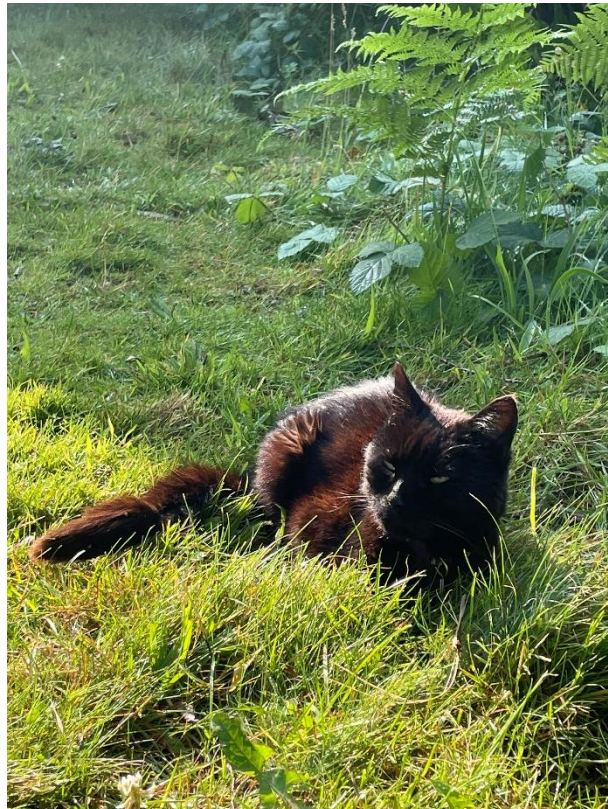


Fourth report for the Barbara and Phillip Denny Trust

By Jessie Harris

This September marks both a year since I started my apprenticeship, and the most abrupt end to summer I can ever remember. This time last year it was still 30 degrees! I was wearing shorts! But as I write this I'm zipped up in my fleece which had been dwelling somewhere undisturbed for the last 5 months in the depths of my locker, with rain beating down outside. There is still an abundance of vegetation and colour in the garden, yet an autumnal chill in the air. The harvests are slowing down, and the beds in the vegetable garden are slowly becoming bare, one row at a time. However, a year into my apprenticeship, I'm understanding the need for the colder months, despite feeling melancholy about the end of summer. It would be utterly unsustainable to work at the intensity we have been the whole year round! The methodical work of pruning, training in, cutting back, mulching, seem necessary after months of chaotic running around in the heat, watering, planting, and keeping up with harvesting.



Some sad news however. At the end of July, our beloved cat Edmund took himself off to quietly fall asleep somewhere, and we must assume he never woke up. It has been a challenging, if not heartbreaking, time here in the gardens, and for cat lovers, of whom there seem to be many here at the Palace. He was such a sweet gentle old man, and I so enjoyed his quiet presence, accompanying me on many solo seed sowing afternoons, peacefully asleep nearby.



