**SPEAKER NOTES - Updated December 2024**

The following speaker notes accompany our 2024 National Garden Scheme Presentation.

**Who are these for?**

For our new county team members who have volunteered to give talks to local groups, these offer you a vital source of background information about the history of the National Garden Scheme and provide a suggested structure to your talk.

For seasoned speakers you may want to utilise these slides to update your existing presentations.

These notes are provided to you as a guide and to provide you with background information, however, we would anticipate that you would adapt these to suit your own presentation style and audience.

**Localising the presentation**

We would recommend that you replace the slides of gardens – shared within the ‘gardens through the seasons’ and ‘the diversity of our gardens’ sections, with gardens from within your own county.

Audiences are also interested to hear about some of the statistics on numbers of gardens opened and money raised from a local county perspective.

Feedback from many of our seasoned speakers highlight the interest their audiences have in:

* The stories of William Rathbone and Elsie Wagg
* Your local gardens opening in the current year
* Where the money that is raised goes and how it is used

**Preparing for your talk**

One of our county organisers, who delivers many talks each year shared her top 4 tips:

1. Agree fee & travelling expenses in writing.
2. Make sure you include lots of lovely photos – people always ask for these
3. Adapt the talk depending on what sort of group you are talking to. E.G. An all-male Probus (retired professional businessmen), a ladies WI meeting or a horticultural club will all have slightly different interests.
4. Make yourself a checklist of things you wish to know from the person booking you:
   1. How long do they want you to talk for?
   2. How many people will be in the audience?
   3. The exact location of venue with post code.
   4. The mobile phone number of organiser for emergencies on the night.
   5. What equipment the venue has?

One participant at a group talk in Berkshire shared the following feedback:

*" Our members were really interested in hearing about the scheme's history and its beneficiaries and were amazed at just how much money the scheme raised in Berkshire alone last year.  Thank you too for your helpful suggestions about possible group visits to some of the gardens in Berkshire.”*

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| **Note:** the first slide in the deck is an instruction slide – once you delete this slide the numbering below will match the slide numbers |

**Slide 1: Beyond the garden gate**  
Introduce yourself e.g. your role with the National Garden Scheme and your interest in gardens. Welcome the audience and explain what your talk will be about:

* the history of the National Garden Scheme
* visiting our gardens
* how your visits make a difference – our beneficiaries

Start to engage your audience from the beginning by asking a question such as:

* Who has heard of the National Garden Scheme?
* How many of you have visited a National Garden Scheme Garden?
* Has anyone opened their own garden?

**Slide 2: Since 1927**  
Many people know that the National Garden Scheme opens beautiful gardens to the public – but do you know why? During this presentation, in addition to sharing some of our beautiful gardens, we’ll tell the story of how we began, what we believe in and how we do what we do.

The starting point is that is our strong **commitment to nursing and health** – it’s in our DNA! This commitment to nursing and health has made us the **most significant charitable funder of nursing in the UK**.

And opening gardens to the public is a very effective way of raising funds whilst offering people a wonderful day out – **over £74 million donated since 1927**.

**Slide 3: What we do**  
Simply put we discover the most remarkable gardens, we support their generous owners to open them to the public and share their passion for their garden, and we offer our visitors a memorable day out in the knowledge that their admissions, and purchases are being used to make a real difference to individuals in need of support

**Slide 4: A bit of magic makes it possible**  
And how do we do that? Through the amazing generosity of so many people. Every individual act of generosity by all these people: whether by opening their garden or helping to serve the teas or bake the cakes, offering to join one of our voluntary teams to help find new gardens, support our garden owners, promote the openings or accounting for the funds raised or imply visiting a garden. **Many individual acts of generosity come together to make a real difference.**

**Slide 5: Our story begins**  
Our story begins in Liverpool when **William Rathbone**, a wealthy Liverpool merchant, employed a trained nurse – Mary Robinson, to care for his dying wife. After her death he asked her to stay on and look after the sick and poor in Liverpool.

*Backdrop:* In Liverpool at this time was a workhouse for the poor, 15,000 died in Liverpool and in 1847 was the Irish potato famine.

William Rathbone was a philanthropist and was a passionate advocate of women’s rights as well as nursing. He wanted to employ a nurse in every district in Liverpool and in 1860 approached **Florence Nightingale** for advice. She said he should build a training facility to train nurses attached to the Liverpool Infirmary. This he did and the first centre opened in 1863. He became a firm friend of Florence Nightingale – sending her flowers every week!

The **District Nursing Service was born**. His successful approach spread across the country.

