

Rick Mather David Scrase Christopher Lloyd Scholar September 2023

It's a huge honour to be the first of the Rick Mather David Scrase Christopher Lloyd Scholar'. I have had one of the most amazing experiences over the last year, having had the opportunity to train at Great Dixter with its esteemed team, intense planting, playful creativity and thundering morale. It is a place of absolute pleasure, joy and expression. Sure, the work is challenging but not without its regular benefits and learning opportunities. I must extend a huge thank you to the Rick Mather David Scrase Foundation for giving me the chance to stay for another year, to hone my skills and develop additional layers onto that which I have already learnt.

We have our new Scholars now and I find it mildly bizarre as I step into a new role in the same venue, new faces arriving, curious, enthusiastic and willing to envelop themselves in the madness that awaits around every corner. It's quite sweet, yet entertaining knowing that I was in that position not so long ago. Instead my role is now more of the observer and teacher to these four. Knowing that they require the same moulding that I so deeply sought on my first year. It's a real honour to have the ability to progress and to notice it. The milestones that I have passed in the last 12 months can almost seem quite seamless. It's not until I really start to get into the nitty-gritty information and the logistics with the new students that I truly begin to understand just how much it is that I have learnt, as well as how important my new role is to aiding the development of the new scholars. That in itself is such a pleasure. I have had such a desire for a long time, that at some point in my horticultural career, I would like to move into one of those practical teaching roles, observing students work, advising and educating them on certain details or ways to improve their actions. Now I am here and I feel slightly bemused as to the reality of it...When did this happen?...Am I ready for this? . . . I feel confident and able to show the way, so that is what I shall do to the best of my ability, yet still aware that my learning is still in its junior stage and I am just as absorbent as I was over the last 12 months. I notice that as my understanding of Great Dixter improves, I am becoming more enthusiastic and interested into further developing this space. It has a hold of me, I doubt it'll let go, nor would I wish it to.

The learning continues, regularly. There are new projects on the horizon, and a big one at that. Last year I managed the seedlings and their foreseeable future until they went into the garden. Now, for Ernie (one of two Christopher Lloyd Scholars) and myself; we are to take on the "car park", an area of the garden nursery that is used for a mix of all sorts, being; plants for pots, nursery stock, projects, propagation, village sales and new purchases to be worked into the garden. As of now, our aim to grow really strong plants, big, lovely healthy ones that can be used for all the above, whilst having a good dose of order sent their way. Key to this process is ensuring that we propagate stock from the garden that can be used for sale in the nursery. It helps completes a circuit, adding a process of sustainability to the estate. Keeping are incomings low and our outgoings of that which we already grow. I am highly excited for this project,

having been desperate to give it a dose of structure and order for a little while. It's no easy feat either and also of importance in this project, is making sure that we keep plants moving out into the garden. We are essentially a nursery, and the skills I expect to learn over this years project will be those that I can keep with me forever onwards. In conjunction with this, I will be taking on the cacti house down at the farm. My main role and ambition of this space is to propagate cacti and again, produce big healthy plants. A discussion on a cacti pot display has been thrown around a few times, so a check for any uneven york-stone paving slabs will be in order.

The meadow cutting is coming to an end. The last areas of major cut have now been complete, with the strewing's of the horse pond being moved down to the topiary lawn and long boarder in order to diversify them more with *Scorzoneroïdes autumnallis*, the autumn hawksbit: a late flowering species in the Asteraceae. Complications in this are the fact that its late flowering, meaning the cutting of those meadow areas is delayed, but the bonus is that its late flowering, extending that nectar source just that little bit extra. If you can, do...!

The garden is really beginning its autumn phase; the leaves are browning, slowly taking their stance on the edge of paths and across the tiled roofs. The stems, sans nitrogen begin to hold their ground in a different form, marking those spaces with upright rusty yellows and copper browns. There are no more bedding changes or large additions, the garden starts to enter the rougher side of its expression as the weathered material begins to inform us of a seasons close. Large seed heads from across the garden, memories of their joys to pollinating wildlife; static in form, yet developing slowly, ripening till they drop or we collect for sowing shortly after. I see the garden differently as to 12 months ago; I feel that I actually see it, observing the changes of key, witnessing the differences in each stage, week by week.

Rob Leonard Flack.