

Merlin Trust Report for Bursary Trip to America May 2015

By Thomas King

In September 2014, the students and Dr Brian Trader from Longwood gardens came to visit us at Wisley. They showed great enthusiasm about our interest in carrying out a reciprocal visit to America, to see Longwood and the surrounding gardens. In November, it came to our attention that Dr Doug Needham, Education Department Head, was visiting Wisley so we arranged a meeting to discuss our proposed trip. With his help, we arranged communication with the proposed gardens to discuss our visit to the USA and arrange the itinerary for the trip.

The aims and objectives of the trip included:

- To investigate the types of plants that are grown in American Gardens and increase our knowledge of which plants can be grown in the UK.
- How are the collections held at each garden used to their best advantage?
- How do the gardens manage to maintain a degree of professionalism whilst still communicating with the public in a friendly way?
- How is educating the professional sector, e.g. students, different from here, and are they focussing more towards the plant world as a whole and public engagement, or is the focus still solely on the practice, art, science and skill of horticulture?
- Witness and experience the practices involved with Display Horticulture in American Gardens and the differences/similarities to our own and gain an understanding of how this is achieved.
- Learning more about the Longwood Professional Gardeners Program as this will help the members of group thinking of applying to study at Longwood but will also be a way of considering best methods and practise that may not be covering in horticultural training in the UK already.
- To see how gardens in the North East USA, both botanical and public, manage their plant collections to ensure their survival and conservation, how they interpret their collections to the public and engage them, and also to get the best out of the plants from a display perspective. To also look at their historical significance, and how they act as a living museum or reference collection. Understanding the purpose of each collection, their future and the specific merits the collections bring to that institute or garden, ornamentally, educationally and historically. This will be achieved through tours of the gardens with knowledgeable members of staff, understanding the management of the collections, their value, history and relevance in today's gardens.

- To investigate the training opportunities available to gardeners and the public, and how they vary from garden to garden depending on the objectives and the purpose of each garden. Are students leaving these gardens/institutes with a wider skill set and more holistic understanding of the impact of horticulture than in the past? Is it different to the UK? To witness if they vary much from our own, and potentially investigate what the RHS can take from the training schemes offered to American horticulturists and apply it to their own students.
- To witness and learn more about the native plants which grow in the area and their characteristics which make them suited to the area. How do they utilise their native flora to greatest ornamental effect? Can this be replicated with our native plants in our gardens? How do they blend their native flora in with introduced plants to form a display which balances the two, and maximises their potential? Do the American public understand and appreciate that the flora they are seeing when visiting these gardens consists of mainly native plants? How do these gardens engage and inform the public of this?
- What similarities do their display and ornamental gardens share with our own? Is our influence on American horticulture apparent or has American horticulture evolved to have its own identity? Are we now influenced by American gardens? Is the imagination of the American horticulturist setting them apart from the rest of the world when it comes to innovation? Are there certain design principles or pioneering design elements that are utilised to great effect?
- How do gardens in America promote the education, art and science of plants and horticulture? How is this shared and encouraged within the community?
- What techniques, strategies and schemes do the garden offer to engage the public, particularly children and young people, in understanding the importance of plants and gardens to the wider world, ecologically, scientifically and for the wellbeing of humans? What schemes or events are undertaken to draw people to the gardens?
- Increase networking and make new contacts, consolidate links and ties with the RHS and ensure future ties are made. Increase the profile of the RHS, and act as a presence and ambassadors for the organization. We are arranging to do a presentation to staff and students at Longwood and Central Park, focusing on RHS Garden Wisley, the Diploma in Practical Horticulture and a small piece on the Specialist Option Certificates.
- To gain an insight into the management of the specific gardens we are visiting. For example Chanticleer, which has an unorthodox management system whereby lead horticulturists manage and develop their own sections, but are overseen by the Executive Director. How does this lead to a more fulfilling, harmonious and successful garden?

The list of participants of the trip were:

Thomas King; Horticultural Trainee (WDPH1)

Brendan Arundel; Horticultural Trainee (WDPH1)

Robert Bradshaw; Horticultural Trainee (WDPH1)

John Cookson; Horticultural Trainee (WDPH1)

Maggie Tran; Horticultural Trainee (WDPH1)

Janina Timter; Horticultural Trainee (WDPH1)

Lawrence Wright; Horticultural Trainee (WDPH1)

Alison Legg; Horticultural Trainee (Ornamental Horticulture SOC)

Once we had decided on our aims and objectives, put our itinerary together and received funding we set off to America to begin our bursary trip.