**Slide 6: District Nursing grew rapidly**  
Over the next 20 years district nursing grew rapidly.

In 1887, as part of Queen Victoria’s Golden Jubilee celebrations, the District Nursing Service became Queen Victoria’s Jubilee Institute for Nurses (later renamed the Queen’s Institute of District Nursing, QNI), with The Queen as their first Patron, to coordinate national standards for district nurses with the objectives of providing the ‘training, support, maintenance and supply’ of nurses for the sick and poor, as well as establishing training homes, supervising centres, co-operating with other bodies and establishing branches as necessary.

Queen Alexandra then succeeded Queen Victoria as their Patron, and on her death the **QNI set up a fund in her memory** to further develop the district nursing service and provide for retired nurses. And **this appeal became the National Garden Scheme**

**Slide 7: National Garden Scheme is founded**  
A significant individual in our story was a QNI committee member **Elsie Wagg** – a Sussex high society belle. She proposed the idea of opening private gardens to raise funds saying, ‘We’ve got these beautiful gardens in the country and hardly anyone except their owners and friends ever gets to see them – why don’t we ask them to open next year for the Appeal?’ And this was our beginning.

The National Garden Scheme was founded, **almost 600 gardens** opened their gardens in the first year and each charged **a shilling a head**. They raised the ‘splendid sum of **£8,191**’ for the QNI.

*Note: the current day value of this sum is around £450,000 – a huge achievement*

**Slide 8: Sandringham**  
One of the key factors in this success was the support Elsie gained from Lady Hilda March (who later became Hilda, Duchess of Richmond), a formidable woman of great persuasion! It was her that persuaded King George V to participate (by opening Sandringham). The great and the good around the country soon followed suit.

She also formed a committee of ‘Lady Superintendents’, banking on them being competitive, to recruit garden openers in different parts of the country. By 1930, 900 gardens opened for the National Garden Scheme, and Sir Winston Churchill and Vita Sackhill-West were among our famous garden owners.

**Slide 9: Ramster Gardens**  
Of the original 600, **56 are still opening today** – most in the ownership of the same families. Including Ramster Gardens in Surrey which has opened every year for almost 100 years – an incredible support and commitment by generations of the same family to the National Garden Scheme.

**Slide 10: Our first guide**  
The **first guide** to open gardens was **published by Country Life** in book form, costing one shilling a copy. It contained an illustrated list of 1,079 gardens.

**Slide 11: The war years**  
Gardens continued to open throughout the war years. **Opening was considered part of the war effort**, a means of raising spirits, of demonstrating how to grow vegetables and how to disguise air-raid shelter roofs with camouflage planting.

In 1948 The National Health Service and local authorities took over responsibility for the home nursing service, but the call for funds – for training and to care for nurses young and old through illness as well as in retirement remained as strong as ever.

In 1949 we saw our garden guide turn yellow **symbolising a mood of national regeneration**. The guide became known as the ‘yellow book’ from this day onward.

There followed years of growthand in 1955 the funds raised from open gardens exceeded pre-war levels for the first time. With 1,115 gardens open raising £19,000

In 1977 there were 1,400 gardens open, entrance fees had increased to 20p (4 shillings) and almost £100,000 was raised.

**Slide 12: We become independent**  
The National Garden Scheme, which had remained part of the QNI since 1927, **became an independent charity**. This paved the way for an expansion of the donations policy to a wider group of nursing and later gardens & health charities.

In **1984** the first donation was made to Macmillan nurses (now Macmillan Cancer Support) and a decade later in **1996** this was expanded to 5 additional beneficiaries: Marie Curie, Help the Hospices (now Hospice UK), Crossroads for Carers (now Carers Trust), The Royal Gardeners’ Orphan Fund and the Gardeners Royal Benevolent Society also became beneficiaries.

In **2013** - Parkinson's UK joins the National Garden Scheme as a guest charity and goes on to become a permanent beneficiary.

**Slide 13: Royal Patronage**  
We are delighted to still have Royal support of the National Garden Scheme. The former **Prince of Wales** took over the role of patron from his grandmother who was patron from 1980 until her death in 2002. He remains our Patron as King Charles III

And our president is **Alan Titchmarsh** – who we all know is gardening royalty! His reputation and style embody our values – quality, community, quintessentially British, down to earth and generous.

