

Walled Kitchen Gardens Network Conference 2017

Name: Hélène Dove

Area of country: London

Horticulture Career: I started my career at Langthorns Nursery in Essex, before gaining a place on the Heritage and Botanic Gardens Training Scheme in 2014. My placement garden was Myddelton House Gardens, where I was a trainee for two years. In 2016 I gained the role of Senior Kitchen Garden at Myddelton House Gardens.

Previous to horticulture, my main career was as Music Teacher in Sixth Form education.

Training: Walled Kitchen Garden Network Conference 2017, 22 – 24th September. Held at West Dean Gardens

Awarded: Garden Scheme Award, awarded £115 for accommodation.



The training was a conference which took place over two full days and one afternoon. The focus was on glasshouses in walled gardens, but also had general talks on walled gardens and West Dean Gardens. The Friday afternoon was a talk and tour of Alitex glasshouses factory. I currently work with two Alitex glasshouses, one which houses the peaches at Myddelton. This was a fascinating tour and showed us the construction, but also the history of the glasshouse.



Figure 1: Trained pear at West Dean Gardens

The Saturday was based in West Dean Gardens, with talks in the morning and a tour in the afternoon. This was my first visit to the gardens, which in itself was invaluable, as this garden is famed for its walled kitchen garden, especially its trained fruit, which although wasn't a focus of the talks, I managed to get a good idea of how long it takes to create them, and also how. Fruit trees on the walls were trained up wires which were formed into the eventual shapes. Larger 3D shapes had large metal supports to help them into their eventual shapes. During her talk, Sarah Wain said a lot of the shapes were inspired by the training in the gardens of Versailles.

The first talk of the day was from Sarah Wain of West Dean Gardens, and covered the history of her and her partner, Jim Bucklands restoration of the gardens, which started in 1991. The focus was on the restoration of the glasshouses, and looked at the maintenance of wooden glasshouses. The talk also looked at growing vegetables in glasshouses and how to deal with the pests and diseases. She recommended using F1 varieties for plants such as cucumbers and melons, as they have much better resistance. She also covered the double cordon system for training tomatoes, which I will try next year as they were very productive. Another interesting tip I picked up was sowing two batches of courgettes, one early in March/April, then a later sowing in June, which gave a constant healthy production. I saw the June sown plants, and the fruits were

looking fantastic, and a lot less tired than my May sown ones, which are still producing, but not so abundantly.



Figure 2: Glasshouses at West Dean Gardens

The next talk was from Simon Harrison of the Victorian Glasshouse Company. This company create wooden glasshouses based on Victorian designs. He showed a range of projects he has worked on, and gave some useful hints, such as using hardwood instead of softwood as it does not require constant painting. He has also trialled used Iroko wood, and found this a fantastic timber, both to use, and aesthetically. One great hint was to check the acidity of timbers, as he has found that some ericaceous loving timbers actually corroded metal fixings.

Alitex next gave a talk on the history of glasshouses, looking at designers such as Henry Hope & Sons, Paxton and Thomas Messenger.

The final speaker of the morning was Ben Pope who is head gardener at a private garden nearby, with a walled garden designed by Arne Maynard. He focused on a year in a walled kitchen garden, including how he sows mainly into modules, and how he worked with annuals to create cut flower beds.

In the afternoon, we went on a tour of West Dean with Sarah Wain and Jim Buckland. We looked at the orchard and the management of this area, and also how they chose cultivars of vegetables, which is sometimes for aesthetics rather than for taste.

On the second day, we toured three walled gardens in the area, which was an interesting way to compare and contrast. The first we visited was Fittleworth House which is a large private property, thought to have been originally built in the 16th century. We then visited Whithurst Park, which again is a private house, but the walled garden which is a recent creation. It was interesting to see a walled garden with lots of modern inventions. Many of the beds had complete netted cages over them, and every bed had irrigation drip pipes running through them. The garden was obviously productive, but mainly less attractive than others, but this is obviously not a priority in this setting. The final garden we visited was at Petworth House. Petworth itself is a National Trust Property which is open to the public,

but the walled garden we visited was part of the private grounds belonging to the owners of the house. This walled garden was very large and contained many rooms within the walls. They have a very productive kitchen garden, but also lots of ornamental rooms.

I found this conference extremely interesting, as along with the set agenda, I met many other people working in Walled Gardens, whether as a public attraction or as a private restoration. This was invaluable in itself. I was also inspired to try some of the techniques spoken about over the weekend, from interesting companion planting to new ways of growing vegetables to give more constant harvest. Being immersed in this conference and visiting four walled gardens in a short space of time gave me chance to compare different ideas. I hope also try some of the fruit training in my future career. I would like to take this chance to thank the National Garden Scheme and the Professional Gardeners Guild for supporting me in this training, it was a fantastic opportunity and very inspiring and productive for my future career.