

[2015]

Three Month Journey:

Unearthing the grass roots of Horticulture in the UK



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SIR JOHN PAGAN AWARD

BBM YOUTH SUPPORT

AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF HORTICULTURE

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HARDY'S COTTAGE GARDEN PLANTS



Growing up in a family owned and operated nursery in Australia, I couldn't think of a better way to begin my travels than in one very similar in UK.

Hardy's Cottage Garden Plants is a highly regarded independent nursery founded in 1988 by Rob and Rosy Hardy, both of whom still play an active part in growing herbaceous perennials for retail and professional gardeners. And whilst I only spent a week there undertaking work experience, I found it a very valuable and

rewarding experience, happily calling everybody there, a pleasure to learn from. We formed a great relationship as they exhibited at the many Royal Horticultural Society shows; which I also attended, watching them win their 20th Gold medal at the RHS Chelsea 2015.

It was wonderful to see a nursery operate on such a large scale within the industry. Hardy's are heavily involved in production, breeding and introducing new varieties such as the Walberton Nursery release *Rehmannia Magic Dragon* and one of my very favourites and Rosy Hardy introduction; A *Gaura* named *Freefolk Rosy*.

In the 13 acre Hampshire countryside area, much of the work is conducted where all the stock is organised and allocated via a computer system; making for extremely efficient operations, specifically with online ordering and orders for professional gardeners and landscapers.

During my time there I was introduced to all of the nursery's operations including Administration, organising orders, sales, and production. Upon arrival I was immediately struck the different soil medium used. It is rather called "compost" with very fine and fluffy tilth; extremely different to Australia's grit and bark filled, loose, open mix. I soon learned that this was due to the UK's cooler climate as this compost assists in retaining warmth and nutrients, making it more suitable for most of UK's plants.

I was also introduced to the Vine Weevil; a very prevalent pest having a huge impact on nursery stock throughout the UK and arriving in compost of plants imported from Europe. It is detrimental at both life-cycle stages; firstly as a larvae residing in the soil eats the roots, and secondly as a beetle that chews plants right off, at ground level. Keeping this in mind, Hardy's method of limiting this pest was to prevent and dispose of any affected plant material and compost, rather than inefficient chemical treatment, followed by observation, which has proved to be successful.

Regular events and workshops were also held at the nursery. I was lucky enough to attend a talk by Rosy Hardy. She had invited the public in and specifically spoke about 12 plants, their characteristics and cultural information relevant to the audience's area. I found it quite insightful but soon became quite envious with plants that I'd never seen before.

Hardy's also grow prime stock for show gardens such as Chelsea. I had the pleasure of tending some white Foxgloves for a show garden at Chelsea for Alan Gardner Which was certainly a highlight!

On my last day at Hardy's I was kindly offered to attend a plant fair with Rosy at the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew. Naturally jumping at the opportunity it proved to be an amazing day out. The plant fair was open to the public by ticket and was a great place for customers to connect and see plants

that nurseries had for the coming summer, as well as a good opportunity for fellow nurseries to network and discuss business. All conducted in a beautiful setting of the world renowned Kew Gardens.

Kew Gardens in itself was an absolute privilege to walk-through; dating back to the 18th century. The extent, age and size of the gardens were remarkable. Here I saw the first plant that I still can't fathom; a 50-year-old Brown Turkey Fig espaliered tree complementing the side of a heritage building. Although even more famous, the 250-year-old Pagoda tree with a constant crowd around it. I was also introduced to many English techniques with beautiful tapestries of tulips and fields of bluebells with yellow beech trees dotted in amongst.

From Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, the garden in which I became quite fond of was the productive garden; a typical English vegetable garden with a fruit orchard with educational classes, signs and a television show dedicated to encourage people out into the garden and to 'grow your own'. I found it really inspiring and rewarding even picking up a few ideas myself with the thought of possibly implementing a similar approach back in Australia.



Rehmannia Magic Dragon



Espalier Brown Turkey Fig, Kew



Alan Gardner at Chelsea

RHS CHELSEA FLOWER SHOW 2015



This scholarship presented me with some of the most amazing experiences. One of which at the Australian Institute of Horticulture awards dinner, chatting to some of the horticultural greats. I had the pleasure of meeting my childhood superhero and Better Homes and Gardens presenter Graham Ross. After chatting with him he soon introduced the

possibility of not only visiting the Royal Horticultural Society Chelsea Flower Show 2015, but to have the chance to become part of the Australian team 2015! I jumped at the opportunity and was soon introduced to the lead landscape designer Charlie Albone and his landscape team including Mick Conway from Conway landscaping.

