

Tresco Abbey Garden, Isles of Scilly
Merlin Trust Bursary Report



Caroline Pheasey
20th November – 6th December 2021

Introduction

As part of the Level 2 Horticulture Operative apprenticeship at the Eden Project, I am involved in the maintenance and development of exhibits which present plants native to California, the Mediterranean basin, South Africa and Western Australia. Being relatively new to the sector, I am keen to develop my knowledge of ornamental horticulture by gaining more experience within this specialised area. A work experience placement at Tresco Abbey Garden presented a valuable opportunity to bolster and expand my knowledge by working with their extensive collection which directly complements Eden's indoor and outdoor temperate-themed garden areas. I was also particularly interested in learning about how the garden has been designed to take advantage of its microclimates whilst protecting it from severe Atlantic gales.

Aims

- Learn about Tresco's unique collection of plants typically grown indoors in the UK
- Enhance my current knowledge of subtropical plant species
- Observe wildflowers on the archipelago
- Work alongside Tresco's permanent team, students and volunteers to broaden my understanding of the horticulture sector drawing on their backgrounds and experience
- Assist Tresco's team with winter maintenance and development of the garden
- Gain practical skills directly applicable to my role at the Eden Project
- Experience a unique way of life on the Isles of Scilly

Itinerary

20th November 2021

Drive to Land's End Airport

Take Skybus to St Mary's Island

Boat transfer to Tresco Island

Accommodation provided on site

4th December

Boat transfer to St Mary's

Accommodation booked at B&B for two nights

Visit Carreg Dhu Garden

5th December

Day trip to St Agnes or St Martin's not possible as no boats were running

6th December

Take Skybus to Land's End Airport

Drive home

Located 28 miles off the coast of Cornwall, the Isles of Scilly experience strong salt-laden Atlantic gales. However, their position in the Gulf stream coupled with a shelter belt originally established using salt-tolerant Californian *Cupressus macrocarpa* and *Pinus radiata* has created a mild and equable climate in the garden.

Commencing my two-week placement with a tour given by Head Gardener Andrew Lawson provided insight to the history of Tresco Abbey Garden and an overview of the extensive plant collection which is continuously evolving. My initial observation was the sheer jaw dropping scale of the plants in the garden; specimens I have worked with on the mainland only a metre or so tall, towered over me.



One of many *Leucadendron argenteum* trees native to South Africa. *Cordyline australis* for scale.



Three large specimens thriving in the garden: *Banksia integrifolia* tree (Australia), *Furcraea longaeve* (Mexico), *Coleonema pulchellum* (South Africa)

Microclimates

Situated on a south-facing hill and with significant height differentials, there are strongly contrasting microclimates within the garden. On the exposed top terrace, South African and Australian species, many from the Proteaceae family in particular, thrive in the sunny, open aspect with its free-draining, low nutrient soil. In contrast, in the area south of the Long Walk the deeper soil has enabled trees to establish and mature. These cast shade and create a more damp, humid and sheltered environment favourable to plants endemic to Chile, Madeira and New Zealand.



Top terrace



South of The Long Walk

Eastern Rockery

One of the tasks I assisted with during my placement was weeding the Eastern Rockery. Certain plants had become too dominant and were overshadowing and hiding the form of succulents, for example: the Mexican species *Agave applanata*, *Agave stricta* 'Rubra', *Yucca carnerosana*. Plants we removed included *Aristea ecklonii*, *Chrysocoma coma-aurea*, *Senecio glastifolius*. Whilst these South African plants were desirable in other areas of the garden, the Head Gardener felt these did not contribute to the intended aesthetic of this rockery.

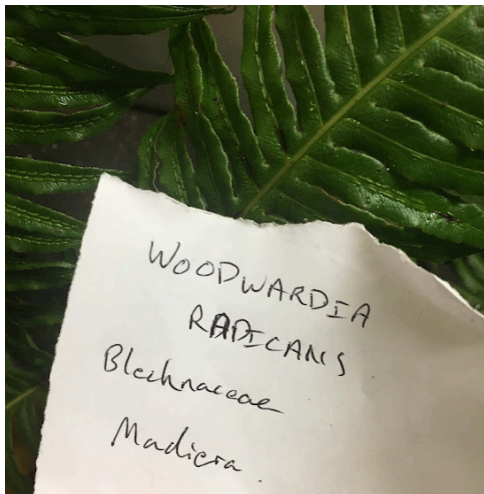


Plant Idents

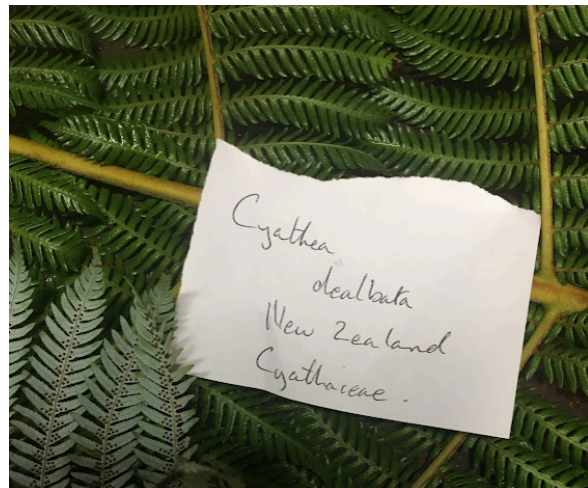
Regular plant idents of a selection of 30 species helped the team to gain familiarity with the collection. One of the most challenging was the fern ident. However, in examining and discussing their most distinguishing features enabled me to identify a range of ferns more confidently.



A few plant samples from an ident.



Woodwardia radicans have a chain-like detail on its fronds. Common name Chain Fern



Distinctive spore pattern and silvery colour on the underside of a *Cyathea dealbata* frond

Coastal plants and wildflowers

In addition to my main role at the Eden Project, I regularly assist the National Wildflower Centre and was keen to extend my time on the Isles of Scilly exploring the coastline and observing wildflowers. Species still in flower on St Mary's in December included *Achillea millefolium*, *Armeria maritima* and *Silene dioica* which are all native to the UK.



Cakile maritima and *Beta vulgaris* subsp. *maritima* at Apple Tree Bay on Tresco

Trip Summary

I relished the opportunity to undertake a period of work experience at Tresco Abbey Garden. Although I had researched and studied the world famous garden in advance, I was still taken aback by the sheer scale and diversity of the plant species thriving in this unique environment. By working directly with Mike Nelhams, Andrew Lawson and the team, I gained greater insight into the management and development of the garden and learned how to design specific areas in order to optimise the diverse microclimates. Through practical tasks, plant idents and lectures, I became more familiar and confident with this extensive range of plants and gained skills which I will be able to apply to my future professional career in horticulture.

Budget Breakdown

Travel:	Air Fare	£215
	Fuel	£35
	Airport Parking	£64
Subsistence:	Accommodation	£112
	Food	Personal contribution
Total:		£426

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank The Merlin Trust for the financial support which was kindly provided to enable me to visit this unique archipelago.

To Mike Nelhams, Andrew Lawson and the permanent garden team, current students and fellow volunteers, I am truly grateful for their generosity with both their knowledge and time and for making me feel so welcome.

Finally, I would like to thank the Eden Project for their support and encouragement for undertaking this work experience placement.