



Trustees' Annual Report for 2024/25

The year, which runs from April 2024 to the end of March 2025, has been successful and enjoyable but saddened by losses. As always, it has been a joy to see our members at our events and talks.

I can only reiterate my message from last year that we could not do what we do without the support from the members and the dedication of the Trustees. I would like to thank the owners of the gardens for their generosity and hospitality in arranging for us to visit. Thank you to all our speakers who have been happy to share their research and knowledge with us either in a Zoom talk, at our last in person meeting at Purley Barn, or as an introduction to the gardens we visit.

It is with great sadness that I report that Dr Christina Hill Williams DL passed away in April this year. Christina was instrumental in founding the Berkshire Gardens Trust in 2008 in concert with Fiona Hope (who initially promoted the idea), Ben Viljoen and Liz Ware. Christina took the role of Chairman, which she held until 2013, heading committee meetings of the board of trustees. From 2022 she became our President until her death. A tribute to her is posted on our website. Her commitment and energy were of huge value to us and we shall miss her.

As we have already reported, Ben Viljoen, founder member and Trustee for 8 years, died just before our AGM in 2024. Fiona Hope, founder member, and Secretary and Trustee for 16 years, has now stood down as a Trustee but she remains a keen member.

Charitable Status and Governance: Our updated 2024 Membership Rules and Complaints Procedure have been posted on the website.

Finance: We have continued to run on a well-managed financial basis under the able guidance and administration of our Treasurer, Hugh Simon. I would like to thank him for his support and commitment. My thanks to Brian Tubman for carrying out the examination of the 2024/2025 accounts. BGT's current account at Lloyds Bank is up and running smoothly. We have also transferred £5,000 into our Nationwide saving account. Hugh's detailed report follows.

Future support for projects: We now have a draft strategy for giving grants, sponsorship and other support to projects which comply with our charitable purposes. In June we sponsored the En Plein Air painting competition at Windsor Castle. This is held every two years and involved 95 artists, resulting in some lovely paintings of the gardens, in particular of the Moat Gardens. We have now supported further projects in the last 6 months (as set out in the Chair's Update)

Membership: The membership decreased slightly over the year from 99 at the beginning of April 2024 to 95 at the end of the financial year. Do continue to spread the word on our wonderful trips and lectures and how important our historic parks and gardens are for our well-being, wildlife and the continuity of our valued garden and parkland history.

The new subscription rates came into force on 1 April 2025. Thank you to all of you who have renewed your membership. We have sadly lost some of our founding and less active members.

Trustees: I owe Hugh, our Treasurer and Secretary, a huge thanks for keeping our finances in order and ensuring we meet the demands of Company House and the Charity Commission. Thanks to him we enjoyed a private visit to Boxford House.

Alison Mihail remains a stalwart at coming up with new ideas, making new contacts, in particular with those who manage the Great Park at Windsor, Windsor Castle and the Royal Gardens at Windsor (as set out in the Chair's Update), and ensuring that we have our usual range of refreshments at Purley Barn.

Michelle Leek has been a Trustee now for two and a half years. Michelle has kindly taken over writing the minutes for both our meetings and the AGM.

Sian Thomas has also been a Trustee for two and a half years. Regrettably Sian offered her resignation in August 2025 due to her many other commitments. I thank her for her very positive contribution to BGT over the past two years.

Kim Hacker remains our stalwart membership secretary, also arranging a visit to Chiswick House in April 2024.

Susan Carter was co-opted as a Trustee and onto the committee in July 2025. Susan has lived in Streatley for nearly 30 years and has been involved with local groups. Her career was in the world of PR and marketing and she was very involved with marketing and PR for the Royal County of Berkshire Show leading up to the centenary show in 2009. She has a lifelong enthusiasm for gardening and has opened her garden for the NGS. I will ask you shortly to vote on the election of Susan as a Trustee for a term of three years in accordance with the Articles of Association.

BGT now has 5 Trustees and we are actively seeking a new President.

Visits: We enjoyed five visits in 2024/2025. The first was a very informative visit to Chiswick House in April led by Ricky Pound, in rather inclement weather. In early June we had a highly successful visit to Boxford House with the kind permission of Mr and Mrs Storey, led by their leading garden designer, Meri Mower, and their Head Gardener, Penny O'Connor. In late June we were welcomed to John and Rosamund Wallinger's beautiful Gertrude Jekyll Garden at Upton Grey. In July, we had a joint visit with Oxfordshire Gardens Trust to Parmoor, Henley-on-Thames where we explored the walled garden and learnt much about the wonderful work being done by Lady Parmoor and her team in providing voluntary work and education for disadvantaged young people. Lastly in September a small group of us had a wonderful walk-through of artefacts chosen by the librarians at RHS Lindley Library, followed by a visit to Chelsea Physic Garden. To all, thank you for some wonderful teas.

