

# GREAT DIXTER CHARITABLE TRUST

## ANNUAL REVIEW

YEAR END MARCH 2024



# 1. INTRODUCTION

This Annual Review provides a visual overview of the past year at Great Dixter and presents a brief summary of our Annual Accounts (which can be seen in full [here](#)).

## 2. CHARITABLE OBJECTS AND HOW THEY HAVE BEEN ACHIEVED

### 2.1 To Conserve, Maintain and Enrich the Garden for the Benefit of the General Public.

*I saved the best for last, a garden with a huge heart, Great Dixter. On paper this is a six-acre garden in Northiam, East Sussex surrounding a historic home. In person? It is pure alchemy.*

Chickadee Gardens November 2023 Oregon USA

### Great Dixter Garden

The gardening style at Great Dixter continues to be daring and bold and inspires gardeners from across the world. The planting philosophy mimics natural plant succession, but at a much higher tempo. Native species, which are left to self-seed through the garden, are interspersed with more unusual and ornamental species further complementing the diverse pollen and nectar resource.

Great Dixter highlights how gardening and horticulture can play a crucial role in reversing the loss of biodiversity within the UK. Many of the techniques used at Great Dixter to create and maintain habitats can be replicated in any garden or semi-natural greenspace. Throughout the year ecologists continued to monitor the Garden and wider estate adding to the species count which was demonstrated in the [Biodiversity Audit](#).

In 2023/24 we welcomed 48,181 visitors to the garden (40,724 in 2022/23), 3935 annual ticket holders (5121 in 2022/23) and 2369 Friends of Great Dixter (2466 in 2022/23). In 2024 the entrance fee covered admission to both the house and garden.



*1 Plant Idents to challenge the students and the visitors*

*“In a country full of beautiful gardens, I think it is the culture of intelligent curiosity and questioning creativity that sets Dexter apart.”*

*Jodie Jones. Freelance writer and Dexter Volunteer*



*2 Front Meadow in early June 2023*

*“To see a meadow in bloom is a delight  
– it’s alive and teeming with life,  
mysterious, dynamic and seemingly out  
of control”. Christopher Lloyd*

Great Dixter is involved in a number of projects including the introduction of Tulip Sprengeri back into the wild. To help facilitate this Great Dixter acts as a conduit for providing seeds to botanic gardens in Turkey.



*3 Tulipa Sprengeri in the High Garden*



4 Photo by Richard Bloom - Twitter - @RichardBloom\_ Instagram - @richardbloomphoto



*5 From the High Garden June 2023*



6 Photo by Richard Bloom - Twitter - @RichardBloom\_ Instagram - @richardbloomphoto



7 Photo by Richard Bloom - Twitter - @RichardBloom\_ Instagram - @richardbloomphoto



*8 Bam Garden 2023*



*9 Walled Garden. Photo by Coralie Thomas*



*10 High Garden October 2023*



*11 Mown Meadow in August 2023. Photo: Coralie Thomas*



*12 The start of a new year*



## Experiments in the Garden



Visitors frequently comment that the garden is different each time they visit. The garden is constantly changing although the structure created by the yew hedges and topiary remains the same. Planting in certain areas, such as the Solar Garden for example, may be changed three times a year. This enables the garden team to review different combinations, varieties and species of plants. If successful they may appear in some way in other areas of the garden in future years.



*13 Zinnias. Solar Garden 2018*



*14 Poppies, Solar Garden 2020 Photo: Carol Cassenden*



*15 Pastels, Solar Garden 2022 Photo: Fergus Garrett*

*“Try and organise your thoughts and analyse the scene before you. I like this; I don’t like that; why?”*

Christopher Lloyd



16 Foxgloves, Solar Garden 2023. Photo: Coralie Thomas



*17 Amaranthus and Canna Sola Garden 2024. Photo. Coralie Thomas*

In the summer of 2023 volunteer “Garden Greeters” were introduced in the garden. We wanted to ensure visitors had the best possible experience and our Garden Greeters welcomed visitors at the gate, explained the layout of the garden to newcomers and helped visitors to identify plants, especially those in pot displays in the porch. This has proved to be very successful, and we are grateful to those who have given their time to help others enjoy their visit to Great Dixter.

