



Great Dixter House

Merlin Report

Two weeks volunteering in Great Dixter Nurseries from 4th-15th September and 18th September at Zophian Plants Nursery.

Great Dixter Nursery was started by Christopher Lloyd in 1954, selling plants he deemed 'garden-worthy'. They remain a small, professional nursery run alongside Great Dixter House and Gardens.

Now run as a charitable trust led by Head Gardener Fergus Garrett (a former pupil of Christopher Lloyd), the 'organised chaos' of their planting style is endlessly fascinating and there is always something new to learn about the way they layer and combine plants. I had learnt more about the garden by reading 'Dear Friend and Gardener', a series of letters between 'Christo' and Beth Chatto and the Well-Tempered Gardener by Christopher Lloyd, who was a prolific and knowledgeable garden writer.

I first visited Great Dixter in July 2022 to attend a class in Successional Planting with Head Gardener Fergus Garrett. Since then I have volunteered at their Working Weekend in January 2023, helping gardeners prepare for the new season and at the Plant Fair in April 2023. Each time I visited, I was struck by how friendly and open the team were, how they encourage learning and are keen to help people from all backgrounds into Horticulture.

I have recently embarked on a career change, completing RHS Level 2 at Shipley and Craven College while working in Administration. I am delighted to report that I have recently received confirmation that I have passed and completed my RHS Level 2 Diploma.

As someone whose background is working in Customer Service and Administration for over 15 years, I was very keen to boost my practical horticulture experience. After speaking to Great Dixter Nursery Manager, Michael Morphy, I was offered the chance to return and spend time learning from the Great Dixter Nursery team.

The plan was to spend two weeks working alongside the Great Dixter Nursery team learning their methods of propagation, mixing their own compost, plant care, collecting plant material for cuttings and seed collection. The nursery grows plants for sale and to be used in the Great Dixter garden planting. Most of the plants are propagated from plants grown on site.

Whilst there, I was offered the chance to spend the day at Zophian Plants Nursery, so I extended my trip by two days.



Great Dixter Nursery

Day 1- Monday 4th September



Great Dixter Nursery

I was shown round the Nursery by Michael Morphy and introduced to the Nursery team, Shaun Blower, Ros Crowhurst, Daniel James and Jamie Todd. The Nursery also has part time staff members Nigel and Emma and many regular volunteers.

The Nursery is on a relatively small site, within Great Dixter garden next to the Shop and Loggia Cafe. There are 3 small greenhouses used for propagation- a Sunken glasshouse, Hot Glasshouse and a Cold Glasshouse. Plants are then moved to a series of brick and glass cold frames to grow on. They also have stock beds at the far end of the garden where new varieties can be trialled.

The 'engine room' of the Nursery is the Potting Shed where the compost, also known as 'Dixter Gold' is created. It also houses the tools for the garden team.

The main components in this compost are Loam (turf dug up onsite and stacked and mixed with green compost, then sterilised at 80°C), bought Peat Free Compost, Composted Bark and Horticultural Grit. (Slow release fertiliser-Osmocote is added according to the final use).

There are 3 main types used by the Nursery team-

1. Seed Compost
2. Potting Compost
3. Pot Displays (on the moist side to prevent moisture being taken from the plant)

Plastic pots are used in the Nursery but are reused when plants are potted on. The pots are not sterilised as the plants are all grown 'hard' in unheated units, making them strong, healthy and more resistant to pests and diseases.

Potting is done in a shed that doubles up as the Nursery shop. A historic building with low wooden beams, never has the phrase 'Duck or Grouse' been more appropriate!

On my first day I potted up some *Geranium Wallichianum* 'Havana Blues' ready for sale and was shown how to print labels. Finding the correct Genus, Species and sometimes Cultivar name as well as the correct pot size to ensure the pricing is correct. I was shown how to record plants on the stocktake system as well as recording the location using the bed map in the stock book.



Shaun Blower giving a cuttings demo



Daniel James giving a seed sowing demo

The nursery team were hosting a propagation workshop as part of a 'Behind the Scenes' tour at the Garden. I watched Shaun Blower give a demonstration of Cuttings including Nodal and Internodal cuttings. He used a plastic bag to keep the cuttings moist as well as using a plastic tub of water to sit the cuttings in before potting.

