

HOW TO GROW GEILSTON GARDEN?

Ideas for attracting more visitors to the garden.

February, 2018



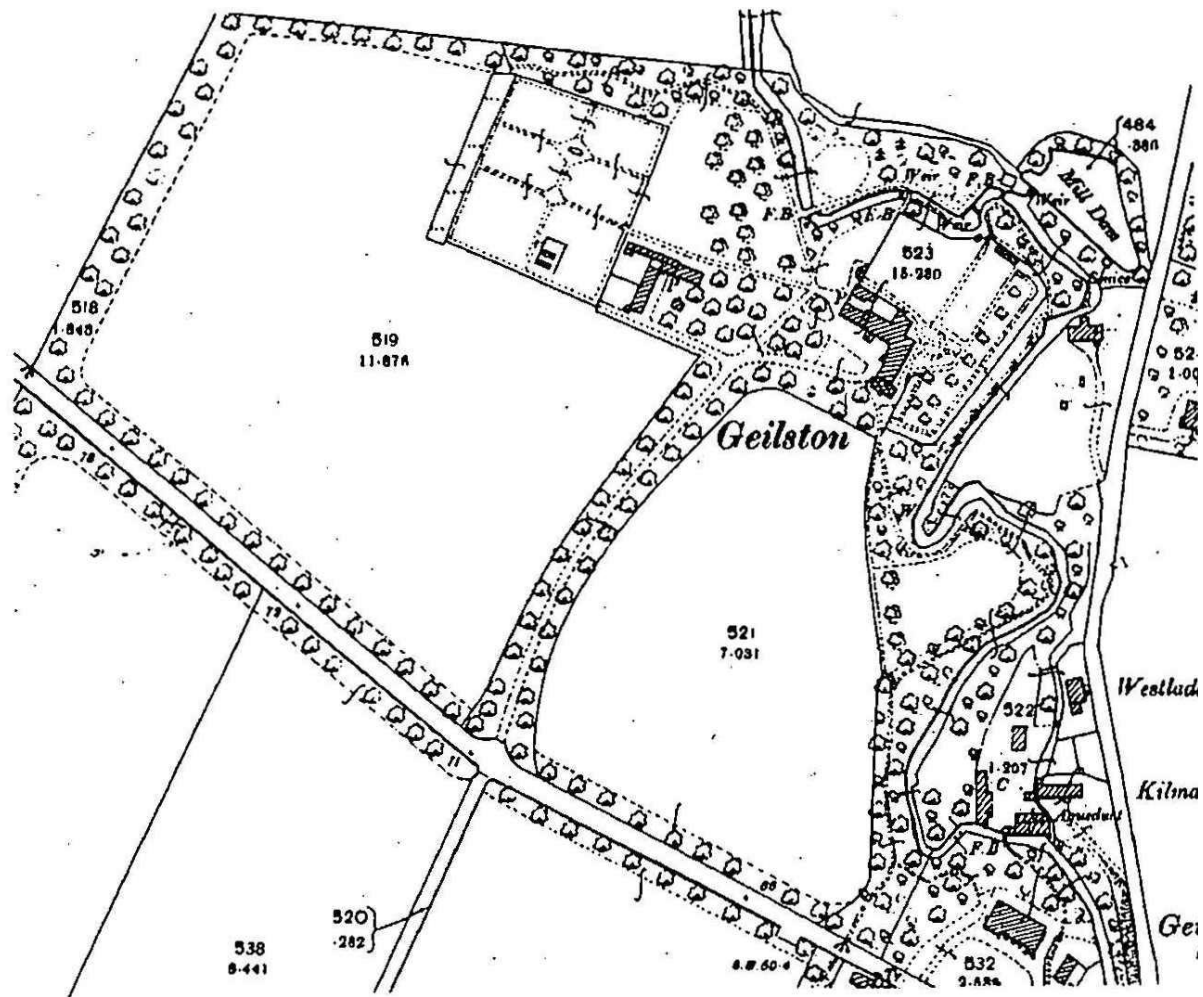
*Friends of*
GEILSTON

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Ordnance Survey second edition [1899] twenty-five inch map.



