

# GREAT DIXTER

## Friends' newsletter



Dixter  
Daffs

Spring 2011



Left to right: Tête-à-Tête, Minnow, Jenny, Tazetta, Jet Fire, *N. pseudonarcissus*,  
*N. bulbocodium* var. *citrinus*, *N. cyclamineus*. Photo by Graham Hodgson, 25.03.11

# Money Matters

After the snow of November and December there was a great surge of activity beyond the boundaries of the garden in January. Large earth-moving equipment dug trenches in all directions for cables, pipes and storage tanks to link the utilities together for Dixter Farm, the new loggia and the Great Barn and Oast.

The main car park had to be excavated to accommodate the ground source heating components. Slinky pipes were laid at the required depth of at least 1.2m. The pipes were then covered by subsoil, geotextile, aggregate, Terram membrane, topsoil with sand, Netlon reinforcement and finally turf. The amount of aggregate used means excess water will flow down and out along a French drain. Will this mean the end of the ritual straw-strewing and the tractor on standby at times of wet?

Dixter Farm is being transformed from cow stalls to three new bedrooms for students, an education room, chemical store and gardeners' showers. The structure has been made eco-efficient using the ground source heating and solar panels. Fergus has kept a close eye to ensure the Dixter character will be evident. To this end the skills of Craig Pharo will be used to make the worktops from Dixter wood and the drawer handles will be crafted from wood such as the old mulberry, yew, leylandii (he is amazed at the beauty of the wood from this much reviled tree). Without a large donation this project would not have been possible - thank you Monument Trust.

The next and final stage is to make the Great Barn and Oast safe, to construct a pleasant place for refreshments by the shop and to overhaul the creaking heating system of the house. The tenders for the work are coming in and when it is completed in summer 2012 we will have fulfilled our Building Project undertaking. We are still looking for funding for this last, vital phase.

A letter to all our Friends was sent out in March and April explaining that the 5-year covenants taken out after Christopher Lloyd's death in early 2006 would be coming to an end and asking if people wanted to continue their standing orders or give another one-off donation. So far £8,667 has been received. The replies are still coming in and in due course we will list those generous Friends, old and new, who have supported Great Dixter this year.

A special mention must go to our U.S. Friends, in particular Nancy Hallman who hosted a party in her Fort Worth garden on 17<sup>th</sup> April, which raised over \$13,000. Aaron was there and gave three talks to the 170 guests.

A big thank you also to Goldman Sachs Gives for a substantial gift to the Trust. Details to follow in the next newsletter.

# Tara Culley, Gardener

Arriving at Great Dixter in 2003 was like joining a family. A letter to Christo and a brief chat with Fergus on the bench at the end of the long border... and I had joined the garden team. I had recently completed my two-year diploma at Wisley; I was ready to take up a position.

It had to be Dixter for me. Like many, I was intrigued by Christo's maverick spirit and wry humour, and over many visits I had been entranced by the garden's freedom and, above all, personality.

Christo had also been a great supporter of Wisley students and was famed for his working weekends, when after a good day's work and much merry-making we all slept by the roaring fire, medieval style, on the floor of the Great Hall. I seem to remember once actually falling asleep in the dog basket! Horticulturally, working for Christo was a revelation. I will never tire of the intricate complexity of the borders, or the simple beauty of the meadows.



Archie and Lyall on the old Massey

I now work part-time, because in 2006, just after Christo passed away, I had my first son Archie, then Lyall, my second, in 2009. Living in Hastings Old Town around the corner from Fergus and Amanda, my sons are growing up with their two girls, Ayse and Nullifer - the next generation to enjoy the Dixter magic.

Over the past five years I have been helping to design and create a garden for another Friend of Great Dixter, Chris Hutt in Pett, near Hastings. This garden will be open for the first time under the National Garden Scheme on Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> June (11am to 5pm) at Fairlight End, Pett, Hastings, Sussex, TN35 4HB.

