

Forum 2026 - our speakers

Sheila Das – Head of Gardens and Parks at the National Trust

Having changed career in the early 2000's, Sheila studied at Kew, worked for English Heritage, and was a garden manager at RHS Garden Wisley with responsibility for Education, Edibles, Seed and Wellbeing until 2024.

Sheila's time at Wisley included the development of the hilltop landscape which features gardens for Wildlife, Wellbeing and Food as well as the reimagination of the Wisley orchard to demonstrate a more nature focused approach to fruit growing.

Sheila is passionate about growing food in sustainable ways to support planetary and human health and interpreting the gardener's role as a participant in landscapes from past to present to future. Sheila is well known for being committed to soil health and looks to develop thoughts around how systems connect and how people can rediscover and celebrate their role in that connection. Sheila is now Head of Gardens and Parks at the National Trust as the Trust embarks upon the delivery of its 'People and Nature Thriving' strategy.

With a firm commitment to horticultural training, Sheila has been a trustee for the Professional Gardeners' Trust, a co-founder of the Gardener X exchange scheme and is now a Trustee for the Beth Chatto Education Trust.

Mark Morrell – Head Gardener, Holkham Hall

Mark is Head Gardener at Holkham Estate, where he has led the ongoing renovation of the walled Kitchen Gardens since 2019. He brings extensive experience in the management, restoration and development of historic and private gardens, having worked at a range of historic gardens and estates throughout the country.

Mark graduated with an Honours Degree from Writtle College in 2005, developing a strong foundation in horticulture and garden management. Following his studies, he undertook the restoration of the historic St Nicholas Gardens in Richmond, North Yorkshire, helping to revive and enhance these important Arts and Crafts gardens. He subsequently worked as Head Gardener for a private estate in Oxfordshire, where he was responsible for the management and development of the gardens and wider horticultural landscape. Mark then moved to Ragley Hall in Warwickshire, taking on the role of Head Gardener and overseeing the care and development of its historic gardens.



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Since joining Holkham Estate in 2019 as Head Gardener, Mark has played a key role in maintaining, developing and presenting the estate's diverse and historic gardens. His career reflects a passion for horticulture, landscapes, and the long-term stewardship of historic gardens.

Pam Smith - Senior National Specialist for Garden and Park Management and Access. National Trust.

Pam leads for garden history and garden management in the National Trust. She has worked in horticulture for over 40 years across public parks, museum, botanic and historic garden sectors and has worked for the National Trust for 15 years.

She is currently involved in developing a methodology for the assessment of significance and heritage value of the 210 glasshouses in National Trust care to inform the understanding of capacity for change, prioritisation of resource and public benefit.

Gemma Sturges – Kitchen Garden Supervisor at Audley End House and Gardens

As Kitchen Garden Supervisor, Gemma manages the historic kitchen garden and its organic production of fruit, vegetables and flowers. She has been working at Audley End since 2011, her work focuses on traditional horticulture, soil health, seasonality and sustainable growing.

Gemma is passionate about heritage varieties and the role of historic kitchen gardens in connecting people with food, horticulture and heritage.

Gemma is a Soil Association Farm to Fork Ambassador and a Trustee of the Professional Gardeners' Trust, supporting organic growing, sustainable food systems and the development of the horticultural profession.

Ben Whitworth, Archivist at Hestercombe and **Mike Kleyn**

Susan Campbell's Research Archive and Working Library

Now housed with the Hestercombe Trust, Ben and Mike will give an update on plans for digitising and making the archive accessible for study and future research.