THE IMPORTANCE OF GEILSTON GARDEN: THE RECORD

- Geilston displays evidence of agricultural practice and horticultural styles in Scotland over more than 200 years and comprises of 4 main garden elements: the avenue and lawns, the walled garden, the glen, and the kitchen garden (GUARD report 1998)
- The chief aesthetic significance of the gardens lies in their contrasting elements of relative formality and picturesque informality (and) the relative completeness of their survival (NTS Management and Conservation Plan 2005-10).
- In 1990 the then Historic Buildings and Monument Council rated Geilston as “*outstanding*” when taken as a whole – house, contents and landscape. A submission is now to be made to Historic Environment Scotland for Geilston to be included in the Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes.
- Over the last 20 years the NTS has sensitively maintained the garden, including restoring the glass houses, developing the kitchen garden and orchard, and by introducing play equipment and garden structures, as well as modern elements of planting.
- Geilston is a Royal Horticultural Society Partner Garden and gateway garden of the Glorious Gardens of Argyll and Bute (including 2 other NTS gardens) and has received a Visit Scotland 4 Star attraction and Green Tourism Gold awards.
- Geilston is an inclusive garden, providing access for the young, elderly, and for the less mobile
- Geilston has a tradition of high quality gardening, has fostered strong volunteer involvement and links to NTS members centres, and has participated in the training of horticultural students.



MISS HENDRY, MISS BELL, THE NATIONAL TRUST FOR SCOTLAND AND THE COMMUNITY.

“Today Geilston preserves the qualities of tranquillity, domesticity and seclusion as a testament to the care of its last private owner Miss Elizabeth Hendry and her companion Miss Margaret Bell”

“The high standard of care, a characteristic of the Hendry period, is evident in the garden, which conveys a feeling of being cherished and regularly renewed”.

The above quotations, from the Statement of Significance from the NTS Conservation and Management Plan 2005-2010, captures the garden and its relevance: its sense of place, care and renewal. Also encapsulated, implicitly, are the characters of Miss Hendry and Miss Bell who generously supported good causes, notably the National Trust for Scotland itself.



Miss Hendry on left; Miss Bell on right

Prior to Miss Hendry leaving Geilston and a large financial legacy to the NTS, she had already made substantial anonymous donations to allow the Trust to purchase Ben Lomond for the nation and to fund building conservation work. Miss Madge Bell also contributed to the Trust's General Income Fund, to specific appeals, and relinquished her life rent on the house to achieve Inheritance Tax savings that benefited the Trust to the sum of more than £0.25M at that time, as well as donating the collections, valued then at a little below £0.5M.

Currently the EC Hendry Charitable Trust and the ME Bell Charitable Trust make annual awards to the total value of approximately £65,000 and £100,000 respectively. The good causes range from the local (Cardross Church) to the international (for the relief of Ebola victims) and encompass donations to charitable organisations covering religion, health and medicine, community and care, arts and conservation.

In 1991 a proposal was made by the Director West of the National Trust for Scotland that Geilston should be presented to the public as the Benefactor's House, as it was a unique opportunity *"to show for the first time the background of philanthropic Members, and the ways in which they had helped the Trust and its properties"* (Report to the meeting of the Executive Council on 19 April 1991). The proposals in this paper carry forward this theme but focus on the garden, recognising the contributions made by Miss Hendry and Miss Bell, by developing the garden in ways that reflect their gardening and their charitable interest, concentrating not only on high standards of horticulture but also on garden related activities encompassing health and wellbeing, community organisations, disadvantaged groups and the arts and crafts.



WHAT MAKES GEILSTON SPECIAL FOR VISITORS?

At present people will answer the above question by saying “The garden”. Paradoxically the house and garden do not stand out physically but are almost hidden, enfolded in the landscape. Visitors talk about its beauty, the peacefulness, its protection and the re-assurance provided in an ever-changing world.

Therefore, the garden is the starting point in any discussion on how to grow visitor numbers. In order to maintain its status as a garden worth visiting the garden itself has to be continually improving, both by reaching back to the past while also looking forward, experimenting with new horticultural ideas, plants and styles. In addition, there need to be improvements to the infrastructure if the investments in the garden are to be protected.

Geilston is an NTS West of Scotland members’ garden, attracting regular visits from people living in the greater Glasgow conurbation. It serves a local population as well as visitors from further afield (including a significant number of English National

Trust members). How can Geilston attract more visitors who live within one hour’s driving distance from the garden, and beyond? The answer lies in a combination of the following:

- **Attractions**, the garden and other physical “draws”
- **Facilities** and supporting accommodation
- **Activities**, events and workshops
- **Innovative funding**
- **Local participation** and management
- **Publicity** generated at Geilston
- **Organic growth**

Currently the main attraction is the garden, with its various component parts, and the recent and successful low-key introduction of the play area. Facilities are limited to a coffee machine and a single toilet and the main activities are the NTS Easter and Halloween events. This is a garden operating well below its full potential.



WHO ARE GEILSTON'S TARGET VISITORS?