*“The more notices you put up the less private and personal a garden becomes”.*

**Christopher Lloyd**

## The Estate Team

The Vegetable Garden is cared for by members of the Estate Team and their volunteers. Much of the produce goes to the Loggia to feed visitors and those who are on courses.



*18 Planting out late Spring*



*19 Squash on display*



*20 Bringing in the harvest.*



*21 Friends Event with produce on display*

## Green Woodworking in the Great Barn

Wood from the estate is used to produce a range of hurdles, benches and tables which are sold in the shop. The Team also share their skills with students and visitors.



22 The Dixter Green Woodworking Team Photo: Lewis Bosher



23 Green Woodworking in the Great Barn

## 2.2 To Conserve, Maintain and Restore the House for the Benefit of the General Public.

*“One of Lutyens’ most successful domestic jobs.”*

Nikolaus Pevsner & Ian Nairn, *The Buildings of England – Sussex*, 1965, pp 575-

6

### Repairs to the House and wider Estate

Maintaining a Grade 1 Listed property and its contents is a costly commitment and an important element of Great Dixter’s work. An ongoing programme of work is in place and each year priorities are identified. In 2023 the chimney in the Parlour, which had been badly blocked was cleared of Jackdaw nesting material which had become so lodged we had been worried that it would need major repairs. Jackdaws frequently attempt to join the household and have been found in bedrooms and the kitchen among other places.



24 Nesting material for removal from the parlour Chimney

A highly skilled local craftsman, Paul Sedgewick, embarked on a programme of repairs to the lead on the many windows at Great Dixter. He was with us for many months and we were all sad when his work was completed - but the house was much warmer.



*25 Paul Sedgewick repairing the kitchen window.*

Before the start of the season a hunt commenced for damage to a section of electric cable. After a detailed search (which took two days) a 3mm bite was found which had affected the electricity supply in the house. Floorboards were lifted upstairs and downstairs until the tiny piece of damaged wire was detected. A void of about 1.5 meters exists below these floorboards.



*26 Searching for one small bite*

## Sharing the House with visitors

All visitors to Great Dixter are now welcome to view the original medieval side of the house as part of their entrance ticket. This year we started to provide a number of small exhibitions throughout the open season to allow visitors a taste of the large collections that we hold at Great Dixter.



*27 A small selection of the Alan Caiger-Smith pottery from his Reference Collection*



*28 Uniform belonging to Patrick Lloyd*

## PATRICK LLOYD 1913-1956

Patrick took his army entrance exams and passed at Winchester in June 1931, and in September he was admitted as a Gentleman Cadet to the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich. He was generally considered to be 'a very good sound type of fellow'. After he received his commission as a Second Lieutenant in the Royal Regiment of Artillery he undertook some months of training at the School of Artillery on Salisbury Plain. In a letter to Christopher for his birthday, he described their first shoot on the ranges with a battery of four eighteen pounders: 'The guns made quite a noise and shook the ground. They sounded like a heavy person falling out of bed in the room above, only louder. I was the first to act as a battery commander and conduct a shoot, and though I made some slips I did not make a bloomer. It is rather fun to send orders down a telephone line and then to see the shells burst on the floor a few thousand yards away.'

71 people attended the tours of the Lutyens side of the house (160 people attended 16 tours in 2022/23).

*“Your tour changed my entire understanding of the house at Great Dixter. I had previously only been able to see the medieval portion. Seeing the portion designed by Lutyens and being able to see how he was able to weave those rooms with the Medieval Hall and the Yeoman's buildings was very enlightening”.*

Robin Prater. Chair of the Lutyens Trust America.

The House is also a living space and welcomes many horticulturists, ecologists and artists to stay. It is a place for discussion, debate and learning as well as being a historically important building. This year we welcomed approximately 90 house guests (not counting those staying for the volunteer weekend and plant fairs); some were Christopher Lloyd's friends, others were artists, ecologists, potters, architects, and students.

## Volunteers in the House

A big thank you to the volunteers in the House for their invaluable help with the Archive, cataloguing, sewing and restoring.