Cuttings were taken from plants growing around the nursery including *Salvia bullulata* for nodal cuttings and *Geum* 'Heterton Primrose' for basal cuttings. He also explained why the Nursery team now pot Clematis cuttings in pure Perlite as they had previously used bark, but the cuttings had mostly rotted off with it being more moisture retentive.

Daniel James demonstrated Seed Sowing, mentioning that seed is often collected and sown fresh from the garden. This is especially important for plants from the Apiaceae and Ranunculaceae family as their seed doesn't stay viable for long. He used the traditional wooden Great Dixter seed trays still used since the 1950's and showed how the tray is filled, tamped and how to evenly distribute the seed.

After hours, we visited a former Great Dixter Nursery volunteer's private garden with a really lovely use of grasses, a prairie meadow and newly planted woodland. A really lovely, busy first day!

Day 2-Tuesday 5th September



Great Dixter Peacock Garden

Today I met the new Nursery Scholar, Sam Walker and the Garden team's 4 new Scholars who will be studying and living at Great Dixter for the next year.

I was shown how to prick out seedlings of *Centranthus ruber* and plant them into modules. Jamie Todd mentioned why it was important to try to put larger seedlings in the middle and smaller seedlings on the outside, to ensure they aren't shaded out by the larger seedlings.

I potted up some *Salvia* 'Phyllis Fancy' for sale. I was shown that rather than pushing the label into the pot if you squeeze the outside it creates a gap that the label can easily be inserted into without damaging the roots, a really useful tip!

I potted on various herbaceous perennials and hardwood plants grown from cuttings including *Cornus alba* and the more unusual nettle-like *Boehmeria platanifolia* for growing on.

Each day after hours, I decided to explore a different area of the garden to look at the planting in more detail. Today I looked at the Sunken Garden and Barn Garden with its pond and planting wrapped around on different levels, which was a great way to cool down after the heat of the day.



Sunken Garden and Barn Garden



Great Dixter Barn Garden with planting that envelops you



Hydrangea aspera 'Villosa'

Day 3- Wednesday 6th September

Went on a Plant ID walk with the Nursery team led by Nursery Manager, Michael Morphy. Learned that Christopher Lloyd used to add Aluminium sulphate to the soil in the Blue Garden to make the Hydrangeas more blue!

We looked at key plantings within the garden to assess their growth habits and performance.

We made notes of plants to take cuttings or seeds from like *Tagetes* 'Cinnabar' and *Paris polyphylla*. And also took a look at the stock beds where plants are being trialled like the more unusual *Boehmeria spicata* and *Boehmeria sieboldii*.



Plant ID walk let by Michal Morphy with Shaun Blower, Sam Walker and Jamie Todd



Great Dixter Solar Garden with *Phytolacca icosandra*, *Amaranthus* 'Opopeo' and *Canna* 'General Eisenhower'

Michael discussed how we could propagate the historic Mulberry Tree by the Terrace (according to garden records over 100 years old). He advised that the best way would be a T-shaped 'mallet cutting' of a branch, but as there was limited young growth on the tree to take this from, the Nursery team will try to extract seeds from ripe fruit (if they can harvest any before the birds or peckish gardeners!).



100 year old Mulberry Tree



Tagetes 'Cinnabar'

Back in the Nursery I continued potting up hardwood cuttings including *Cornus sanguinea* and *Cestrum parqui*.

My hosts and B&B owners Linda and Michael Belton are also keen and incredibly knowledgeable gardeners with strong links to Great Dixter, often hosting students attending courses. They would often still be in the garden when I got back from the Nursery and always keen to chat, especially about plants! It was nice to catch up with them for a cup of tea and meal times. As well as providing breakfast they allowed me to use their kitchen during my stay to keep costs down.

Day 4- Thursday 7th September

There is a morning meeting each day where jobs are assigned and the team catches each other up on items on the to do list. Plants are watered and checked on in the cold frames before the Nursery opens to the public.

Continued potting up hardwood cuttings, with a mixture of shrubs, small trees and Roses, really starting to fill up the frame! I got to know the till system and made some sales for the Nursery. The team try to be as sustainable as possible, encouraging customers to bring their own bags or take their plants home in cardboard boxes (donated by local shops) to minimise plastic usage.



