



BERKSHIRE GARDENS TRUST

Chair's Informal Update April to September 2025

I am pleased to bring you up to date with what has been going on this year from April to September 2025. Many of you have joined us on our visits and I do hope that many more of you will join us for Alex Denman's talk and our AGM on Friday 10 October from 6.15pm.

BGT Past President Dr. Christina Hill Williams: Several of the members and existing and former trustees attended a beautiful funeral service for Christina at Douay Abbey in May. We are in process of approaching possible candidates to fill the vacancy in the honorary role of President.

Governance: No further news.

Finance: Hugh Simon will bring us up to date.

Events: A key part of our activities is the programme of events. This year, as a 'thank you' to our speakers and garden owners, we have again invited them as special guests to our AGM and lecture. Hopefully you will be able to meet some of them. Thank you also for the kind messages from attendees saying how much you have enjoyed the visits.

The five wonderful places we have visited this year:

*Compton Elms, Pinkneys Green
in March*



*Spring visit to Windsor Castle
and the nurseries in April*



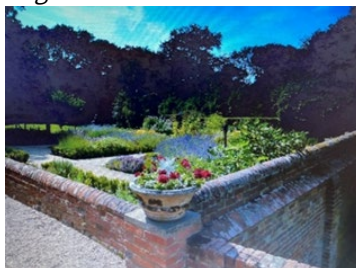
*Guided tour of Orleans House
Gallery, Marble Hill Park and
Turner's House Garden in May*



*Summer visit and reception at
Windsor Castle in June*



*Upton Court, nr Theale, in
August*



Upcoming winter Zoom lectures and talks 2025: We will be restarting the Zoom lectures on Wednesday 19th November at 7.0pm. Ursula Buchan, researcher and expert on the history of historic public parks and gardens, will talk about **Valerie Finnis**, a pioneering gardener and world-renowned photographer, and famed British plantswoman who left thousands of photos from her collection to the RHS Lindley Library. From 1942, Valerie trained as a professional gardener at the Waterperry School of Horticulture for Ladies and taught there until her marriage to David Scott.

In February 2026 Dr Jill Francis, an early modern historian specialising in gardens and gardening in the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries, will explore **Derek Jarman's** unique garden at Dungeness and his legacy.

In March 2026, for our Spring in-person talk we will welcome Adam Scott, Gardens & Nursery Manager at Windsor Castle & Bagshot Park, to talk about the history and development of the gardens at **Windsor Castle**.

Keep an eye on our emails to you and the website for further information about next year's programme.

Membership: The membership has dropped from 95 at 31 March 2025 to 72 this year so far as a result of the need to move standing orders to our new account with Lloyds Bank, and non-renewals by some of our oldest founder members. However, we have welcomed 8 new members this year. For our organisation to remain financially healthy and well supported we do need more members.

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.

Web site: I am pleased to say that we have appointed a new professional web manager, Rowan Ricahardson, to take over from 11 October 2025, after 7 very successful years with our retiring web manager. Initially she will undertake the same role as at present but we are in discussion with her to see how else she can help us. She comes recommended by Kent Gardens Trust.

Sponsorship: In line with many other county garden trusts, the Trustees agreed in May to donate £1,000 to The Gardens Trust, our national body, in support of their campaign to overturn the Government's proposal to remove The Gardens Trust from the list of Statutory Consultees. This is a critical moment for us, as well as The Gardens Trust, as without this status we will have far less influence over decision-making on proposed development and Local Plans and Neighbourhood Plans policies affecting our historic parks and gardens. These and other planning reforms are expected in the near future together with cut-backs in funding from Historic England to The Gardens Trust.

In July, together with many other county garden trusts, the Trustees agreed to sponsor Sarah Rutherford, landscape historian and author of several books, to the sum of £500 in support of her forthcoming book on grottos across the country. Here in Berkshire, we have one of the best examples of a grotto at the private Ascot Place, Grade II* Registered Park and Garden. Sarah has agreed to give a talk to us on her findings in November 2026.

Planning matters have been much quieter in the last six months with 13 cases. Of interest have been:

- Development proposals within **Park Place** Grade II* still keep rolling in;
- **Alexandra Park, Windsor:** we have joined local people in raising our deep concerns about the applications to continue and expand the Windsor-on-Ice and Observation Wheel developments which occupy this valuable local non-registered park and garden within the setting of Windsor Castle. Together they cause immense damage to the park for nine months of the year, restricting access for park users and obstructing important and historic views of Windsor Castle;
- **Nicholsons, Maidenhead Centre:** Together with Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust, we have raised concerns about the proposed major development in the town centre, well above the height of existing buildings, and its effect on the settings of Windsor Castle and Home Park Grade I, Windsor Great Park Royal Gardens Grade I, Cliveden Grade I, Taplow Park Grade II and Berry Hill Grade II. The new buildings will project well above the skyline in key views from these locations;
- **Setting of Windsor Castle:** A wonderful piece of work has just been published by Historic England <https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/news/windsor-castle-setting-study/> describing the importance and history of the Castle and what is the essential setting of the Castle. Key views and surrounding townscape and landscapes have been analysed and advice given to Slough Borough and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead on how to best protect the setting of the Castle from inappropriate development;
- **Bradfields Bore Farm, Benham:** We raised concerns about a new very large chicken unit to be constructed in the middle of a field within the visual setting of both Hampstead Marshall Grade II and Benham Park Grade II Registered Parks and Gardens. This has been refused by West Berkshire;
- We have been urging Reading Borough, Bracknell, West Berkshire, and Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead to include policies to protect non-registered but valuable local parks and gardens in their **Local plan Updates**. Wokingham have set a good example in their policies and list of non-registered local parks and gardens;
- Good news at the **University of Reading, London Road:** We supported the proposal to restore the historic fernery at **The Acacias**. The gardens to

The Acacias are largely intact and would be a good candidate for a non-registered local park and garden in Reading.

The Gardens Trust: I continue to be involved in the meet ups of the county gardens trust Chairs and in contributing to discussions and events organised by our national body, The Gardens Trust. The Gardens Trust has its own membership, providing discounted in-person and Zoom events, a bi-annual Garden History Journal, monthly newsletter, and exclusive invitations. They are well worth supporting for all the planning advice, campaigning, researching, volunteer support, and outreach they provide to ensure the future enjoyment of our historic parks and gardens in England and Wales.

Thank you to all our members for your loyal support. Do continue to encourage your friends to join as members and to spread the word on how important the health and quality of our historic parks and gardens are to us all.

Bettina Kirkham

Chair of the Berkshire Gardens Trust