It proved to be a definite highlight of my trip; being one of the best things I've ever been a part of and something I'll never forget.

Charlie designed an emotive garden space. A place where he could connect with his father after losing him at age 17. As you move through the garden space, visitors were welcomed with a soft, romantic and mostly Australian planting. Strolling down a winding sandstone path to a water feature imitating life and love with a plunging motion, also a place for reflection. Continuing through the rear of the garden, Charlie designed an intimate space to sit, connect and communicate with past and present loved ones through the use of static symbols carefully placed throughout the design. This was surrounded by pillars that represent important people in his life and a central fireplace symbolising the foundation of Charlie's life: his wife Juliet Love.

Charlie and Mick had spent years planning its amazing design. Whereas this whirlwind adventure started on day one of the build where I met the rest of the amazing team, who over that time were awesome to work with. I was one of only three girls on the build but despite this, the boys were the best crew to work with, exuding loads of passion and ambition and despite common stereotypes... They could cook way better than any of us girls!

Bright eyed and bushy tailed we arrived on day one, completely unaware of exactly what we were about to do, or the massive transformation we were about to inflict upon the Royal Chelsea Hospital grounds. Thankfully we were graced with some great tools from our sponsors, Husqvarna and Gardena, and got stuck into it!

A rainy first day saw the site marked out as we took shipment of one of our most important deliveries: a shipping container all the way from Australia with hand carved sandstone pillars and

pavers. Hoping they weren't broken or cracked Charlie opened container with relief, letting go one of his biggest nightmares after finding everything intact.

Before long the Conway boys set about with a flurry of machines leaving me in awe and admiration for how precise everything had to be and the sheer skill and responsibility. Mick and especially his brother Simon were brilliant machine operators and as a result I hit them up for a lesson or two! (Apparently next time I'll get a booster seat!). Over the next week we made good progress, as I got to help out and learn absolutely everything that went on in the build from carpentry, plumbing, painting, right down to digging holes in readiness for the excitement of planting.

After punching out some long days, most of the foundation construction had been completed, or as Mick would have it put "the face is done, now it's time for the planting team to put on the makeup and make it look pretty!"

Lorries filled the grounds arriving with loads of amazing plants from all over the world. While anxiously waiting for ours to arrive I managed a sneak peek of plants from some other show gardens, really got me excited seeing such glorious specimens, most chosen by some of the world's top designers to feature at Chelsea. This left me very eager for the arrival of our features. One of the first being that of the shaped Buxus spheres; 50 years old and meticulously shaped for the show. Charlie explained that these were 'let go' and then cut off low allowing them to regenerate with constant light tipping to increase density, whilst shaping.

Sunny 't-shirt weather' had become a desired day on the arrival of our espalier oak hedge. Quite unusual; the design incorporated them to frame up the garden around the outer edge. They were unloaded in a line and left in the plant team's care after a big gust of the UK's lovely weather decided to show off, creating giant 3 m high dominoes! Soon enough one by one they were carefully placed around the landscape by a Telle-handler. I had the responsibility of selecting them one by one, then placing the best in focal points, before climbing up with a string line and secateurs to level the hedge as much as possible. This soon earned me the nickname which has forever stuck called, "Sparrow" (guess I'm a little small!).

Over the next two weeks the garden was really springing into life with many of the plants arriving. Including many Aussie natives attracting the UK horticulturalists attention with Westringias, Polygalas and the show stopping African Proteas.

Larger trees and shrubs were first placed and planted with the aid of machines, whilst smaller plantings were placed and planted afterwards after consolidating positions.

The design incorporated some amazing feature trees such as a Magnolia which had amazed us all by having both bud and flower after being wrapped upon a long lorry trip as well as Charlie's prized Ficus named the "tree of life" as its gnarly trunk protruded through an old tree stump.

One of the largest specimens however did not turn up as brilliant. As we were informed a mature Zelkova serrata had very little leaf and an amount of dead wood. With 8 days till judging the pressure was on the girls to get it looking its best for show time. And so regular doses of liquid fertiliser was applied to both roots and leaves to encourage leaf growth.

The only other task was to remove the dead wood. And so, with a cherry picker and a trusty pair of secateurs I was guided up and around the tree looking at the shape and removing all of the dead tips and wood. Up at around 40ft my smile could be seen all the way from ground level!

