

## **Progress Report for the Barbara and Philip Denny Trust – By Sophie Whittall, July 2016**

The last four months have been very busy at Fulham Palace as we have moved from spring into summer. There have been lots of jobs to do in the vegetable garden including producing crops for the restaurant we supply and maintaining our garden barrow. In addition, there have also been many jobs to do outside of the Walled Garden, including tending to our flower meadow and mowing the lawns. In June we sat our exams for the second part of our RHS level 2 course. These exams were about vegetable gardening, garden planning, garden maintenance and growing under glass and so they have fitted in well with what I have been doing at work. I will find out my results in September. Alongside this we have been continuing with our plant identification tests - our latest ident focused on plants in the knot garden such as *Echinops banaticus* 'Taplow Blue' and weeds we had been pulling from the flower meadow and moat, including *Brassica nigra*.

### Restoration Project

At the moment it is full steam with raising money and planning for the next restoration project at Fulham Palace, called 'Discovering the Bishop of London's Palace at Fulham'. The Project will focus on improving the Tudor Quadrangle, the Great Hall and other historic rooms and the grounds. Specific to the garden the project will look to open up views from Bishop's Park to the Palace so as to entice in more visitors. At the front of the Palace the paddock will also be enhanced making the buildings and courtyard more visible from the top of the drive. In addition, there are plans to introduce new plantings which would have been historically grown when Henry Compton lived at the Palace. Work has already begun to open up a fourth gate into the Walled Garden from the woodland walk - it is a very exciting time to be working at the Palace.

### Vegetable Garden

This year in the vegetable garden I have been looking after the Fabaceae bed and the sweetcorn and leek bed. In the Fabaceae bed I have grown broad beans, runner beans, climbing beans and peas, with pumpkins and courgettes in the middle. We sowed a crop of broad beans last autumn which overwintered, so were ready earlier in the season. This crop was very successful and we had a bumper harvest. The second lot of broad beans were sown in the spring but it was attacked by Aphids. I got rid of the aphids by pinching out the top of the plants and removing the aphids by hand with water. Despite this, the crop was not nearly as good as the earlier crop so next year we will not sow a spring crop.

The runner beans were sown in 9cm pots and started off inside the green house. I planted them in late May-early June once the temperature and soil had warmed up. Despite this, one cultivar of Climbing Bean called 'Cobra' did not survive so this had to be replanted. I built two long a-frames using 8 foot canes and string to support the beans; each cane was placed 23cm apart and one plant was planted per cane. The plants have now reached the top of the canes so I have started to pinch them out to ensure they put their energy into producing more lateral branches. We harvested our first batch of beans last week and they seem to be selling well on the barrow. We are hand watering the plants as they like a lot of water when they fruiting and sprinklers can lead to the leaves getting mildew or being scorched.

The first batch of peas to be planted was massacred by slugs but the second sowing was netted and managed to survive. We have been harvesting peas but if I was to plant them again I would increase the number of plants so that we had a bigger crop and also use a higher net as one of the cultivars has outgrown the net I have used.

The sweetcorn is doing well so far and has not been eaten by the squirrels as we have netted it and buried the net in a trench so that they cannot burrow under. We were recently visited by a vegetable expert who recommended that we use a 1.5 litre water bottle with each end cut off to protect each cob. The bottle can be inserted over the cob but will still allow air to circulate and sunlight to get through. We are currently collecting 1.5 litre bottles.

Behind the sweetcorn I have planted some sweet potato plants - this is an experiment as these are well known for being hard to grow as they normally like a much warmer climate. I planted these at the beginning of July against an a-frame so that they can be trained to climb up it rather than creep along the ground where they would use their energy to root rather than produce tubers. I also planted the plants in a mound of compost and spread compost around each plant to help conserve moisture, as they like a lot of water.

Once the broad beans had been harvested this area in the bed was ready to be used for other crops so this has been sown with beetroot, Swiss chard and radishes. These were sown a couple of weeks ago and at the beginning of this week I thinned each line of crop so as to produce good sized healthy vegetables.

### Glasshouse

As well as growing vegetables outside we are also growing tomatoes, cucumbers and aubergines in the glasshouse where there is a warmer environment. We have seven different varieties of tomatoes and these are being grown up string as cordons. We have been pinching out any side roots that we see which we call 'arm pits' so that the plants have one main stem that grows upwards and so that they put their energy into producing fruit rather than side shoots. Once the fruit started to appear we removed leaves that were covering them so that more light could reach them. We have also changed to watering every other day so that we do not overwater the tomatoes which can cause them to split. The first harvest of tomatoes was taken this week by the restaurant which we supply.

### Mowing and Lawn Maintenance

Summer is also mowing season so I have spent a lot of time using the ride on mowers and hand mowers which has been really good for improving my mowing. We have also learnt about lawn maintenance and how to scarify and use a motorised aerator. As well as using rotary mowers I have learnt how to use a cylinder mower which is used for more ornamental lawns and we have been using this to mow around the vegetable beds. This mower gives a better cut as it cuts using a scissor motion rather than a slashing motion like the rotary mower. Before using the cylinder mower you can check the quality of cut and improve this by tightening or loosening the blades. You can also set a precise height of cut on this mower, we started off using a height of 32mm and we have now moved down to 30mm. This mower also has a roller which means it leaves stripes on the lawn which makes it look really good.

### Herbaceous bed

In June we helped to dig and plant a new herbaceous bed in the Walled Garden. This was created using plants that had been grown from seed in the garden. It was really exciting to work as a team to plant the bed, making sure we planted the plants where they had been laid out, planting them to the right depth and ensuring they were firm as well as regularly watering the bed while it is establishing. The bed is already bulking out and looking good, some of the plants included in it are *Liatris spicata*, *Penstemon esprit* and *Achillea* 'Summer Berries'.

### Pruning *Buxus sempervirens*

This week we have been focusing on pruning the Box hedge in the Knot Garden to achieve the box shape and crisp straight lines. I have not done this before so it has been a real learning curve pruning it with hand shears to get the exact shape and size. I am really enjoying this task and spend a lot of time working on it to make sure it looks good.

The last four months have been very fast paced as spring/summer is the busiest season in the garden. I have really enjoyed it and have learnt a lot. I feel really pleased with all the work we have done and I think this is made evident through the beautiful displays of colour and the crops we are harvesting in the vegetable garden.

Thank you for your support.

Sophie Whittall.