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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

SHAKESPEARE'S GARDENS, NEW PLACE

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Name: SHAKESPEARE'S GARDENS, NEW PLACE

County: Warwickshire

District: Stratford-on-Avon (District Authority)

Parish: Stratford-upon-Avon

label.localisation: Latitude: 52.190699
 Longitude: -1.7067148
 National Grid Reference: SP 20146 54758
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
 Grade: II
 List Entry Number: 1001192
 Date first listed: 01-Feb-1986

Details

Early C20 formal gardens designed by Ernest Law on the site of Shakespeare's last home and garden, with pleasure grounds designed by Law with advice from Ellen Willmott.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In the late C15 Hugh Clopton, who had made a fortune as a mercer in London, and who in 1492 had served as Lord Mayor, built a large house in Stratford, adjacent to the Chapel of the Guild of the Holy Cross which he had endowed. Leland commented c 1540 that New Place was a 'pretty house built of brick and timber' (Chandler 1993). Sir Hugh's family continued to own New Place in the early C16, but by 1545 it had been let to Thomas Bentley, physician to Henry VIII. The site of the Great Garden, which until 1544 belonged to Pinley Priory, was added to the Clopton property in the mid C16. Bentley died in 1548 and was succeeded by Alderman William Bott, who bought the property when William Clopton was forced to sell in order to settle bequests under his father's will (Halliwell-Phillips 1864). Bott sold the house in 1567 to William Underhill, a noted Catholic recusant, who in turn sold the property to William Shakespeare in 1597. The house was in 'great ruine and decay and unrepayred', and extensive work was undertaken in 1597 (Fogg 1986). Shakespeare's wife lived at New Place from its purchase, and the poet himself lived there permanently from 1610 until his death in 1616. As his only son, Hamnet, had died in 1596, Shakespeare entailed the property through his daughter, Susanna Hall. Susanna lived at New Place until her death in 1649, having entertained Queen Henrietta Maria there in 1643. Susanna Hall's daughter, Elizabeth, was married to Thomas Nash, who owned neighbouring property from c 1630. In 1649 she married as her second husband John Barnard, who was knighted at the Restoration. Lady Barnard, the last of Shakespeare's heirs, died in 1670, and New Place was sold first to Sir Edward Walker before passing back to the Clopton family. Extensive alterations were made for Sir Hugh Clopton in the early C18, but in 1753 the property was sold to the Rev Francis Gastrell, a canon residentiary of Lichfield Cathedral. Under Sir Hugh Clopton, New Place had been opened to visitors, including David Garrick who visited in 1744. Canon Gastrell, however, resenting such intrusions, felled a mulberry said to have been planted by Shakespeare in 1756 and in 1759, as the result of a dispute with the Corporation over poor rates, demolished the house. The site passed through various hands in the late C18 and C19, with some building taking place on the Great Garden, including, in 1827, the Royal Shakespearean Theatre which was designed by Mr

