**Fulham Palace Gardens HBGBS Traineeship 2014 – Elma Murphy**

My career in horticulture started in June 2012 (after being made redundant). I completed a City & Guilds one year part-time course, then 7 months as a Seasonal Kitchen Gardener at Chiswick House while studying RHS Level 2 in the evening and I was then delighted to be offered a HBGBS Trainee position at Fulham Palace Gardens starting mid-January 2014 to end August 2014 (7.5 months). The traineeship consisted of hands on experience in a restored historic garden, working alongside experienced gardeners along with a Training Programme covering all areas of gardening.

Of particular benefit was the detailed training provided on a number of gardening machines ranging from pedestrian and ride-on mowers to hedge trimmers, leaf blowers and strimmers (still to come is the tractor training). The Garden Supervisor’s experience in this area is invaluable; he makes sure every aspect of the machine is covered as well as all Risk Assessments before the machine is operated, ensuring the task was carried out to a high standard.

The Head Gardener’s workshops on plant propagation, wisteria and apple tree pruning, deadheading a range of herbaceous perennials to soft-tip cuttings were delivered to professional standard. Other practical horticulture skills covered were weeding with a hoe, edging with edging shears, using a border fork, sharpening tools, creating tree circles, using plant fertilizers and I feel much more confident now carrying out these range of tasks.

During the Traineeship it is important to continually increase my knowledge of plants and every fortnight I learn twenty new plants (botanical names) from those in the gardens. Projects are also a part of the traineeship and these have involved researching the history behind the Gardens, find out more about the plants and this formed the basis of the project on Walking Trails Map and the Tudor Courtyard.

Alongside the Gardening Team, I have managing our very dedicated volunteers, engaged with the public at Open Days by providing guided tours of the Walled Garden and also during Plant Sales Events. I also assisted in running the Head Gardener Lectures, liaised with the speaker beforehand and introduced them on the night.

The traineeship at Fulham Palace Gardens has developed my confidence, expanded my knowledge and given me some great practical skills to advance in the horticulture industry. Extending my traineeship so I complete a minimum of a 12 month placement would give me a complete full year in a garden so that all seasons are covered. There are also some exciting projects taking place at Fulham Palace Gardens such as the new ‘Transatlantic Orchard’ and the new compost area which would be invaluable projects to be involved in.

I would like to express my thanks to the Barbara and Philip Denny Trust as I understand the placement was only possible due to the generous funding provided by the Trust.