

Merlin Trust Bursary Report
Work Experience at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh

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INTRODUCTION

My name is Jonathan, and I am currently studying towards my RHS Level 4 Diploma at RHS Garden Wisley in Surrey. As part of this program, my peers and I have been presented with an incredible opportunity to gain work experience in another garden. I firmly believe that work experience plays a vital role in career development. It allows us to explore new passions, learn from the diverse work and challenges posed by different climatic zones and growing environments, and forge meaningful connections within the industry.



Me during a 2021 excursion with the Wisley School of Horticulture

During my early career I was lucky to undergo a horticultural apprenticeship at the botanical gardens of Hamburg, Germany, where I was also allowed to organise two weeks of work experience at the prestigious Royal Botanic Gardens of Kew. This experience, generously funded by a German charitable trust, opened my eyes to the vast diversity of the horticultural industry in the UK and directly influenced my educational trajectory and decision to pursue further learning opportunities in the country.

While working at Wisley, I have been able to improve my horticultural skills, particularly expanding my knowledge of plant cultivars and their practical applications. However, despite many newfound interests, my passion for botanical horticulture, which I developed during my apprenticeship in Hamburg, still motivates my desire to work with botanical collections. I am deeply aware of their significance to scientific research and the preservation of plant species and wildlife habitat. Although my current career path leans toward historic garden conservation and private estate work, I felt compelled to approach the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh to delve deeper into the intricacies of managing and conserving these historical collections. I chose the RBGE due to the age of its scientific collection, its high status in the horticultural industry and its harsher climate when compared to the UK's Southeast.

Given my initial training in the cultivation of herbaceous perennials, I held a particular fascination for their alpine and woodland collections of the RBGE. To my delight, Richard Brown, the Senior Horticulturalist for the Rock and Woodland Garden, accepted my request to join his team for a week of work. Thanks to the generous support of the Merlin Trust, I was able to finance my travel expenses and accommodation near the garden to make this trip possible.

ARRIVING IN EDINBURGH

After a beautiful train journey through the picturesque landscapes of England and Scotland, I finally arrived in Edinburgh. I was instantly captivated by the city's stunning architecture and topography.

Edinburgh is divided into two distinct areas: the Old Town and the New Town. The Old Town, a UNESCO World Heritage site, exudes an irresistible charm with its medieval street plan, labyrinthine alleyways, and iconic landmarks. On the other hand, the New Town showcases an elegant fusion of Georgian and Neoclassical architecture, complemented by serene squares and beautifully landscaped gardens.



Edinburgh's Old Town

It was the first time I had been this far north in the UK and, once I had made myself at home in my hostel room, I couldn't resist the urge to explore. I had brought my longboard with me to avoid having to rely on public transport for my daily commute, and it allowed me to explore a significant part of the Old and New Town. The diversity of the city, architecturally and culturally, blew me away and led me down a rabbit hole of research into its history once I returned to my room.

Among the many landmarks, two attractions held a particular fascination for me: Edinburgh Castle and Arthur's Seat. Perched high above the city on volcanic rock, Edinburgh Castle stands as a testament to its storied past. Its breathtaking vistas offer panoramic views of Edinburgh and the beauty of its surrounding landscape. But Arthur's Seat, an ancient volcano nestled within Holyrood Park just east of the city centre, also provides a remarkable vantage point. Both landmarks, steeped in history, have become popular destinations for tourists and locals.

I was also very intrigued by Edinburgh's Royal Mile, a famous street in the heart of the Old Town, which holds a rich historical legacy, connecting Edinburgh Castle to the Palace of Holyrood House. It was the main thoroughfare of medieval Edinburgh and remains a hub of cultural and historical significance.



View of Edinburgh castle from Princess Street



View of the Scott Monument from one of the old town's back alleys



View of the city from a small churchyard garden in the old town

THE HISTORY OF THE GARDEN

The origins of the RBGE can be traced back to the 17th century when it was established as a physic garden in 1670. It was initially situated near the Palace of Holyrood House to grow medicinal plants for the Royal family's physicians. However, due to its limited space, the garden was relocated several times before finding its permanent home in the present-day location on Inverleith Row.