Hardwood cuttings cold frame filling up!

Popped over to spend my tea break with the Garden Team with Head Gardener Fergus Garrett, Deputy Head Gardener Coralie Thomas and Gardener Michael Wachter. Really good to have a catch up with people I've got to know over the past year, many of whom have now become friends.



The Exotic Garden- full of exciting combinations like Hedychium and Roses

Another hot day, so I explored the Exotic Garden (former Rose Garden) after hours. Large palms, towering Musa basjoo and an under story with an unusual mix of tropical plants like Hedychiums, woodland plants like Schefflera delavayi and Pines. Combined to make a twisting collision of shapes that needs to be pushed through, but surprisingly calming with predominantly green hues.

Day 5- Friday 8th September

Walking the 20 minutes along the country roads to Great Dixter each day has been a lovely start to the day. I've enjoyed seeing the changing countryside and taking advantage of the blackberries still lining the hedgerows as a cheeky snack on my walks.

Today I learnt about taking nodal and internodal cuttings from Salvia 'Blue Enigma' from Jamie Todd in the Nursery Team. I removed the tips and lower leaves, making cuttings approximately 7cm long. The pots are crammed full, partly due to limited space in the greenhouses and also due to the microclimate created around the plants creating better conditions for growing and rooting.



Salvia Cuttings

I learned the technique for making and mixing the compost used in the Nursery from Ros Crowhurst and Shaun Blower. Loam made from stacked turf dug up on site mixed with green compost from one of several massive compost heaps is rotivated, sieved and then loaded into a steriliser and heated to 80°C for around 1 hour. This is to kill any weeds, pests and diseases.

It is then mixed with Peat Free Compost, Composted Bark and Horticultural Grit. (Slow release fertiliser-Osmocote is added according to the final use). In order to mix this together evenly the mixture is dug using spades then 'thrown' against a sheet of plastic where it falls down and combines evenly. This is then repeated while the mixture is moved into its final pile, wetted as it is mounded up to ensure it doesn't dry out.



Ros Crowhurst and Shaun Blower mixing compost



Loam before being sterilised



The first mix- Layers visible



The final mix, wetted and ready for use

After all this physical work it was lovely to have a trip to the beach and pub in Hastings with the Nursery and Garden team.

Day 6- Saturday 9th September

Alongside some of the Nursery and Garden team, I entered the Northiam Horticultural Society show. This is the village where Great Dixter is located and the garden has strong links to the society, Head Gardener Fergus Garrett is the President. Great Dixter students and staff often give talks there and help out with events.



Naciim Benkreira, Shaun Blower and Jamie Todd hard at work on their show entries!



My attempt at a mini arrangement



Jamie Todd's entry with a lovely Dahlia merkii



The hall and some of the entries



Delighted with my first ever show win!

Several of us made a miniature bouquet (which had to be exactly 6 inches in height, 4 inches wide and 4 inches deep, a tricky task!), 3 Dahlias and a Seed head (a giant Fennel-*Ferula glauca*). The others also entered flower arrangements and the estates team entered vegetables, including a Giant Pumpkin.

My hosts Linda and Michael Belton entered and won so many categories they qualified for an RHS medal! Two of my entries, the Dahlias and Seedhead won and Shaun won with a lovely cut flower arrangement. As this was my first time entering a horticultural show I was thrilled and bought the team good biscuits with the prize money to celebrate!

It was great to see the other entries, spend time with the other gardeners and meet people from the village. We helped pack the tables down and clear up afterwards.



Pumpkin entries vs the ultimate winner- took 2 men to carry it out in a wheelbarrow!

Day 7- Sunday 10th September

I took a day off to go and visit Hastings. I spent the day visiting the beach and museums like the Hastings Fishermen's Museum and the Shipwreck Museum.





Hastings Trip

From a local fisherman, I learned about Copal, a hardened resin from the *Protium copal* tree, endemic to Mexico and Central America where it was used as incense. In the 18th-20th century it was imported to be used as an ingredient in wood varnish and still washes up occasionally from shipwrecks. It can be mistaken for Amber, which is fossilised tree resin, many millions of years old whereas Copal is much younger. Lovely to have a chance to get to know the history of the area and have an ice cream on the beach!



