

Merlin Trust Report

Work Placement at Woburn Abbey, 8 June – 23 August 2024.

Woburn Abbey

Over a three-month period in the summer between my first and second year of studying FdSc Horticulture at Nottingham Trent University, I took part in a work placement at Woburn Abbey with the intention of improving my general horticultural skills and gaining experience in a professional horticultural setting.

Woburn Abbey is a stately home that holds special significance in the horticultural world with the abbey gardens being part of the works of historical garden designer Humphrey Repton and was the largest one of his “Red Books”. The deep horticultural history of the abbey was a big part of the appeal for me to conduct my placement there.



Woburn Abbey



The Woburn Red Book

Why did I choose to do a placement?

The choice to take part in a summer placement was a no brainer for me as I believe the experience to be gained in a professional setting is invaluable and an opportunity that wouldn't be present forever. Having a respected name like Woburn on my CV should greatly benefit me when it comes to seeking employment upon my graduation from university. The willingness to spend your summer break working and gaining experience for your future should hopefully be valued by an employer to set me apart from other candidates.

What did I want to gain from the placement?

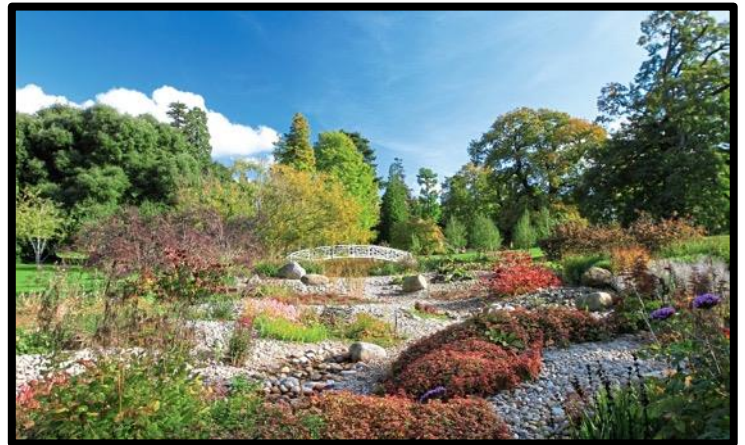
As well as wanting to improve my general horticultural skills I also had a few specific interests which were my focus on placement, and I took any opportunity I could to gain experience in these areas. These areas were machinery experience and arboricultural works. I wanted to gain as much experience using as many different machines as possible, the bigger the better. I understand that machinery is present in all modern horticultural settings and employers would rather someone with previous experience in this field.

I hoped to get a taste of tree works whilst on placement as I am unsure of which specific career path to take and the idea of being an arborist is one that intrigues me. Woburn being such a big site with large wooded areas and a trained arborist/climber on site made it seem like a good choice for me to get a feel for this type of work. A placement is the perfect time to try out as many different things as possible to find new areas of interest or in the same breath, things you don't want to pursue.

What did I get up to?

Whilst on placement I was assigned an area of the abbey gardens, namely the Bog Garden. I took on a weekly maintenance schedule just as any staff member would and worked other tasks into it as needed.

Mowing, pruning, and planting out are a few of the regular tasks I undertook. Alongside my regular tasks I was also given the opportunity to work in other areas to give me as much of a varied experience whilst on placement. Opportunities such as working on large scale team attacks on hedges, a three-day stint working at the Woburn Safari Park to experience zoo horticulture, and tree pruning.



The Bog Garden.

Whilst at the safari park I experienced a completely different way of thinking about horticulture. Considering the needs of animals from around the world and replicating environments was something I had never done before. Considerations towards members of the public using the park also had to be made which gave me insight into the process behind planting in a public space compared to private.



Perks of the job.

During my time there was some tree work to do, including crown lifting and branch pruning with pole saws. There was also a large tree fell which I got to observe and learn from and then be involved in the clear up. Taking the opportunity to get a taste of arboriculture on placement was well worth it as I have now realised it is an area I would like to learn more about and potentially pursue.



Crown lifting with a pole saw.



Climbing practice.



Clearly enjoying it.



Tree clear up.

I fulfilled my interest in machinery experience as I managed to use almost every tool and vehicle in the workshop before my time was up. Using big ride-on mowers, loader tractors and gators made it a very enjoyable experience for me.



Cutting a beech hedge.



The mower I used each week.



Lawn stripes done by yours truly.



Telehandler mounted basket, used for cutting tall hedges out of.

Summary

Over the course of this placement I believe I developed a lot especially in my confidence to work alone and decision making. I learnt a lot about time management and working efficiently as well as task prioritisation. I gained all the practical experience I hoped for and a lot more. I worked within a team of inspirational professional horticulturalists and tried to learn as much from them as possible, this should set me in good stead for future employments. Overall this placement was more beneficial for me than I could have imagined and I would recommend anyone to take part in one, given the chance.

Cost breakdown

Amount Granted: £1000

Personal contribution: £300

Expense	Cost
Subsistence	£675
Travel	£660
Total Cost	£1335