

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

SHOBDON

Auteur(s) : Historic England <https://historicengland.org.uk/>

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Name:	SHOBDON
District:	County of Herefordshire (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Shobdon
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.259144 Longitude: -2.8827800 National Grid Reference: SO 39843 62698 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1000894 Date first listed: 28-Feb-1986

Details

Elements of formal gardens of c 1700 associated with a country house of the same date (main house demolished), and landscape park developed in the mid C18 about the time the celebrated Rococo-Gothick church was built immediately north of the house.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The Shobdon estate, including the recently rebuilt Shobdon Court, was bought from Robert Chaplin in 1705 by Sir James Bateman, MP, financier, a director of the East India Company, Governor of the Bank of England (1705-7) and sub-Governor of the South Sea Company from 1711. On his death the estate passed to his son William, a great art collector (cr Viscount 1725, d 1744). His son John, the second Viscount, committed the care of the estate to his brother Richard, a friend of Horace Walpole. In 1751 Richard rebuilt Shobdon church, setting up the seat known as The Arches using materials culled from the old church in 1752. On Viscount Bateman's death in 1802 the title became extinct and Shobdon passed to his cousin's son William Hanbury. It then descended in that family (who c 1840 took the name Bateman-Hanbury) until the death of the third Lord Bateman in 1931, following which Shobdon was sold and the Court demolished. House and estate remain (1997) in private hands.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Shobdon Court lies 1km north of the village of Shobdon, which stands on the B4362 Ludlow to Presteigne road 9km west of Leominster. The park falls gently from north (190m) to south (140m); north of the park the ground continues to rise to Shobdon Hill 2km to the north-west, while to the south it continues to fall to the River Arrow 4km away. To the south, east and north the park boundary largely follows local roads, and is generally defined by a low stone wall. Elsewhere it follows field edges. The registered area is c 185ha.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main approach to Shobdon Court is up a straight, 500m long drive from Shobdon village to the south, which is raised on an embankment as it passes Swan Pool and is partly tree lined. At the south entrance to the drive are tall iron gates on ashlar stone gate piers, all probably C19. North of the Court the drive continues up the west side of the church before turning east, to run on a straight line, with trees to either side, to the hamlet of Easthampton, on the eastern boundary of the park. The main entrance (listed grade II) into Shobdon Court lies on the north side of the pleasure grounds, east of the church, and comprises ashlar gate piers with flanking walls and iron railings and wrought-iron main gates with an elaborate overthrow incorporating two 'B's. All is apparently pre 1765.

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PRINCIPAL BUILDING The present Shobdon Court (listed grade II) was contrived from the service and kitchen ranges when the existing house of that name was demolished in 1933. Of brick with stone dressings, most of the fabric is of the early C18. To the west of the Court, across the approach road, is the large, brick stables block of c 1700 (listed grade II), remodelled and restored in 1930s and in late C20 used as houses and garages. Beyond is a farm court. North of the Court is the celebrated Rococo-Gothick church of 1751-2 (listed grade I), almost certainly designed by one of the Strawberry Hill set although precisely who remains uncertain. West of the farm court is a Norman castle mound (scheduled ancient monument), and north of it a later C20 food processing factory.

When Sir James Bateman purchased Shobdon in 1705 he acquired 'A large new built seat with outhouses and barns, stables, malt kilns and other offices, pigeon's house, gardens, orchards, fishponds and plantations.' (Daniels and Watkins 1994, 20). A view of Shobdon by Harris of c 1700 gives some idea of the scale and magnificence of the place in the early C18, although there are difficulties in reconciling aspects of the view with what survives or is documented. The house of c 1700 was said to be in the style of Clarendon House, Piccadilly, with a five-bay front with two-bay wings to either side. Family letters (HRO) refer to considerable improvements in the early 1740s. The house was restored in the mid C19 but demolished in 1933.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The pleasure grounds around the house occupy a roughly rectangular area c 250m north/south by c 150m east/west, the north-west corner of which is taken up by the churchyard. To the north, east and south there is a stone ha-ha, while to the west the grounds are bounded by the churchyard wall and by its continuation in brick past Shobdon Court.

When Shobdon Court was demolished the arcaded, ashlar stone terrace (probably C18, restored in 1860s; listed grade II) along the south front of the house, with flights of steps to either end, was retained and adapted as a raised walk. This overlooks, to the south, a gravelled walk with clipped yew bushes with beyond extensive lawns which fall away in various terraces, remnants of the earlier formal gardens on the site. The lawn contains many mature specimen trees (many of them probably among those mentioned in an article of 1877 which mentions Spa Chestnuts, cedars, occidental planes and beeches, many already of 'remarkable' size), while in the late C20 a line of white birch was planted running from the east side of the terraced walk to the east boundary of the pleasure grounds.

The walls of the old house stand c 2m tall; within is a sunken lawn. To the north and east is a shrubbery with specimen trees, including what would seem to be C18 examples. West of the old house is a turning circle. Some 20m south of the south ha-ha is a substantial ramped terrace, presumably an element of the early C18 formal gardens depicted in Harris' view of c 1700. In that view, from the south, the area of the present pleasure grounds is shown divided into a series of walled courts with a main north/south axial path leading from the door in the centre of the house's south front. Gazebos lay at the south-east and south-west corners of the garden. There was probably also a mount, just beyond the area of the C19 gardens. Improvements, perhaps considerable, were made in 1721-2 when £50 was paid to 'workmen employed in the garden' and '£50 to Mr. Greening' (cited in Daniels & Watkins 1994), almost certainly Thomas Greening (1684-1757), George II's chief gardener who was consulted widely and who worked with William Kent at Corsham. At Corsham, at least (and admittedly later, in 1746), he promoted an irregular style of landscaping with serpentine walks winding through a well-wooded landscape. There were still parterres at Shobdon in the 1740s; however, it seems probable that the formal gardens were only swept away at about the time the landscape park was reworked c 1750. New formal gardens were laid out at Shobdon in the mid and late C19.