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Chantry of London. In 1861 J O Halliwell-Phillips raised a public subscription to purchase the adjacent Nash's House and the grounds of New Place, which were vested in the Corporation of Stratford. Some clearance took place in 1862 and the Royal Shakespearean Theatre, by now an assembly room, was demolished in 1872. Simple pleasure grounds were then laid out on the site and the property was transferred to the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust in 1884. By 1910 the Trustees were concerned that Nash's House was not attracting visitors, and a comprehensive restoration scheme was implemented under the architects Guy Dawber and Guy Pemberton. At the same time schemes for remodelling the gardens in a more appropriately 'Tudor' style were considered, but the outbreak of war in 1914 caused the project to be deferred. In 1918 Ernest Law (1854-1930), one of the Birthplace Trustees and a London barrister, submitted designs for a sunken garden similar to those which he designed at Hampton Court Palace (qv), Esher Place, Surrey and Brompton Hospital Sanatorium, Frimley, Surrey (DNB). Law's scheme was implemented in 1919-20, while Ellen Willmott (1858-1934) advised the Trustees on the planting of the wilderness bank in the Great Garden in the early 1920s. Today (2000) the site of New Place, the early C20 Knot Garden and the site of the Great Garden remain the property of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The site of New Place and the Shakespeare Gardens are situated in the centre of the town of Stratford-upon-Avon, to the east of Chapel Street and to the north of Chapel Lane and some 450m north of Holy Trinity Church. The c 0.5ha site comprises the site of New Place and the early C20 Knot Garden which extend to c 0.1ha, and the Great Garden, which extends to c 0.4ha. The site is bounded to the west by a low brick and stone coped wall adjoining Chapel Street, and to the south by a similar low brick wall surmounted by metal railings which separates the site from a minor road, Chapel Lane. The southern boundary is also screened by a high, early C20 yew hedge which is ornamented with regularly spaced geometric topiary shapes. To the east the site adjoins the grounds of the early C19 Infirmary, more recently the Conservative Club, from which it is separated by a high brick wall. To the north, further brick walls enclose the site from commercial properties fronting Sheep Street, and to the north-west from commercial properties and the Shakespeare Hotel in Chapel Street. Nash's House, since 1884 the property of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trustees and a museum, stands at the north-west corner of the site. The site is generally level, with a terrace wall retaining the higher Knot Garden and site of New Place to the west above the level of the Great Garden. There are significant views east to the late C19 buildings of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, and south across Chapel Lane and the buildings of King Edward's School to the spire of Holy Trinity Church. To the south-west the medieval buildings of the Guild Chapel stand to the south-west of Chapel Lane, while to the west shops and timbered buildings overlook the site from the west side of Chapel Street.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Today (2000) the site of New Place and the Knot Garden are approached from Nash's House at the north-west corner of the site. This arrangement has pertained since at least the restoration and remodelling of Nash's House in 1912. Two gates lead into the Great Garden from Chapel Lane: that c 80m east of the junction of Chapel Lane with Chapel Street is flanked by tall brick and stone piers which support a single wrought-iron gate, while that at the south-east corner of the site is closed by a similar wrought-iron gate.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING New Place, the substantial town house purchased by William Shakespeare in 1597 was demolished by the Rev Francis Gastrell in 1759. The house stood at the western end of the site, at the junction of Chapel Street and Chapel Lane, and in the C16 comprised two ranges arranged around a central courtyard. Today (2000), the brick foundations of the cellars and a centrally placed well survive surrounded by lawns to the south of Nash's House. The shadow of the north gable of Shakespeare's New Place remains visible on the exposed south gable wall of Nash's House. Since the early C20 the gardens have been related to Nash's House (listed grade I), an early C17 timbered house which stands at the north-west corner of the site. In the C19 the house was given a neo-classical stucco facade with a porch supported on columns (Fox 1997), which was removed under the supervision of the architects Guy Dawber and Guy Pemberton in 1912. At the same time windows and doors were inserted in the south-east range of the building overlooking the gardens to the south.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS From a door in the south facade of the east range of Nash's House, a stone-flagged walk with cobbled edges leads south to a flight of stone steps which descends to the site of New Place at the south-west corner of the site. A similar stone-flagged walk extends east below the south facade of Nash's House, with a narrow, stone- and box-

edged flower bed to the north planted with seasonal bedding and wisteria which is trained up the brick facade of the house. To the south of this walk a rectangular lawn is divided by a gravel walk which leads south to a memorial stone which is set against the southern boundary hedge. The south-west lawn has rectangular herb beds to the west, from which a grass slope descends to the level of the foundations of New Place. The south-east lawn is enclosed by gravel walks and is dominated by a mulberry tree planted in 1969 by the Shakespearean actress Dame Peggy Ashcroft. To the north and adjacent to the stone-flagged walk, the south-east lawn is bounded by two rose beds, while to the south an informal hedge of roses separates the lawns from a further narrow lawn which is enclosed to the south by the boundary yew hedge. A flagstaff stands on this lawn. To the east of the lawns and to the south-east of Nash's House, a trench enclosed by oak railings supported on turned balusters with ornamental finials reveals the foundations of the east range of New Place, and a further well; the railings were designed by Ernest Law in 1919-20. The layout of the west garden incorporating the foundations of New Place forms part of Ernest Law's scheme of 1919-20.