Sunday 3rd May – Morris Arboretum

Our first full day in America consisted of visiting the Morris arboretum, which was only about an hour's drive away from our hotel. We started by meeting our guide Barry Jeffries at the entrance. He gave us a lovely tour around the garden, showing us the main features of the arboretum. This included a treetop walk and an absolutely amazing fernery, easily beating anything I have seen before. The arboretum encompassed many garden-like features such as a rose garden to bring the different areas of the arboretum together and provide extra interest for the visitors. One particular highlight of the visit was a gigantic *Cercidiphyllum japonicum*. It easily dwarfed any *Katsura* tree you would find in the UK. This was mostly due to the climate in which it grows, since it is wetter and warmer than the UK in this part of America. Once the tour was over, we were free to explore the arboretum at our own pace, during which we discovered a woven sculpture exhibition by the artist Patrick Dougherty. We also stumbled upon more naturalised areas of the garden which were abundant with wildlife and we also saw many beautiful Magnolias in full bloom.





Monday 4th May – Longwood Gardens

For the next two days, we visited Longwood gardens, the main attraction of our visit. Right from the beginning, Longwood was impressive. There is an excellent standard of horticulture throughout the whole garden and it is clear a lot of thought goes into the planning of the garden. We met with Doug Needham and Brian Trader once we arrived who both showed us around. We started with a massive display of about 56,000 tulips in the experimental garden. Once these had finished flowering, they

would be ripped out and the whole bed would be replaced with something else, just one example of how much money the garden has to play with. The reason Longwood have so much money is due to an endowment left to the garden by the du Pont family. All the work carried out in the garden is paid for by the interest on this endowment, which goes to show how much it must be worth. We next came across the refurbishment of the fountain area, a massive construction site in which 4000 pieces of stone work were being removed to be restored. They were also upgrading the pump and lighting system, the whole project costing an amazing £90 million! We also came across many other amazing features of the garden including Pierce's Wood, the Italianate Water Gardens and the Topiary garden. We also toured the 86 acre meadow in which a whole road was moved to expand the size of the meadow. It provided a peaceful reserve for nature, especially birds, many of which we were shown by our guides. In the afternoon, we were fortunate to spend time working with the students on their show gardens. I worked on a garden called Metallic Interference, helping them to plant many of the grasses and other plants that needed to be put into the ground. It was great talking to the students about their experiences at Longwood and how much they enjoyed their training scheme at Longwood.



Tuesday 5th May – Longwood Gardens

On our second day, we started with a tour of the conservatory complex, which houses a huge range of plants under glass. The structure itself was truly gigantic and consists of a range of climatic zones including tropical, arid and dry temperate. They also had unusual features not normally seen in a glasshouse such as a lawn, although this proved to be very difficult to look after, mainly due to disease problems. Highlights of the conservatory tour included the Bonsai area and behind the scenes where we were shown the Victoria water lilies in cultivation including the infamous Longwood Hybrid. Upon finishing the conservatory tour, we gave a 'brown bag lunchtime talk' to the staff at Longwood about the RHS and why we were there in the USA. To end the day we were given a tour of the composting facility and the research area, both of which were located about a 5 min drive away from the main garden. The research area contained many experimental plants and trial areas where the plants were being tested for different characteristics.

