

Farm rooted in Thanet

Tucked away beside Northdown Park is one of Thanet's undiscovered gems – East Northdown Farm and Gardens

Unique plant nursery

East Northdown Farm's situation on this stretch of the East Kent coast, just minutes away from Botany Bay, is ideal for Will and Louise Friend's Botany Plants family business, which takes advantage of the area's famous micro climate, growing plants from areas in the world that enjoy a Mediterranean type weather.

After graduating from Oxford, Will returned to the farm that has been in the family for centuries, and began to build a botanical collection, which now has more than 3,000 plant varieties maintained in the gardens and nursery. The family also owns a second nursery and business centre in the conservation village of Muckleston on the borders of Staffordshire, Cheshire and Shropshire.

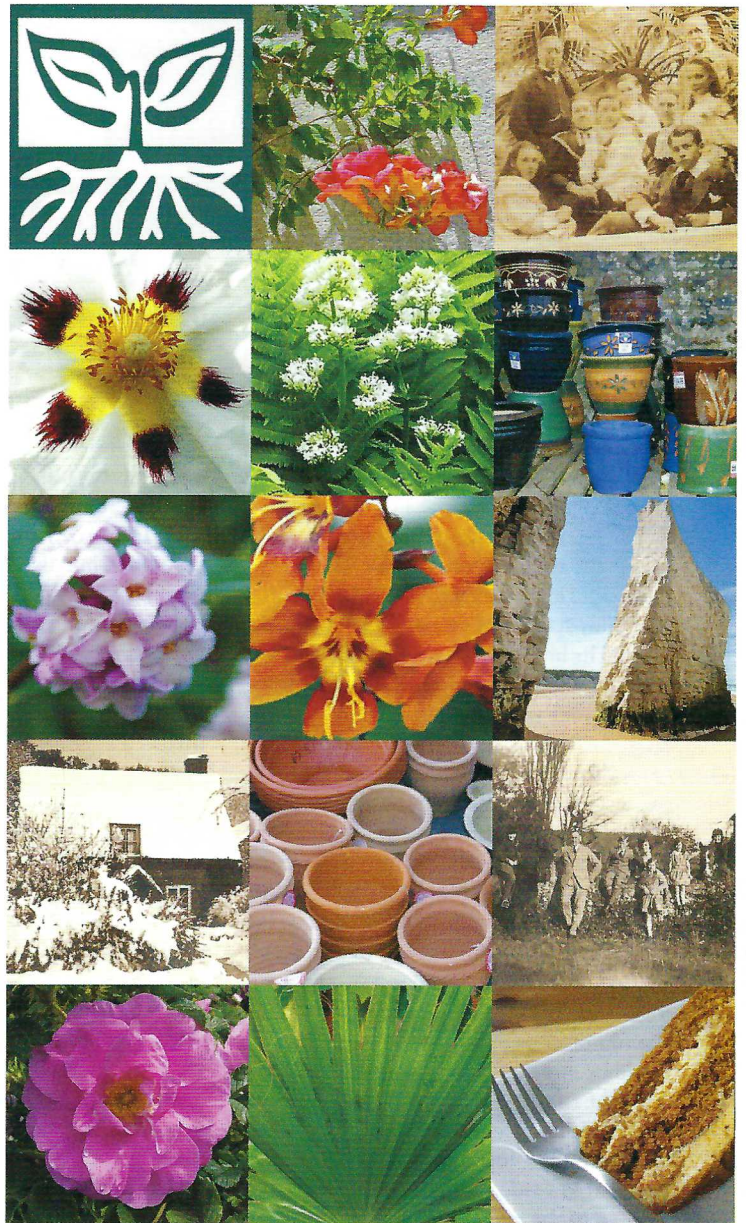
In Thanet, the Friends propagate plants from stock plants in the gardens that thrive in the local chalk soil, with low rainfall and drying salty winds, including many tender seaside plants, while their nursery in the West Midlands specialises in a complementary range of plants

better suited to the cooler, wetter, more acidic conditions of the north and west of Britain, including pond, meadow and ericaceous plants. This, combined with a full range of bedding, veg and 'old fashioned' conservatory plants, means Botany Plants offers a uniquely comprehensive range of garden plants suited to the different growing conditions across the country.

In the community

East Northdown Farm's Business Centre serves as a community hub, offering affordable premises to an ever-growing range of small local businesses, groups and charities.

Visitors to the nursery can also enjoy a delicious light lunch or tea and cake in Taddy's Barn tearoom, named after Will's grandfather. The tearoom is a community project with local business partnership 'The Looking Ahead Project', providing valuable skills and learning support for young adults with special learning needs, who gather work experience in both the tearoom and the plant nursery. ●



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Family rooted in Thanet

Will's family is 'well rooted' in the area and the name Friend, which means 'strange', is said to date back to when the Jutes settled in Thanet in the 6th century. However, the story starts with the Tomlins, a family first recorded at Northdown in the 14th century. Two brothers disputed the inheritance of a field at Botany Bay. Unusually, the ruling went in favour of the younger brother, reflecting the local 'Jutish' tradition of *Gavelkind* (equal to each child), rather than the usual Norman law of *Prima Genitor* (to the first born). The tradition of *Gavelkind* resulted in many small owner-occupied farms, farmed

by the 'Yeomen of Kent' rather than by large country estates. The land at Northdown was repeatedly broken up between siblings, then re-amalgamated by marriage of cousins or death of uncles and aunts with no children. The Estate reached its heyday with James Taddy Friend.

Taddy was only five, when his father, George Friend, passed away. He grew up at East Northdown Farmhouse with his mother Ann (née Tomlin), and across the lane from his grandparents. He and his mother bought Northdown House in the 1840s and extended it into a large country house. Today,

the property is owned by Your Leisure and is open as a venue for functions.

Taddy kept an estate fishing boat in a boat house at 'Friend's Gap' near Foreness point, which was dismantled and rebuilt in the stackyard at East Northdown in about 1900. Local fishermen still refer to the run of water off Palm Bay between the Foreness and Margate Harbour as 'Taddy's Hole (or Haul)'. This is where the nets were dropped for a last run in to home if the catch had been a bit thin. In the late 1980s, the boathouse doors were salvaged once again and incorporated into

'Taddy's Barn', the Nursery Barn and tearoom.

If you're a visitor enjoying the beautiful golden beaches and bays of Thanet, then the Gardens of East Northdown Farm make a wonderful place to repair to from the open elements of the seaside. Wander through vibrant, scented gardens, browse the selection of unusual plants at the nursery, and refresh yourself with tea and homemade cake at Taddy's Barn Tearoom.

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