Autumn lecture and AGM: Daniel Steel gave us a lively presentation on *The importance of wildlife conservation in our historic landscapes* with a focus on Royal Holloway and his work at the Royal Parks. Daniel is a conservationist, garden history and landscape manager, master arborist, and horticulturist. We are planning to visit Royal Holloway in 2026.

Zoom Talks and Spring Lecture: We resumed our Zoom talks over the winter with two speakers. Our talk in January was on *Great British Parks - A Concise History* by Paul Rabbitts, a Landscape Architect and current Parks and Open Spaces Manager for Norwich City Council, Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society and chair and founding member of the Parks Management Association. In February we welcomed Bruce Ginsberg, a founding member of the European Boxwood and Topiary Society and lecturer on the philosophy of Zen gardens and East Asian nature aesthetics, speaking on *Topiary: a history of creative use*. This was very much more than about trimming yews and explored the creation of space and place through topiary.

Our Spring Lecture in March was unfortunately cancelled. Our 2025 programme from April to date is reported briefly in my Chair's Update.

Research: Regrettably, we were not able to make much progress in 2024/2025. However, we have been able to get people together. An enquiry from Sian Joseph, currently studying for an MA in Garden History at the University of Buckingham and researching Gertrude Jekyll's plant sourcing network including Charles Turner's Royal Nurseries in Slough, led to her introduction to Richard Bisgrove, BGT member and an authority on Gertrude Jekyll. We have purchased Paul Rabbitts' *People's Park* book which is held at my home. Those undertaking research are very welcome to borrow it.

Planning matters: We responded to 20 planning consultations in the year 2024/2025 in our role supporting the statutory consultee status of the Gardens Trust. This reflects a significant downturn in the number of applications affecting our parks and gardens

from 35 in 2023/2024. This number also includes our comments on the Reading Borough, Wokingham Borough and West Berkshire Local Plan Updates, the proposed extension of Christchurch Conservation Area, Reading and the Hungerford Neighbourhood Development Plan. The current list of planning cases up to September 2025 can be read on the BGT website.

Under the Labour Government and their proposed planning reforms, changes are still expected in the near future to the planning system, although delayed. Cut backs in funding from Historic England to The Gardens Trust have already affected their ability to respond to planning applications. The Government is also threatening to remove The Gardens Trust as a Statutory Consultee which will result in a significant reduction in our opportunity to influence planning decisions for the sake of our parks and gardens.

Newsletter and Outreach: We were hoping to publish a second edition in December/January. Unfortunately, due to Trustee work commitments, we have not been able to achieve this. We hope to rectify this early in 2026.

Communication: We are pleased that hits onto the website have risen considerably. We have continued to update the website with new posts and updated information. We have maintained our close liaison with the Friends of Savill Garden, Caversham Court and the Royal Windsor Horticultural Society. Our presence on Facebook and on Instagram has grown further.

Website: Our Webmaster has continued to give us invaluable support updating the website and setting up booking for each of our events. He has now decided to hand over the job after 7 years. I would like to thank him very much for all he has done for BGT in setting us up on a good footing.

Gardens Trust: We continue to play our part in The Gardens Trust, contributing to the ongoing debate on the future relationship between the GT and the counties. In January I joined up with a few of the south-east county garden trusts (Berkshire, Surrey, Hampshire, Sussex and Kent) to share our experiences and give a regional voice to the changes afoot.

On related matters, in November I attended Historic Houses *The Historic Buildings Parks & Gardens Event* with its series of talks and awards, including Garden of the Year Award won by Inverary Castle.

This year I have again prepared a short separate report on our activities from 1 April up to the end of September 2025. This does not form part of our formal AGM but I hope will be of interest. You will find it online on our website.