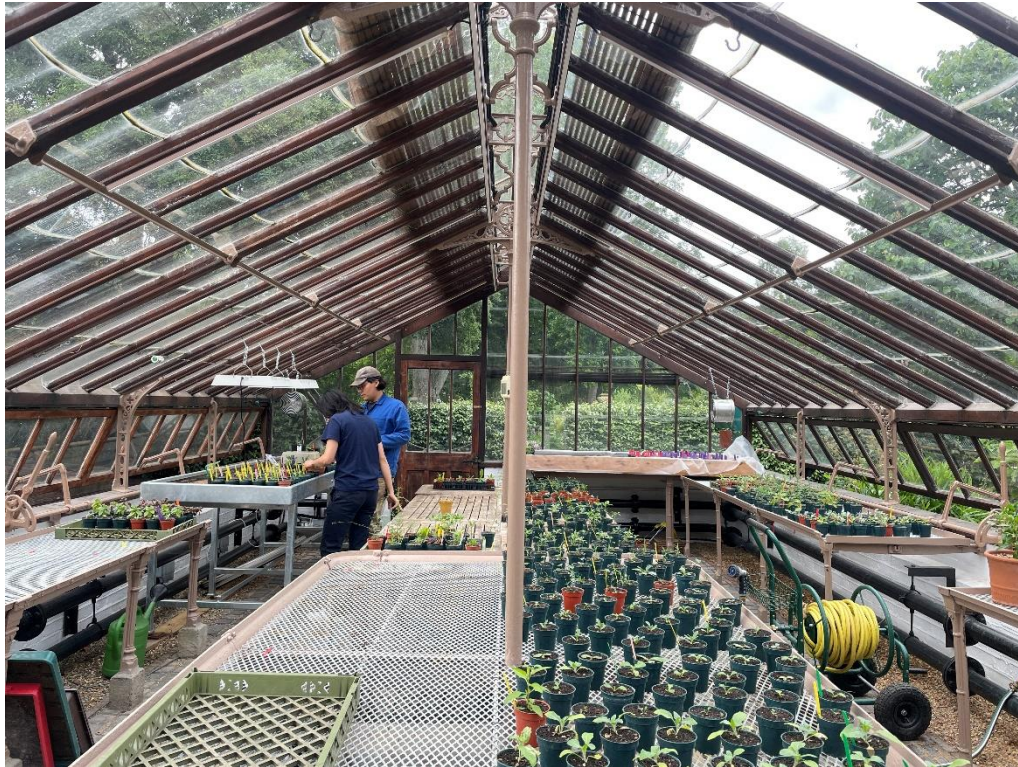
The South African Glasshouse at CPG



Pelargonium sidoides

At the end of June I took my final RHS exam (which I passed!) and have received my qualification. With studying out of the way, I organised a work exchange with my friend Ivo from Chelsea Physic Garden. He came to work alongside me here at the Palace in the first week of July, and I went to work at Chelsea Physic a week or so later. It was brilliant, meeting their knowledgeable and enthusiastic team, being shown round the collections, glasshouses, herbarium, database and nursery. Ivo's placement is funded in tandem with the 350th anniversary of the garden and the major glasshouse restoration that is finally completed. I had the privilege of spending a morning with the glasshouse manager John, where he went through some of the changes they have made to their collections and displays. In their recently completed "Cape Floral region of South Africa" glasshouse (an area of immense plant diversity), instead of a more familiar Victorian idea of display, presenting plants on benches, politely rubbing shoulders in their terracotta

pots, they have planted up beds, showcasing a more modern approach and helping give some context to the plants. The stunning *Pelargonium sidoides*, that we also have here in the Vinery, was planted amongst other things and was allowed to sprawl, illuminating what they might look like in their natural range.



The new propagation glasshouse at CPG

Part of the glasshouse restoration has freed up a large space for their in-house nursery. Elisa, the propagation manager, showed me their methods of record keeping, and systems of tending to plants until ready to be planted out, and helped me realise how much I enjoy this particular area of horticulture. The methodical way of working, the organisation, planning, list making, and the close observation of the plants in your care, really appeals to me. It's rewarding, working with an enormous diversity of plants, trying to cater to each of their needs, and I'm wondering if this might be a possible future pathway I can explore further.

It was invigorating, working at another garden for a week, observing different techniques, meeting other enthusiastic gardeners, working with new plants, but it was also an opportunity to reflect on how much I have learnt here at Fulham Palace. The experience of managing volunteers is invaluable, gaining

the horticultural knowledge to confidently instruct both our regular volunteers and the occasional large groups of corporate volunteers. And the friendships! I have been here long enough to establish good relationships with lots of volunteers (not to mention my lovely and brilliant colleagues), often times the conversation naturally flowing whilst working side by side planting, potting on or mulching. I think one of the powers of gardening is that the joy of it, the pleasure of plants, the beauty of them and of tending to something and watching it grow, brings people together. Whilst working alongside someone you may have never met otherwise, you find mutual ground, either through conversation, completing a challenge together, or just working quietly side by side.



The beans on 15 July

One volunteer, Penny, helped me plot out and construct the frame for the beans, weaving the bamboo canes together and working out the most secure way of fastening them. She helped plant out seedlings another week, the following week secretly tying them in despite my confidence they didn't need it (she assured me that other years had been less successful due to climbing beans' cheeky habit of scrambling up their neighbours' poles and she was determined that this year's beans would be more disciplined!). On numerous occasions I found her weeding the bean bed under her own steam. So it was sad to hear Penny had had an accident and would be off her regular volunteering, the week we began harvesting the runners! We sent her a big bag of them and some flowers, which I hope helped cheer her up.



The bean bed at the end of August

It's a real shame Penny hasn't been here to see the beans in their full glory. And what glory! On several days, we were harvesting more than 3 kilos of beans! I have so enjoyed the big bean adventure – being introduced to all these different varieties, admiring the subtle beauty and difference of all the legume flowers I have grown this year, and was totally chuffed to receive first prize at the 100th Fulham Horticultural Society show. We managed to get a total of 5 first prizes (congratulations to my fellow apprentices Polina and India too!) including the coveted “most amusing vegetable”, for which we submitted a French bean that looked like a hissing snake (I am assured it wasn't the only submission in its class!)



The most amusing vegetable at the FHS show!

This summer has been incredible; the experience, knowledge and pleasure I've gained from growing, tending to, eating (!) and harvesting the astonishing variety of crops, flowers and fruit is amazing. It's gone so fast! But looking back to the spring, when we shifted gears and began the focused, dedicated work of sowing seeds and planning the vegetable garden, I can see how rich and valuable this summer has been. I'm immensely grateful to the Barbara and Philip Denny Trust for their continued support, and also to the brilliant mentorship of senior gardeners Pete and Franziska, and to our head gardener Lucy. I can't quite comprehend the amount I have learnt so far, and look forward to my remaining six months. I have no doubt there is much more to learn!

Jessie Harris - 27 September 2024



My prize winning runner beans at the 100th Fulham Horticultural Society show