Great Dixter Long Border full of colour

Day 8- Monday 11th September



Shaun Blower with a bag full of cuttings



Grevillea 'Canberra Gem'

Went round the garden taking cuttings material with Shaun and Sam. It's important to do this in the morning before the heat of the day so the cuttings material retains its turgidity.

We put the cuttings in bags individually labelled to save any difficulties with identification when potting. Shaun helped Sam and I identify where to take the cuttings from on each plant, for example *Syringa lancia* (cut leaf Lilac) to take the long 'whippy' extension growth.

We then went back to the shed to pot up the cuttings including Grevillea 'Canberra Gem'. The lower leaves were stripped and the cuttings inserted into a litre pot filled with gritty cuttings compost until the pot was full.

The cuttings were kept in a pot of water and misted to avoid them drying out. On the label we listed the name, collection date and number of cuttings. They were put into cold frames until rooted next Spring.

The cold frames at Great Dixter are slightly unusual in that they are double layered, with two glass panes to retain warmth. These are vented each day when the plants can be watered and assessed, with any dead plant matter removed. Plants eventually move out to the sales beds that are still sheltered but open.



Volunteer George



Christopher Lloyd Scholar- Talitha Slabbert

The garden team were busy cutting the last of the meadows in the Topiary Garden, it has been interesting to see the changes in the garden, even over a few short days. Removing the softness of the meadow grass leaves the shapes of the topiary more defined.



Lunch with the Great Dixter Nursery Team and volunteers

We had a great lunch break where Nursery trainee Sam had brought in a lovely homemade cake. Talented as a baker and a gardener!

We had some cut flowers left over from material cut for the Horticulture show so Naciim, Emma and I made some flower arrangements for the shop and Loggia cafe. Having not done much flower arranging before it's been great to experiment and learn.



Naciim and my arrangement in the brown vase

Day 9- Tuesday 12th September

Went round the garden with the Nursery team collecting seeds. Led by Nursery Manager, Michael, we collected seed from the Long Border including *Persicaria orientalis*, which has been much in demand from customers! An annual plant with a long flowering season of cerise pink flowers from late Summer to Autumn and an impressive height of around 1.5m it is certainly a stand out. Once the seed is released the tepals are retained keeping the colourful display going. We collected several trays of seeds and put them on paper in trays to dry in the cold frames.



Nursery Manager Michael Morphy



The Nursery Team



Great Dixter Long Border

The Long Border is well known as an impressive example of 'successional planting', with a mixture of perennials, shrubs and annuals providing a display all year round. The planting combinations that are changed each year, providing a constant source of inspiration and interest. One of my favourites was the delicate crepe paper-like Cosmos 'Cupcake' popping up in between a Pinus mugo.



Long border combinations, including Cosmos 'Cupcake' and Agastache 'Blackadder'

After the usual morning tea, we had a seed sowing demonstration by Ros Crowhurst. Most seed was sown in traditional wooden seed trays, these were overfilled with seed compost, then 'sawn' across with the tamping board at an angle, starting from the middle of the tray and working outwards then repeated at the other end. The compost was tamped down to ensure the seed was in good contact with the soil. Seed was sown thickly and is normally sown as soon as possible after collection. Covered in a thin, sieved layer of soil, then grit before being 'mouse proofed' with wire covers that are attached over each seed tray and pot.



Ros Crowhurst giving a seed sowing demo Seed trays ready for mouse proofing

I processed seed from *Ferula tingitana* 'Cedric Morris', which had been collected earlier from an iconic 1m tall plant used in the Peacock Garden. Also, *Alstromeria ligulata*, which involved cracking the hard seed pods between my thumb and finger onto paper to release the seed.



***Ferrula tingitana* 'Cedric Morris'**

In the afternoon I visited the Green Woodworking Team to learn about making the Sweet Chestnut hurdles used around the garden as traditional plant supports and other garden tools. The wood is coppiced from the wider Great Dixter Estate and processed in a traditional manner. The wood is split using a draw knife then planed to the required shape using a shave horse. The ends are cut using a tenon cutter to allow each piece to be easily slotted together. Ladders are made using a single piece of Sweet Chestnut that is carefully split. The skilled team, including regular volunteers make everything from tables to rakes for use around the garden, with smaller pieces sold in the shop.