With most of the plants arriving, including many I commonly have in my own garden, it became a humbling yet very surreal experience to be planting them at a world renowned flower show.

Plants were now able to be planted after careful consideration with regards to how the garden would be judged. It was a great experience for me as I learnt that there was not only aesthetic, but practical elements to consider too.

And whilst the days progressed, so did the rainy weather (although not so bad as it saved us a job watering). As of 8pm May 14th, planting was complete! This led to detailing in which the whole team applied finishing touches of mulching, laying pebble and believe it or not...leaf polishing!

Day 18 Saturday 16th May the chaos of the Chelsea flower show slowed down and the garden was finished! It was stunning to see the end product and the transformation over such a short period of time. We managed to leave the ground and took a pleasant hour to walk the streets of Chelsea and London, wearing pretty dirty high-visibility clothes, in search of a pub (not having to walk too far) to celebrate our achievement in bringing this incredible design to life and celebrate being part of it! As the following day it would be pre-judged.

Press Day then arrived, bringing with it a circus of VIPS and camera crews. All were invited to view the garden, we welcomed the media and judges as they moved through the space. Three separate BBC crews visited and filmed our garden, which was fantastic to watch. Even the Queen visited and viewed our garden!

This day was amazing. James Wong-Horticultural TV personality; also made a visit. The boys of the crew figured out I was particularly fond of him; So Simon Conway sneakily invited him for a surprise visit! I was slightly embarrassed when he greeted me by my new shocking nick name, but ecstatic all the same! He shook hands with me and said "nice to meet you Sparrow!" Later on he personally signed and delivered his new and unreleased book to me. A terrific guy and an absolutely brilliant day!!

And after some nervous touch-ups and nail-biting, the judges came into Charlie's garden. On the first official day of the show medals were announced. The whole crew met outside the gate to receive the results together. With the envelope nervously opened by Charlie we received a Silver-Gilt medal. An amazing and overwhelming feat for us all.

Now came time to enjoy our placing and the show. Spending the next week, we chatted to intrigued visitors about the show garden. The response from the crowd was heart-warming. 161,000 people visited each day and it was unlike anything I was prepared for. And although pleased for a break, it was nice to get my hands dirty again!

On Saturday, the last day of the show at 4PM, a bell rang out through the grounds and caused a mad flurry of rushing people. This meant that the plant sell-off was underway. No sooner than this, a crowd began around our garden with many people bartering for plants. It was like the chaos of the stock exchange! With Mick standing on a pile of pots, top hat on; he was directing proceedings while the rest of the crew pulled out plants in exchange for cash. It was a terrible, yet very funny experience; running through the garden digging up plants and looking for pots. Must've been quite a sight to see people dash home with loads of plants under their arms, especially on the tube!

The 7 AM start the following day after the show, was admittedly, a little disheartening. Having to pull out all our hard work in just three short days, wasn't easy. With most plants gone, it became a very easy, but sad job; also realising this once in a life- time experience was finally coming to an end

and I would have to say goodbye to the crew. Never-the- less, I am certainly grateful and unbelievably stoked to have been a part of it; making lifelong friends.



Charlie Albone in his constructed garden



Silver gilt award 2015!



Buxus spheres



The one and only Mick Conway



Tree of Life



Myself and James Wong.



Up in the cherry picker



The final tweaking for judging day.



With Graham Ross.

RHS WISLEY GARDENS



Shortly after Chelsea, I made a trip South-West of London to the Royal Horticultural Society's Flagship garden-Wisley.

What felt like a chilly, Aussie winter's day, was the UK's idea of the first day of summer! And also became my first day of work experience in their trials and propagation sectors. It proved to be a great learning experience for me;

focusing on horticultural science and production (both of which are great passions of mine) which I enjoyed expanding on.

In the short week that I spent there I began on the trials team and became quite intrigued with their AGM or Award of Garden Merit; a symbol of a plant's general reliability in the garden; providing a guide to the consumer.

According to the RHS, an AGM can be awarded to a plant that is:

- Readily available
- Of good constitution
- Stable in growth habit and colour
- Reasonably resistant to pest and disease
- Excellent for ordinary use in appropriate conditions.

(A good feat; particularly if you are the grower/breeder of the plant).