Tara is one of 10 part-time and full-time gardeners at Great Dixter. The others are: Fergus Garrett (Head Gardener), Siew Lee Vorley (Assistant Head Gardener), Graham Hodgson, Louise Paddison, Lewis Boshier, James Horner (Scholar), Oliver Jackson (Apprentice), as well as Jean-Michel Tassoni and Aaron Bertelsen.

# Propagation

## To node or internode?

“Technical terms are undoubtedly useful and there is nothing aurally disagreeable about the words node and nodal though the propagator under whom I trained referred to noodle cuttings...

...(Internodes) are, perhaps it will be no great surprise to learn, the stretch of stem linking node to node. The internodes on a clematis stem are often six or more inches long. A nodal cutting would consist of a node at the top, a stretch of internode and then another node at the bottom, below which the lower cut was made. This could be extravagant of material and a physically inconvenient unit to handle. But clematis are amenable to the internodal cuttings...

in which the lower cut is made at any convenient spot across the internode. Roots can, in their case, be made as easily from the internodal as from the nodal cutting. Not only does this give you a cutting of a convenient length, but you can get twice as many cuttings made internodally as you can their nodal counterparts since each cutting in the former case includes only one node. You are with me?

Clematis are not exceptional in their capacity for making roots from the internodal cutting. Hydrangeas will and so, more surprisingly, will roses. Indeed, if we were only a little more adventurous and experimental we should probably find that a large proportion of the plants we root from cuttings would do so internodally.” *Excerpt from In My Garden by Christopher Lloyd*

**Kathleen Leighton** first came to Great Dixter in 1986. Her first love has always been propagating plants. She worked closely with Christopher Lloyd and therefore learnt a lot about the Dixter way of doing things and about his likes and dislikes, for instance Penstemon, he used three different ones in the garden, all red: Chester Red, Drinkstone and Garnet. So no white or pink penstemon were ever for sale.



Clematis cuttings:  
nodal (left) and internodal (right)  
Photo by Sarah Seymour

Plant material offered to the Nursery from the garden comes in any old time. For instance one would normally take *Phlomis fruticosa* in July after flowering, but Fergus cut the plant in the Long Border hard back in March and so this was when Kathleen took cuttings. Not perfect because they then require a lot of pinching out of flower buds.

Here are some of the methods Kathleen uses for Great Dixter plants:

- March - basal cuttings for *Achillea Lucky Break* and *Aster lateriflorus* var *horizontalis*
- June - internodal e.g. the hydrangeas placed in cuttings compost in wooden seed boxes (pictured top right, photo by Sarah Seymour)
- July - tip cuttings for plants that don't like their roots disturbed and are needed in large numbers go into cell trays. e.g. *Weigela florida* *Variiegata* (pictured right, photo by Carol Casselden) and *Phlomis*
- September - semi-ripe cuttings to ensure stock for the following year e.g. *Penstemon*. 15 or so are normally put in a 3 ½" clay pot, and over-wintered in a cold greenhouse.

*Ferula Kryptonite* - this fennel arose from seed of Cedric Morris when it was noticed that one of the seedlings had narrower leaflets, but wider than *F. communis*. Fergus took it to show his fellow members of the Royal Horticultural Society Herbaceous Committee at their Chelsea meeting in 2008 (pictured right, RHS/Ali Cundy).



# Paul Wood, House Guide

Whilst I was living and working as resident manager at Sissinghurst Castle I once saw Christopher Lloyd discussing Vita's garden with a group of students. When, some years later, I retired to the Sussex/Kent borders I wrote to offer my services and for the past four years it has been a privilege and a pleasure to be part of the Dixter extended family - sometimes acting as a guide in the house, sometimes working in the ticket office.



It has been interesting to have known both gardens and houses from the inside as the two are so close geographically, but so far apart in style.

