

Report to the Trustees of the Professional Gardeners' Trust and Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust (UK)

Award Recipient: Chris McDonald

Job title: Gardener

Place of Work: Chevithorne Barton

I was very pleased to be informed that I was successful and the Trustees of the Professional Gardeners' Trust and Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust (UK) offered an award of £320 towards the total fees of £395 for me to attain the CS30 Chainsaw Maintenance and Cross Cutting course at Bicton College.

I have worked in horticulture since 2006, I joined Southampton City Council as a seasonal gardener whilst attending Sparsholt College and studied a FdSc in Garden Design. On graduating I was successful in obtaining a studentship with Hampshire County Council at Sir Harold Hillier Gardens in Romsey. I moved around the 4 areas within the garden, learning many skills and more importantly plant names. After 6 months, I applied and got a full time position as a horticulturalist, I was assigned to the redevelopment of the Centenary Border, a large double mixed herbaceous border that was in need of reinvention. This project was certainly a challenge and took almost 3 years and £250,000, a very steep learning curve that put me in good stead for my next appointment as a team leader of my own area. The Pond area at Hilliers is much more than just the 9 ponds and I found myself managing one other garden team member, students and a band of hardy volunteers. This presented a lot of challenges but to have the autonomy to choose plants and design areas far outweighed any negatives. I continued at Hilliers until November 2016 when an exciting opportunity arose at Chevithorne Barton, home to the National Collection of *Quercus* near Tiverton Devon. My job role here as Gardener requires me to draw from all my past experiences and not only manage the maintenance of this stunning and unique garden but shape and design it for the future.

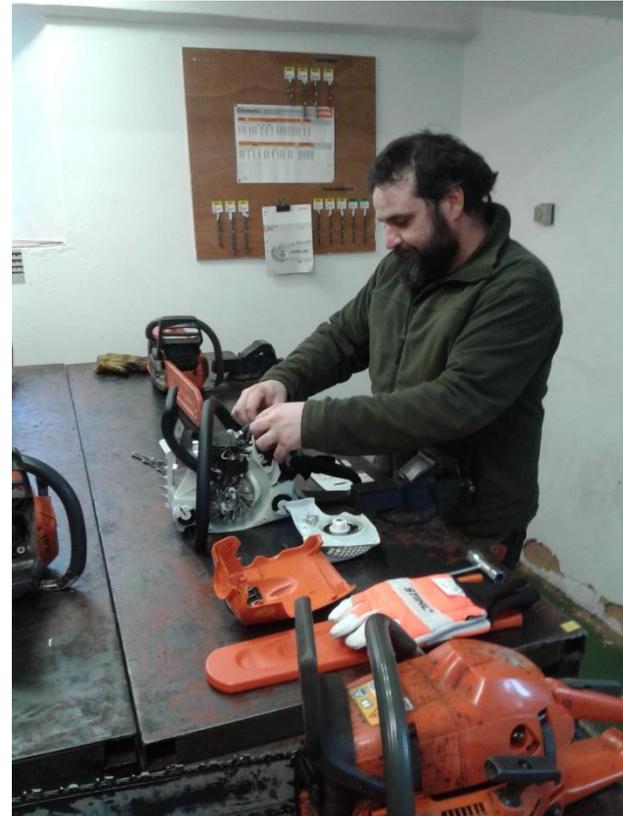
Working for almost 11 years in and around horticulture I have picked up many skills, but one downside to working in a large established and well trained team was that opportunities to gain even more skills never arose, with 5 colleagues holding a chainsaw certificate at Hilliers, there was little call for more to be trained. I have always thought that this would be a real boon to my CV and future job prospects as so many employment adverts end along the lines of 'spraying and chainsaw ticket desirable' or 'Must have PA1/PA6 and CS30 an advantage'. These two tickets obviously represent a large investment for employers so for candidates to have them already takes some of the risk out of the equation for the employer and makes candidates more attractive. I had completed a pesticide application course during my studentship but never the Chainsaw Maintenance and Cross Cutting (CS30). At last the opportunity to work alongside the long standing arborist contractors at Chevithorne Barton arose.

So after applying to the PGT online via email, I was delighted to have my award confirmed and I contacted Bicton College who had pencilled me in and filled out the enrolment forms. Everything was in place all I needed now was a pack lunch and my trusty steel cap boots as the college provided all the required PPE.

