

Fulham Palace House & Garden

The Barbara and Philip Denny Trust

Report 4 – Ellis Lewis

Report date: 22 April 2026

Start Date: 18 March 2025

My previous report concluded just before the Christmas break, a period that marked a milestone turning 18 and returning to the garden with a renewed sense of focus, particularly excited to look ahead to the season of specialist pruning and preparation. I have now reached the one-year mark of my 18-month apprenticeship, which feels both rewarding and slightly daunting, knowing I have only six months remaining. I continue to thoroughly enjoy the role and feel very grateful for the opportunity to be part of such a well-regarded program. I still feel that I am constantly developing, both in my practical horticultural ability and in my personal confidence.

In the garden

With the arrival of spring, the garden is beginning to come back to life, which is always an exciting time. Many of the plants we have been tending through the winter emerge from dormancy, and there is a real sense of momentum returning across the site. The spring bulbs are now in bloom and looking particularly strong this year.

In late December, we planted a drift of *Narcissus* 'Sealing Wax', and it has been especially rewarding to now see them flowering. Knowing these bulbs will naturalize and overlook the main lawn for years to come makes the work feel lasting and meaningful. It is something I will be able to return to in future and remember being part of, particularly planting them alongside the Thursday volunteer group.



Narcissus 'Sealing Wax'

Pruning and propagation

The dormant season has provided a valuable opportunity to focus on pruning, which has been a key area of development for me. I have received excellent guidance from Lucy, which has really improved my understanding, not just of how to prune, but why it is done in certain ways depending on the plant and long-term objectives.

Apple trees

I have taken part in apple tree pruning workshops, where we carried out formative pruning in the heritage orchard. We also undertook some restorative work on more mature specimens in the walled garden. This has helped me understand the balance between maintaining productivity and providing the tree with a healthy structure.

Wisteria

One of the highlights of the apprenticeship so far has been working with wisteria. There has been a sense of anticipation around pruning these historic specimens, including the large plant hugged against the Palace wall. Learning about spur pruning and how it contributes to flower production has been particularly valuable.

It has also been important to think longer term. Spur systems do not last indefinitely, so part of the process involves selecting and training new whips that will eventually replace older growth. Many years ago, the spur system was allowed to grow out too far, so it needed replacing.

Now that the buds have broken and flowers are beginning to develop, it is very satisfying to see the results of that work. I am looking forward to seeing the wisteria in full flower and reflecting on the role I played in its care.

Tree maintenance

Across the wider site, we have been carrying out general tree maintenance. Using pole saws, we have worked through areas identified in tree surveys and assessments. This has mainly involved removing dead, diseased and damaged material to improve both tree health and public safety.

This work has helped me build confidence working at height and using tools more efficiently, while also reinforcing the importance of regular inspection and preventative care in a public garden setting.



Pruning the *Wisteria Senensis* on the Palace wall on the scaffold structure



Dead wood that had been pruned

Rose pruning

Rose pruning has been another key seasonal task. Bush roses are relatively straightforward, generally reduced by around a third with cuts made above outward-facing buds to encourage an open shape. However, climbing and rambling roses require a more considered approach.

I have been learning how to manage long, flexible growth by tying stems in a cinnamon bun style swirl. This encourages more flowering points along the length of the stem, rather than just at the tip.

Kitchen garden responsibilities

In the kitchen garden, I have sown broad beans as part of the new season's crops. Over the winter, the focus has been on maintenance tasks such as weeding, mulching and generally preparing the beds. I also had the opportunity to write a blog on mulching, which was published on the Fulham Palace website.

The quieter winter period has allowed time to reflect on my first full growing season in a formal, visitor-facing environment. I learnt a great deal about crop planning, presentation, and consistency, particularly when working in a space that is both productive and educational.

This coming season, I will be taking on responsibility for new and miscellaneous crops alongside beans, peas, herbs and asparagus. I am particularly looking forward to working with less commonly grown crops, as this will broaden my understanding of different growing requirements and introduce more diversity into my edible growing knowledge.



The wigwam I created

Now that March has arrived, seed sowing is fully underway, and the glasshouse is extremely busy. We are sowing and potting on thousands of plants, both for the kitchen garden and for display and sale. It is a demanding but enjoyable time, and it feels good to be part of such a productive phase.

With the rays of spring sun beating down we completed wig-wamming in the walled garden. This process is where we construct hazel weaved structures that support the life of sweet peas and other annual climbers. This was also a joy to do as it enables an enthesias on the creative side of horticulture.

The long serving herb garden was slowing in its production rates and as head of herbs in this coming season I saw an opportunity to complete some renovative works. I lifted, divided and designed a new functional herb garden with a beautiful woodchip path that allows better functionality and accessibility. This mini project of mine has brought me lots of joy in completing.

Horticultural knowledge and college

Alongside practical work, I have been focusing on revision for my exams. I am relieved to have completed my first assessment and continue to build on the theoretical side of my training ready for my second in June.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I remain very positive about my apprenticeship and the experience it provides. It has been a year of significant growth, and I am keen to make the most of the remaining six months. I know this time will go quickly, so I am focused on continuing to develop and making the most of this chapter of my life.

With many thanks to the Denny Trust,

Ellis Lewis