SUSSEX GARDENS TRUST

Highlights of 2025

In 2025 Sussex Gardens Trust marked its 30th anniversary. Throughout the year with the help of our volunteers we continued to celebrate the rich diversity of parks and gardens in Sussex, promoting and researching their history and helping to protect the future of these designed landscapes through conservation casework and small grant assistance. We welcomed some of our newest members to a special summer afternoon tea at Sedgwick Park, and membership of SGT continues to grow. A particular highlight of the year was the 2025 Gardens Trust Volunteer Award by the national Gardens Trust to Jim Stockwell for his long service to Sussex Gardens Trust.

SGT events and visits in 2025

Garden owners, lecturers, members and event organisers all worked hard to offer an enjoyable programme for members and friends throughout the year. We began 2025 with two lectures: the first from Dr. Jan Woudstra on Robert Marnock and the second from Michael Gilson discussing his latest book *Behind the Privet Hedge*. A new venue in Lewes was used for the first event which proved popular and we will be visiting there again. Wherever possible we like to link visits to our talks and other Trust activities and in May we visited Alexandra Park in Hastings, designed by Robert Marnock, where we were welcomed by the Alexandra Greenhouse Group. The Greenhouse Group had received a small grant from the Trust for new display boards and we were delighted to continue working with them. We had an inspiring tour of the park led by Dr. Owen Johnson who talked about the trees that Robert Marnock had included in his design, many of which are still there to enjoy in their maturity.





SGT members meeting Dr Owen Johnson for the guided tour of Alexandra Park, Hastings. The display boards in the Alexandra Park greenhouse feature the work of Robert Marnock.

June and July saw delightful visits to the gardens of two of our members: Lady Noel Collum at Clinton Lodge and Dr Gordon Lindsay at Durrance Manor. It is always valuable to hear from owners about the development of their gardens before experiencing the gardens ourselves. In August we went across the county border into Surrey to Loseley Park. This was a garden suggested by one of our members who kindly helped organise the visit.



Loseley Park in Surrey



Durrance Manor

In September we enjoyed a visit to Legh Manor at Ansty where the owners, Tim Sheldon and Karen von Habsburg-Lothringen, and their gardener, Dave Osgood, showed us their plans for rejuvenating the garden originally designed by Gertrude Jekyll. Sally Ingram had researched this garden for the 2022 SGT publication *Gertrude Jekyll in Sussex* and shared copies of Jekyll's plans with the group as they walked around the garden.



At the end of the year we were back to our annual Christmas/winter event in December with Tom Coward, Head Gardener, from Gravetye Manor. After our visit in 2024 we were delighted to hear more about William Robinson and the current plans at Gravetye from such an enthusiastic and knowledgeable speaker.

Thank you to everyone who supported our events in 2025. The Events group welcome suggestions from members so if you have any ideas for gardens to visit please do let us know.

Jennie Starr: Events group coordinator.
Events group: Linda Kindersley; Nicky Owen; Barbara and Ian Voller.

Clinton Lodge, Fletching. The garden was the first visit by the newly formed SGT in 1995 and we made a welcome return visit in 2025.

Researching and recording the history of parks and gardens in Sussex

During 2025 members of the SGT Research group have focused on preliminary investigations for their new project – 'Fertile Ground: Nurseries and nurserymen in Sussex 1865 to the present day'. The project will catalogue the historic pattern of the growth and decline of nurseries and nurserymen in Sussex by a study of Ordnance Survey maps, local directories, advertisements and other archival information; identify key nurseries, individuals or related topics as case-studies for further investigation; and set the development of the nursery trade in Sussex in a national context.

As Sussex was split administratively into East and West Sussex in 1865, the project is split into two parts: PART 1: East Sussex (including Brighton and Hove) and PART 2: West Sussex, and researchers have started to identify East Sussex nursery sites. A training visit to The Keep to consult street directories and information available on Ancestry UK was arranged to help produce timelines and histories for individual nurserymen.

Barbara Simms: Research group coordinator.
Research group: Pat Dauncey; Nicholas Hagon; Kate Ibbotson; Don Josey; Nicky Owen; Carol Parham; Penny Vasey.

Two articles based on the project are included in the fourth ***Sussex Gardens Trust Journal***, published in November. The 2025 issue begins with three articles on significant Sussex gardens: East Bourne Place (Compton Place), Lamb House (Rye) and Petworth, all of which bring new insights to their histories. Other contributions focus on the designer Percy Cane's first major project at Sharnden (Mayfield), early results from the SGT's Sussex nurseries project, and notes on Lord's Place (Lewes), the Old Roar waterfall and White Rock Gardens (Hastings). The issue is completed by a book review of the recently published *Grown in Lewes.*

Journal editor: Barbara Simms. Advisory group: Celia Davies; Sally Ingram; Alan Starr.



Petworth garden staff, c.1900. Garland Collection, Petworth House Archive.

Conservation and Planning

SGT works closely with the national Gardens Trust (GT) to review and comment on planning applications. This work focuses on applications affecting historic parks and gardens included on the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest.