Simon splitting the wood



Some of the handmade items on display



One of the chestnut hurdles in action in the borders



A very tame Robin in Topiary Garden barn

Day 10-Wednesday 13th September

Potted perennials for sale, including Chrysanthemum 'Dixter Orange' with warm orange flowers and dark leaves with a grey green underside, a really lovely plant.

Potted up *Ferrula communis* root cuttings from modules, also known as 'Giant Fennel' these will hopefully reach around 3 metres tall!



Ferrula communis roots



The heated greenhouse

Today, we had a visit by former Great Dixter Gardener and Nurseryman, Dean Charlton. Recently returned to his home town of Rotherham, South Yorkshire to set up Hooten Walled Garden Nursery, it was great to hear about his new venture and to see how supportive the Great Dixter team are of their alumni.

Attended a talk at a local community centre by Dean about 'Guerilla Gardening' about his endeavours to green up neglected local spaces and the positive impact this can have on the wider community, such as reducing littering and anti-social behaviour.

As well as using seed and making use of cheaper/donated plants he applied many of the principles taught at Great Dixter around succession. For example, planting Crocus to be followed by Narcissus Tete-a-tete, N. Jetfire, then later flowering N. Thalia followed by Camassia leichtlinii. As well as providing a long season of flowering interest he found that this discourages local council contractors from strimming/mowing until later in the season. If this is then seeded with a wild flower mix, providing a more diverse planting for insects and wildlife. We were left urged to "Fight the filth with forks and flowers", a fun informative evening!

Day 11-Thursday 14th September



Hesperantha coccinea



Glimpse of the Exotic Garden from the Nursery

We were treated again at tea time to Sam's baking with some delicious cookies! Tea times are a great chance for the team to relax and catch up without the pressures of work, although the potting shed is also a really fun, chatty place to be.

We were joined by Symposium attendees, many of who travel from the USA for a week long learning programme in the garden. Shaun gave a demonstration on cuttings, including taking 'heel' cuttings of Rosa 'Chanel' and Clerodendrum trichotomum var. fargesii from roots cuttings. We learnt that the Clerodendrum is from the Lamiaceae or 'Mint' family and so roots readily from any part of the stem.

The cuttings compost mix used is very gritty and contains no fertiliser as the cutting doesn't require any nutrients for root growth. The mix is made of 4 parts Horticultural Grit, 1 part Sterilised Loam, 1 part Composted Bark for good drainage. The cuttings are watered from above once to settle the soil, then placed on a heat bench (covered in gravel), after which they are watered from below to avoid disturbance and encourage strong root growth.

We learned about taking leaf cuttings of Eucomis comosa, Shaun explained that only the bottom produces a bulbil. The leaves are cut into sections using a knife, planted into a shallow tray of cuttings compost to avoid rotting by making a line half an inch deep then inserting the cutting. When potting on put the plant half way up to raise the roots away from the bottom of the pot to avoid rotting.



Eucomis Cuttings on the heat bench

Nursery Manager, Michael gave a seed sowing demonstration. He started by talking about the science behind seed germination, including hard seed coats and chemical inhibitors to germination. After filling the pots and tamping down, he sowed some *Paeonia* seeds starting round the edge of the pot. Then tamping the seed down to bring them level with the pot then gently sieving soil on top followed by grit slightly proud of the pot.

For small seeds Michael tamped down the pot a bit more, then mixed the seed with sand. Divided into two, then pinching between finger and thumb sow over half the pot, turn the pot 90° then continue. Add a layer of grit to act as a mulch and avoid drying out.

I finished up the day potting up more plants for sale, including *Ampelopsis brevipedunculata* variegata.

Day 12-Friday 15th September

Started the day watering the cold frames and potting up *Aloysia triphylla*, (Lemon Verbena) positioning it next to the paths so people could enjoy the lovely smell when they brushed past the plants.

Watched Shaun and Sam do a *Eucomis* experiment, growing leaf cuttings in different substrates, some in cuttings compost and some in pure grit.

Sam and I began processing the *Persicaria orientalis* seed collected earlier this week. All the seed at Great Dixter is processed by hand and this one proved a little tricky!



