

Professional Gardeners' Trust Report by Thomas Holmes



Managing as a Head Gardener:

Presented by Alan Sargent FCIHort, MPGCA

One Day Seminar; Thursday 24th October 2019
Lodsworth Village Hall, Lodsworth, Petworth, GU28
9BL

Cost of Course: £150

Fully Funded (£150)
through the annual **Kenwyn Pearson Award**
donated through the **PGG**

My name is Thomas Holmes and i am currently working in a team of 3 as a Skilled Gardener on a private estate on the East Sussex/Kent border with around 4 acres of formal gardens and 20 acres of leisure/grazing land. The last 18 months has been a period of huge changes and advances in my career: having been a self-employed gardener for just under 10 years (beginning as an informal apprentice on a friend's round through to running my own busy gardening business) I undertook and completed the RHS Level 3 in Practical Horticulture and 6 months ago started in my current employment. My Head Gardener, knowing me to be ambitious and remembering a line from my CV detailing my goal to one day become a Head Gardener recommended I attend Alan's seminar as it was going to be the last one of its kind in it's then current form and this i did through the help of the aforementioned award.

The seminar was attended by a group of 7 in a lovely village hall in West Sussex. It was a good opportunity to meet other gardeners from a range of gardens across the UK. The seminar effectively covers the transition to becoming a Head Gardener in the private sector from application through to appointment drawing on Alan's long-serving experience, expertise and extensive knowledge within the sector. Without going into too much detail (I believe that the content of the seminar will continue to be delivered but in a different form) I will briefly mention a few of the most salient points for myself. Whilst i knew that being a Head Gardener was more than just being a plantsman it is with this aspect that i am most comfortable. I have tended to lack self-confidence and to be bamboozled by what is expected of me when it comes to job applications, interviews and the legal jargon of contracts: having come from being self-employed with a good work ethic and with an academic background I have been lacking in practical knowledge of the industry, of best practice and of working on large sites. The seminar addressed these things by running through actual job advertisements, explanations of the selection processes, a mock interview and looking through a contract of employment. This has given me both a solid

platform and guiding thread from which to start building up my work profile with the confidence gained through knowledge in keeping with what would be expected from a Head Gardener. The seminar also fleshed out that role itself for me; covering aspects of the role that I had not considered; for example the relation of one's legal liability with regard to contractors and staff on the site based on your contract and also the starting of one's own inventory when taking over in the role (again a potential issue of liability and specific practicalities). The notes that i have taken together with the handouts from the day will go on providing me with a rein and rail to keep me on the right track as I work towards becoming a Head Gardener myself: afterall to be forewarned is to be forearmed.