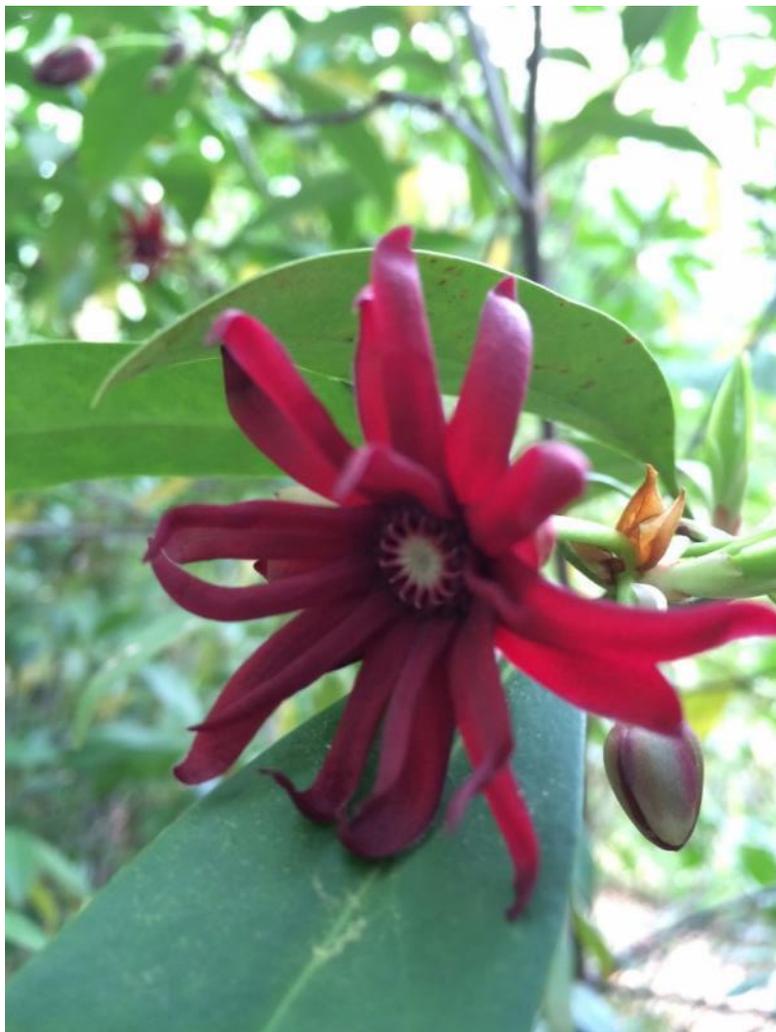




Wednesday 6th May – Mount Cuba Centre

Upon arriving at Mount Cuba Centre, few of us were ready for what we were about to see. We had come through beautifully artistic iron gates at the entrance which led up to the main house which now houses the offices for the staff. We started the tour at the formal gardens at the back of the house which had a very extravagant display of Tulips. However, as we moved further on past this area, we discovered what Mount Cuba was all about. We were guided into a woodland area which housed immense drifts of flora native to the local area. It soon became clear to us that each area was finely edited to make it look natural, whereas in reality it was intensely managed. The astounding beauty of each area constantly amazed and inspired us all. There were many plants such as Trilliums, Tiarella and Cypripedium, all perfectly placed to bring out their natural beauty. Upon leaving this intensely managed area, we were shown Mount Cuba's natural lands in which there are 533 acres of woodland, forest, meadows and wetlands. The areas are slowly being reverted back to their natural state via re-forestation initiatives among others. Mount Cuba only receives a few thousand visitors a year, but this is partly what made it so special. It was so peaceful and tranquil and perhaps trying to attract more visitors would ruin that experience.





Thursday 7th May - Winterthur

When we arrived at Winterthur, we met with Chris Strand who began to show us around the garden. Winterthur is a 1000 acre estate but the main garden is the 60

acres surrounding the house. We were lucky enough to see an azalea wood in full bloom as well as many other spring flowers. There were also very large specimens of Liriodendron scattered across the site which gave a cathedral like effect to the area. There was an enchanting children's area which had the whole group captivated. It had so many different areas for the children and all looked so natural. We were also given a tour of the museum, which gave a fascinating insight into the character of Mr du Pont, whom the garden used to belong to. We were also shown some of the natural areas of the estate later in the day, and the sheer scope of the site soon became apparent. We briefly visited an old barn which is currently being used for storage and seemed to sit in the middle of nowhere. There were massive expanses of land everywhere you looked and it was clear to us how important it was that this land belonged to the garden so that it stayed natural and wasn't developed on.







