

Final report for the Barbara and Phillip Denny Trust

By Matthew Weston

I wrote a matter of fact report for my final report to the Denny Trust but that isn't me and doesn't really represent Fulham Palace gardens, the team here or the experience the Barbara and Phillip Denny Trust has afforded me. I decided to rewrite the report this afternoon after a conversation with a regular visitor to the Palace as we closed the gates to the walled garden. We have spoken a lot in the last year and his passion for poetry has always been impressive but today after I told him my apprenticeship was due to end shortly, he quoted Thomas Moore 'All that's bright must fade, The brightest still the fleetest; All that's sweet was made But to be lost when sweetest.' It summed up my feelings about the ending of the apprenticeship pretty precisely.

Thomas Moore also wrote 'Finding the right work is like discovering your own soul in the world' and this last 18 months has been the right work for me in so many ways. There is real balance at Fulham Palace, it starts with learning that all plants are a part of something bigger than a visual display or practical surface for leisure. Learning the value of nettles, inaccessible woodland, uncut long grass areas and areas of undisturbed 'weeds' to the wildlife exceeds that of those same areas' value to humans but vastly adds to the more anthropogenic areas by encouraging spontaneous wildlife experiences and simultaneously making them more sustainable through carbon sequestration and increased biodiversity to add to the resilience of the local eco system.

We cleared an area of woodland to increase the range of flowering plants in it as ivy and nettles had come to dominate. We left grass long across the site in no mow May and will continue to do so throughout the year, this is in addition to the orchard meadow in the walled garden. We sowed two wildflower meadows and put-up bird boxes and added two small ponds to the walled garden. The eco piles and piles of wood chip were habitat for stag beetles that delighted the whole garden team. The head gardener's unbridled joy at finding peacock butterfly caterpillars on the nettles in the woodland is a memory I will cherish for a long time. The dragon flies resting on the irises of the small ponds in the orchard meadow, the June bugs filling the

air one night in the walled garden after work as their lawn habitat isn't full of chemicals and the gardeners aren't eradicating them to get perfect lawns. The patchy main lawn of the Palace played host to ashy and tawny miner bees who are right at home in patchy lawns.

But for all this wildness what I found amazing is how it all ties together, how the more formal areas of the vegetable garden and knot garden still retain a wildness to them through the choice of coppiced wood for wigwams and plant supports, the free-flowing forms of the planting softening the hard edges of the hedging and the lawn paths. The long grass toward All Saints Church links to the meadow of the orchard and learning to mow considerably through spring is a lesson I'm glad to have learned this year.

There are many practical skills I have learned from the time of the last report too: I can now take basal cuttings of plants emerging in spring, survey trees for oak processionary moth, answer RHS level 3 exam questions, repair Breendon gravel paths, I can brush wood stake herbaceous perennials, create wigwams for climbing plants, create small hazel fences to protect areas of planting, protect seeds/ seedling from mouse damage, I can whip and tongue graft apple trees and of course mark out parallel lines with high accuracy by using a 3-4-5 triangle that all Fulham Palace apprentices become expert in making marking out row of vegetables easy.

What a journey these 18 months have been. I started working for Fulham Palace Trust hoping to gain practical skills, improve my plant knowledge and improve my confidence and as sad as I am to be leaving, I'm happy I can evidence that I have improved in all of those areas. No prize for guessing who said "A genuine odyssey is not about piling up experiences. It is a deeply felt, risky, unpredictable tour of the soul." That's right Thomas Moore again! Gardening through a pandemic has been unpredictable and my connection to this garden, its history and the community of visitors is and will always be deeply felt. I'm extremely excited to be continuing the odyssey by joining the team at the Cambridge University Botanic Garden as a trainee technician in September where I hope to continue to improve as a considerate and soulful horticulturist. I will always be grateful to the Denny Trust and Fulham Palace Trust for what has been one of the best years of my life thank you so much for funding this apprenticeship.



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