The Queen Mother's Memorial Garden



Alpine houses and troughs

In 1820, the RBGE moved to its current site, covering about 70 acres (28 hectares) of land just north of Edinburgh's city centre. The garden was designed by renowned Scottish botanist, John Hutton Balfour, and the famous landscape architect, David Cousin. This move marked a significant turning point, as it allowed the garden to expand its collections and facilities, becoming a hub for botanical research and education.

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, the RBGE continued to flourish and gain international recognition. It played a pivotal role in botanical exploration and plant discovery, with numerous plant species being introduced to Europe through its efforts. The garden's herbarium, with over three million preserved plant specimens, became a valuable resource for taxonomic studies and botanical research.

In addition to its scientific contributions, the RBGE embraced a strong focus on conservation. It actively engaged in plant collection and preservation initiatives, collaborating with partners worldwide to protect endangered plant species and conserve biodiversity. The garden's dedication to sustainability and conservation has earned it a place as a leader in global plant conservation efforts.



Alpine cushion plant display



The public glasshouses are currently undergoing renovation efforts to rejuvenate their structure and safeguard the plant collections

Over the years, the RBGE has expanded its footprint with the creation of additional gardens and glasshouses, each offering a unique representation of plant life from different regions of the world. Notable collections include the Scottish Heath Garden, the Rock Garden, the Alpine Garden, and the Chinese Hillside, among others.

The RBGE continues to evolve and adapt to the challenges of the modern world, embracing cutting-edge research, education programs, and public engagement initiatives. It remains a cherished cultural and scientific institution, drawing visitors from all corners of the globe to experience its rich botanical heritage.

GETTING A TOUR OF THE GARDEN

On my first day, I was welcomed by Richard and his team. The day commenced with an extensive tour of the Woodland, Rock Garden, and the Alpine glasshouses. Richard generously shared his experience managing these areas and the unique challenges they encounter, including everyday maintenance and the impact of climate change, particularly the effects of extreme winter temperatures experienced the previous year.

Our tour began with a visit to the Rock Garden, undeniably a defining and cherished area of RBGE. The original Rock Garden at RBGE was designed by William Evans, then curator. Built around the year 1871, it was one of the earliest rock gardens in the world. This first rock garden was located on the site of the current Queen Mother's Memorial Garden.

However, by the early 20th century, the original rock garden had become overgrown and less successful in showcasing the alpine plant collection. This led to the decision to create a new and improved Rock Garden, which was designed and constructed by the botanist and plant explorer, Reginald Farrer, along with RBGE's staff. This new Rock Garden was built between 1908-14 and is the one that remains at RBGE today.

The decision to rebuild the Rock Garden was crucial in creating a specialized environment that better simulated the natural habitats of alpine and rock-dwelling plants, allowing for the successful cultivation and display of diverse and unique species from high-altitude regions despite the challenging position of the new garden on a north-facing slope.

The rocks used in the design originated from two nearby quarries in Dumfries and Galloway (Sandstone) and Ben Ledi (Gonglomerate). The garden's construction was fully completed in 1925, and it quickly gained recognition for its innovative design and collection of alpine species.

Over the years, the Rock Garden continued to evolve under the guidance of RBGE's skilled horticulturists and plant enthusiasts. The garden's collections expanded to include a wide array of alpine plants, from diminutive cushion plants to hardy perennials, each thriving in the specialized microclimates created within the rock formations.



RBGE Rock Garden in c1874, defined by dense planting of yucca and araucaria species.

Source: <https://stories.rbge.org.uk/archives/14268>



See above: the rock garden in 2023 with its defining lawns and the adjacent Caledonian Hall built in 1829 to house exhibitions and herbarium collections.



The Rock Garden Stream

Today, the Rock Garden remains a highlight of RBGE, attracting visitors with its formal lawns and effective use of the site topography to create vistas and hidden surprises. It serves as a testament to the dedication and expertise of the garden's staff, which continues to maintain the garden despite a significant reduction in workforce compared to its early days.

Over the years, the Rock Garden has undergone significant changes, being divided into distinct geographical sections, each showcasing plants collected from various research trips conducted by botanists throughout the 20th and 21st centuries.

