INSTITUTE OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH | SCHOOL OF ADVANCED STUDY UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

HISTORY OF GARDENS AND DESIGNED LANDSCAPES SEMINAR

Autumn 2026

Gardens of Pleasure



Francis Bacon's famous assertion that a garden is 'the purest of human pleasures', Andrew Marvell's finding it a place of 'delicious solitude' and Vita Sackville West's perception that it is a place in which a gardener can 'Maintain a bastion of his opposition/...To keep enjoyment in his breast alive/when all is dark' all attest to the many ways in which a garden can offer pleasure.* And the detail from a painted miniature showing the garden at Sadabad in Istanbul (above) reminds us of yet another type of pleasure – that of convivial engagement and relaxation in beautiful surroundings.

The garden of Sadabad at Kagithane, Istanbul. Fragment of a painted miniature, anonymous, 18th century (Creative Commons 3.0)

** Francis Bacon, Of Gardens (1625), l.1; Andrew Marvell, The Garden (1681), l. 16; Vita Sackville West, The Garden (1946), ll. 51,53,54*

Our Autumn Term programme is dedicated to considering gardens created for pleasure across differing dates and places: from eleventh-century China and seventeenth-century Japan and Italy to Europe and the USA in the seventeenth-, eighteenth- and nineteenth centuries. As well as describing the layout, planting, features and entertainments in these gardens, the presentations will bring to the fore the complexities and contradictions of the pleasure they afforded to their owners, creators and visitors alike.

Autumn 2026 Schedule

Curie Virág
University of Warwick

Aesthetic Pleasure as Moral Resistance: Self-Cultivation and Literati Gardens in Song Dynasty China

8 October 2026, 6pm, Wolfson NB01, IHR, and on Zoom

Sergio Monferrini
Independent researcher

Pleasure for Body and Soul: The Gardens and Academy of Vitaliano VI Borromeo on Isola Bella

22 October 2026, 6pm, on Zoom

Ane Cornelia Pade
University of Cambridge

From Private Pleasure to Public Amusement: The Gardens of Post-Revolutionary Paris

5 November 2026, 6pm, Hybrid or Zoom (TBC)

Stephen Bending
University of Southampton

Pleasure Gardens and the Problems of Pleasure: Versailles to Monticello

19 November 2026, 6pm, Wolfson NB01, IHR, and on Zoom

Corrina Ellis
Courtauld Institute, University of London

The Provincial Daimyō Garden of Early Edo Japan: Not Merely a Matter of Seeking Pleasure

3 December 2026, 6pm, Wolfson NB01, IHR, and on Zoom

Also possibly of interest is the London Group of Historical Geographers' seminar at the IHR at 5.30pm on 10th November. Kimberley Glassman (The Fitzwilliam Museum) will give a paper entitled *Plants on the page: reconstructing Harriet Sheppard's botanical practice through the archives* (Wolfson NB01 and online).

Our seminars are free and open to all
They are sponsored by the Friends of History of Gardens and Landscapes Seminar & the Birkbeck Garden History Group

Convenors:
Christine Lalumia, Charlotte Brooks, Suzanne Lovell, Francesca Murray, Jesse O'Neill

For more information, visit our page on the IHR website
Or contact us at gardenhistory.ihr@gmail.com