## In the Attic

Emma Seniuk and Debbie Wiles arrived in February for a six-month stint fresh from a two-year course at Longwood Gardens. Debbie is interested in Garden History and studied gardening and horticulture at UCLA. Emma has worked with heirloom tomatoes, clematis, bees and Christmas trees. The two of them attended an impromptu barbecue given by Fergus in the nursery one spring evening.



Romain Chalaye was also in attendance and made a tasty fruit salad (banana, kiwi and mint in green tea, a dash of orange juice and sugar). Romain, studying in Blois south of Paris, is yet another charming French boy with a flair for gardening, cooking and drawing (see right).



## In a jam jar

James Horner (Christopher Lloyd Scholar, here until September) has been putting together interesting flower/foliage combinations in the Friends Room each week. This one is wych elm seeds, rhubarb flowers, wild garlic, daffodil Pipit (James's favourite daffodil) and a red tulip.



# Dixter Diary

**Alan Caiger-Smith** and Charlotte Davis came recently for lunch with Fergus. Curator Katie Hobbs took the opportunity to bring together the many pieces Christopher Lloyd had bought of his work to learn more about them. In his piece for the *Dear Christo* book, Alan Caiger-Smith notes: “he acquired many of the best pieces... Among them is a flared red lustre bowl, which I would not have parted with to anyone else. Christo gave it a prominent place in the hall.” Photo by Sarah Seymour.



**Education Officer** Catherine Haydock has had a wonderful time this spring with young children from local schools. Very enterprising and exciting days spent in both the woods and the garden - building fires, making cakes in a Dutch oven and firing imaginations: puppet-making with Persephone Pearl and story-telling by Rachel Bennington. Photo by Catherine Haydock.



**The beehives** were moved to the field beyond the orchard, this is a more sheltered site and two new colonies were settled in this spring.

**Roz Greenwood** (right) came in April. She told archivist Hazel Gatford how she had contacted Christopher Lloyd when on a visit to UK, having met him in her native Australia, he insisted she come and stay not for one night but two. Roz kept his letters and kindly brought them for our archive.



**One of our Friends** recently let us know that she was leaving a legacy to Great Dixter in her will, with the proviso that she hoped this would not be for some time yet. Makes our hearts warm though.

**A mallard** made her nest in the Nursery in April and laid 7 eggs amongst the *Artemisia lactiflora*. She stripped the plastic labels from the neighbouring pots of miscanthus as nesting material. Her preferred diet is phlox, particularly Skylight but not Sherfield. Photo by Philip Leighton.




# Bay leaf custard and rhubarb

Aaron thought this combination worked well as a pudding at a recent lunch.

600ml (half pint milk half pint double cream), 6 bay leaves,  
2 free-range eggs plus 2 yolks, 2 tbsp caster sugar.  
6 x 3" ramekins.

Bring milk and bay leaves slowly to almost boil,  
take off heat and leave for 20 minutes.  
Remove leaves.

Whisk eggs, add sugar then  
pour into milk.



Bake at 180°C/350°F/gas  
mark 4 in bain-marie for 40  
minutes. Serve with Christo-style  
baked rhubarb: "place your chopped-up  
stalks, with sugar to taste (brown is nice),  
in a casserole. Cover, to prevent exposed bits  
from drying and hardening, but no water needs  
adding. Bake at 140°C/275°F/gas mark 1 for 50  
minutes."

The bay tree by the Porch is one of the original  
plantings of 100 years ago.

Photo by Aaron Bertelsen

## Calendar

**13<sup>th</sup> June** Friends Day from 4pm to 7pm

**16<sup>th</sup> June** Tidebrook Manor garden picnic (fundraiser for Great Dixter). Fergus and Ed Flint will be giving talks. Details from [caroline.tidebrook@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:caroline.tidebrook@tiscali.co.uk).

**1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> October** Great Dixter Plant Fair

**10<sup>th</sup> October** Friends Day from 11am to 4pm

**26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> November** Great Dixter Christmas Fair

**Study Days:** 18<sup>th</sup> July - Succession Planting 1<sup>st</sup> August - Good Planting

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