A recent enhancement includes the introduction of new, resin-bound gravel paths, thoughtfully designed to eliminate water pooling after rainfall, which had previously affected the area's accessibility. Moreover, the Rock Garden stream has been widened, and the central mount raised. To ensure long-lasting structural integrity, the old wooden bridge across the stream has been replaced with a modern synthetic version.



A striking combination of the foliage of an *Iris germanica* hybrid and the impressive blooms of *Euphorbia characias* subsp. *wulfenii* 'John Tomlinson'

As the RBGE experiences a steady rise in visitor numbers, the increased footfall has necessitated changes to several path layouts and landscape designs. The garden, not originally constructed to accommodate such numbers, faces the challenge of maintaining the health of its formal lawns, especially amidst the ongoing renovation of the glasshouses. Richard shared his struggle of preserving the lawns, occasionally having to cordon off areas to allow them to recover and prevent the formation of desire lines.

A persistent challenge in the garden is the presence of equisetum, the main weed species. The RBGE combats this through consistent weeding efforts throughout the growing season, ensuring the delicate collection of species plants isn't outcompeted by this noxious weed.

Adding to the garden's challenges are the badgers residing on site, which stress the planting and lawns during their search for insect larvae underground. Despite these challenges, RBGE's dedicated team continues their efforts to maintain the beauty and diversity of the garden's cherished collections.



Iris 'Turkoman', a striking hybrid of *I. korolkowii* and *I. stolonifera*



Narcissus 'Eystettensis'



Muscari sp.

We continued our tour in the Woodland Garden, which is separated into two distinct sections. Originally established as an arboretum in the early 20th century, the Woodland Garden has evolved over time into a thriving woodland habitat, showcasing an impressive array of trees, shrubs, and woodland flora. I was particularly excited to see the thriving collections of *Rhododendron*, *Paris*, *Trillium* and *Meconopsis*.



A field of *Anemone nemorosa* in the woodland Garden



Rhododendron rex ssp. *fictolacteum*

The development of the Woodland Garden began around 1922 when renowned botanist and explorer, George Forrest, initiated the planting of numerous tree species from his travels to remote regions of Asia, particularly China, Tibet, and Burma. His expeditions yielded a treasure trove of plant specimens, enriching the RBGE's collections and contributing to the garden's growing reputation as a centre for botanical exploration.

Over the years, the Woodland Garden expanded its collection, incorporating native and exotic woodland plants. The gentle slopes and natural contours of the landscape provided the ideal canvas for creating a diverse and harmonious woodland habitat. In the spirit of RBGE's commitment to conservation, the Woodland Garden became a sanctuary for endangered and rare plant species. It served as a refuge for plants threatened by habitat loss and other environmental challenges. The garden's role in safeguarding biodiversity and preserving plant species made it an essential component of RBGE's broader conservation efforts.



Richea x curtisiae

In recent years, the Woodland Garden has continued to evolve and adapt to the challenges posed by environmental factors, climate change and visitor footfall. However, as the garden embraces a modern approach to conservation and questions the sustainability of its working practices, it faces significant questions regarding the future of its cherished collections and infrastructure. The impact of climate change and the threat of invasive pests and diseases may render some plant species less suitable for the garden's current conditions. Consequently, the future of certain beloved aspects of the woodland garden is uncertain, and it may be necessary to relocate them to RBGE's partner gardens, if possible, where more favourable climatic conditions may prevail.



Trillium erectum



Paris incompleta



Scopilia carniolica



Epimedium pubigerum

Richard, with evident concern, also addressed the preservation of the popular peat garden. This delicate environment could prove challenging to replenish in a sustainable way once the current peat blocks fully decompose, raising concerns for the future of this unique habitat and the related plant collections.

Moreover, irrigation emerges as a vital aspect for the woodland garden, requiring particular attention. Presently, the garden relies on a sprinkler system, divided into various sections, running for about 20 minutes each night to maintain consistent water pressure within the aging pipe system. While effective in many situations, this approach may prove inefficient during dry seasons, necessitating supplementary targeted hand watering to fulfil the needs of the plant collections.

To safeguard the delicate collections, the garden employs biocontrol strategies, with a specific focus on combating the aggressive viburnum leaf beetle. Additionally, measures are taken to protect against the potential harm caused by slugs, using controlled and carefully placed slug pellets.