Awards are given after a trial period at a RHS garden (usually Wisley) after they are judged by forum committees with extensive knowledge in the particular plant species field. All kinds of plants are trialed from ornamentals, to fruits and vegetables; with the AGM list currently including more than 7 500 plants.

On the first day I made a visit to the trial offices where I toured the trial field. At that time in June, it was an amazing space with 22 trials being conducted at Wisley. There were trials of gorgeous Clematis, Agapanthus, Euphorbias, Berries, Brassicas, Iris and Viburnum to name a few. All growing in categorised plots with tags signifying number and variety. And whilst the trials were going well, they were facing problems of pest and disease. In particular Phytophthora (a soil borne fungus) having a detrimental impact on results. And so in the near future the trials team are looking to relocate the trials area.

In the afternoon I had the pleasure of walking around the garden; soon learning why it was a popular attraction; blown away by the immaculately maintained gardens. The many themes and landscapes were stunning; with the age of the garden dating back to 1903. This provided a very English heritage context. It was amazing to walk by huge Gunneras, Dogwoods and Camellias. Made me wish I had Mick Conway's digger to take them home!

Over the next few days I had the pleasure of working with the trials officers as part of the team. I learnt how to gather data and recorded information for the Helianthus or sunflower trial. I counted the number of every plant in each plot to gauge seed germination. I was also shown how this data was then formulated electronically on an excel spreadsheet for future reference.

And so after being shown the process of recording and transferring data; I was able to spend time with Sabitino Urzo; the Horticulturist Team Leader and an all-round lovely guy. Working in the Bearded Iris trials, we were preparing for a forum committee meeting the following day. We were tasked with removing broken stems, propping flowers and weeding.

We also worked with the Dutch Iris, which would be viewed the next day as well; I assisted in gathering data, counting inflorescences and flowers/stem, keeping an eye out for trebles (3 flowers/stem). I then put this data together back in the trials office. The best part was being able to hand out this data at the committee meetings where I got to see the people in that committee who knew absolutely everything there is to know about Irises and see how they use that information and interpret it in to defining which plant deserves an AGM. It was great to be involved and quite interesting to see all the processes involved.

They were very particular when discussing growth habit, flower growth, and growth under current weather conditions, health and their general opinions of whether they would be deserving of an AGM. I found it very insightful to chat to them and their knowledge with regard to Irises was amazing. They even helped me out with some problems that I'd had trouble with back in Australia!

I spent the last day with the Propagation team who were phenomenal. Given a tour also, I learnt the majority of plants for the garden are sourced from this team. The propagation team incidentally supply most of the trials plants too. This calls for a very strict schedule; having lots of garden teams relying upon them for stock, inclusive of herbaceous, orchard, trial and glasshouse teams. All of who need various quantities of plants at different times of the year.

I was introduced to their quarantine area, quite fittingly named 'Plant Reception' where plants coming from other overseas botanical gardens maybe held for one week to three months to check for presence of pest and/or diseases.

After the tour I was tasked with planting rare and unusual seeds in attempt to add interest to the garden and increase their prominence. Pretty exciting, I only hope that most of them germinated!

I also had the opportunity to work on a huge collection of fuchsias; staking them for a future glass house display. It was here where I was first introduced to Integrated Pest Management (IPM) system

in which Wisley used biological control and predatory insects in the form of sachets, to control aphids on Fuchsias. This provided a very interesting alternative to relying of continual spraying.

At the end of my week at RHS Wisley gardens I was unknowingly greeted by both the trials and propagation team. They generously thanked me for my time there, welcoming me back anytime. It was a pleasant surprise and a pleasure to work with such lovely and knowledgeable people. I shall definitely be back!



Recording data- Helianthus



Planting rare seed



Cornus/ Dogwood



Bearded Iris trial



Predatory mites placed on Fuchsias

THE LOST GARDENS OF HELIGAN



My first stop in Cornwall was at one of the most anticipated gardens that I'd planned to see; 'The Lost gardens of Heligan.' You could hardly miss them with such an enticing name. That hint of mystery, brings gardeners from all over the world.

As the name implies; The 400 year old Heligan gardens did actually become lost and forgotten. In August 1914 its entire workforce of gardeners were called up for the war erupting across Europe. Without its gardening team and all able-

bodied men leaving for the war. Over the ensuing years of WW1, the gardens fell into disrepair and became an overgrown jungle, lost in time.

Since being rediscovered and thankfully reclaimed, the 200 acre estate welcomes you from the moment you step through the gate. Heritage and quirkiness grab your attention from the get-go.

