

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

GREAT DIXTER

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**GREAT DIXTER**

Name:	GREAT DIXTER
County:	East Sussex
District:	Rother (District Authority)
Parish:	Northiam
label.localisation:	Latitude: 50.996498 Longitude: 0.59206834 National Grid Reference: TQ 81987 25098 <a href="#">Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)</a>
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: I List Entry Number: 1000736 Date first listed: 25-Mar-1987

## Details

A C20 garden with a formal framework by Sir Edwin Lutyens in 1911, with subsequent modifications and additions and continuous development of outstanding planting by Mr and Mrs Nathaniel Lloyd and Christopher Lloyd.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The manor of Dixter is first mentioned in 1220. The earliest part of the present house dates from the mid C15 and was probably built by Sir Thomas Etchingham. The property passed through various families until the house, immediate grounds and farm buildings were purchased by Nathaniel Lloyd in 1910. He commissioned Sir Edwin Lutyens (1869-1944) to restore and enlarge the house and to lay out the gardens. On Lloyd's death in 1933, the house and estate of c 182ha, including Little Dixter, was run by his widow. On her death in 1972 the estate was divided and passed to her four extant children and a grandson. Subsequent to a further division, Great Dixter and its gardens passed to her son, Christopher Lloyd, and a grand-daughter. They remain (1998) in private ownership.

### DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Great Dixter lies c 0.5km west of the main A28 Tenterden to Hastings road, on the western edge of the village of Northiam. The registered site of 2ha is bounded by open pale fencing along the lane running north-west from Northiam village. North-west of the lane and to the west and south, the garden merges into, and has views over, surrounding wooded farmland. To the east are the gardens of adjacent, detached houses. The slope of the site, from east to west, plays a significant part in the garden layout.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The house and gardens are approached on their north-east front from the lane. The paling fence encloses a tree-planted bank which slopes down to the Horse Pond (shown established on OS 1st edition map surveyed 1872), with its waterside planting. The gardens are entered c 20m further north-west along the lane, through a timber gate in the enclosing boundary yew hedge. The visitors' car parks are sited on the north-east side of the lane and also adjacent to the western boundary of the garden.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** Great Dixter (listed grade I) sits in the centre of its gardens forming an ensemble with the barn and oast house (built c 1890) and with the compartments of the garden. The house which Nathaniel Lloyd purchased and which was

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then known as Dixter, lies at the west end of the present building, the Great Hall, solar, porch and porch room above surviving from the C15. Between 1910 and 1912 Sir Edwin Lutyens added a wing to the east side and also, to the south-east, the Hall House, (c 1500), moved to Dixter from Benenden. The house was renamed Great Dixter.

GARDENS Lutyens' framework for the gardens (a plan exists at Great Dixter, dated 1911) was designed to be enjoyed as a series of contrasting compartments, linked by various of his typical devices of steps and archways. Previously the site consisted of various fenced enclosures and a collection of detached farm buildings, surrounding the original house, which Lutyens incorporated into the garden layout.

On the north-east, entrance front, a central paved path leads to the house through a rectangular compartment enclosed by yew hedges and laid to grass managed as a meadow garden. In front of the north wing of the house is the Solar Garden with regularly changing plantings. Halfway along the meadow garden, between the entrance gate and the house, a path leads off northwards, through an arch cut in the yew hedge, into the Sunk and Barn Garden. This is enclosed by the barn and oast house (listed grade II\*) on the north-west side and by the stables (now the garages and listed grade II) on the north-east. The Sunk Garden, created by Nathaniel Lloyd from a former lawn in 1923, contains a central octagonal pool set in a rectangle of York stone paving with prolific planting of creeping, sun-loving plants. The paving is surrounded by a low, stone retaining wall, a narrow bank of grass and a perimeter path with mixed borders on either side. Fig trees growing against the wall of the stables are part of Lutyens' original planting.

To the south-west, steps lead through an archway in the enclosing wall of the Sunk Garden down into the rectangular Wall Garden, which is completely enclosed by brick walls. A rectangle of lawn is surrounded on all four sides by mixed borders. A flagstone path runs close to the wall along the north-east side, then passes beneath an archway in the south-east wall and down a double flight of both curved and angled steps into a small garden at the north-west corner of the house. Its central path is flanked by topiary yews at its western end and by the open Loggia to its south-west. To its north-west are tall hedges of holm oak and beyond them, on the west boundary of the garden, is a belt of ash trees.