Additionally, the conservation of plant collections faces a rising concern with increasing plant theft on site. Delicate woodland perennials' tubers, bulbs, and seedheads have been targeted. To combat this, the garden raises awareness among visitors, enhances site security, and shortens collection monitoring intervals.



A striking combination of *Equisetum hyemale* var. *affine* and *Schefflera taiwaniana*. Various *Schefflera* species are grown across the garden to great effect.



Rhododendron arizelum
(Subsection Falconera)



Rhododendron racemosum
(Subsection Scabrifolia)



Sanguinaria canadensis
'Multiplex'



Fothergilla major

Next in line were the alpine houses and courtyard. The Alpine House and adjacent coldframes were constructed in 1975 using a cedar wood frame and serve as a reminder of traditional cultivation practices for delicate alpine plant collections grown in sand plunges. The structures were designed to mimic the natural habitats of alpine areas, offering controlled temperature, humidity, and light levels.

The RBGE's Alpine Courtyard, adjacent to the Alpine Houses, was later added to complement and expand the display of alpine flora. The courtyard, with its carefully curated rock garden and raised beds, provided an outdoor space to showcase a diverse range of alpine plants in a more naturalistic setting and has become a popular feature itself due to its traditional alpine plunges which provide a relatable scale of cultivation for visiting hobby gardeners.

Over the years, the Alpine Houses and Courtyard at RBGE have been continuously developed and improved to accommodate new plant acquisitions and evolving horticultural practices. Nowadays, the houses, much like RHS Wisley's new Alpine display house or Kew Garden's Davies Alpine house have predominately taken on a display role, offering the visiting public a seasonal glimpse of the diverse plant collections behind the scenes.



The traditional timber display house and coldframes.



Various alpinines grown behind the scenes in traditional coldframe plunges.



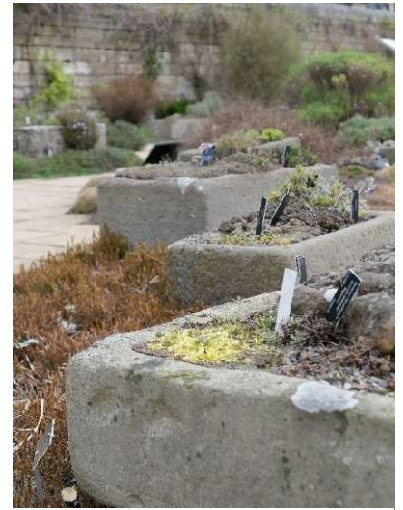
The new alpine cushion house built in 2013.

In 2016, thanks to the generous support of the visiting public and various charitable trusts, RBGE began the restoration of the original timber frame of the glasshouse, raising over £65,000 for the project. With the revitalized traditional structure, the garden continues its vital mission of conserving rare alpine plants. Through the public display of alpinines within the glasshouse, RBGE also strives to raise awareness about the alarming destruction and endangerment of alpine habitats, underscoring the importance of preservation efforts on a global scale.

To enhance public understanding of these species' native habitat, RBGE also constructed a contrasting, modernist alpine house within the courtyard. This captivating structure features a natural rock wall setting, carefully assembled using recycled tufa sourced from a road construction project in Germany.

Within this unique environment, cushion plants are showcased, planted into narrow bore holes that are hand-drilled into the rock face. This planting method aims to replicate the natural establishment of these species in the wild. By allowing the plants to fully develop their taproots, they can reach the looser and moist substrate on the backside of the rock face, mirroring their growth patterns in their natural alpine habitats. The result is a captivating display that not only highlights the beauty of these plants and the development of horticultural practices over the years, but also educates visitors about the fascinating, evolutionarily convergent adaptations of cushion plants.

The Alpine Houses and Courtyard remain cherished features of the RBGE, attracting visitors from near and far to immerse themselves in the beauty and diversity of alpine flora, all while contributing to the garden's mission of safeguarding and promoting botanical knowledge and conservation.



Alpine troughs spread out across the courtyard.