**Slide 14: Gardens and Health**  
In 2016 the National Garden Scheme **commissioned a ground-breaking report from The King’s Fund**, ‘Gardens and Health: Implications for Policy and Practice’, confirming our position as the leading protagonist of the **health benefits of gardens and gardening.**

In the same year we announced we would give annual donations to charities promoting the link between gardens and health. The first donation was given to Horatio’s Garden – a wonderful charity whose aim is to build beautiful gardens in each of their 11 spinal injury centres to allow patients, their friends and relatives enjoy the restorative effects of time in a garden.

The amazing, positive effect that gardens can have on health is a point of research and promotion that we are passionate about. In August 2017 we successfully launched our first Gardens & Health campaign dedicated to promoting the positive impact gardens can have on health and wellbeing. Every year groups of people who would not usually have the opportunity to visit a garden – many from our beneficiary charities, are able to enjoy a visit free of charge.

This was followed in 2019 by the publication of a second King’s Fund Report: ‘**Investing in Quality, the contribution of large charities to the future of health and care’.**

In 2020 in response to the lockdowns resulting from the Coronavirus pandemic we undertook a piece of research with garden owners and National Garden Scheme supporters to look at the value of gardens on people’s health and wellbeing. The result was the publication of ‘*Gardens and Coronavirus – The importance of garden outdoor spaces during lockdown’.*

*Note: Think about highlighting how many gardens in your county are wheelchair accessible, and if known how many gardens are participating this year in the gardens and health week*

**Slide 15: National Garden Scheme today**  
You can see just how much the National Garden Scheme has grown from 1927 to today: the **609 gardens that opened in 1927, has grown to 3,300 in 2023.** The diversity of our gardens has expanded to include tropical gardens, allotments, hospice gardens, school gardens and small roof top terraces. And one of our most popular events – that of group openings, where a number of gardens in the village or urban area come together to open.

*Note to speaker: You may want to include the numbers for your own county*

And our yellow book listing all the gardens open across the country is still in existence today! Now called our **Garden Visitor’s Handbook** – it’s a valuable resource and available from our website or from all well-known bookshops and local independent bookshops.

**Slide 16: Website – Find a garden**  
on our website you can search for a garden by date, name, location or postcode. Click on the Find a Garden menu option to find a garden open near you. Here is where you will always find the most up to date information on a garden opening.

However, the website is not the only way you can find out about what we are doing. You can pick up a free county booklet from your local libraries, large garden centres and numerous other outlets across the county, as well as ordered online via our website shop.

You can also keep in touch with all the latest news and information via our social media channels – we are on **Facebook, X and Instagram**

**Slide 17: Our gardens through the seasons**  
But now it’s time to take a look at some of our beautiful gardens – open throughout the year from January to November.

**Slide 18: Winter**  
Our season begins with snowdrops and spring flowers. This year we had 104 gardens opening in January and February. A perfect time to throw of the winter blues and get out into our gardens. You can search our website to find all those early opening gardens each year.

*Note to speaker: We recommend you replace this photo with a local garden – highlighting its opening date, if you do any winter walk & talk events etc.*

**Slide 19: Spring**  
And as we move into Spring we highlight gardens with stunning displays of daffodils, followed by our tulip gardens which offer a riot of colour.

*Note to speaker: We recommend you replace this photo with a local garden – highlighting its opening date and other interesting information about the garden*

**Slide 20: Summer**  
Summer is our busiest time - 50% of our gardens are open over 7 weekends from June – July. And what better way to spend an afternoon than gaining inspiration from another’s hard work, enjoying the peace of a day in beautiful surroundings and in many cases enjoying a delicious tea with homemade cake – made by our wonderful band of volunteers.

*Note to speaker: We recommend you replace this photo with a local garden – highlighting its opening date and other interesting information about the garden*

**Slide 21: Autumn**  
As we move into Autumn there are gardens with gorgeous displays of autumn colour. And even though the gardens may not have a riot of flowers at this time of year, they still offer relaxation and enjoyment with nature which demonstrates the benefits that gardens can offer to our health and wellbeing.

*Note to speaker: We recommend you replace this photo with a local garden – highlighting its opening date and other interesting information about the garden*

**Slide 22: The diversity of our gardens**  
We are proud of the quality of the gardens that are open to the public. But our list no longer looks just like a roll call of stately homes. Today we have an incredible diversity of gardens all offering character and interest. Here are just a few examples:

*Notes to speaker:   
We recommend you replace these photos with local gardens to show the range and diversity of gardens as well as some of your flagship openings – including highlighting their open dates. You may also want to select gardens from neighbouring counties to encourage visitors to explore further afield*

**Slide 23:**  
Country gardens – displayed here is Chilworth Manor in Surrey.

**Slide 24:**  
We have many gardens designed by renowned and talented garden designers. Pictured here is the Hertfordshire garden of designer Tom Stuart-Smith who has opened his own garden for the National Garden Scheme for 30 years.

