

Design a Shaw House Garden!



Shaw House, near Newbury, is a Grade I Listed Building¹ within a Grade II Registered Park and Garden² owned by West Berkshire Council. It was built in 1581 by Thomas Dolman II (1543-1622), a wealthy cloth merchant. A map survives (left) that shows us the design of the house and its estate in 1729, a year after they became the property of James Brydges, the first Duke of Chandos (1673-1744). The geometrical layout of the garden around the mansion was very fashionable at the time and could still be seen in 1998 when a geophysical survey of the grounds was carried out. This style was based on 17th century French 'Renaissance gardens' that had regular, symmetrical designs that were supposed to show harmony and order, and people's control over nature.

Formal gardens were laid out in rectangular shapes divided into squares or quarters called 'compartments' or 'parterres' using low-trimmed evergreen hedges. The compartments were filled with elaborate plant beds, decorative flowerbeds, fragrant herbs, coloured brick, gravel or sand, with gravel walks around them. An English speciality was 'plats', regular beds of cut grass. In the middle would be sculptures, water features or fountains. Shaw House also has a raised terrace around the eastern 'Great Garden', so people could walk around and look down for another view.

Popular plants were roses, paeonies, violets, white lilies, lily of the valley, white and blue irises, lavender, wall germander, rosemary, wild strawberries and fruit trees. Trees would be trimmed to the same height and topiary was also popular. The large yew trees at Shaw House would once have been clipped.

Popular colours in 16th century gardens were white, red, yellow, blue and violet. In the 17th century people also liked orange, green and indigo.

Design your own Shaw House garden

The 1729 map doesn't show any detail of what is in the garden. If you were a garden archaeologist and could restore these beds, what would you put in them? Would you want a 17th century design or something different? Use the outline overleaf to show us your inspiration!

Don't forget to share your designs with us on Facebook @WestBerkshireHeritage or Twitter @WbHeritage using the hashtags #ShawHouse and #VirtualSummerFair!

West Berkshire Council Archaeology Service (www.westberkshireheritage.org/local-heritage)

West Berkshire Council's Archaeology Service is dedicated to the conservation, enhancement and promotion of the district's rich and diverse historic environment and our mission is to work with local people to better understand and preserve their heritage.

¹ For Shaw House's Historic Environment Record (HER) entry, please see:

www.heritagegateway.org.uk/Gateway/Results_Single.aspx?uid=MWB5023&resourceID=1030. For its Listed Building record, please see: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1220445>.

² For the HER entry of the park and garden, please see:

www.heritagegateway.org.uk/Gateway/Results_Single.aspx?uid=MWB15774&resourceID=1030. For the Registered Park and Garden record, please see: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1001446>.

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