As broad a spectrum of garden visitors as possible? This might include:

- People of any age who enjoy or have an interest in gardens; individuals and groups
- Visitors wanting to be out of doors and in touch with nature.
- The very young carried by their relations, or in pushchairs, or running ahead of their grand-parents to get to the play area (but what is there to interest older children and teenagers?)
- Visitors looking for a pleasant environment with well-designed facilities such as a café, shop, and gallery that complement the garden: a complete and satisfying environment.
- People who appreciate and enjoy the art and crafts, features, displays and activities that are placed within or grow out of the garden.
- Visitors who are looking to experience and learn more about gardens: growing, gathering, arranging, recording, painting, preparing, cooking....and eating!
- People who see Geilston as a haven or place of refuge: for renewal,

fitness, and therapy, to encourage mental and physical well-being.

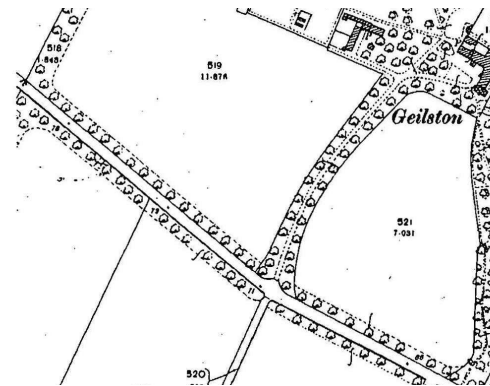
- Heritage enthusiasts who are interested in seeing the full historical picture, linking the past to the present (and to the future). This group, in particular, is more likely to be represented by visitors from beyond the greater Glasgow conurbation, and includes tourists to Scotland.
- Visitors who are coming to see other local attractions including the Hill House, Helensburgh, Dumbarton Castle, and possibly NVA's St Peters seminary in the future.



GARDEN ATTRACTIONS

The avenue and lawns

An area that has traditionally fallen outwith any consideration of the garden are the two fields that flank the entrance avenue. In the spirit of re-connecting with the past, the thick hedges or shelter belts shown on the First Edition of the Ordnance Survey (1860) might be reinstated, not only for wildlife habitat creation (in conjunction with an edge meadow regime) but also to form defined and protected spaces for new visitor attractions or activities (be they rare breeds animals, horse riding, weddings, or a sculpture park).



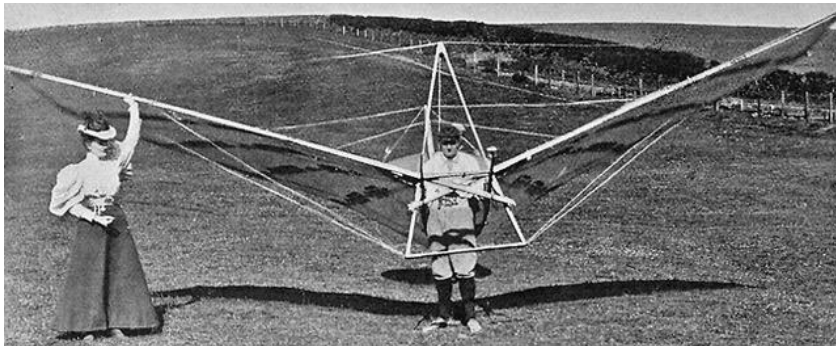
The walled garden

Having made the point that a garden needs to be continuously improving, it is not the purpose of this report to propose detailed restoration or horticultural enhancements to the garden such as the walled garden (one of the highlights) which require the input of Ann Steele, NTS Head of Heritage Gardens -Policy, Simon Jones, Gardens and Designed Landscapes Glasgow and est, Alison Farrell, head gardener. This applies not only to the walled garden but to the garden as a whole.



The glen (including the woodland)

The play area has been introduced successfully and this could be extended to include woodland play equipment and tree structures. The latter might also support a replica of one of Percy Pilcher's early airplanes. (Percy Pilcher experimented with gliders in the fields behind Geilston and possibly could have beaten the Wright brothers to the goal of powered flight had he not died in an early air accident).



The main defining element in the glen is the burn where there is scope for water features such as cascades, sculptures, or water driven machines, the latter possibly sponsored by west of Scotland engineering companies, and with the proviso that movement of sea trout up the burn is not impeded. Extending the potential of the burn might include access to the mill pond and Kilmahew Mill which itself could be the subject of archaeological investigation (with public involvement), access being created as part of the Sustrans route.



The kitchen garden

The kitchen garden already is an important draw, along with the produce, the latter possibly being supplemented by controlled fruit picking. The interest could be extended by installing a poly tunnel, model plots, and bee hives, as well as growing of unusual vegetables and the like.

