

Garden



Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*) with *Dahlia* 'Verrone's Obsidian,' by the benches © Paul Debois

A Long Summer awaits...

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Digitalis purpurea 'Pam's Choice' with different Alliums © Emily Blackmore



Canna x ehemannii © Paul Debois

As a team we are always observing and discussing how we can develop the aesthetics and season of interest in the Garden. In the summer of 2020, Sean and I filled our notepads with our thoughts on the border that runs parallel to Paper Buildings. This border is historically known as 'The Long Border' on old plans in the Archives.

First and foremost, we discussed the sustainability of the border, alongside the highs and lows of the displays. This led to the decision to move away from the fleeting peaks of the highly intensive and environmentally questionable seasonal bedding where most of the border is dug out and replanted twice each year. Instead, a mixed herbaceous border with a

long season of interest, including shrubs, perennials, bulbs and seasonal annuals weaving through, felt more in-keeping with the progressive ethos of the Garden. Secondly, our notes highlighted a wish for an experimental approach to produce a loose, flowing border with emphasis on texture and senescence. Finally, we wanted the Long Border to offer a different atmosphere and visual appeal for garden visitors, whilst also complimenting the High Border adjoining the other borders across the Garden.

The Long Border, as the name suggests is very long, at 60 metres in length, but rather narrow at roughly three metres wide. Therefore, to highlight the name of the border, the Yew buttresses (which had

created compartments for the bedding displays) were removed to offer a continuity to the observer's eye drawn along the border. Also, the restrictive width of the border was a consideration in the choice of plants, favouring ones that would offer a feeling of depth to the border, a design trick. Another observation that influenced the choice of plants was the pale backdrop of Paper Buildings. This led to bold, architectural, and textured palette of plants being chosen. To 'pop' against the building, the arresting lime-yellow flowers of *Euphorbia characias subsp. wulfenii*, the hot flowers of *Lobelia tupa* towering high and the huge, dark green glossy leaves of the popular *Fatsia japonica* were chosen.

The border was cleared in early 2021, relocating several shrubs from the southern end of the border to other parts of the Garden. Positioning of the benches was mulled over to capture the best views across the Garden whilst being nestled in

purpurea 'Pam's Choice' was chosen for late spring, which was wonderful on mass, but we felt slightly lost against the pale backdrop. This year, a hue of pinks and purples will parade along the border from *Digitalis purpurea* 'Excelsior Hybrid,' 'Sugar Plum,' 'Pam's Choice,' and 'Camelot Rose.' For the summer spectacle, I was excited to include elegantly exotic *Canna x ehemannii* with its pendulous fuchsia flowers. In addition to a number of Dahlias. My favourite performers this year were *Dahlia* 'Verrone's Obsidian,' constantly smothered by bees attracted to the buttery yellow centres, contrasting the near black velvety petals; the intricately structured pompon Dahlia 'Ivor's Rhonda'; and the rich red purple flowering Dahlia 'Hillcrest Royal.' To amplify the tropical feel of the border, I grew from seed towering colourful annuals which included Amaranth (*Amaranthus*) and Mexican sunflowers (*Tithonia rotundifolia* 'Torch').



Mexican sunflower
(*Tithonia rotundifolia*
'Torch') © Emily Blackmore

Lobelia tupa
© Emily Blackmore

Dahlia 'Verrone's
Obsidian' © Paul Debois

Dahlia 'Ivor's Rhonda'
© Paul Debois

amongst the planting. Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*) and Mexican fleabane (*Erigeron karvinskianus*) has been encouraged to self-seed into the surrounding paths by the benches to soften the edges. Thousands of bulbs were planted to broaden the layers of interest across the year, including *Narcissus* 'Pipit' and *Camassia leichtlinii*. These start the bulb display with drifts of lemon yellow and bluish lavender. Prolonging the spectacle in late summer, the tiny magenta heads of *Allium schoerocephalon* weave through the planting, before offering seed head structure into winter.

We added choice seasonal plants to weave through the border to extend the season of interest and tie to the wider Garden. In the first year, a sea of *Digitalis*

Over the first year, our notepads expanded with our scribbled observations of the Long Border, and the plant combination successes to repeat; what to stake and when; peak moments of the border and how to elongate the season further. This highlighted the necessity for more architectural shrubs to mitigate the wind that whips across the border and an ever-growing wish list of choice perennials to add. Under our creative scrutiny, the border will continue to be a source of experimentation and continuous improvement. I hope you have enjoyed witnessing the transformation of the Long Border so far, and will share our excitement in how it evolves over what we hope will be a long summer.