**Slide 25:**  
We have many new gardens each year, like this one in Dorset.

**Slide 26:**  
And we are once again sharing our expertise on the growing of fruit and vegetables – both in the walled gardens of our larger houses but also in many allotment gardens including this one featured here from Derbyshire.

**Slide 27:**   
And as well as the traditional country gardens we have some incredible contemporary gardens – both in rural and urban settings. There are absolutely gardens to suit every style and preference.

**Slide 28: Ticketed Gardens**  
For some of our special locations we offer more exclusive visits at our ticketed gardens. Tickets can be booked online (find them under Find a Garden/Special garden events) and you can sign up to our digital newsletter to hear about them as soon as they open for booking. With some it is important to book quickly to avoid disappointment.

Some include lunch and a garden tour, others an evening tour with wine and a talk

*Note to speaker: if you have ticketed gardens within your own county or region then we recommend you replace this photo, and highlight the opening*

**Slide 29: An open day – great gardens, great cake, great causes**  
So, for those who have not yet visited a garden, rest assured it is a memorable experience. ‘**Great gardens, great cake’** says it all! A beautiful garden to explore, opportunities in many to talk with the garden owner and discuss their planting and plans for the future, or even buy plants that they propagated from their own.

When plants started being sold at open gardens (before garden centres existed) this was often the only place people could source plants for their own gardens. It was how Alan Bloom started – selling plants off a table at Bressingham Hall, when they opened for the National Garden Scheme. He was so successful that 10 years later– he founded his garden centre business *Blooms of Bressingham*.

And in many, what we are well known for - our delicious homemade teas and cake, or in some evening openings a glass of wine and music.

**Slide 30: Arranging a group visit**  
If you are part of a group, whether this is for a group of friends, a local interest group or society you can also arrange a personal visit – this is an **exclusive** opportunity for you to have a **private tour** of the garden at **a time to suit you**. Visitors can usually expect a talk from the garden owner and our famous tea and cakes.

You can contact the garden owner direct to liaise about everything from convenient times and dates to what you’ll see and do once you’re there, to costs and deposits.

So don’t be shy, garden owners are delighted to have the opportunity to share their gardens, and many choose only to open by arrangement for groups for practical reasons – limited parking or don’t want to commit to a date so far in advance.

*Note to speaker: consider mentioning the numbers of gardens open by arrangement in your county*

**Slide 31: The Great British Garden Party**  
In 2020 together with Dame Mary Berry, we launched our first national community fundraising event – the Great British Garden Party, to help raise additional funds to make up for the drop in income in a year when our garden gates had been closed for the first time since 1927. The general public responded enthusiastically with plant and cake sales, afternoon tea parties and garden tours. This is an opportunity for all our supporters to get involved and help us to raise money for our nursing and health beneficiaries. It can be small scale - just a few friends, a community event or a workplace event - what is important is that you get involved, gather your friends and enjoy time together whilst making a difference!

**Slide 32: What a difference your visit makes**  
In 2023 we were able to donate a record amount from the funds raised at our gardens that year.

**Slide 33: your visits make a difference**  
With the generous support, hard work and commitment of our garden owners, county volunteers and donors as well as all those who visited, we donated £3.5 million at the end of 2024.

*Over 80 pence in every £1 raised at our open gardens*

**Slide 34: Nursing and health donations**  
Every year we donate to six nursing and health charities, ensuring a longevity of contributions which has made us the most significant charitable funder of nursing in the UK. Our commitment to nursing remains strong.

**Slide 35: Gardens and health donations**

We have championed and supported the concept that access to gardens and practical gardening are good for people’s health and wellbeing since 2016. We continue to make substantial donations to specific charities for health-related garden projects supporting Horatio’s Garden to build 11 gardens for NHS spinal injury centres and Maggie’s to add to their portfolio of gardens at their cancer support centres.

**Slide 36: Donations in support of gardeners**

We also support a broad spectrum of people and communities. For those looking for a change in career and getting into horticulture for the first time, to supporting garden projects that help re-habilitate ex-servicemen or reduce social isolation, our funding provides a positive introduction to gardening

**Slide 37: 2024 in numbers**

Here are just some of the incredible things that have been made possible in 2024 by the funds raised in our gardens.

**Slide 38: Thank you**  
Thank you for your time and interest. I hope to see you all visiting a National Garden Scheme garden this year and enjoying a memorable day out in the knowledge that your visit is helping to change lives.