What impressed me most was the old fashioned romantic plantings. Walled gardens overflow with annual colour while the heritage glasshouses and bee sanctuaries bring a nostalgic 'feel' to the atmosphere. Almost like you have stepped back in time.

Centre stage at the garden in the spring is the gigantic, century old Rhododendrons. Windy weather turned the lawns and garden beds into stunning colour palettes, blanketed with the dropped petals of the giant cerise-pink, simply stunning!

To see centuries of old gardening practices and the enthusiasm of the public, along with community involvement; was a fantastic experience.



The sleeping Mud Maiden



Glasshouse bursting with Geraniums

THE EDEN PROJECT



My second stop off was another exciting challenge. This time, rather than just a visit; I had procured a week of voluntary work at the amazing Eden Biodomes in St Austell.

The Eden Project came about as an environmental clean-up of a disused clay pit mine. As this area became depleted of clay, the question remained: What to do with an eroding hillside and huge gaping hole in the beautiful Cornish countryside?

Fortunately some forward thinking people got on-board, resulting in the Eden Project. Rather than just revegetate the landscape; the idea of using the area as a way to test and teach recycling, using interactive displays and hands-on experience began to build.

The fact that there was very little soil on-site and also that the excavation of the clay had reached right down into the water table and beyond, were but just two of the major challenges presented to the founders and creators.

The Eden Projects main mission was to engage and educate people world-wide to see the benefits of regeneration, revegetation and reconnect them with nature and encourage them to see the world with fresh eyes. While also encouraging them to each take a responsibility for the environment.

Walking through the gardens I could see these ideas illustrated through educational exhibits, meaningful sculptures as well as the enthusiasm of all those involved. Front and centre you are made aware of how dependant we are on all of our natural resources, and how we can minimise destruction to our environment by modifying or changing how we procure them. The focus is on how best we can save the planet, manage it more efficiently and leave that legacy for our children.

Many gardens carried themes; most were targeted on different countries world-wide, showcasing their individual land uses and plants typical from that region. Plant-based commodities like coffee, sugarcane, rice and fibres were highlighted also, while often outlining how those regions have also been degraded by adopting poor land-use practises.

I was lucky enough to work within these Biodomes and saw first-hand the interaction between the exhibits and the visitors. Being privy to all of this, it was refreshing to see how Horticulture is moving forward in such a positive way in the UK. People genuinely enjoyed the learning experience.

My work began in the Mediterranean Biodome which was cosy and warm. We were planting sunflower seedlings on-masse; the display highlighted the origins of the plant and its uses throughout the world. While in the rainforest Biodome I felt quite at home in the 33 degree heat! It felt much like a summer at home while the outside temperature was quivering under 12 degrees!

Both of the Biodomes are stunningly huge from the outside but on entering the warmer temperatures, your world shrinks back into the leafy 3D atmosphere and you forget that the whole area is manipulated and managed artificially.

Whilst in the rainforest Biodome, I partook in a tour which discussed the many and varied plant-based commodities, where they are sourced and how they are used. I learnt quite a few new things

as well. The rainforest Biodome requires quite a lot of maintenance in the temperature and humidity area. A lot of my time was spent misting and watering so as to keep the humidity at its peak.

Overall it was a great week, being able to compare between the UK and Australian horticulture sectors; to see where they are heading in the future and how they use different educational tools to illustrate how important horticulture is to society. It was very refreshing to see and be a part of. I hope to one day return to Eden to see what other improvements Eden uses, and how they convey this to people, to help motivate them into their own gardens, while thinking about our current and future environmental situations.



Sculpture teaching pollination means



Inside the Mediterranean Biodome

WALBERTON NURSERY



By chance and after numerous recommendations; my working trip ended at another nursery. I had the pleasure of gaining work experience and learning at Walberton Nursery.

Walberton Nursery is a large scale wholesale nursery, part of a group of wholesale nurseries collectively known as Farplants group. Each nursery specialising and producing a range of high quality plants in West Sussex.

My trip initially started off at Hardy's Cottage Garden Plants retail nursery; where I learnt how important supply, demand and marketing was. By contrast, at Walberton, I was able to better understand and apply large-scale general nursery production operations. Both experiences essentially giving me a brilliant overview of the UK's retail and wholesale Nursery Industry.