Friday 8th May - Chanticleer

Arriving at Chanticleer, we met with Executive Director Bill Thomas who showed us around the garden. As soon as you arrive, it becomes apparent that Chanticleer is a garden like no other. Every plant and object in the garden had been carefully placed. The garden was all about taking risks and experimenting, meaning no area of the garden was boring to look at. There were unusual plant combinations and a high level of creativity across the whole garden. Each gardener designed and maintained their own area which brought real character to each area of the garden. They also had many displays of craftsmanship on show, which they all create in the harsh winters when they cannot do any work outside. There was an amazing gravel garden with a beautiful Wisteria at the end, looking out onto the rest of the garden. There was also an amazing Asian Woodland which showcased many wonderful plants such as Cypridium and Arisaema. We were lucky enough to get the opportunity to work with the gardeners there. I worked on the gravel garden with the blazing sun beating down on me, helping to plant a variety of different plants and water them in thoroughly to make sure they didn't dry out. Despite the intense heat, it was an extremely enjoyable experience to work in such a lovely garden.

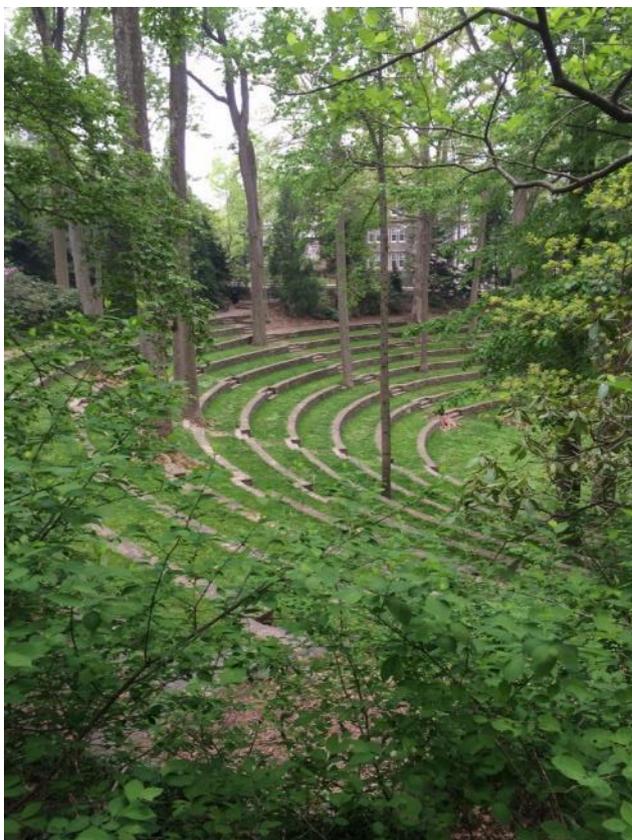




Saturday 9th May – Scott Arboretum and Charles Cresson's Garden

We spent the morning of today visiting Scott arboretum, located on the campus grounds of Swathmore College. We were shown around some of the 300 acres it encompasses and saw a wide variety of plants from trees and shrubs to herbaceous perennials. We were lucky enough to see a historic peony collection in full flower and witness some magnificent specimen trees. One particular highlight was an 'allee' of

Dawn Redwoods which towered four stories high and were very imposing. There was also a magnificent amphitheatre which looks ancient and fits perfectly into the landscape. The key feature of this site is how it introduces horticulture into the lives of the students on the campus, ensuring it will be important to them in the future. They are constantly surrounded by well-tended gardens and amazing plants. This meant that horticulture was sure to rub off on some of them in some way, which can only be beneficial for the future of American horticulture.





Later that day, we visited Charles Cresson's Garden, a man so enthusiastic about plants, it instantly inspires you. He has worked in his garden most of his adult life and has slowly developed it to become a magnificent private garden. He seemed to know

every minor detail of the garden and every plant inside it. Charles was once a student at RHS Wisley and he was very inspired by his time in England, choosing to grow difficult plants and push the boundaries when he grows his plants. There were huge drifts of colour in the garden from the Azaleas and lots of smaller interesting plants such as Mertensia and Tiarella. Charles was incredibly kind to share his incredible knowledge with us and he will be fondly remembered for his fantastic hospitality.





