



## **Birkbeck Garden History Group**

### **Visit to RHS Wisley, Surrey**

### **Tuesday 15 September 2026**



*The Old Laboratory*

*Photo: Len Williams cc-by-sa 2.0*



*The Glasshouse*

*Photo: Colin Smith cc-by-sa .2.0*

### **RHS Wisley**

The site of the Royal Horticultural Society's flagship garden was acquired as a gift in 1904, marking the Society's Centenary. A nucleus of existing gardens has since been developed into the most horticulturally diverse of the RHS Gardens, now covering 97 hectares (240 acres). We have arranged an introductory guided tour and our guide will introduce us to the Garden's rich history and advise on routes and options for discovering the numerous and varied garden spaces, water features and glasshouses.

Seasonal highlights in September are likely to include the twenty-first-century landscapes created by Tom Stuart Smith and Piet Oudolf around the Glasshouse and newly excavated lake, a project celebrating the RHS Bicentenary. The landscapes have been developed further in the intervening years since the grand opening in 2007. The magnificent Glasshouse, built by Smeijmans Projecten with interior landforms designed by Colvin and Moggridge, may occupy us for some time.

Wisley's fine collection of trees can be admired in some of the most historic areas: the Pinetum, Arboretum and Seven Acres where we may find early autumnal colour. Also not to be missed is the precipitous Rock Garden built of Sussex sandstone blocks in 1910 by James Pulham and Sons. The slopes, with streams and cascades, are home to several special collections of alpine and dwarf conifers. A Japanese-style landscape and dramatic waterfall were added in 2004. (See FITNESS LEVEL below)

Important buildings to visit include the iconic Arts and Crafts Old Laboratory, now a fascinating museum of scientific research at Wisley before 2021. Our guide will introduce the displays and there will be an opportunity to explore further in free time. New research

laboratories are now housed, with the Herbarium and Library, in Hilltop - the Home of Garden Science, opened in 2021. The spacious Atrium is open to the public and all may browse the Library. Beyond Hilltop lies Clear Lake, another new lake, opened in 2023 and providing sustainable wildlife habitats as well as water for irrigation.

### **FITNESS LEVEL**

Wisley is a hilly site but the RHS aims to make the gardens as accessible as possible to all mobility levels. Paths are smooth surfaced and maps (issued on arrival) show recommended routes through the gardens for those who wish to avoid steps and the steepest slopes. The 40-metre-high glasshouse is on several levels but there is a step free route to all zones plus an internal lift constructed behind the waterfall.

Some historic features are less easily navigated, notably the Rock Garden where the vertiginous network of paths and steps is strictly for the sure footed - but good general views can be obtained from several viewpoints.

Sensible shoes are (obviously) recommended.

### **TRAVEL**

By train from London Waterloo to West Byfleet and transfer by prebooked taxis to Wisley (four miles)

We will take the 9:53 train from Waterloo, arriving West Byfleet 10:21. We plan to leave Wisley at 17:20 for transfer to West Byfleet in time for the 17:57 train arriving Waterloo 18:29. Return ticket £11.45 with a Senior Railcard. There may be a further discount for Freedom Pass holders

### **CATERING**

No refreshments or lunch are included in the price. We plan to arrive in time for members to buy coffee/tea in the café adjacent to the foyer of the Welcome Building where we will meet our guide. Other refreshments and lunch are available from several cafés on the site. Those who prefer to take a packed lunch may picnic in the Riverside Garden, with the chance of sighting the wildlife of the River Wey: kingfishers, herons, damsel flies...

### **PROGRAMME**

9:53 Train from Waterloo, arriving West Byfleet 10:21 for taxi transfer to Wisley

10:40 Arrive Welcome Building and café; opportunity to buy coffee

11:15 Guided tour

13:15 Rest of day free for individual exploration

17:20 Leave by taxi for 17:57 train West Byfleet to Waterloo arriving 18:29

## **COSTS**

£18 to include guided tour and transport by taxi between West Byfleet Railway Station and Wisley and return to the Station at the end of the day.

£10 without transport if you prefer to meet the group at Wisley in the foyer of the Welcome Building by 11.00.

NB There is no entry charge: the visit takes advantage of BGHG's status as a RHS Affiliated Society which offers a group visit each year to one RHS garden with free entry (normally for Wisley £15.20 - £20.50 for non-RHS members).

## **BOOKING**

PLEASE NOTE THAT BOOKING FOR THIS VISIT CLOSES ON 7 SEPTEMBER.

Booking is via [BookWhen RHS Wisley trip](#). Payment can be made online with a card or via BACS (bank details on BookWhen) with reference 'Wisley'. There is an option on BookWhen to pay by cheque (pay offline) posted to our Treasurer.

Priority is given to BGHG members. If you would like to bring a guest please tell Margaret Scholes (contact details below) and she will let you know when a guest place becomes available.

## **ENQUIRIES**

Please contact Margaret Scholes with any queries: [mdscholes8@gmail.com](mailto:mdscholes8@gmail.com) or 07427 851177

REFUNDS ARE NOT ISSUED UNLESS A REPLACEMENT CAN BE FOUND. PLEASE NOTIFY MARGARET IF YOU ARE UNABLE TO ATTEND



*The Mixed Border at Wisley*

*Photo: Joan Pateman*