



Friends of GEILSTON

Friends of Geilston Annual Report 2025

In this report I look back at the last year of activities promoted by the Friends in the Garden and anticipate the new season (the Garden re-opened on 16th March)

Unfortunately, whilst we had some good weather during the year, we had to cancel for the first time two of our main events due to wet and windy storms towards the latter part of the season. The Sunday in the Garden in September and the Autumn event in October both had to be called off. But despite this we still had a good season of varied activities to promote the Garden.

We had two Sundays in the Garden featuring live music from local choirs alongside the Home Baking Stall, and another successful Craft Fair. Many thanks to Alana for bringing these big events together and the committee and volunteers for supporting the days. Alongside these larger events we again ran a series of prebooked workshops and activities including return visits from Nicky Brownrigg with a foraging walk and tasting and the art workshops led by Carol Moore and Julia Gurney. The Sound Bath by Reflection Holisites also returned and once more proved very popular.

Two new events were the Photography Workshop with Kath Polley and the History walks led by Alana Ingram and Fiona Collins. In the latter Alana and Fiona recreated Miss Hendry and Miss Bell to provide an informative and entertaining account of the house, garden and its occupants. Both will feature in our 2026 programme.

As well as the History Walks around the garden, Alana presented history talks about Geilston to the University of the Third Age (U3A) and Horticultural Society both in Helensburgh and Knightswood Historical Society in Glasgow. In February 2026 she delivered a talk at the Cardross Golf Club to an appreciative audience. All these talks helped promote the Garden and work of the Friends.

Hamish Ingram provided 250 cards based on original paintings for sale at Geilston and again these have proved very popular with visitors.

Looking forward to the new season we are planning to again offer the Sundays in the Garden, Craft Fair and Autumn Celebration (fingers crossed for the weather!). We will have the Sound Bath, art and photography workshops and the history walks. New for 2026 are Mindfulness with Wendy Alexander (making a welcome return) and Whispering with the Trees from Reflection Holisitics. In support of the National Year of Reading, we are promoting a couple of book-based events. In association with the Helensburgh Book Festival, author Leonie Charlton will be coming to the garden, and we are planning a Celtic Storytelling event later in the season. And keep an eye out for the Book Gnomes (courtesy of Gillian Macdonald) who will be depositing books around the garden.

The NTS will again be promoting their Easter Trail and to end the season the Halloween Trail.

All the above are aimed attracting people to the garden through a varied programme of activities

We also continue to reach out to a variety of local community groups to organise visits to the garden.

Overall visitor numbers for 2025 totalled 13,634 which was a slight increase on the previous year and there were 215 new memberships of NTS signed up at the Garden.

House update

We hope to get another update at the forthcoming AGM on refurbishing the house for holiday letting from the NTS. Plans were submitted to Argyll and Bute Council in November for change of use and £2.5 million has been identified by the NTS towards this work. We were pleased to see that provision has been made for a couple of rooms to be set aside and equipped for event use which would be a great asset.

Other work around the estate is ongoing.

We have confirmed that we are happy to commit significant money towards a shelter in the garden to provide somewhere dry for visitors during inclement weather. We understand that this requires planning permission and approvals, so this is in the hands of NTS. Hopefully we will see some progress on this during the next year.

In the meantime, we have we have purchased five large umbrellas for lending to visitors during the season to give protection from showers- or the sun!

Calendar 2026

Again, we produced a calendar based on our photography competition where visitors to the garden submitted their pictures. Thanks to Ken Readman for coordinating and to Dennis Hendry for judging. We sold all the stock we had printed and many thanks to the sponsors for their support.

Membership and support

I would like to thank everyone who supports the Friends through taking out membership. This helps demonstrate people's commitment to the garden. Just to remind people that memberships are now due and can be paid at the AGM or online and if you are a taxpayer the subscription can be gift aided. We currently have 485 members.

Several help support the group in volunteering at the events. The larger events such as the Craft Fair and Autumn Celebration and Sundays in the Garden do involve quite a bit of work in putting on, so the more people who volunteer the easier it is to keep staging them. They do attract good numbers of visitors to the garden so are important as part of our programme. Help with setting up and clearing away, staffing of the Baking Stall, baking for the stall and helping direct people around the garden are all important for these events. We would not really be able to stage them without this support so please consider offering your help in any way you can.

As a registered charity we do have certain obligations to meet such as having a requisite number of trustees on the committee to provide organisation through the year and producing a verified set of accounts. We would welcome interest in coming onto the committee to augment the current membership. If you would like to know more about what is involved, please get in touch with me. The committee does have authority to coopt members during the year.

Thank you

As usual there are several people to thank for their efforts in support of the Friends. Again, the centre of everything is the garden nurtured by Alison and her great team of gardeners and volunteers. They work throughout the year to ensure that the garden looks wonderful for the season. During the season there is the Visitor Services Team welcoming people and providing information, snacks and a smile! Thank you to Rachel who has managed the team now for several years but is moving on to other projects within NTS, so we wish her well in her new role and look forward to working with her successor. Also, thanks to Ian and Louise for their continued efforts in support of Geilston on behalf of the NTS.

Thanks to all the committee members for their work and support through the year.

We say goodbye to 3 of our committee this year. Fiona Lockart has been a member from the early days of the group and has been membership secretary and managed our communications and more recently coordinated the community group visits. Many thanks for all your efforts over so many years. Dorothy Dollier took on the role of membership secretary and has been a mainstay of our Sunday in the Garden Baking Stall team. Susan Snadhorst joined the committee last year but unfortunately work commitments have limited her time, but Susan has contributed much to the events support and baking. Hopefully all will be able to continue their support of the Friends.

Publicising the work of the Friends is important in keeping members and local community informed about what we are doing and in this regard I would just like to thank Kenny Lockhart for continuing to manage the website, Wendy for her work on posters and in

looking to take on the website from Kenny, and Susan Mitchell for her work on our Facebook page.

Also, many thanks to David and the Golf Club for hosting our various meetings through the year.

I hope that you continue to support the Friends and enjoy the Garden through the year.

Chris Moore,

Chair, Friends of Geilston

Scottish Charity SC050608

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