Sunday 10th May – Rooftop Garden

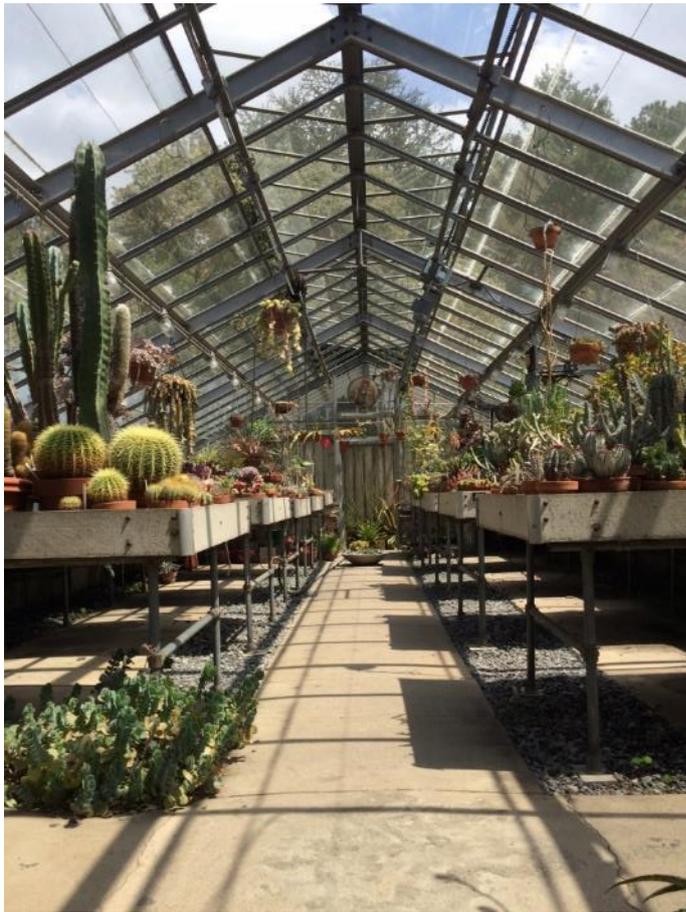
After arriving in New York, we were keen to explore and we met up with a lovely couple named Jane and Jim Dillon who help to maintain a roof garden on the 20th floor of an apartment building. The garden is maintained by the local community and even though it was still in its infancy, it was starting to look very nice. The views from the rooftop were truly incredible and it was nice to see the community coming together to run this project.



Monday 11th May – Wave Hill

Today we visited Wave Hill, a 28 acre garden which is based in the Bronx. Our tour guide for today was Charles Day, who happened to previously work at Wisley. Wave Hill provides a valuable sanctuary to New Yorkers who want to escape the hustle and bustle of the city. We were shown particular plants of interest by Charles and the key areas of the garden, one being the lovely glasshouse which contained many rare tender plants. We also got to meet the staff on their break and talk to them about what they do at Wave Hill. We were also told that Wave Hill suffered from a lack of funding and this could be seen in parts of the garden where there was clearly no staff members to look after it. However, despite its difficulties, it was still a unique

garden, containing some amazing plants and had the best views out of all the gardens we visited.







Tuesday 12th May – New York Botanical Garden

Once we arrived at the New York Botanical Garden, we were met by Charles Yurgalevitch who began to show around the 250 acre site. The garden is described as an iconic living museum and this is immediately obvious as soon as you enter the garden. We firstly visited the herbarium and were given a talk by Tom Zanoni who discussed their collection which is the largest in the Western Hemisphere, with over 7 million samples. We were then taken to the library, which was truly magnificent. It has the world's largest collection of books on botany, horticulture and landscape design under one roof and also has a 'rare works' section which house amazingly rare books including original works by Darwin and the first edition of Linnaeus' Species Plantarum. Later we were given tours of the perennial garden and the native plant garden, both of which were very impressive and contemporary enough to be relevant to the visitors there. We were also taken to the 50 acres of original native woodland in New York which has been preserved perfectly to ensure that it remains in its original state. Any invasive plants were kept under control and the native were allowed to fully colonize this amazing area. One particular highlight of the garden was the rock garden which was beautifully designed and even more beautiful to be standing in. Every detail of it was meticulously thought out and the planting schemes were very well thought out. We then moved on to an amazing Azalea garden with extreme bursts of colour to wow you at every glance. We also visited the world class glass house which contained many different temperature zones and a wonderful range of different plants to look at.