Although so different from one another I soon recognised a connection linking wholesale and retail. That connection being a Walberton new-release plant *Rehmannia Magic Dragon*; which I had worked with at Hardy's. This plant was originally produced at Walberton and bred by David Tristram; founder of Walberton Nursery.

It was fantastic to gain insight into the release of a new plant to the public from start to finish. With this insight I was able to see the whole process from breeding and plant development, to the end product in which they were placed into the hands of a home gardener.

I was very fortunate to cap off my UK trip by seeing every aspect of Walberton Nursery; and one on such a large scale. Something that I'd never been privy to before; in England or at home in Australia.

But my time there had only just begun. Upon arriving I was given a tour, soon realising the scope of the Farplants group; let alone one single nursery site within this co-operation.

It was awesome to see how such a large amount of staff worked so cohesively as a team. Each specialising in either production, propagation, crop protection, potting, despatch or general management.

Happy to get my hands dirty again, I became part of the potting team to begin with. I was able to work with and observe how a potting machine worked. Something I'd always been keen on but never had the chance to see. As potting 'machines' at my nursery in Australia were usually myself or a fellow staff member.

My first impressions of this machine were based around its efficiency in the increase of production and uniformity.

Over the next couple of days we potted and transported 6" Euphorbias. The potting machine would push the compost via a stockpile, filling pots on a rotational system. As these pots moved around each would be dibbed and a set amount of fertilizer added ready for the operator to place a plug or small plant in. The potted plant then came around out onto a conveyor belt to where it would be picked up at the end by a set-down team. Plants were set down on 'V' shaped beds, sloping towards the middle and used to direct excess water away from either irrigation or natural rainfall.

Initially sounding easy due to the conveniences, I soon found out that I was very wrong. Because of its efficiency and constant speed, it must constantly be maintained by staff topping up resources. But overall it was a great machine to work with, with everything able to be modified to suit different plant needs from fertilizer amount, pot size and dib depth. I just had to keep up!

I started in the laboratory next; a very different area of the nursery. Micro propagation and the meristem process took place in the lab. Here clean, disease free stock for the nursery was produced and made available to clients or landscapers on request.

Upon entry into the lab extreme hygiene was employed as hands were washed and shoes made clean. The lab was also rigorously cleaned regularly from floor to ceiling to prevent any compromises to production.

There were various rooms where plants were principally separated by temperature for optimal growing. These rooms formed a 'plant library'; full of plates of Phytigel (a growth stimulant similar to agar) all with different nutrient concentrations, consistent with plant needs.

I got to contribute to this library too! Learning about the meristem process by separating plant tissue responsible for division and forming new plants. The process was very delicate as each meristem had to be carefully stripped by seemingly 'giant' scalpels under a microscope.

Whilst the process seemed easy enough in theory; when applied I found it quite a skill to master and with time, the more nervous I got and the shakier I became; soon tearing the specimen into microscopic confetti! I had, and still do have a lot of admiration for the lab technician and her keen eyesight (and patience!).

After stripping, the meristems were placed on top of the media on a plate. Forceps and scalpel used were also dipped in mentholated spirits and flamed to sterilise. These plates were then dated, labelled and placed in the appropriate library; and monitored regularly for any virus or mould.

Work within the lab was insurance if any problems of pest/disease were to occur in the field. Clean stock could always be attained, therefore easily rebuilding stock and numbers.

After plants have grown, having visible roots in the lab they were taken to the Isolation House to observe any variations; ensuring they were true to form.

It was also a place for testing to take place and where I was introduced to the 'Quinoa Test'. I found this quite interesting, but yet to try it myself. Quinoa plants act quite quickly to any virus; much quicker than any other. At Walberton, if a plant is questionable; a leaf is taken off the potentially affected plant and crushed with water and grit (for adhesion) and smeared onto the surface area of a Quinoa leaf. If the Quinoa leaf becomes distorted or yellow this confirms a virus is present.

Another area of testing takes place for variation in plants in the dedicated trial area where 'Zedding' occurs. In which plants receive a range of different treatments to observe effect and potential for a plant to be a new release.

All this experience was getting me geared up for work with the very busy Despatch team which I looked on with excitement during my first week.

I was introduced to a team of four who were primarily responsible for the managing and collection of orders from retailers, selection of plants and their eventual cleaning, labelling and their transport to another Farplants common facility for collective despatch to all nurseries.