South-west of the holm oaks, a paved apron leads through a gap in a semicircular yew hedge onto the Topiary Lawn. Enclosed by yew hedges on the north-west and south-west sides, the lawn is set with an arrangement of free-standing yews cut into various shapes, again dating from Nathaniel Lloyd's planting from 1912 onwards. To the east, between the Topiary Lawn and the garden front of the house, is a section of dry moat known as the Upper Moat. The perimeter path around the Topiary Lawn gives access south-eastwards through the Hovel, a former cow shed, to the Exotic Garden. This garden, enclosed on its other three sides by sculptural, convex yew hedges, is divided into geometrical beds by paths, with a converted drinking tank in the centre, and is planted for late summer and autumn sub-tropical effect. It was originally laid out by Lutyens as a formal rose garden, on the site of a former cattle yard. One path leaves the garden from the south corner and leads into the Orchard, an open area of orchard trees and grass managed for a great variety of all kinds of flowering plants, notably narcissi. In summer, paths are mown through the grass. South-west of the orchard is a long pond which is a surviving section of a lower moat, probably associated with an earlier house.

A second path leads out of the east corner of the Exotic Garden to end at Lutyens' complex of triple, circular steps which give access to the south-west, garden front of the house. One of the black mulberries he planted still flanks one side of the steps. A drystone wall supports a lower terrace running along the house front, from which further steps lead to an upper terrace and into the house. South-east of the circular steps, the 70m Long Border runs from the house to the boundary of the garden. The Border faces south-west, overlooking the orchard, but is separated from it by a flagstone path and a band of mown grass. The path is terminated by a seat in a yew alcove, the present one being a replacement of one of Lutyens' original designs. The Border is now (1990s) planted with a rich, subtle mixture of shrubs, herbaceous and other plants, to give interest from April through until October.

A path bisecting the Long Border leads north-eastwards through the yew hedge at its back into the Orchard and High Gardens. These are laid out to a typical Edwardian kitchen garden design, enclosed by yew hedges and quartered by narrow, flagged paths meeting at a central square. Tall, clipped yew hedges and a flight of steps sub-divide the garden, which is planted with shrubs and fruit trees and with stock plants arranged in designed groups for use in the garden borders and nursery. An archway leads

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through the yew hedge on the north-west side of the High Garden into a further compartment which is the Peacock Topiary garden. Again quartered by paths and with a central square platform, it is planted with a dense, regular arrangement of flat-topped, pyramidal plinths of yew with clipped peacocks atop. The variety of birds was originally greater and included pheasants and fighting cocks. The double lavender hedges linking each piece have now been replaced by michaelmas daisies. The former orchard, east of the High Garden, was planted as a Prairie Garden in 1997. Outside the main compartmented garden to the west is the nursery, specialising in clematis. Great Dixter's gardens are known for their elaborate, innovative and continuously developing planting, the philosophy and details of which may be found in Christopher Lloyd's own books, such as *The Year at Great Dixter* (1987), *The Well-tempered Garden* (1970) and *The Mixed Border* (1957; 1985).

#### REFERENCES

Country Life, 33 (4 January 1913), pp 18-26; 58 (21 November 1925), pp 795-7; no 11 (17 March 1988), pp 84-9 L Weaver, *Houses and Gardens* by Sir Edwin Lutyens (1925), pp 261-72, 334 *Victoria History of the County of Sussex IX*, (1937), pp 270-1 I Nairn and N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Sussex* (1965), pp 575-6 T Wright, *Gardens of Britain* 4, (1978), pp 144-50 G Plumpton, *Collins Book of British Gardens* (1985), pp 126-7 Great Dixter, guidebook, (Great Dixter 1995) D and B Martin, *The Rape of Hastings*, Architectural Survey No 983, Northiam, Great Dixter, (nd), pp 9-11

Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: 3rd edition published 1910 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1872 2nd edition published 1909 3rd edition published 1931

Description written: July 1998 Register Inspector: VCH Edited: March 2000

#### Legal

This garden or other land is registered under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 within the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens by Historic England for its special historic interest.