## 2.3 To Manage the Woodlands, Meadows and Fields in a Manner which Encourages Biodiversity

Work on the development of a Conservation Plan for the Estate and Garden continues. We continue to work closely with ecologists who monitor species and advise on habitat management. The programme of coppicing from the Dixter woods continues and provides resources for the green woodworkers. This allows a constant source of wood to be gathered, and improvements made to habitats by bringing light to the floor of the woods encouraging a mosaic structure and along with this, diversity.

Visitors to Dixter will also notice that frequently dead wood is left standing around the garden and estate. This is because it provides a further valuable habitat for other species.

Thanks to the generosity of the High Weald Landscape Trust, native wildflower seeds have been sown along the tope edge of High Park field.

## 2.4 To Advance Education in Horticulture and Biodiversity

Providing free horticultural education is central to the work of Great Dixter. Significant funding is received from our Friends to all this work to continue.

### Scholars at Great Dixter



*29 Some of the Dixter Scholars from 2023/24. Ernie Weller, Naciim Benkreira, Matt Padbury, Will Larson, Talitha Slabbert*

Scholars work alongside our team of gardeners and also get the opportunity to make trips abroad, and to other gardens in the UK, to expand their knowledge. In 2023 three scholars spent a week in mountains of Turkey which offered the opportunity to explore a huge variety of plants growing in the wild which are only seen in their cultivated forms in the UK.



*30 Wild flowers in Turkey by Rob Flack*



*31 Wild flowers in Turkey by Rob Flack*

## Garden Volunteers

In 2023/24 six volunteers worked along-side our garden team on a regular basis. They make a considerable effort to join the team at 8am and work through in all weathers. They are often also involved on other areas of our work such as supporting our plant fairs and friends' events.

## Other learning opportunities

In February 2024 we were delighted to welcome back an army of 40 volunteers for the annual volunteer weekend. Students and gardeners and others who are simply interested to take part, spend a weekend working in small teams and are supervised by the Dixter garden staff.

## Adult



*32 Volunteers and staff at the Winter Working Weekend*

## Education Courses and Symposiums

Many of our courses offer limited free places for community gardeners, students or those who work in public realm greening.

### Study Days

These one-day courses were originally developed by Christopher Lloyd and Fergus Garrett. Each study day is a mixture of lectures in the Education Room and demonstrations in the garden. Refreshments and lunch are provided. 247 people attended 12 Study Days in 2023/24. Subjects include Bulbs, Succession Planting in the Mixed Border, Designing with Plants, Meadow Gardening, Sub-Tropical Gardening, Nursery propagation, and Planning and Preparing Borders for Spring and Summer.

Additional courses have been introduced in 2024 and led by Coralie Thomas and Michael Wachter, both Dixter gardeners, include Gardening with Annuals and Practical Ethnobotany. This course, led by Michael, takes place one afternoon a month over 4 months. Nine people joined the course in 2024.

### Art and Craft of Gardening

This course is for keen amateurs and professional gardeners, held monthly over one year that using lectures, demonstrations and hands-on learning. For those who have completed this course a further course, the **Advanced Art and Craft of Gardening**, is available. These courses have proved so popular that an Alumni Group has formed to maintain contact, continue learning and visit new gardens as a group. Thirty-five people took part in the Art and Craft of Gardening courses in 2023/24 and 26 in the Advanced Course. Forty-eight people attended Alumni courses and visits.



*33 2023 Art & Craft alumni trip to Andy Salter's garden with tutors Fergus Garrett, Ed Flint and Coralie Thomas*

## Art and Craft of Garden Design

This course meets monthly over nine months and is led by visiting tutor Annie Guilfoyle. Twelve students attended this course in 2023/24.

## Behind the Scenes at Great Dixter

This provides a monthly guided walk around the garden, showcasing plants of interest or in flower. These walks start at 12.30pm and finish at 3.30pm and are led by the Dixter gardeners. Eighty-three people attended in 2023/24.

## Symposia

Symposia at Great Dixter offer a rare opportunity for gardeners to learn and practice traditional techniques first hand in the Great Dixter gardens, to discuss aspects of border design and maintenance and to tour nearby world class gardens with Fergus Garrett and the Great Dixter Team. Participants study at Dixter for a week, they arrive knowing they will receive excellent horticultural tuition and leave realising that they have also become part of the Great Dixter family. People return year after year to attend these rather unique courses.