Jamie Todd processing *Persicaria orientalis* seed, a full tray of dried seed



Sam Walker processing *Persicaria orientalis* seed Seed with its outercoat removed

We were shown by Jamie and Ros how to rub the seed firmly between our palms, developing friction to remove the seed coat, we then sieved it. This was repeated several times until the black shiny seed was released. The seed is then sent to be packaged and sold in the shop and online. The Great Dixter Nursery remains open over Winter (the Garden is closed from November-March) and also processes orders for plants and seed via the online store.

As this was my last day I said goodbye to the team, we were treated to a chippy tea by the generous Michael Morphy. I then stayed in the gardens until twilight with some of the garden team. Seeing the sunset from the Terrace was a lovely and slightly emotional end to my time at Great Dixter.



Great Dixter High Garden and Peacock Garden



Cosmos 'Cupcake'



Gardeners in the Orchard



The Long Border at Dusk has an almost painterly quality to it



Bedding combinations with Tagetes 'Giant Orange' a stand out. Last View of the Nursery

Day 13 and 14-Saturday 16th and Sunday 17th September



Rye Town crier



Lovely Arbutus unedo in the church yard

Unfortunately being reliant on public transport has its downsides and an attempt to get to National Trust, Smallhythe on Saturday was scuppered by buses failing to show up. Instead I spent the rest of the day in Rye with some of the garden team.

My B&B hosts were going on holiday on Sunday, so I moved accommodation to Rye. The rain showers were torrential so instead of a planned trip to Rye Nature Reserve to look at wildflowers I went to National Trust, Lamb House. Former home of writer Henry James (who did much of his writing in the Garden Room) and writers E.F Benson (Mapp and Lucia) and Rumer Godden (Black Narcissus). Thankfully the rain abated long enough for a walk around the walled garden which, though small, had an impressive collection of mature shrubs and cherry trees. It also coincided with some village celebrations for the start of an Arts Festival with drummers and the Town Crier.



National Trust- Lamb House with Dahlia 'David Howard'

Day 15- Monday 18th September- Zophian Plants Nursery



Toby Shuall showing me round the Nursery

I extended my visit after an invitation to visit Toby Shuall at Zophian Plants Nursery, who I met through his stall on plant fairs at Great Dixter and Charleston Festival of the Garden.

Formerly a carpenter living in London, Toby is a self taught plantsman who built his home nursery in Battle, East Sussex just 3 years ago, but has already built an impressive reputation in the gardening community.

Specialising in drought tolerant plants, unusual Mediterranean and Eastern European species and with an impressive collection of Shrub Phlomis. Toby takes inspiration from the experiments of James Hitchmough, Oliver Fillipi and Peter Korn, building large sand beds where he could try out different combinations and propagate the best plants from this for sale.



Sand beds with *Lotus hirsutus*, *Scabiosa hymettia* and *Phlomis chrysophylla*

He showed me around the Nursery and stock beds, talking me through some of the more unusual plants, like *Lotus hirsutus* and lovely low growing *Scabiosa hymettia*. The sand beds are a mix of $\frac{2}{3}$ Sand and $\frac{1}{3}$ Leca (Expanded Clay Balls) with added homemade Biochar.



Stipa Ichu



Gallardia 'Firecracker'

We collected seed from *Stipa ichu*, a lovely smaller, more delicate grass than other *Stipa* varieties like *Stipa tenuissima*. Cuttings and seed are grown in the greenhouse, then planted out or potted up for sale or as stock plants. There were many unusual forms and varieties in the garden, which are not commonly available in cultivation like *Silphium terebinthinaceum* (Prairie Dock) and a rare *White Perovskia atriplicifolia*.



Sand bed inc *Euphorbia cornigera* 'Goldener Turm'



Green house with *Verbascum*, *Euphorbia* and *Cynara cardunculus* seedheads

He told me of his plan to make a garden made up of around 1/3 Shrub Phlomis along the principles of Piet Oudolf. These plants are evergreen and can be hardy, but prefer a more sheltered spot and free draining soil. Despite this year's wet Summer the plants were all performing well.