Wednesday 13th May – The High Line and Central Park

To begin the day, we visited the High Line, an impressive garden built on the structure of an abandoned freight railway line. We were shown around by Tom Smarr, the Head Gardener, who passionately shared his horticultural knowledge with us. Local residents fought to save the abandoned structure and recognised the beauty of the vegetation that had started to grow there. The Friends of the Highline group was formed and after much fundraising and hard work, we have the garden in its current form as it is today. The structure is two miles long and was designed by Piet Oudolf, in a naturalistic style, including lots of grasses and perennial plants. The Highline recently opened its third and final section to visitors, though it will be a few years before it is complete, as it looks slightly barren at the moment. The importance

of the Highline soon became clear to us as a temporary escape in an area of New York which is constantly being developed on.





In the afternoon, we visited Central Park where we met Chris Cousino who kindly showed us around part of the site. We were taken to a naturalistic lake area on the edge of the site where there was a small abandoned island which they were looking to develop in the future. We were shown landmarks and interesting features and then finished our tour at a huge fountain. Once we were left to explore the site on our own, we looked at the map and realised the massive scale of central park. We were only about a tenth of the way up the whole site and had much more to see! Central park is 842 acres of green space in the heart of New York City, a massive achievement considering the amount of urbanisation around it. A special part of central park was the conservatory garden which had a lovely display of fountains and a huge Wisteria arch behind it. There were many hidden areas of central park and it is even possible not to see or hear New York City in parts of the park. For such a big

area, the standard of horticulture was very impressive and was a place we could all learn from.





Thursday 14th May – Brooklyn Botanic Garden

Today began by meeting Maureen O'Brien who was the community field manager at Brooklyn Botanic Garden. We were firstly taken to an educational section of the garden where vegetables and other edible plants are grown. After this, we visited two community gardens in Brooklyn, called 6/15 Green and Prospect Heights respectively. Both were built upon sites where existing infrastructure used to be, in this case a petrol station and housing, and both proved to be vitally important to the communities, enhancing the lives of everyone who grew plants there. We then headed back to the botanic garden where we met Melanie Sifton, the Deputy Director. She showed us interesting areas of the garden such as the Shakespeare garden and a wonderful peony garden. We also had the opportunity to meet Elizabeth Scholtz, the first female director of the garden. She had the first yellow flowered Magnolia named after her and had also previously received the prestigious

Veitch Memorial Medal for services to horticulture. The garden had lots of wonderful areas to explore and was one of my favourite gardens during the trip.





Friday 15th May – Brooklyn Grange Rooftop Farm and Battery Park

We started today by visiting Brooklyn Grange Rooftop Farm where we met Annie Hauck-Lawson who showed us around the site. The rooftop of the building is used by a group of locals who utilise the space to its maximum potential to grow food crops in a sustainable manner. Annie herself uses the site for her project called 'Mompot' where she creates her own compost using sustainable methods. The rooftop farm was an excellent example of how to grow food in intuitive ways and make use of all the space available to you in an ever urbanised environment, such as Brooklyn.





Our final day in New York was concluded by visiting Battery Park on the southern tip of Manhattan. We were greeted by Sean Kiely who showed us around the site. The site receives 6 million visitors a year and is constantly used by New Yorkers and tourists who crave the much needed green space. The park was designed by Piet Oudolf, strongly utilising herbaceous perennials, but also shrubs and small trees. The site was hugely damaged by Hurricane Sandy in 2012 and the park is slowly being restored back to its original state. Battery Park is also the site of a significant memorial, in the form of giant stone tablets listing the names of Armed Service People who were killed in the Atlantic during WW2. New planting schemes are being developed in the park such as a native flora garden and borders which are again being designed by Piet Oudoulf. Even though this garden wasn't at it best when we visited, it will definitely be a garden to visit in 5 years' time once the plants have matured.







Our bursary trip to America has been an unforgettable experience that I will certainly never forget. A huge thank you to anyone who provided us with funding for the trip. It wouldn't have been possible without the collaboration of the different bursary schemes. Thank you to The Merlin Trust who were very generous in providing each of us on the trip with £250 which went towards the cost of our flights. Learning from the horticultural practices in America has been invaluable to us all and has taught us all many things. So much has been learnt from this trip which we can all take away and use in our future careers and beyond.