Saxifraga longifolia



Corydalis wilsonii



Primula pauciflora
(Syn. *Dodecatheon pulchellum*)



Saxifraga 'Bohemian Karst'
(*columnaris* x *kotschyi*)



Tulipa linifolia

A notable mention must also be given to the RBGE arboreal collection. Upon entering the garden for the first time I was immediately captivated by the incredible diversity of woody plant species across the garden. It was admittedly the perfect time to appreciate the many formidable specimens, as most of the deciduous flowering trees were in full swing, allowing for a better understanding and appreciation of their defining features.

One of the defining botanists behind the establishment of the arboretum was George Forrest. George Forrest was a renowned Scottish botanist and plant collector who conducted multiple expeditions to remote regions of Asia, particularly China, Tibet, and Burma, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. During his explorations, he collected numerous plant specimens, including many woody plant species, which he introduced to cultivation in Britain.



Champion tree: *Pyrus elaeagnifolia* var. *Kotschyana*



Zelkova sinica

Another significant figure was Ernest Henry Wilson, a prominent British botanist and plant collector. Like George Forrest, Wilson embarked on several botanical expeditions to Asia, particularly China, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He introduced a wide range of woody plants to RBGE, adding to the growing diversity of the arboretum.

Thanks to the efforts of these pioneering botanists and others, the RBGE Arboreal Collection grew steadily over the years, becoming one of the most extensive and diverse collections of woody plants in the world.

Today, the RBGE woody plant collection is comprised of over 3,500 trees made up of 730 different species, two thirds of which are known to have been collected in the wild. The collection continues to evolve and expand, with ongoing efforts to add new species and ensure the preservation of endangered and rare plants. A special highlight amongst the towering old tree specimens were the large populations of *Lathraea clandestina*, a Holoparasitic member of the *Orobanchaceae*, which has been introduced from Europe and have since naturalised in the English and Scottish wilderness. Their flower heads, emerging from the root systems of various members of the *Juglandaceae*, *Fagaceae* and *Betulaceae*, seemed to puzzle many visitors.



Lathraea clandestina

The RBGE is known for its impressive population of these low-growing marvels, which have been a big reason behind my decision to visit the garden at this time of year.



Ulmus minor 'Umbraculifera Gracilis'
A rare cultivar, thought to have originated from Iran, with natural resistance against Dutch elm disease.

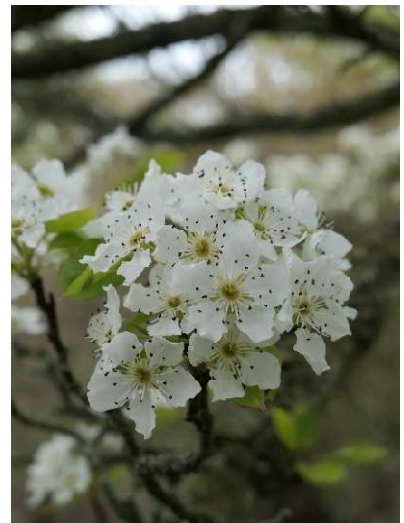
Personal Highlights of the RBGE Arboreal Collection:



Sorbus gracilis



Malus x robusta



Pyrus korshinskyi



Nothofagus antarctica



Betula ermanii



Oemleria cerasiformis



Euptelea polyandra



Cercidiphyllum magnificum ♀



Cercidiphyllum magnificum ♂

By pure chance, my visit to Edinburgh coincided with a work placement of my Friend and then housemate Silas, the latest RHS/Garden Club of America Interchange Fellow. He predominately worked in the garden's tropical and sub-tropical collection to satisfy his keen interest in plant lineages of evolutionary significance. Meeting up with him during my breaks and after work allowed me to get a glimpse of said collections and behind the scenes of the tropical and temperate Palm Houses and the varied glasshouse collections. Both glasshouses are currently undergoing extensive restorative efforts under RBGE's biomes project, which aims to preserve the Grade A listed structures and their associated botanical collections.



The RBGE *Ericaceae* collection glasshouse



Brownea grandiceps in the gutted Plants and People House

The RBGE glasshouse collections have evolved over centuries, with a primary goal of maintaining, studying, and displaying a rich diversity of plant life. The Tropical and Temperate Palm Houses, built in 1834 and 1856 respectively, provide controlled environments that mimic specific ecological conditions, allowing the cultivation of plants that might not thrive in the challenging Scottish climate.