Phlomis viridiflora

Toby explained that the plants grown in sand often have longer, healthier root systems than plants grown in compost. This is because with compost, much of the nutrients are available to plants near the surface leading to shallow rooting. In sand the roots need to grow further to reach water and nutrients, these plants are often healthier and hardier.



Checking Silphium for seed



Persicaria orientalis and Eupatorium cannabinum

It was great to compare the style of planting at Zophian to Great Dixter, as Toby also allows plants to self seed and is keen to try new things. He has spent time in the Great Nursery learning some of their techniques but has also developed his own methods. As a small, one man Nursery Toby explained that he had to be selective with the plants he grows, choosing only plants that are garden worthy, with an eye for more unusual and less readily available forms.

Toby was very generous with his time, (especially as his Nursery is also the family home) and his enthusiasm for Dry Garden planting and plants in general is infectious. I was inspired to learn more and he recommended Oliver Filippi's book *The Dry Gardening Handbook* as a good place to start.

This visit has inspired me to spend time visiting other nurseries and gardens to learn more about different techniques and how they adapt to their individual growing environments.

Conclusion



Great Dixter Nursery

I really enjoyed my time at Great Dixter Nursery and day spent at Zophian Plants and I am very grateful to the Merlin Trust for funding this opportunity.

I was hoping to gain more practical experience working in a Nursery using traditional methods (which are sadly becoming harder to find among the more common commercial nurseries). I had little experience of propagation outside of college study and self-teaching so it was great to spend time watching the Great Dixter Nursery team and being given a chance to practise tasks, like taking cuttings. The team was incredibly supportive and friendly, as I was initially nervous about my lack of experience. They also seemed to enjoy sharing their knowledge as well as seeing my progress and growing confidence.

I put my previous customer service experience to good use making sales and interacting with customers. It was a relief, though, to have garden walks to give me a chance to test and develop my Plant ID skills and learn more about the plants. The feedback I received from the team and Nursery Manager Michael Morphy was really positive and I am very grateful to them for taking the time to help me. It was also great fun getting to know everyone and spending time in such a remarkably beautiful garden.

Visiting Zophian Plants was a great chance to compare different styles of growing with Great Dixter and learn more about a new pallet of Dry Garden plants. Although gardening in sand seems to have caught the recent zeitgeist, plantsmen like Peter Korn, James Hitchmough and John Little have been experimenting with these techniques for many years. Toby Shuall at Zophian is using these examples to further his own trials to grow plants that can adapt to our changing climate. It has inspired me to do more research and visit other nurseries to learn from different growing environments and techniques.

In the future I plan to return to Great Dixter for a longer stay with the Nursery and Garden team. The Nursery does a great job of teaching traditional growing techniques and ensuring they are carried into the future. This trip was a great chance to build strong links with the garden and develop my knowledge. I hope to continue practising these skills and sharing them with others.

Since this trip I have decided to take a break from formal studies to learn traditional land skills and try to gain more practical experience while applying for gardening jobs. I have been hedgelaying Hawthorn using traditional methods and next year will be doing more tree pruning with local Co-operative Fruitworks, tree planting and hoping to try dry stone walling.

I have continued volunteering at the Hepworth Gallery Garden, been on a garden visit to Yorkshire Arboretum with a team of gardeners and Hooten Walled Garden Nursery run by former Great Dixter Nurseryman, Dean Charlton. Although still working part time in my office job, I am determined to leave this as soon as practicable to pursue a career in Horticulture.

Costs-

Table of Costs	Sunday 3rd-Tuesday 19th September
Accommodation- Northiam (14 Nights- 3rd-16th September)	£420.00
Accommodation-Rye (2 Nights- 17th-19th September)	£175.00
Train Fare-Saltaire-Rye	£59.50
Train Fare- Rye-Saltaire	£59.50
Taxi-Rye-Northiam	£25.00
Taxi- Northiam-Rye	£25.00
Bus- Northiam-Hastings Bus- Hastings-Northiam	£2.00 £2.00
Bus- Northiam-Rye Bus- Rye- Northiam	£2.00 £2.00
Train-Rye-Bexhill on Sea Train-Bexhill on Sea-Rye	£9.60 Day Return (Zophian Plants-got lift from and returned to station)
Food (including eating out)	£227.49
Total Spend	£1,009.09
Total Grant-Merlin	£1,0000.00