

**Award given in support of Sophie Whittall, Garden Apprentice, Fulham Palace Trust, London**

**Supervisor's Report by Lucy Hart, Head Gardener**

Sophie has been an apprentice at Fulham Palace for almost 18 months and is very much an established member of the team; she is still learning new skills as the season moves on. Sophie has recently covered new tasks such as cylinder pedestrian mowing, taking semi-ripe cuttings, vegetable sowing, thinning and harvesting. She has also been putting into practice the knowledge she has already gained such as strimming, ride-on mowing, planting and seed sowing and pricking out.

Sophie has completed her RHS Level 2 – and we wait to hear her results. She attended Capel Manor Regents Park one day a week. At Fulham Palace the in-house training goes on and the apprentices are set a fortnightly plant identification test of 20 plants; they are required to write a daily work diary and have regular one to ones with the head gardener to go over the skills log which monitors progress and the key skills for that season.

**Events at Fulham Palace**

Part of the apprenticeship involves helping out at garden events throughout the year and includes setting up, manning stands, talking with the public or party guests followed by packing up. Sophie always makes herself available to support the events that are usually out of work hours and we really appreciate her help. Already this year we have hosted an Edwardian Garden Party - a family daytime occasion at which the garden team sells home-grown plants and produce on the "Barrow" as well as run the garden games. Apprentices are also asked to attend evening events such as the Chairman's Summer Garden Party which is hosted by Dr Richard Chartres, the Bishop of London - the apprentices run the Barrow. This June Fulham Palace took part in Open Gardens Square where we gave garden tours. Sophie gave a garden tour to the ticket holders of the Walled Garden including the vegetable garden and orchard.

**Saturday Supervising**

Fulham Palace apprentices are required to work Saturdays to supervise and lead the team of Saturday garden volunteers. Not many gardens offer Saturday volunteering but Fulham Palace has an open-to-all ethos which includes people who might like to get some horticultural experience but need to work in the week. A few of our Saturday volunteers have studied the RHS level 2 course part time. Others have followed a different career and hope to make the break into horticulture but just require a bit of practical experience. The apprentices need to plan their day with volunteers making sure the tasks get done and that the volunteers know what they are doing. Sophie organises the team well setting some up on different tasks such as feeding the box hedge with liquid seaweed whilst others are mulching the new herbaceous border of the wisteria once the bulbs have died down. This is a good opportunity for the apprentices to practice their supervisory skills and it also demonstrates to potential future employers that they have supervisory experience and that they are qualified to apply for supervisory roles.

**Practical Tasks and Sophie's Progress**

**Vegetable Garden:** Since May the Vegetable garden has been well underway with direct sown and planted out crops. The vegetable beds are divided into three and each apprentice takes on one

## Fulham Palace Garden Apprentice Progress report May to July 2016 for the Barbara and Philip Denny Charitable Trust

section which might either be legumes and other crops, brassicas and the children's Little Green Fingers bed or roots, this is then overseen by the Head Gardener. Sophie looks after the legume, cucurbits and miscellaneous beds and is responsible for direct sowing successions, thinning, watering, weeding and harvesting. She harvests climbing beans, runner beans, peas, broad beans pumpkins, courgettes and sweetcorn, prepares flowers for cutting and maintains annuals, perennials and sunflowers to keep the beds looking colourful. The apprentices also help each other and get to work on all the beds so they each get an understanding of all the crops. From May we started to plant out tender glasshouse grown crops out. Fulham is a warm zone and with the protection from the Walled Garden we are able to start a bit earlier than other places. Sophie learnt how to plant 9cm flowering and vegetable annuals out into the seasonal beds.

**Mowing:** In 2013 the garden team started raising money to buy a pedestrian cylinder mower from plant and vegetable sales. A museum volunteer donated £2,000 towards the funds and we were able to purchase an Allett Buffalo model. Although we don't have that many formal lawns we can use this in the vegetable garden. It is essential for the apprentices to come away from Fulham Palace knowing how to set the height and quality of cut for a cylinder mower which was the main motivation for getting the mower. Having been trained up, the apprentices now take it in turns to mow with the Allett and gain the practice they need to become competent using and altering the machine.

Over the past 3 months Sophie has been learning how to take semi-ripe cuttings, plant a new herbaceous border and then lead the Saturday volunteer team. Now the summer season is in full swing we need to dead head the annuals such as cosmos calendula, zinnia, perennials such as the Bishop dahlias and penstemon and salvias in the Knot Garden. Other summer tasks have included woodland maintenance such as cutting down nettles and ivy and making the paths clear for visitors. Sophie has also been working hard to take out the large weeds in the moat which were making the entrance look untidy. This is a hard job, especially in the warm weather, as the moat is a suntrap. However, the job gets done thanks to Sophie's perseverance.

Sophie shows great initiative and gets on with seed sowing and pricking out and direct sowing in the vegetable beds. She uses her time well and if she has a spare 15 minutes, she will sow a few more seeds to get it done. Sophie can be relied upon to get the job done; when asked to do something such as potting up the *Echium pininana* she makes it a priority. She has a marvellous can do attitude and always keen to find the most efficient solution to a job and see it through to the end. For example she is very willing to help out the Fulham Palace Caretaker now and again and not swap half way through with another apprentice, even though she would rather get on with her vegetable garden.

Sophie is very adaptable and understands the need to muck in and do the less glamorous jobs such as pot washing, clearing the sludge from the ferry steps for archaeology clubs searching the river foreshore. She also works alongside the volunteers, cutting back nettles in the woodland and grubbing out the moat area.

**We are very grateful to the Barbara and Philip Denny Charitable Trust for funding Sophie's Garden Apprentice placement at Fulham Palace.**