

A Brief History of Gardens in Bedfordshire



A note about reference numbers

Each documents held at Bedfordshire & Luton Archives Service has a unique reference, which enables us to identify one document from another. Our references are a combination of letters and numbers, usually the letters at the beginning of a reference indicate the collection the document is from and the numbers which follow show where it is within that collection, for example LHE199 is the 199th document in the Luton Hoo Estate collection. Therefore we always refer to documents by their reference.

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Mediaeval and Early Modern

Early in the development of English surnames, it is likely that the people, who are mentioned as *le Gardiners* (the Gardeners) actually were gardeners in the places in which they appear.

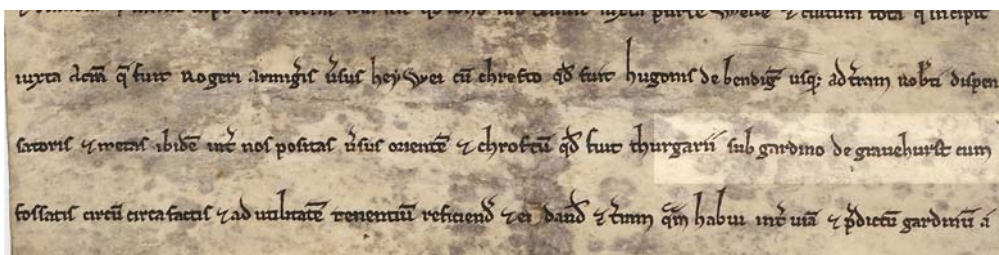
The earliest reference specifically to a Bedfordshire gardener is in the Court records of the Eyre of 1202, (Bedfordshire Historical Records Society [BHRS] Volume 1). Godwin Gardiner, along with a number of other men, was falsely accused of stealing fowls at Willington. Miles Gardinar acted as a pledge for Robert Blund in a case of attack on Ralph Key. The place is not given but it was somewhere in the Hundred of Wixamtree.

The Subsidies of 1309 and 1332 (Suffolk Green Book Volume XVIII) list names; some of which are occupation based. In 1309 thirteen Gardeners/le Gardeners are mentioned. They are in: Campton with Shefford, Bedford, Cardington, Cranfield, Eastcotts, Elstow, Harrold, Marston, Shelton, two in Houghton Regis, and two in Thurleigh. In the 1332 Subsidy there were eight Gardeners at: Bedford, Carlton, Houghton Regis, Shefford cum Campton, Marston, Shelton, Stagsden, Thurleigh. It is interesting that none of these men and women came from East Bedfordshire, later the centre of the Market Gardening industry.

The Coroner's Rolls (published in BHRS Volume 41) in their descriptions of the circumstances of death, give a number of little vignettes of life in the 1270s:

At about prime on 16 February 1271, Alexander le Gardiner of Potton, Lady Christine de Fornival's servant, was digging under the walls of an old dovecote in the garden in lady Christine's court yard in Sutton to demolish them, and as he dug, the wall fell by misadventure upon him and broke his head so that he immediately died there. His wife Alice came with his breakfast, looked for him, saw his surcoat and cap and the spade with which he dug and so found him dead and his whole body broken.

References to gardens in Bedfordshire title deeds are comparatively few prior to the 16th Century. The earliest we have found in archives held at Bedfordshire & Luton Archives Service dates from about 1200 and is to "the garden of Gravenhurst with the ditches surrounding it" (document reference: LJeayes378).



(LJeayes378)

Sometime after 1233 the Prior of Newnham granted to Geoffrey son of Ralph of Renhold

our court in the same vill, where lately was our garden from opposite the court of the aforesaid Geoffrey, just as it is enclosed by a ditch, except the curtilage of the Vicar just as Robert of Ely, late Vicar of this vill held it (Russell Mediaeval deeds in Box R213)

