

**Fourth report for the Barbra and Phillip Denny Trust.**

**By Matthew Weston**

I started the year recovering from what I'm grateful to say was regular seasonal flu, and not COVID, but this still meant I wasn't feeling 100% physically fit through January. Despite that my optimism was overflowing. With a new senior gardener joining in December, our garden team was the strongest it had been since I started and the plans for the year presented great learning opportunities and lots of fun.



The first thing we tackled was renovating the compost bays. The surface had become uneven, so we lifted the wooden boards, re-levelled the site and laid a geo-textile matting before topping that with tracking boards. This will give us an easy way to maintain durable surface to use our tractor on in the coming season, and it also speed up the process of turning the compost, so the time used doing this felt really well spent.



In a similar vein I assisted the new senior gardener Pete with replacing the blades of the garden shredder. We struggled to get much woody material shredded towards the end of 2020 and the blades were very blunt so changing them again represented a much-needed improvement in the efficiency of a regular task. This really was the theme for January with lots of tidying of store areas, planning crop schedules, stock checks and ordering things for the coming growing season.



Then came the snow and cold temperatures. Though I wasn't involved in protecting our less hardy plants from the cold, I did experience clearing paths of ice and walking the grounds to ensure everyone was adhering to government COVID-19 guidelines while enjoying the snow.



As soon as the snow had melted the temperature soared and the ground warmed up enough for us to plant our first crop in the vegetable garden. Again, working in a team, we planted the broad beans in no time at all. This reminded me of the potato planting when I first started my apprenticeship and how this kind of task really bonds a team.



Fulham Palace paid for the apprentices to gain a LANTRA certificate in strimmer and brush cutter use. Now we can competently clear areas of brambles in the woodland areas of the garden which will aid our drive to increase biodiversity in the garden.

One of the steps we have taken to keep staff and volunteers healthy during the pandemic is to reduce the length of volunteer sessions. While this also reduces the need for sharing communal space you can tell the difference in how long some tasks take. The winter Wisteria pruning in the walled garden for example typically takes a week and a similar period of time for the Wisteria on the Palace wall. This year it took a little longer but does stand as a reminder of just how important the volunteers are to the upkeep of the garden.



The thing I've been looking forward to the most this year has been to get back into growing vegetables. As I'm writing this report I have my first successions of root vegetables sown in the vinery and our seed potatoes are chitting on the windowsill. I can't wait to get my first crop in the ground and I'm really excited for the all the revelations each of us apprentices will have and share in the journey from seed to harvest. I feel I have learned so much already and yet that I still have so much more to learn here at Fulham Palace.

Thank you again for helping to provide this opportunity and I look forward to updating you on how we get on and what more I've learnt next time.