When they were first constructed, these glasshouses were some of the tallest structures of their kind in the UK and allowed the Victorian public rare insights into the flora of remote corners of the Commonwealth. Through meticulous curation and dedicated efforts in research and conservation, the RBGE has assembled a remarkable collection of plants from around the world, which allowed scientists to study exotic species and contribute to a deeper understanding of plant ecology and physiology.

Glasshouse Collections of Particular Interest:

Tropical/Temperate Palm Houses: The Palm Houses are one of the RBGE's most iconic glasshouses, housing an extensive array of tropical plant species. Once the ongoing restoration is complete, visitors will once again be able to admire many species of palm (e.g. *Cocos nucifera*, *Ravenala madagascariensis* & *Licuala grandis*), Cycads (e.g. species of *Cycas*, *Zamia* & *Encephalartos*) and other tropical trees, shrubs and epiphytes).

Orchid and Fern House: The Orchid and Fern House features a captivating display of orchid varieties and ferns. Many species orchids are showcased in combination with ferns and woody plant species.



Adiantum reniforme

Montane Tropics House: This glasshouse is dedicated to high-altitude plant species found in mountainous regions around the world. The Montane Tropics House simulates cooler temperatures and frequent mist, facilitating the cultivation of plants from regions like the Andes and the Himalayas.

Arid Lands House: The Arid Lands House accommodates a plethora of desert-adapted plants, including cacti, succulents, and other xerophytes. The glasshouse provides an arid environment, with controlled water availability to mimic the challenging conditions of arid regions.

The RBGE glasshouse collections, including the 16 research glasshouses behind the scenes encompass over 4,500 plant species from over 300 families, representing diverse ecosystems from around the globe. Approximately 2,000 of these species are listed as threatened or endangered, emphasizing the importance of the RBGE's conservation efforts.

The RBGE's glasshouse collections receive thousands of visitors annually, including researchers, students, and the general public. This high level of engagement fosters a greater appreciation for plant biodiversity and the pressing need for its preservation. Continued efforts in maintaining and expanding these collections will undoubtedly contribute to the advancement of botanical science and conservation on a global scale.



Passiflora coccinea

Here a couple of highlights from my short visit to the glasshouse collections: I was especially excited to see their collection of tropical conifers. RBGE's conifer collection extends into the wider garden to include many impressive, mature specimens, especially those of the Genus *Araucaria*. Including their glasshouse collections, RBGE is actively cultivating over 450 species belonging to 6 Families, which makeup around 73% of the world's known species.



Echium wildpretii



Cleistocactus strausii



Puya venusta



Vaccinium summifaucis



Rhododendron aurigeranum



Dimorphanthera amblyornidis
var. *moorhousiana*



Rhododendron rhodoleucum x *helwigii*



Welwitschia mirabilis



Unlabelled conifer



Acropyle pancheri

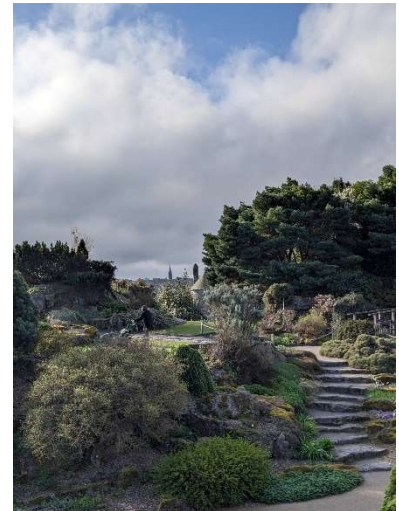


Cibotium regale

MY WORK WEEK

My week spent working with the Rock and Woodland Garden team proved to be an incredibly enjoyable experience. Not only did it offer me valuable insights into the challenges and joys of tending to a historic collection of rare horticultural treasures, but it also provided a unique opportunity to learn from Richard and his team's approach to managing such a diverse collection with limited resources compared to Wisley.

During our tour around the garden, Richard openly shared their methods for maintaining the thriving and diverse collections. My curiosity was piqued when I saw the seed store within the Caledonian Hall, where an extensive collection of wild-collected seeds is carefully preserved in two freezers. These seeds are the product of numerous excursions and research expeditions to distant countries, and each one undergoes meticulous cleaning and drying to achieve specific moisture content before storage.