- Government Proposal and Objection

The GT's role as a statutory consultee has been a significant help. However, the government set out proposals in November 2025 to remove this status, calling for comments by January 13, 2026. Both the GT and SGT have sent responses objecting to this proposed change, which they believe is unhelpful and would put historic parks and gardens at greater risk of damage.

- 2025 Planning Caseload

Our total workload during 2025 included 58 cases. Some of these were not relevant to garden heritage (for instance, internal alterations to listed buildings located in or near a Registered Park and Garden (RPG)). Other cases, however, required a more detailed consideration of the voluminous documentation associated with each application.

- Positive Outcomes

Following a 2024 meeting, we were pleased to see that two new applications at Leonardslee Gardens this year reflected our advice, despite our adverse comments on previous applications over the past few years. Additionally, in six other cases we supported or offered comments/advice, for example, recommending the provision of additional information.

We were also pleased to be consulted before a planning application was submitted for Batemans. We advised the National Trust about their proposals to restore the Mulberry Garden and revise access paths.

Jim Stockwell: Conservation group coordinator.
Conservation group: Clare Farrand; Virginia Hinze; Virginia Pullan.



The Mulberry Garden at Batemans, East Sussex. This photo was taken before some years ago, before the Mulberry tree (centre) was fully grown. ©National Trust.

The Small Grants Scheme projects in 2025

This year's varied grant offers demonstrate SGT's wide range of interests – from community gardens to historic squares and research in garden history.

We have helped two community gardens, one new and one a previous recipient. We welcomed back Stanmer Street's community garden group, based at The Old Green in Brighton. Our grant in 2024 enabled them to expand their activities (including building new ponds) and volunteer numbers very successfully so we were delighted to offer them a further £366 to buy new tools and a secure tool store.

Our new applicant was the Wellsbourne Healthcare Community Garden, based in East Brighton. It's directly connected to a GP surgery and aims to offer a calming and therapeutic space visible from the waiting area and easily accessed by people referred through social prescribing, as well as by the wider community. We were impressed by their dedication in turning a piece of scrub into a proper garden and offered them £300 for tool purchase.

Mindful of SGT's role in promoting and conserving historic gardens and features, we were pleased to offer a grant of £750 to Dr Sarah Rutherford towards research for a forthcoming book on grottoes. It will include Sussex's two significant ones, at Goodwood and Pitshill.

Finally, we have made a provisional offer of a grant to the Friends of Palmeira Square and Adelaide Crescent for tool purchase. They are awaiting the outcome of an application to the national Gardens Trust for renewing historic planting – which our grant would complement.

Virginia Hinze: Small Grants Scheme coordinator.



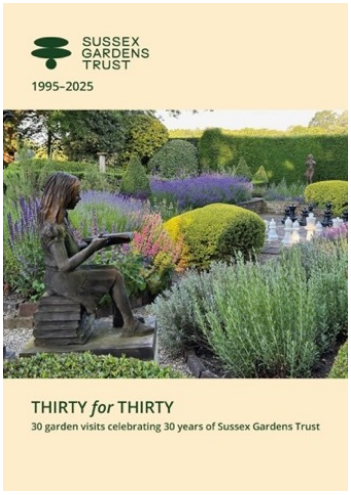
Volunteers working at the Wellsbourne Healthcare Community Garden, 2025

Sharing the News

The SGT Communications group ensure there are many different ways of keeping in touch with members and friends. Each month we email a newsletter to members and publish topical features about gardens and events on the SGT website. Our aim is to raise awareness of the Trust more widely, and in 2025 we held three events at National Garden Scheme open days, in different parts of the county, with displays of our recent projects and publications. We met visitors to the gardens, talked about the work of a county gardens trust and encouraged people to join SGT.



SGT display at The Old Vicarage, Washington, August 2025.



Thirty for Thirty booklet.

As well as keeping a personal connection with members we seek ways to reach a more diverse audience, and it's pleasing to see a growing number of additional subscribers to the monthly email, as well as over 400 followers on Instagram – all of which helps to share what is happening, increase the profile of the Trust and attract potential members.

To mark the Trust's 30th anniversary we celebrated thirty gardens that SGT has visited in the last three decades, with 'Thirty *for* Thirty' - a booklet given to members at the end of the year, profiling these special gardens and their designers, creators and enthusiasts. Revisiting the archive of SGT Newsletters has revealed a valuable source of information about the garden visits, recorded by members over the last thirty years, and together with personal recollections, the 'Thirty' collection of ephemera contributes to the social history of parks and gardens in Sussex.

Sally Ingram: Communications coordinator.
Communications group: Celia Davies; Jennie Starr; Paul Tosey; Penny Vasey.

If you would like to support the work of SGT in any way, perhaps suggesting a garden to visit, becoming a 'garden detective' and helping the work of the research team, or writing an article for the website, please do get in touch: information@sussexgardenstrust.org.uk

The criteria for submitting a bid to the Small Grants Fund can be found on the website.