Bettina Kirkham

Chair of the Berkshire Gardens Trust

BERKSHIRE GARDENS TRUST COMMITTEE

Current Committee members / Trustees are:

** Susan Carter	Michelle Leek
* Alison Mihail	Hugh Simon (Treasurer and Secretary)
Bettina Kirkham (Chair)	† Sian Thomas

The Membership Secretary is Kim Hacker

** standing for re-election*

*** standing for election, having been co-opted by the Trustees' committee in July 2025*

† resigning with effect from 10 October 2025

In accordance with the provisions of the Articles the following officers have been elected by the Trustees for the forthcoming year, to take effect at the conclusion of the AGM:

Bettina Kirkham, Chair
Hugh Simon, Treasurer

TREASURER'S REPORT 2024-5

FINANCIAL SUMMARY (financial year ending 31st March)

	£ 2025	£ 2024
INCOME & EXPENDITURE		
Incoming Resources	3,766.34	5,742.35
<i>less</i> Resources Expended	3,298.55	5,694.70
Interest received	350.92	165.57
Net incoming resources for year	818.71	213.22
NET ASSETS as at 31 st March		
Fixed Assets	22.44	44.88
Cash at bank	7,793.17	12,100.45
Deposit account	15,000.00	10,000.00
Other current assets	939.50	639.93
Total Current Assets	23,732.67	22,740.38
<i>less</i> Creditors	931.80	780.66
Net Assets	22,823.31	22,004.60

The Trust's net assets, which are predominantly held as cash and bank deposits, increased by £818.71 over the year. Subscription income and donations of £1,689.35 for the year (including Gift Aid £184.35), £350.92 deposit account interest received, and a £296.39 surplus on events were offset by operating costs of £1,495.51. Depreciation on fixed assets was £22.44; there was no capital expenditure in the year.

During the year the Trust's current account with NatWest Bank was transferred to Lloyds Bank. The account with NatWest Bank was closed on 1 November 2024. On 26 March 2025 £5,000 was transferred from Lloyds Bank current account to the Trust's 95 days deposit account with Nationwide.

There were 95 paid-up members in the subscription year ended 31st March 2025, a decrease of 4 members compared with the previous year.

My thanks to Brian Tubman ACMA, who has examined the accounts for 2024-5. The income and expenditure account and balance sheet are set out in the following pages.

Hugh Simon ACMA, Treasurer

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS (*see note 1 below*)

INCOME & EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT

<i>Financial year ending 31st March</i>	£ 2025	£ 2024
Incoming Resources		
Donations and Gift Aid	559.35	834.35
Membership subscriptions	1,130.00	1,136.00
Events	<u>2,076.99</u>	<u>3,772.00</u>
	<u>3,766.34</u>	<u>5,742.35</u>
Resources Expended		
Newsletter	-	450.00
Website	394.42	328.42
Sponsorship and advertising	269.00	-
Research	8.00	54.00
Insurance and memberships	613.14	589.40
Administration and travel	210.95	113.90
Events	1,780.60	3,980.90
Depreciation	<u>22.44</u>	<u>178.08</u>
	<u>3,298.55</u>	<u>5,694.70</u>
Interest received	350.92	165.57
Net incoming resources for the year	818.71	213.22

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31st MARCH

	£ 2025	£ 2024
TANGIBLE FIXED ASSETS	<u>22.44</u>	<u>44.88</u>
CURRENT ASSETS		
Debtors	588.80	593.66
Stock	38.20	46.27
Prepaid expenditure	312.50	-
Deposit account	15,000.00	10,000.00
Cash at bank	<u>7,793.17</u>	<u>12,100.45</u>
	<u>22,732.67</u>	<u>22,740.38</u>
LIABILITIES		
Creditors	12.00	-
Deferred income	<u>919.80</u>	<u>780.66</u>
	<u>931.80</u>	<u>780.66</u>
NET CURRENT ASSETS	<u>22,800.87</u>	<u>21,959.72</u>
NET ASSETS	<u>22,823.31</u>	<u>22,004.60</u>
FUNDS		
At start of year	22,004.60	21,791.38
Net incoming resources for the year	<u>818.71</u>	<u>213.22</u>
At end of year	<u>22,823.31</u>	<u>22,004.60</u>

NOTES TO FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

1. The full Directors' Report and Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2025 may be found on the Trust's website: www.berkshiregardenstrust.org
2. In accordance with the provisions of the Trust's articles of association, the Trustees have elected for the financial statements for the year ended 31st March 2025 to be examined in lieu of a full audit. Mr Brian Tubman ACMA, the Trust's independent examiner, has certified that in his opinion the financial statements for the year ended 31st March 2025 and the balance sheet as at that date show a true and fair view of the Trust's affairs.