



## **Annual Report 2024/25**

### **Introduction**

In this report as usual I look back on the last year of activities and forward to the new season. The report covers the period March 2024 to March 2025.

### **Review of 2024**

Unfortunately, the weather generally was not great although we were fortunate with the events we put on during the year.

Again, we promoted our *Sundays in the Garden* featuring live music from local choirs including new visitors in the Peninsula Choir and the Lomond Community Orchestra and return visits from the ever- popular Tartan Harmony and Helensburgh Oratorio. We had another very successful Craft Fair and an Autumn Celebration with a variety of exhibitors focussing on wellbeing in nature. All seemed to enjoy the day and find their visits well worthwhile. Thank you to the continuing support of the Ginger Breadman with the supply of hot soup for the Autumn event which is always much appreciated.

Thanks must go again to Alana for coordinating these events supported by the committee and a team of volunteers and to the Geilston Baking Crew for all the fantastic home baking.

We also ran a programme of guided walks and workshops through the season including tree identification, Mindfulness Meanders, art workshops and fern walk.

### **House**

At last year's AGM it is probably fair to say that whilst people appreciated the investments around the garden by NTS, there was disappointment that there had been no progress on the plans to refurbish the house. During the past year we have had several meetings and communications with Ian McClelland, the NTS area manager, to try to establish the commitment from NTS to this project. So, we are really pleased that at the end of the year we received confirmation from Ian that the Board of Trustees had agreed to invest £2.5

million on the house, reaffirming the plan to refurbish for holiday letting. We thank Ian for all his efforts and commitment during what has been quite a lengthy process. Of course, we still await details of how the project will be delivered and timescales, but the public commitment to spending the money is we believe a major milestone. We will continue to monitor progress of the project.

### **Community groups visits**

We have continued to welcome local community organisations to the garden, helping several secure group memberships that allowed them to visit throughout the season for walks, workshops, and events. This has been made possible thanks to on- going support from the Miss Elizabeth Bell Trust. Participating groups included Jean's Bothy, Helensburgh Heart and Stroke Club, Lomond Carers, Parkinsons UK, Helensburgh Hub, Visiting Friends and Homestart Lomond. This has been a worthwhile initiative and thanks to Fiona for coordinating the programme. Looking ahead we hope to reach out to new groups from the wider area. We have also gathered feedback from the visiting groups and hope to reflect on how we might enhance the experience and accessibility of the garden.

### **Geilston Memories**

We made some progress on our oral history project this year. We had a good round table meeting in June where some twelve people who knew Miss Hendry and Miss Bell came along to share their memories and stories. Many thanks to Ruth McKechnie for facilitating this. We followed this up through the year with several more interviews including with people who had not been able to make our round table. This has built up a store of recorded memories which we hope to work into an accessible resource to place on our website. We are also thinking about bringing these memories to life through an historical event in the garden.

We are still looking for memories to add to this repository, so if you have any personal recollections or know of someone who does please get in touch. Thanks to Jacky for helping me with the interview programme.

### **Calander**

We produced our calendar for 2025 based on the annual photo competition. After a slightly slow start we were pleased to receive a good number of quality photos to make up the calendar, which again is widely distributed locally and beyond. I would take this opportunity just to encourage regular visitors to think about submitting their photos. It is a really nice way of promoting Geilston. Thanks to Ken for organising the competition and production and distribution of the calendar and Dennis Hendry for judging.

### **In the garden**

Again, our thanks to the Visitor Services team who provide the welcome and information to visitors and to all the team at Hill House for their support through the year.

Of course, the star of the show throughout the year is the garden and again we wish to express our thanks and admiration to Alison, the gardening team, and volunteers. As well as maintaining and nurturing the established garden, there are new ideas and developments. A great example of this during the season was the new Trefoil bed in the kitchen garden.

As a group committed to supporting the garden as a wonderful place to visit and spend time, we are keen to invest in projects that will help towards enhancing people's enjoyment. Looking ahead, we hope in partnership with the NTS to provide a new shelter which we believe will further contribute to visitors' enjoyment of Geilston.

### **Subscriptions and support**

Many thanks to all members who have already renewed their subscriptions and to new members. Just to remind everyone that the subscriptions are due so if you have still to renew or pay then please do so as soon as possible. If you are a tax payer then you might consider gift aid of your membership subscription as this enables us to reclaim the tax and maximise your contribution. Also, if you set up a regular annual payment by standing order or direct debit this makes it easy to keep the subscriptions updated. Thank you to Dorothy our membership secretary for managing the membership records and inquiries.

If you feel that you can commit some time to supporting the Friends then there are a couple of ways to do this. One is to sign up to be one of our event volunteers. Organising and managing a range of events through the season takes some time and effort, so the more people we have willing to help just makes this a bit easier and helps spread the work. Typically, tasks supporting events include setting up gazebos (and taking them down), helping on the Friends stalls, baking, guiding people around the events site. There is no specific time commitment. If we have a good number of volunteers on our rota then we can spread the load over the season.

We have also been thinking of establishing a group to help plan our events so if you have some experience of events management then please get in touch.

### **Conclusion**

As ever I want to say thank you to all our supporters. Your continued support for the Friends contributes to our influence and helps demonstrate the importance of Geilston for so many people.

Thank you to all the committee and volunteers. Your commitment and efforts throughout the year means we can continue to operate as a charity and organise events and activities that help promote the garden as a place to visit, spend time and enjoy.

Thank you to Kenny, Susan, and Tahira for keeping the website and our social media platforms running. These all provide valuable tools of communicating with members and the wider public, telling people what is happening at Geilston and hopefully encouraging visits to the garden.

I hope that we have a good season.

Chris Moore

Chair,

Friends of Geilston,

Scottish Charity SC050608

March 2025