## What did the participants say in 2023?

*“Fergus is an exceptional teacher. I am an adult educator (English as a Second Language, adult literacy) and noticed he instinctively employs many best practices - repeating and building on concepts, employing lots of modes of learning (lecture, hands-on, visual). He was alert to our energy as a group and sensed when we needed a stretch or a change. He set a tone of respect and curiosity in which questions were welcome and we felt safe to learn and expose things we didn't know. We also gained a lot from the example of how he works and just 'is' around the garden and with others. It was a privilege to learn from him”.*

*“Truly, we learned a lot from all the gardeners and staff we spent time with - the energy of learning and teaching is vivid at Great Dixter. Your whole team is so generous with your time, energy and knowledge. Thank you”.*

*“The Symposium far exceeded any expectation of what I thought it was going to be. I really appreciated that Fergus worked in everything we asked to cover and added so much more.”*

*“My week at Great Dixter was better than any educational experience I have ever had, including my formal education in Landscape Architecture. It was a great mix of classes and hands-on experience to implement what we were learning. I was really pleased at how much time Fergus spent with us. The experience has changed my outlook on design and honed my personal skills in the garden.”*

## Engaging with Children and Young People

Great Dixter works with pre-school children and their parents or carers, as part of the Garden Explorers programme, and also provides family holiday activities. In 2023/24 we worked with 1165 family groups in total. Eighteen of these sessions were holiday activities and aimed at a

wider age range 78 of these sessions were Garden Explorers sessions. 179 children visited through the school group visits and 10 Pocket Park families spent time with the Education Lead at Dixter. In addition, 9 Forest School sessions were run for the local primary school for years 4 and 5. We welcomed 2 work experience students this year.



*34 School visit 2024*



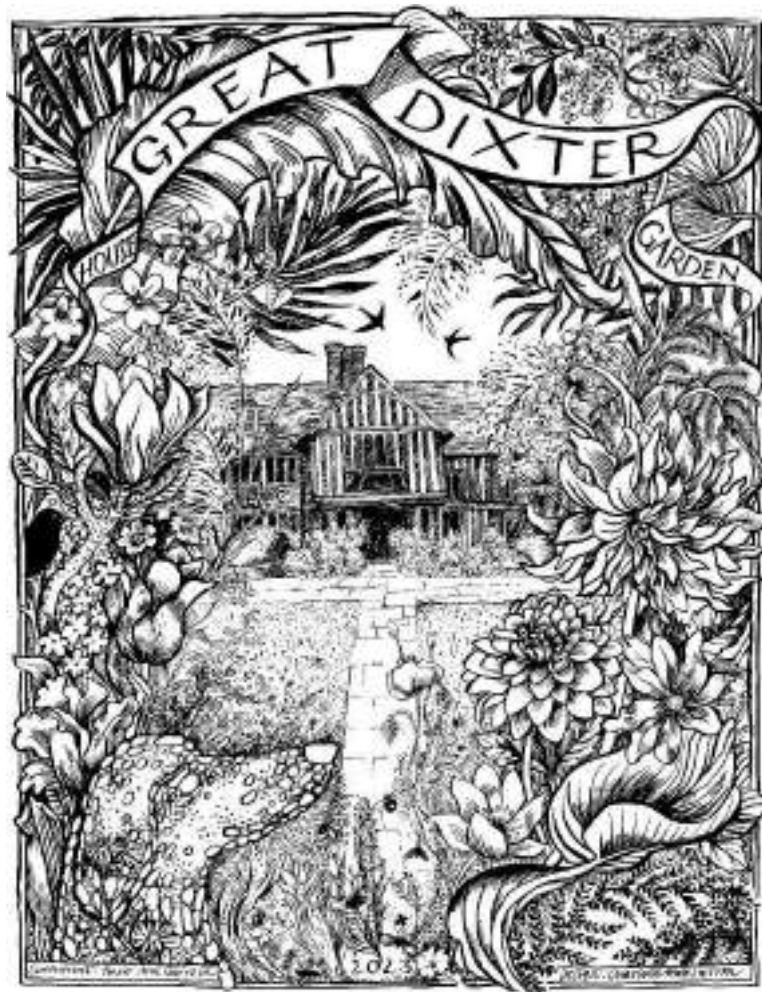
*35 Catherine Haydock and Trevor Marlowe from the Fieldfenn Trust who generously donated funds to allow the Dipping Pond to be restored.*

### 3. FRIENDS AND FUNDRAISING

Great Dixter relies heavily on the Friends to support the many areas of work that we undertake. Some have donated £6 per month since Cristopher Lloyd died in 2006, some support our biodiversity work, others fund entire posts at Great Dixter. Whatever the level of giving – we are so grateful for their ongoing support.