PARK Shobdon lies at the centre of a landscape park which slopes downhill from north to south. Belts and plantations around its edge, especially to the east, screen the interior where public roads run around the perimeter. South of and below the house and gardens, around Rookery and Swan Pools, an arboretum has been planted since the mid 1960s and the ornamental aspects of the landscape around the pools much enhanced. North of Shobdon churchyard, and east of the walk to The Arches, is Shobdon cricket pitch; a new pavilion was built in 1996 in the south-east corner. An extensive caravan park, Pearl Lake Leisure Park, occupies the south-western corner of the park, on the east shore of New Decoy Pool. Otherwise the park is largely farmland (late C20).

North-west of Shobdon church, and on the west side of the walk to The Arches, is a large, rectangular, pool, c 100m north/south by c 50m east/west. A further three large pools lie south-west of the house complex. Some 100m south of the kitchen

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gardens, and running parallel with it, is Canal Pool, comprising a 250m long and 75m wide canal with a broadened pond c 120m in diameter at its west end. In the south-western part of the park is the 350m long New Decoy Pool, which connects with Park Pool to the north-east.

Some 350m north of Shobdon Court, at the end of an uphill grass walk (continuing the line of the main approach to Shobdon from the south), lined with some mature oaks and late C20 replacements, is The Arches (listed grade II; also scheduled ancient monument). This, an eyecatcher or seat, was contrived in 1751-2 from the Romanesque chancel arch and other architectural elements removed from Shobdon church during its rebuilding. The re-erected chancel arch has a triangular pediment above with crocketed pinnacles to either side; smaller arches, also with triangular pediments, flank the central one at an angle.

About 400m east of the house, on a natural hillock, is a later C18 garden temple (listed grade II*, in poor condition in 1997). It comprises a stone facade with four Ionic columns approached by three stone steps supporting a full entablature and pediment with much rich carving. Seven sweet chestnuts, probably contemporary with the temple, stand as an incomplete ring around the bottom of the hillock.

Canal Pool, and perhaps the pool north-west of the church, presumably formed a part of the formal landscape at Shobdon depicted c 1700. As noted above, it is possible that Mr Greening's work at Shobdon in the early 1720s extended outside the formal gardens to the landscape beyond. In the 1740s correspondence shows that the woodland on the Shobdon estate was managed for its amenity value as well as for its commercial value. The steward was instructed that following the cropping of beeches 'over against the Wilderness' elms were to be planted 'not in clumps ... (but) irregularly, like the Wilderness' (cited in Daniels & Watkins 1994). Conifers were purchased in London and Shrewsbury. In 1741 a 'Great Walk' was created in the woods; also mentioned is 'the great garden in the woods', planted with roots of lily of the valley, white aconites, honeysuckle and roses' (ibid). The main woodland then lay within the deer park, which when mapped in 1774 occupied the whole area north of the east drive and west of the kitchen garden and Canal Pool. In 1747 an ornamental pool below the house (Swan Pool) was stocked with perch and tench. The Arches were set up within the deer park by March 1752; soon after Richard Bateman wrote to his steward enquiring about how 'the ruins of the Abbey' appeared, suggesting The Arches were an allusion to Shobdon's past and specifically to the brief period in the earlier C12 when it was the site of England's first Victorine priory. This may also have been the period when the landscape park began to be developed, following the campaign of works on the house in the 1740s. Several features, however, date from later in the C18. The temple east of the house, whose location mirrors that of The Arches as an eyecatcher, is not shown on the map of 1774 although a date very soon after that seems likely on architectural grounds. Also post-dating 1774 are New Decoy Pool and Park Pool in the south-west of the park.

KITCHEN GARDEN The kitchen gardens, which lie west of Shobdon Court and immediately south of the stables and farm complex, are surrounded by 1.5-3m tall brick walls (listed grade II) with triangular brick coping which encompass an area c 180m east/west by 70m north/south. Opposite Shobdon Court, in the east wall, is an elaborate door into the gardens with enriched stone architrave (possibly re-set). A slightly raised walk, unenclosed to the south, runs along the exterior of the garden's south wall. The ground within, which is rough pasture, slopes gently to the south. No glass survives. A brick pigeon house (listed grade II) stands within, and close to, the north-eastern corner of the garden. One of the houses to the north of the garden was presumably the gardener's house.

A walled enclosure with pigeon house within is shown on Harris's view of c 1700. The brickwork indicates an early C18 date, and it seems probable that at least the pigeon house (specifically mentioned in the particular of 1705) was but a few years old when Shobdon was purchased by Sir James Bateman in 1705. The present garden walls may be slightly later, as a new kitchen garden was constructed in 1721-2.

REFERENCES Anon, *The Churches of Shobdon and their Builders* (nd), [reproducing Harris' view] *Country Life*, 20 (10 November 1906), pp 666-74 J Brit Archaeological Assoc 146, (1993), pp 87-92 S Daniels and C Watkins, *The Picturesque Landscape: Visions of Georgian Herefordshire* (1994), pp 20-1 I Pfuell, *A History of Shobdon* (1994)

Maps Plan of Shobdon, 1774 (G39, box 66), (Herefordshire Record Office)

OS 6" to 1 mile: Herefordshire sheet 11 NE, 1st edition 1889 OS 25" to 1 mile: Herefordshire sheet 11.7, 2nd edition 1903

Archival items Estate accounts, plans and other drawings (G39), (Herefordshire Record Office)

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Description written: 1997 Register Inspector: PAS Edited: September 1999

Legal

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