Various viewing angles of the surrounding city have been retained in the Rock Garden



Part of the seed storage in the Caledonian Hall

Richard explained that the degree of desiccation of the endosperm plays a vital role in determining the potential storage time without compromising the germination rate of the seed. Once accessioned, the seeds are stored in glass vials with silica gel pellets at a chilly -18°C . This method ensures that the seeds can be quickly thawed and sown when needed. Over the years, the garden has amassed an impressive seed store through these research trips, relying solely on wild-collected seeds for their generative propagation efforts in the Woodland and Rock Gardens.<

Despite this rich seed collection, the garden faces challenges when it comes to sharing its extensive plant diversity with other horticultural institutions in the UK. Strict regulations prohibit the garden from selling or profiting from the wild-collected seeds or any plant material of similar origin. Consequently, they can only exchange some plant materials for research purposes, limiting the opportunity for wider dissemination of their unique collection.

Furthermore, the team sadly encounters regular instances of plant theft, especially among the rare specimens displayed in the Alpine and Rock Garden. This unfortunate issue underscores the significance and desirability of the garden's plant rarities.

Throughout the week, my primary task involved weeding in the Rock and Woodland Garden. The Rock Garden, like many alpine collections, faced an ongoing challenge with *Equisetum* threatening to outcompete the rare cultivated species perennials. On the other hand, the Woodland Garden grappled with managing self-sown annuals and perennials, such as bindweed, enchanters' nightshade, and *Euphorbia peplus*.



A map of the walled garden and its path layout



A desirable „weed“: *Trillium Grandiflorum*

However, not all self-seeders were entirely undesirable, as I was delighted to witness several sizable self-sown clumps of woodland perennials, including *Trillium grandiflorum*, *T. erectum*, and *Paris spp.*, thriving in unattended areas.

Additionally, I had the opportunity to learn about the meticulous maintenance of the fine lawns scattered throughout both gardens. These lawns were kept to an admirably high standard through weekly cutting, executed using traditional, hand-operated cylinder mowers. Some areas benefited from the assistance of mowing robots, specifically the Husqvarna 435X model, which significantly reduced the team's workload without compromising lawn quality. The edges of the lawns were regularly maintained using a strimmer to retain the crisp finish that visitors have come to expect.



Husqvarna mower robots are being used across site



Some narrow lawns experience especially high footfall and had to be converted to gravel paths



The rotary mower is regularly maintained and able to cut very fine turf without tearing individual blades of grass

On Wednesday, I participated in the maintenance of the peat bank within the Woodland Garden. This involved carefully trimming the mosses growing on its surface using sharp hedging shears and removing self-sown azaleas and grasses. Moreover, I contributed to watering the various collections around both gardens following a comprehensive induction by Richard. He emphasized the unique watering requirements of different cultivated Genera, ensuring proper care and preservation of the diverse plant specimens.

In conclusion, my time with the Rock and Woodland Garden team was not only very enjoyable, but also broadened my knowledge by witnessing Richard's expertise and dedication to preserving and propagating an exceptional collection of plants. RBGE's commitment to conservation and research efforts is commendable, even in the face of challenges posed by climate change, Covid-19 and plant theft.

Returning to a botanical garden three years after my apprenticeship was truly an incredible experience. My time in Edinburgh reignited my passion for the horticultural work in botanical institutions and their invaluable role in supporting scientific research on species and ecosystems. Observing the practices and methods employed by the teams in Edinburgh to maintain their thriving collections has been a significant learning opportunity. It has allowed me to reevaluate my own approaches and those implemented at Wisley, providing valuable perspectives for my coursework.



Cutting the moss on the Peat Banks



Woodland species plant ident in the RBGE Herbarium

I am confident that this newfound understanding will prove highly beneficial for my future career, regardless of the horticultural environment I find myself in. The experiences I made on this visit will undoubtedly enrich my contributions to the field and my ability to perform in potential future positions of responsibility for plant collection, which I am currently working towards.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the Merlin Trust for their generous support, which made this incredible experience possible. Their assistance has allowed me to further my professional development and pursue my passion for horticulture and botanical research.