FACILITIES

The case has already been made, in the current consultation process, for the need for a café, toilets, sales area and multi-purpose structure to serve initially as a gallery, workshop and activity space (see **Activities** immediately following). The facilities should be designed and planned as a whole with overlapping spaces to provide a unified and well thought out environment, in keeping with the ambiance of the garden, and to allow for expansion. Examples are as disparate and far apart as the Kilmartin Museum, Tebay motorway service station, and the Yorkshire Sculpture Park.

In all of this the importance of Geilston House should not be ignored (a failure that has dogged a garden as popular as Heligan, in Cornwall). Ideally this is solved by giving public access to part of the house and its collections so that its interior and contents can be appreciated and its history and relationship to the garden made clear. Alternatively, some elements of the collections might be integrated in the proposed facilities described above, supported by creative interpretation.



ACTIVITIES

By looking earlier in this report at who we might be seeking to attract to the garden we have already started to identify activities, the primary one being the act of visiting and enjoying the garden and the grounds. For some it will be of specialist interest and for others part of a nice day out and possibly even subsidiary to the pleasure of indulging in a coffee, a cake and a little retail therapy, in pleasant surroundings, if these are available. For many it will be a destination or meeting place for family and friends, young and old, and this can be re-enacted and encouraged by events such as the Easter egg hunts and Halloween trails, NTS staple activities. Others visit Geilston as tourists for its heritage interest and special garden (and will come away unfulfilled if these experiences do not meet their expectations). The above probably comprise the core visiting groups served, more or less, by the garden at present.

However, there is scope to attract new audiences. If the Incorporation of Gardeners of Glasgow's motto is "Gardening the First of Arts" what about the other arts and, notably, the people who visit art galleries and, particularly, those who might be attracted to a sculpture garden or sculpture park, of which there are practically no examples in Scotland and none on the west side





of the country? The Yorkshire Sculpture Park, south of Leeds, has shown what can be achieved within an institutional but fine landscape setting. The garden at Geilston, with its 4 main elements, provide a range of different settings for sculpture, whether on loan or permanently, and the two fields allow access and space for major art works.

Building on the arts (and crafts) and their synergy with the garden, is the potential to tap into wider local support by promoting activities such as workshops, residencies, courses and training: artists working at Geilston, gardening classes, flower arranging, painting sessions, cooking demonstrations, the products of all of which might find their way in to the café, the shop and onto the walls of the gallery.



Likewise, the physical and mental activity of gardening can be acknowledged and expanded to keep fit classes, therapy and wellbeing sessions, including serving the more vulnerable groups in society.



 NATIONAL
TRUST for
SCOTLAND

INNOVATIVE FUNDING

The mix of uses and activities will require innovative methods of funding. The present system of the garden only receiving non-members' entry charges and 'subsidy' from the NTS General Income Fund is inappropriate (the major weakness being that, unlike in most commercial operations, there is no relationship between the income generating activities and the actual income received). Income will require to come from a mix of the following:

- Entry charges (non NTS members)
- NTS member Geilston's season ticket (innovative for NTS)
- All net proceeds from the facilities.
- Rentals from lets
- Endowment (the amount of which will depend on the level of income from the lets) from the NTS, fundraising and the Lottery funding.



LOCAL INVOLVEMENT AND MANAGEMENT

The proportion and mix of **Attractions**, **Facilities**, and **Activities** will have a profound impact on how Geilston is managed and marketed. Introducing new facilities and activities, the latter particularly to increase local support and income, suggests the need for more local participation in the management of Geilston, which may be achieved through a local management committee or a trust, comprising representatives from NTS trustees and/or staff, a Friends group and others.

PUBLICITY GENERATED AT GEILSTON

While it is essential that Geilston continues to be promoted by the NTS, additional publicity can be achieved by the property itself through, for instance, the Friends group which might be responsible for a garden leaflet and other publicity material not currently available, a website, Facebook and other initiatives.

ORGANIC GROWTH

The ideas set out in this report are a starting point, to generate further ideas, or combinations of ideas. They are not an end point nor are they seen as being put in place concurrently. It is in the nature of ideas documents that proposals are untested and will need further investigation and development, as well as flexibility in implementation, depending on the public's response and available resources. For instance, take the not unrelated ideas of water features, art in the garden, and sculpture park; one may gradually lead to another, success building on success, or alternatively, one thread only may be followed, with other ideas filling the vacant spaces. Likewise, the financial issue surrounding the garden will not be solved at a stroke so that continuing but reducing assistance will be required for a number of years. However, the best and most resilient examples of garden based regeneration come from well supported proposals by committed organisations, that grow organically, taking current visitors with them and gradually increasing their numbers.