This despatch process would begin each morning by attaining all orders via computer, as it puts bulk quantities of varieties together. This made it easier for selection on the tractor trailers which were then brought into the despatch area. These plants were then put on a conveyor belt for labelling, cleaning, weeding, trimming and a general tidy up if needed. I had done this all previously, although on a fast moving conveyor belt; none of my skill showed!

Once plants had been cleaned, we then placed them on appropriate trolleys designated with the aid of the computer system. These were then checked over, watered and sent to the finishing centre.

On my first day our team despatched 1026 plants (a small day apparently!).

Working in despatch enabled me to see new plants and see familiar ones such as *Spirea Magic Carpet* grown and sold in Australia. Coincidentally also originating at Walberton Nursery.

After sending some of these plants out I was able to see where they began whilst spending some time with some of Walberton's dedicated Propagation team.

Hygiene was paramount in this area too as well as Integrated Pest Management. Only as I arrived I noticed the extent of IPM with the extent of sticky traps everywhere, colour coded for different pests. These were regularly monitored and insects recorded weekly to determine management as well as efficiency of traps. Apparently a bird had even got caught up in these; making me keep my hands planted firmly in my pockets.

I helped with this recording. It made it much easier to use this gathered data to manage pests. I learnt quite a lot about IPM and became really interested after I sat in on a Farplants IPM training session. I realised that, although we do not have the same pests in Australia; we can still apply some of the basic principles that are used in the UK.

After this, I moved back into propagation where I learnt how to maximise production through cuttings and division. Regular checks and monitoring of plants are also conducted, understandable due to the scale of the nursery. This helped to determine production efficiency.

So after getting a valuable overview at Walberton Nursey I had the pleasure to compare and visit other nurseries within Farplants.

I first visited 'New Haven'. Extensively smaller but with a large plant turn over. When I arrived, the glasshouses were loaded with Calla Lilies; every colour ever imagined. However I was informed that this was a quiet time of the year, but when at their peak production times, 130 000+ Scabiosa filled New Haven. Still unfathomable!

I also visited 'Swallowfield', a contract grower for Farplants.

'Swallowfield' focused largely on Hebes as well as Standard Fuchsias and Thunbergia *Black Eyed Susan* which I was particularly taken by, as I had never seen such an array of colour differing from the common orange.

'Swallowfield' was very forward thinking and open -minded. As while only visiting, I viewed their biomass heaters; slowly combusting mulch chips keep the glasshouses warm, while vents remain opened, keeping air circulating and therefore limiting Botrytis and other fungal diseases.

Topping off this whole experience at Walberton Nursery, I accompanied a few staff to the HTA National Plant Show; a show for nursery staff and people in the industry whereby trends, new plants and horticultural products were presented and promoted. A fantastic way for nurseries and likeminded people to connect and discuss problems and ideas. And with that, I brought loads of ideas, books and photos of plants to add to my "aspirations list".

One of the last places I visited was the RHS Hampton Court show. Invited by yet another Walberton staff team-mate. It was a great contrast to the Chelsea Flower show. It was much more plant orientated with less emphasis on show gardens.

I was also able to catch up with Hardy's Cottage Garden Plants and RHS Wisley staff here too. It was great to see everyone and particularly the people I had become so fond of before I flew out;

Much like a home-coming, before my coming-home. Generally, a great day out, and a great way to end my trip.



Potting Machine (my next xmas present)



'Setting down' of potted plants



Plant Library in the Lab



Despatch line



Plant division in propagation



Calla lilies at New Haven

CONCLUSION



On this whirl- wind adventure; I can confidently say, it has been one of the best things I have ever had the opportunity to do in my life.

Working and travelling in the horticultural capital of the world has really inspired me and filled me with loads of ideas. It has equipped me with a rich knowledge to

pursue my career in Horticulture, to its fullest extent.

I'd like to thank the Big Brother Movement and the Australian Institute of Horticulture for this once in a lifetime opportunity. It has provided me with an amazing foundation to launch my career and has encouraged me to reach for and achieve my full potential; Showcasing Horticulture as a rewarding and important career choice to students with similar aspirations.

I hope I can further build upon my knowledge and experience, while sharing it with likeminded and passionate people. Building more ambition and fresh ideas to help enthuse more interest into the industry and its many different facets, both world-wide and in Australia.

The opportunity to meet and learn from the industries leaders has been a privilege!

Thankyou.

I would also like to thank these important people who helped guide me through the whole wonderful journey.

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-Kate Grace *2013/14 Sir John Pagan Hort Scholarship recipient*

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