

Tresco Abbey Garden

Merlin Trust Bursary report

Ezra Hicks

2nd January 2025 – 21st February 2025



In order to gain more horticultural experience and, have the opportunity to put skills learnt on the City and Guilds Level 3 Technical Diploma course into practice, I felt a volunteer placement at Tresco Abbey Gardens would be useful and beneficial to my career. Tresco's microclimate was also extremely interesting to me as it gave me the chance to work in a unique garden with the ability to grow things impossible on the mainland. I hoped to have the opportunity to learn new skills, as well as identifying and caring for a whole different plant range. I was particularly interested in a placement at Tresco Abbey Gardens as I already harboured a passion for tropical plants, which I hoped would only grow throughout my time on Tresco. As well as this I am interested in specialising in tropical and sub-tropical plants, making this opportunity invaluable to my future career.

One of my main goals on this volunteer placement was to experience working in a garden team. Tresco Abbey Gardens was the first professional garden team I have worked in, giving me the chance to learn a lot about how gardeners work together and working in a public garden, and these skills will both be useful in the future.

Plan

2nd January – Travel to Penzance from London via sleeper train

3rd January – Travel to Tresco via helicopter

Stay in provided accommodation

21st February – Travel to St Mary's via boat

Take Skybus to Lands End

Take bus transfer to Penzance

Take train home

Goals

- To work in a team of gardeners and gain valuable knowledge from various members of staff
- To use horticultural machinery in a public garden
- To gain and develop useful horticultural skills
- To experience caring for a unique and new plant range
- To learn about sub-tropical plants
- To be able to identify different species of sub-tropical plants
- To experience island life on Tresco
- To work and assist in a nursery and glasshouse environment
- To work on a functional kitchen garden



View of the mediterranean garden



The Long walk

Plant range

During my time volunteering on Tresco I learnt so much about sub-tropical plants. Tresco Abbey Gardens mainly houses plants from South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and Chile, but has plants from many other countries as well. On the first day I was overwhelmed by the diversity and range of plant species Tresco has, my particular favourites being plants on the top terrace area of the garden. A few plants I was particularly fond of were the *Protea neriifolia* and the *Protea neriifolia* 'Snow Crest' pictured below, both from South Africa.



Protea neriifolia



Protea neriifolia 'Snow Crest'

Top Terrace

The top terrace was my favourite part of the gardens at Tresco. I found the plants mesmerising with an abundance of Proteas, Banksias, South African Ericas and Grevilleas. Most of the plants on the top terrace are South African or Australian due to the harsh, strong sunlight. These plants prefer dry conditions with direct, strong sunlight and good airflow making the top terrace a perfect place for them. Up on the terrace it feels like another country with the exotic planting and stunning views.



View from the top terrace



Banksia serrata

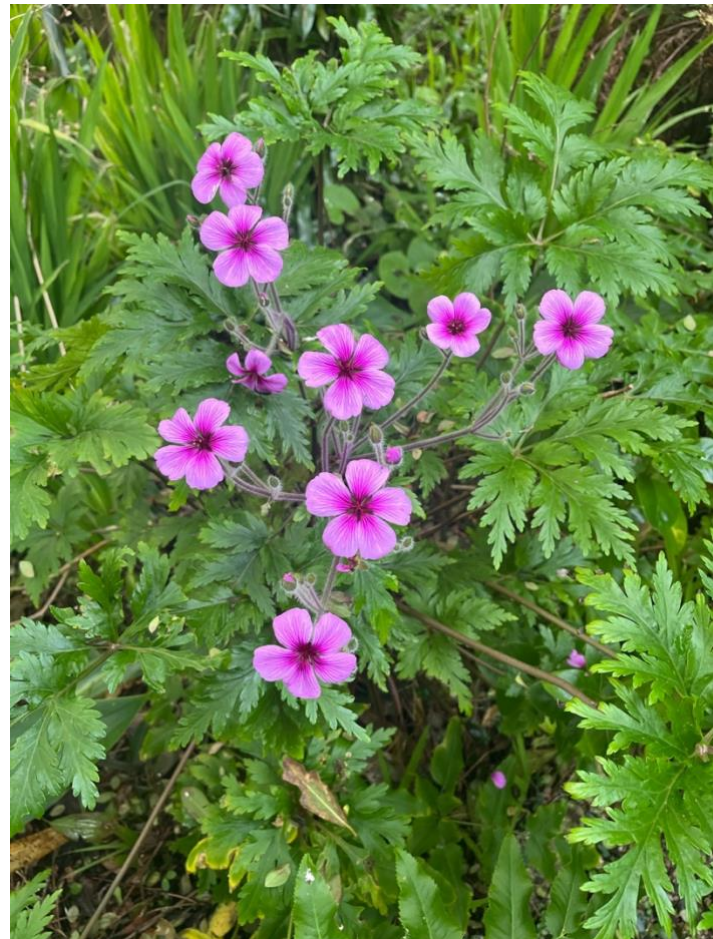
Long Walk

The long walk is the middle section of the garden - slightly more humid and wet than the top terrace with more dappled and soft sunlight. Various tree ferns are situated here, mainly *Cyathea medullaris*, as long as various Clivia species and Camilias. There is such a mix of planting here with many from the UK, as well as a multitude of sub-tropicals as well. One plant that particularly interested me here was *Semele androgyna* which unfortunately was not in flower during my time on Tresco, but is particularly known for having leaf like stems that have multiple tiny flowers growing off them.



Sparrmannia africana

(Found on the long walk)



Geranium maderense

(Found on the long walk)

Propagation

Something I particularly enjoyed learning in the gardens was different methods of propagation. I learnt to propagate many different plant species, such as Crassulas, Proteas, Ericas and Geraniums. This involved a few different techniques and mediums. One method (pictured below) meant pulling healthy leaves of different succulent species and aeoniums and placing them straight onto a damp tray of perlite. This is kept moist and soon the leaves grow root systems and a while knew plant starts growing out of the base of the leaf



Aeonium arboreum

(Can be propagated using this method)



Aeonium tabuliforme

propagated with this method

Kitchen Garden

Another highlight for me were the kitchen gardens run by Kate. As I volunteered during the winter, unfortunately it didn't look like much! However I thoroughly enjoyed potting up sweet peas, planting onions and weeding the various beds. One of my favourite things in the kitchen gardens – although not plant related – were the chickens! I helped out by feeding them and changing their water in the mornings and although I didn't have much else to do with them, they helped to brighten my mornings. We spent a few days in the kitchen garden making structures for sweet peas and a hut like structure for cucumbers which challenged my creativity and knot tying skills!



Cucumber structure



Sweet pea structures



Chickens fertilising the soil in the
Polytunnel for the tomatoes in
Spring

Highlights

- Learning and putting into practice new propagation techniques
- Working in a team of gardeners
- Working with South African plants
- Building structures in the kitchen garden
- And of course chickens!

Budget Breakdown

Travel:

Plane fares – £320

Train fares – £120

Bus transfers – £15

Travel insurance - £20

Sub total: £475

Subsistence:

Accommodation – Provided

Food - £225 provided by Merlin Trust and other half personal contribution

Sub total: £225

Total: £700

This volunteering project was a brilliant opportunity and I am so thankful for the Merlin Trust for awarding me a bursary to make this possible.

I would also like to thank the entire team at Tresco Abbey Gardens, as well as Mike Nelhams, everyone was so friendly, encouraging and I have learnt so much from everyone.