

Kenneth Black Bursary news

Kirsty Dougall is the beneficiary of the first CGS bursary which we have awarded in conjunction with the RHS, from the legacy kindly donated to our Society by Kenneth Black.

I have just been awarded an *RHS Coke Trust* bursary, including a generous donation from The Cottage Garden Society. This will enable me to complete a nine month seasonal placement at Knightshayes Court National Trust Garden. I recently graduated from the University of Sheffield, where I gained a first class degree in Landscape Architecture with Ecology. I greatly enjoyed this, but soon realised that I was happiest when outdoors getting my hands dirty, rather than behind a computer thinking about other people doing so. I believe that the most successful designers are those who understand the elements they work with; the soil, the weather and the plants. It is essential to understand the relationship people have with nature, both those who use it and those who maintain it. This understanding is easy to forget when in an office, but not easy to forget when easing aching limbs and picking thorns from fingers! The placement specifies alternate weeks to be spent in the four acre walled kitchen garden then the formal and woodland gardens. There is also opportunity to get involved in the management of the parkland as well as associated activities such as educational visits or camping weekends.

The main garden at Knightshayes uses the cottage garden style to great effect. Within the 'garden in the wood' lush swathes of hellebores, snowdrops and pulmonaria give way to successions of colour and ever-changing form throughout the year. This is punctuated with a multitude of stunning acer and birch stems set amongst rhododendrons. Grass paths and log steps integrate seamlessly with the vegetation and make you feel part of the planting itself, as well as offering opportunity to appreciate the planting from all angles. The long herbaceous terraces juxtapose multilayered herbaceous planting against the geometric lawns and formal paths to create a completely different effect. Even the kitchen garden has a large herbaceous border - its aim is to look full, abundant and buzzing with life.

Through tending these areas throughout the coming season I will grow in confidence with the complexities of designing, using not only colour and form but structure in the dimension of time. By living on site I will be able to experience the seasons as they manipulate the landscape into ever changing forms. In just a short time I have already watched spring make its first inroads, covering the ground in a carpet of bulbs and the canopy with a sprinkling of *Cornus mas* and *Hamamelis*.

While at Knightshayes I will also (thanks to funding from the National Trust) undertake training courses of my own choosing to further my skill set. This will include the RHS level 3 certificates, a diploma in practical horticulture, my tractor driving ticket and the forest school qualification. My plant knowledge will increase greatly through working with such a wide range of plants, identification tests and utilising the extensive plant records database.

Eventually I am aiming to gain full qualification as a landscape architect and use this for non-commercial projects. The knowledge gained here at Knightshayes will enable me to integrate the cottage garden principals of abundance, productivity and continual successive interest into any project. I also hope to work outside putting these designs into place, coordinating volunteer groups and providing environmental education if desired. I want to design landscapes that will intrigue people, feed people and inspire people to enjoy nature.

My experience to date has ranged from renovating an old farm house in Italy, building schools with environmental education in Uganda, volunteering on organic farms in the peak district, working in a landscape architect's office in Bath and undertaking a youth and community ecological internship in Somerset. I know that living and working in this beauty spot in central Devon will firmly ground me in the horticultural knowledge I need to build a satisfying and exciting career!

Kirsty Dougall gardens at Knightshayes Court, Devon.

