

Merlin Trust Placement Report – Sissinghurst Castle Garden

8–12 June 2026



Thanks to the support of the Merlin Trust, I was fortunate to spend a week working with the gardening team at Sissinghurst Castle Garden from 8th–12th June 2026. It was an incredibly rewarding experience and one from which I learnt a great deal, both practically and professionally.

During my stay I was accommodated in one of the cottages on the estate, which was a real privilege. It meant I was able to spend time walking through the gardens in the evenings after they had closed to visitors. Seeing the gardens in the quieter hours, with a completely different atmosphere from the daytime, was one of the highlights of the week and gave me an even greater appreciation of the beauty and character of Sissinghurst.

On Monday I worked with Pete in the Upper Courtyard, deadheading climbing and shrub roses. It was a good opportunity to improve my understanding of rose maintenance and the importance of regular deadheading in encouraging continued flowering and keeping the displays looking their best. In the afternoon I joined Jade in the Rose Garden where we continued deadheading. It was fascinating to work amongst such an impressive collection of roses and to see the high standards of maintenance required in a world-famous garden.



Tuesday was spent in the White Garden working alongside Paul. At this point in the season the oxeye daisies had begun to dominate many of the beds, so we removed around half of the plants to create space for the summer planting of *Cosmos sp.*,

Nicotiana sp. and *Galactites tomentosa*. It was a good reminder that even in iconic planting schemes, gardeners have to make practical decisions to maintain balance and ensure other plants have the opportunity to thrive.

I spent Wednesday back in the White Garden. It was a real pleasure to work in one of the most celebrated garden rooms in the world and to experience it from behind the scenes. Throughout the day I had many interesting conversations with visitors from all over the world. Watching people see the White Garden for the first time and hearing their reactions was very rewarding, and it reinforced how much these gardens mean to so many people.



Although Thursday brought persistent rain, work carried on as normal. I spent the day planting *Helianthus sp.* and *Cobaea scandens* in the Purple Border. Despite the weather, it was satisfying to contribute to the seasonal development of one of Sissinghurst's famous garden rooms and to see the team's commitment to maintaining the garden regardless of the conditions.



Friday was spent in the recently created Delos Garden with Richard, and this was perhaps the most thought-provoking day of the week. Richard explained the philosophy behind the garden, which takes inspiration from the natural processes that shape the landscape on the Greek island of Delos, particularly grazing, wildfires and wind. It was fascinating to hear how these ecological processes can be interpreted through horticulture. One particularly memorable task was learning to deadhead *Salvia sclerea* in such a way that it appeared to have been naturally grazed. It was surprisingly challenging but very satisfying once I understood the technique. The Delos Garden feels completely different from the more traditional garden rooms at Sissinghurst, while also honouring Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson's own experiments and vision for the space during the 1930s.



One thing that stood out throughout the week was just how central Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson remain to everything that happens at Sissinghurst. Their original ideas and philosophy are clearly still at the forefront of the gardeners' thinking, and

conversations regularly returned to what Vita or Harold intended or how they might have approached a particular aspect of the garden. It was inspiring to see such a strong connection between the current team and the garden's history.

Overall, it was an incredible week and one that has broadened both my practical skills and my understanding of historic and horticulturally significant gardens. I left feeling a more knowledgeable and accomplished gardener, having learnt not only new techniques but also new ways of thinking about planting, maintenance and garden design.

I would like to thank everyone at Sissinghurst for making me feel so welcome, particularly Troy, Saffron, Paul, Jade, Richard and Pete, as well as the rest of the gardening team. Finally, I would like to thank the Merlin Trust for making this placement possible. It was an unforgettable experience that I will benefit from throughout my career.