scientists?
4. How was the knowledge of these non-professional practitioners valued (or devalued) by their contemporaries?

Reflecting the creative nature of our subject matter, we welcome applications for papers in formats other than traditional presentations. Furthermore, the conference will include a practical workshop with the artist and natural dye expert Nabil Ali. We hope that our creative workshop will feed into participants' practice and inform their contributions to our proposed publication.

This conference will be held in person from 8–9 July at the University of Cambridge. Lunch and refreshments will be included.

We aim to offer grants of £150 to contribute towards the cost of travel and accommodation for speakers coming from outside of Cambridge and the surrounding area. Please let us know in your application whether you would like to be considered for a travel grant.

Please send an abstract of max. 300 words and a short biography to the conference organisers, Lucy Havard (lh655@cam.ac.uk) and Zara Kesterton (zlk21@cam.ac.uk) by Friday 14 March 2025.

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