At the south-east corner of the lawns there is access to a tunnel arbour of timber trellis construction planted with trained fruit trees, which extends east along the south side of the Knot Garden. The Knot Garden is screened from the lawns to the west by mature espalier apple trees. The Knot Garden comprises a square, sunken enclosure surrounded on each side by a raised, stone-flagged terrace walk retained by a low brick wall. This is surmounted by a low oak balustrade supported on ornamental balusters which are surmounted by decorative finials. Law's design for the rails was inspired by the depiction of a garden on C16 tapestries at Hampton Court Palace (Law 1922). At the centre of each terrace a shallow flight of stone steps descends to stone-flagged walks which divide the sunken area into quarters. The steps to the west are aligned on the entrance to the west garden, while those to the east are aligned on the gate leading to the Great Garden. To the south the steps lead to an arched trellis pavilion at the centre of the tunnel arbour which is planted with laburnum. To the south of the pavilion a yew arbour with a stone-flagged base shelters a timber seat. The tunnel arbour runs parallel to the southern boundary of the site, and encloses two narrow lawns, each with a central rectangular rose bed, which are screened to the south by the yew boundary hedge. To the north the Knot Garden is enclosed by a high brick wall planted with fig trees, which screens the garden from neighbouring properties. The sunken parterre is laid out in four box-edged 'knots' of different design, which are planted with a mixture of seasonal bedding, low shrubs and herbs. At the centre of each knot is a standard rose.

The Knot Garden formed the centrepiece of Ernest Law's 1919-20 scheme for New Place. Its interpretation of 'Tudor' themes was derived from a study of sources including Bacon, Lawson and 'Didymous Mountaine', as outlined in Law's own account of his work at Stratford (Law 1922). The plants for the Knot Garden were provided through public subscription, which achieved the support of a wide cross-section of society: the standard roses were provided by the Royal Family, while other plants came from more humble donors. In 1925 Ellen Willmott advised the Trustees on the planting of the Knot Garden, purchasing bulbs for the Garden (Trust minutes, 1925). The Knot Garden replaced the informal mid C19 garden which was recorded on the Board of Health plan (1851) and the OS maps of 1886 and 1914.

The Knot Garden is separated from the Great Garden to the east by a timber trellis screen, on the outer side of which are planted espalier apple trees underplanted with irises. Today (2000) the Great Garden is entered through a mid C20 gate and timber turnstile at the south-east corner of the Knot Garden c 30m south-east of Nash's House. This gate replaces an early C20 timber trellis gate set on the central axis of the Knot Garden which formerly led to a raised terrace at the south-west corner of the Great Garden. The terrace is paved with a geometric pattern of triangular stone flags laid between rows of cobbles, and has tile-edged rose borders to the west with topiary yews framing the axial gate from the Knot Garden. Retained by rustic stone walls to the east, steps descend from a rondpoint on the axis of the Knot Garden to a large, roughly rectangular area of lawn which occupies most of the Great Garden. The terrace rondpoint is ornamented with a late C20 bronze sculpture, *The Tempest*, by Greg Wyatt, which stands on a pedestal which is set at an angle to the axis of the terrace. To the north the terrace is terminated by a timber bench seat which stands against a brick boundary wall, while to the north-east the terrace leads to a gravel walk retained by a low, rustic stone wall which runs parallel to the brick wall forming the north-west boundary of the garden. A single line of chestnuts and beech grow on the edge of the lawn parallel to the north-west walk, while at the north-west corner of the garden there is a single-storey, lean-to timber shelter which was designed by Guy Pemberton. The gravel perimeter walk continues along the wall which forms the northern boundary of the Great Garden, where timber benches are placed between several