We received considerable support from our many Friends overseas, in particular from North America. We continue to be grateful for their support.

The 2023 Appeal brought in £47,500. Huge thanks to Charlotte Molesworth for her beautiful design and Rosie MacCurrach for producing the screen prints.



### 4. INCLUSIVITY & COMMUNITY

Reporting on how we have achieved our Charitable Objects only tells part of the story of Great Dixter. There are other areas of work that we are proud of and are keen to continue. We

offer both work and volunteer opportunities in the garden, wider estate and house to people with a wide range of skills and experience. This is central to our approach.

As well as providing support to gardens large and small across the country we and share our knowledge with a range of smaller community groups, urban greening groups, pocket park leaders and horticultural societies across the country.

People often ask about our work with the Community. It begs the question “what is meant by community?” Community to Great Dixter is so broad. It extends to the former friends of Christopher Lloyd, horticulturalists from across the world, students of horticulture both past and present. It refers to be numerous people who come from across the country to help us run the plant fairs, it is the nurserymen and women who attend. It is the people in the village and surrounding area who we employ, who volunteer for us, who are our suppliers. It is the keen amateur gardeners who visit over and over again from across the UK and beyond, it is the small horticultural societies across the country to whom Fergus lectures. It is the people who are trying to replicate what we do in their own cities, towns, villages and gardens. It is also anyone in this field who we try to help. It is the tremendous group of people who are our Friends and donors. Where we use the expression the “Dixter Family”, others would perhaps use the word “community.”



*36 Plant Fair Autumn 2023*

## 5. BIODIVERSITY & SUSTAINABILITY AT GREAT DIXTER

The Gardens and wider estate of woodlands and meadows continue to be managed with biodiversity in mind. In the wider estate grassland management experiments continue, with different grazing, disturbance and cutting regimes creating different sward structures. Monitoring continues and new discoveries are made. Great Dixter continues to be recognised as an exceptional place for nature. The Garden and Estate Conservation Plan which was started last year is now almost complete. This will connect the biodiversity management of woodland, grassland, and gardens throughout the Estate and provide an innovative conservation vision for the future. It will inform the decisions that are made over the next 20 years. One of the first new interventions will be the introduction of conservation grazing in Great Park.

Between 2016 and 2023 over 3000 records of nearly 1200 insect species have been documented within the Great Dixter Estate. The majority of this data was collected during the Biodiversity Audit 2019, the Long-horned Bee Survey 2020, and the Meadow Bumblebee Survey 2021. A database of 2642 detailed insect records of over 700 species has been created which includes high quality plant association data, habitat resource association data and location data. This data can be analysed to interpret many aspects of insect assemblages present within Great Dixter and can be visualised in complex ways using mapping software (eg QGIS).

Following a joint piece of work with *Sound Matters* a recording has been made of the Great Dixter Soundscape, highlighting the biodiversity that co-exists with the people who work here. This can be heard on headsets in the Great Barn.

The findings of the Biodiversity Audit and the impact of Fergus Garrett's lectures have had significant influence both nationally and internationally. Practice is changing throughout the horticultural world as a result of Great Dixter and other like-minded people and organisations. The message has not only been influential but has brought a new dimension and richness to our gardening life.

In 2023 we conducted an audit of our carbon emissions. The information gained from this work is being used to inform decisions across the Trust. Great Dixter puts protecting the environment and working towards sustainability at the centre of its work – this informs the way we manage our estate and gardens and the decisions we make. Great Dixter and its nursery has gardened peat free since 2007, it grows the majority of its plants, collects its own seed, has a no burn policy, makes over 20 tonnes of compost a year, waters sparingly using borehole water, uses as much of its wood for building, manages its woodland in a sustainable regenerative way, uses sustainable heating techniques, recycles and reuses widely through the estate.