The First Day started with a warm hello and more forms to fill in, these were for enrolment on to the NPTC register and health and safety questionnaire for the college, along with next of kin details as part of the risk assessment. After this we made our way down through the dairy farm to the short course outdoor learning centre, the 3 students and the Lecturer had a brief social chat introducing ourselves and briefly explaining our jobs roles

and our experience with chainsaws. Then it was down to business, the course is quite intense and there is a lot of information to learn in two days, so the fact that I had previously used a chainsaw under supervision and spent a lot of time working with arborists certainly helped. Our instructor outline what the course was to cover, this included: Risk assessment, Emergency procedures, Legislation, Safe working practise, Environmental awareness, Tools, equipment & PPE, Manufacturers recommendations, Safety features (of the chainsaw), Maintenance, Fault finding and basic repair, Chain types, Filing/Sharpening, Chain and Bar Maintenance, Waste disposal, Pre start checks, Cold start, Warm start, Cross cutting, Plunge cuts and Rolling plunge cuts.

First session was delivered in an absorbing manner, and we discussed at length the rules and regulation and how that applied to real life situations. After lunch we were each issued a chainsaw and a work bench, we were shown how to completely disassemble a chainsaw down to its component parts, with the function of each part described in detail, we learn how to sharpen a chain and maintain a saw to the manufacturers specifications. Then the saws, having been cleaned and sharpen were ready for use.



The second day started swiftly with a recap on safety, PPE, and saw operations, we then got dressed into the appropriate PPE, and went outside the classroom. The instructor ran through the cold start procedure, and then the three students took it in turns to perform our cold starts. With the saws warmed up and operating correctly we moved to an area with some cut timber (students on one of the felling courses had previously felled the tree) and then we ran through the warm start procedure with the instructor demonstrating the different types of cuts and in which circumstance you would use them. We then under careful supervision all took turns to perform the cuts. After lunch, it was back to the workshop to clean and sharpen the saws, whilst we busied ourselves carrying out the maintenance the instructor led a question and answer session to make sure we felt ready for the assessment on the third and final day.



The Assessment had come round very quickly, but I felt confident that my saw in the workshop was ready to go and had my tools ready on my bench. I arrived to find all my tools had been put away, I was to use a different saw (albeit the same model) and the Assessor was 'simulating' damage on the chain to ensure I was capable of performing maintenance on a saw other than my primed ready to go saw I so diligently prepared the

afternoon before. As I sharpen the saw and carried out the maintenance I was quizzed on all

the underpinning knowledge. There are certain things you must know and be able to tell the Assessor, whilst other areas of knowledge you are only required to prove you understand therefore this is somewhat easier as you can explain in your own words. Having successfully put the saw back together and convincingly answered all the questions we headed out to the work area. We started by individually demonstrating the cold start procedure, then answered questions about the site specific risk assessment, followed by a warm start and being asked to perform various cuts, explaining why we were using our chosen cutting techniques. The final task of the assessment was to cross cut timber on the ground which requires you to make several lateral cuts down from the top and then and roll the log over and repeat the process having the timber sever as the cuts meet. I had a bit of a wobble as I kept missing so my cuts didn't meet. Not a problem just roll the log and try again, but under test conditions this proved very difficult, I did eventually get there in the end, with the Assessor remarking on how you fuel I used compared to follow students. He then stuck out his hand for me to shake and declared that I had indeed passed my Assessment along with my course mates.

I found the course to be very comprehensive, and anyone experienced in using garden machinery with a 2 stroke engine, shouldn't struggle with the mechanical aspects of the course, I was lucky in that I was a bit more experienced in horticulture than my course mates (being 10 years their senior) and having a sound knowledge of good pruning techniques, such as the principles of step cuts/under cuts to release the tension and compression in living wood as this aspect seem particularly tricky for them. I would highly recommend that you find an experienced chainsaw operator to go through the basic operations and supervise you practicing using a saw or go on an introductory course before this course if you have never used a chainsaw before as the assessment can be quite intense.

Overall I was very pleased to pass the assessment, with the assessor remarking on my report that I had good underpinning knowledge but must practice getting my cuts to meet... I have been busy at work practicing my cross cutting and this has proved invaluable clearing windfalls with the arborists in the recent high winds.

Without the support of the Trustees and the Awards Manager Helen Seal, I would not have been able to complete this training, and I greatly appreciate the time and hard work of all involved.

Many Thanks
Chris McDonald

Email postscript Feb 2017

...since my course, my 12 month contract has been made permanent and I have been given the job of Head Gardener here at Chevithorne Barton. Now I'm not saying that it was a direct result of me getting a chainsaw ticket, but I certainly think that as I pro actively sought out funding and proved my enthusiasm for continuous career development, it definitely didn't hurt.