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mature deciduous trees. To the south of the walk two long rectangular beds are cut into the lawn, and are planted with seasonal bedding. Some 10m south of the perimeter walk a raised circular bed retained by a drystone wall contains a mature multi-stemmed mulberry which is traditionally said to have been grown from a cutting taken from Shakespeare's mulberry which was felled in 1756. At the north-east corner of the Great Garden, c 80m north-east of Nash's House, a service yard containing a late C20 metal glasshouse, a late C20 brick shed and an earlier C20 timber lean-to glasshouse, is screened to the west and south by yew hedges which are ornamented with figurative topiary. Immediately to the south of the service yard, and approached along a short gravel walk enclosed to north and south by yew hedges, a late C18 monument to Shakespeare (listed grade II*) stands against the eastern boundary wall. The sculpted relief of Shakespeare seated between the Dramatic Muse and the Poetic Muse below a bracketed pediment was removed from the Shakespeare Gallery, Pall Mall, London to its present position in 1871.

The perimeter walk continues along the east side of the lawn, with a deep border of trees and evergreen and flowering shrubs to the east, known as the Wilderness. The border is retained by a low drystone edging with recesses for timber benches; c 3m from the edge of the bed a further drystone wall retains the eastern area of trees and shrubs. Some 10m south of the Shakespeare Monument stands a single stone column with a metal plaque and inscription recording that it was removed from the C17 town hall which was demolished in the late C18. Ellen Willmott advised the Trustees on the planting of this border in the early 1920s. The perimeter walk turns sharply west at the south-east corner of the site, and returns parallel to the southern boundary of the site to join the southern end of the raised terrace on the west side of the Great Garden. The south walk is flanked by parallel borders, that to the north edged with low box hedges and divided by six low box hedges which run from north to south. The divisions in the north border are planted with seasonal bedding. The southern herbaceous border is edged with a low box hedge, and is divided by six down-swept 'buttresses' in yew, which extend from topiary ball finials on the southern boundary hedge, and which terminate adjacent to the southern walk in low domes of golden yew. At the central point of the southern border a yew arbour shelters a flagged base and a timber bench. The arbour faces the main lawn and is approached from the lawn by a narrow gravel path flanked by box hedges.

In the late C16 the Great Garden was planted as an orchard (deeds). In the early C17, stables, later converted into cottages, were built on its southern boundary, while in the early C19 a theatre was also built fronting onto Chapel Lane. The remaining, northern section of the Great Garden was laid out as a bowling green with an area of shrubbery to the east. This arrangement is recorded on the Board of Health plan (1851). Following the clearance of the buildings along the southern boundary in the mid and late C19, the Great Garden was laid out with lawns, shrubberies and a perimeter walk (OS 1886). This C19 garden was removed in favour of the present design by Ernest Law in 1918-20.

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Maps S Winter, *Plan of Stratford-on-Avon, 1759*, (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Record Office (SBTRO) Board of Health plan for Stratford-upon-Avon, 1851 (Z735/10u), (Warwickshire County Record Office)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1886 3rd edition published 1922 1938 edition

OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1886 2nd edition published 1905 3rd edition published 1914 1938 edition

Illustrations S Winter (?), *New Place from the south-west, 1759* (SBTRO) Photograph, *The Knott Garden, New Place, c 1930* (private collection) Photographs, *The gardens at New Place, C20* (DR309/41(50), (SBTRO)

Archival items The following items are all held at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Record Office: Inventory, 1753 (ER1/59); Deeds, 1578(1652 (ER1/76); Plan of New Place and neighbouring properties, 1822 (ER1/86f.62); Cutting from *The Illustrated*

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London News, 12 April 1862 with letter from J O Halliwell-Phillips (DR406/108); E Law, Shakespeare's Garden Restored, 23 April 1920 (DR390/28); Shakespeare Birthplace Trustees Minute Book, 1925.

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Legal

This garden or other land is registered under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 within the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens by Historic England for its special historic interest.