Soil underpins all growth and gardening. Healthy soil creates healthy biodiversity and Great Dixter demonstrates this association. In 2023 we started to bring in compost for the garden from a new source. We now use bio-digestate from a local farm to mulch the beds throughout the ornamental garden.



*37 Dixter Garden Team holding the warm pipes full of digestate liquid*

## 6. THE NURSERY, SHOP & LOGGIA

Approximately 25% of Great Dixter's income is raised through the shop, loggia and nursery.

The Nursery provides mostly home propagated, peat free plants. It is a place of training for the Nursery Apprentice and the staff contribute to the teaching programme as well as to the various Friends' events.

The majority of plants sold are raised in the Nursery from garden stock. Christopher Lloyd recognised "the joy of doing things oneself" and the nursery staff continue to do everything by hand, using traditional propagation techniques of sowing seeds, cuttings and division.

Approximately 80% of plants used in the garden are produced at Great Dixter.

Following a refurbishment in the winter of 2023 the Loggia opened its shutters with a new manager, team and menu. Very good reviews have been received this year for the quality of the food. We are aware that facilities remain somewhat limited and are exploring options to improve this in the future.



*38 Loggia staff*

The Shop aims to provide locally sourced items alongside some specialist gardening accessories which appeal to the keen gardener.

## 7. Other News from 2023/24

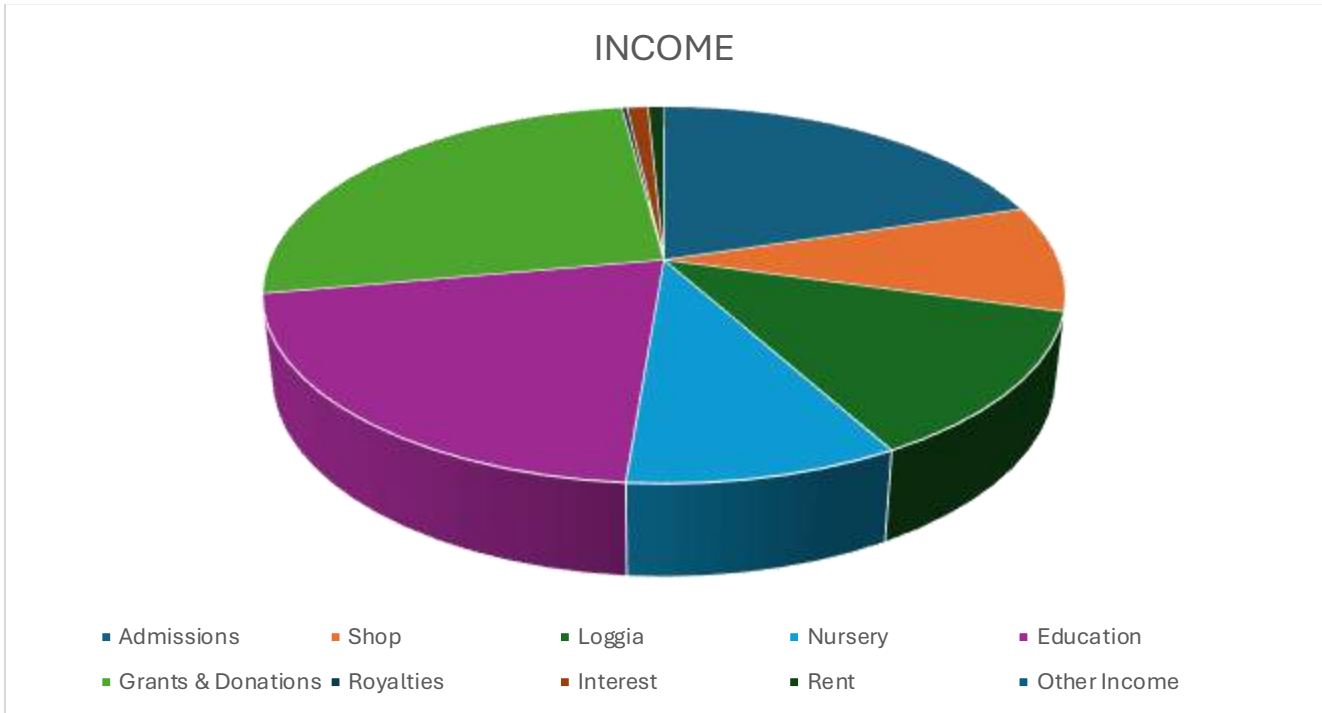


39 *Gardeners Question Time. Front Row: Juliette Sergeant, Matt Biggs, Kathy Clugston, Fergus Garrett, Matthew Pottage*

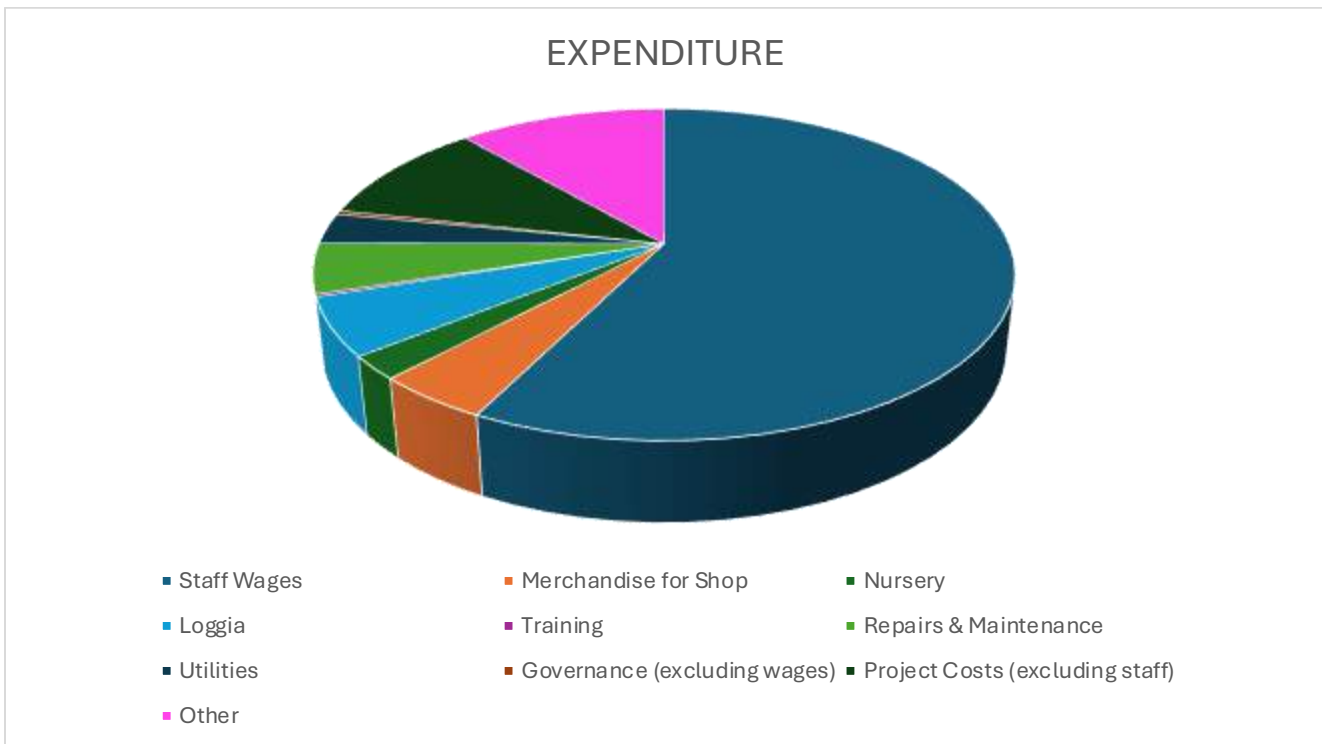


40 *All hands on board to create wreaths for sale at the 2023 Christmas Fair*

## 8. OUR INCOME AND HOW IT IS SPENT



Total Income: £2,220,563



Total Expenditure: £2,166,601

The full accounts can be seen [here](#).

## 9. Working at Great Dixter



*41 Annual Staff Photo February 2024. Photo: Phil Harrison*

This photograph is just a snapshot. It does not include the many volunteers and seasonal staff who help us when we are open to the public.

A big thank you to everyone who has supported Great Dixter this year and allowed us to continue our work.

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