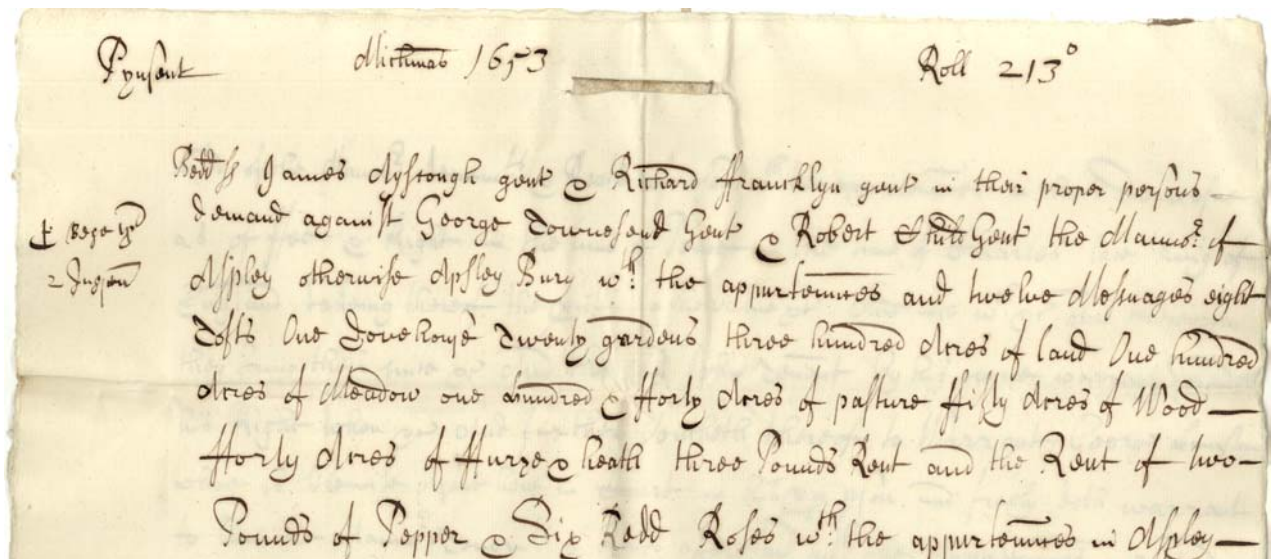
Other deeds at Bedfordshire & Luton Archives referring to gardens include: TW84, which records the granting of two parts of a messuage with a garden with a thorn hedge, croft etc in Biddenham by Thomas Sampson to the Chapel on Biddenham [Bromham] Bridge, 1385.

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PR156, dated 1422, records that a messuage and garden and other land in Little Staughton was granted to John Crowe. Another messuage in Over End was described as next to the Garden of the Prior of the Knights Hospitalers.

A deed of 1479 (TW347), which refers back to deeds of 1422, shows that gardens were already an urban phenomena. A house in School Street [now east part of Mill Street] in Bedford was abutted by the way leading to Goldington (Castle Road) and the garden of John Fyssher, the Glover.

Flowers are often mentioned in mediaeval deeds, as part of the service the tenant had to render to his Lord. Document LHE199 of circa 1300 mentions a rent of "unm clavum gertofferum" - a clove gillyflower (*Dianthus caryophyllus*). A deed poll of 1 March 1409 made by Hugh Hasilden, William Goldington, William Cotherstoke and Richard, Vicar of Ravensden, granted a messuage, 2 tofts, 192.5 acres of land, 5 acres of meadow, 8 acres of pasture and 3 acres of wood in Renhold, Salpho, Ravensden and Goldington; 18.5 acres of land in Bedford and a messuage, 60 acres of land, 3 acres of meadow, 4 acres of pasture and 3 acres of wood in Renhold, Salpho, Ravensden and Goldington to the Prior and Priory of Newnham for a term of 5 years at a rent of one red rose to be given on feast of the birth of St. John the Baptist. (Russell Box 213).



Poult Mortuato 1653 Roll 213°

Recovery by James Dylstough gent & Richard Franklyn gent in their proper persons
Demand against George Downes gent & Robert Sturges gent the claimants of
Aspley otherwise Aspley Surry wth the appurtenances and hveles of the same eight
tofts two dove holes two wth gardens three hundred acres of land two hundred
acres of meadow one hundred & forty acres of pasture fifty acres of wood
forty acres of furze & heath three pounds rent and the rent of two
pounds of Pepper & Six Redd Roses wth the appurtenances in Aspley

L25/38 Common Recovery, 1653, note rent in the last line of "two Pounds of Pepper & Six Redd Roses"

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Sixteenth and early Seventeenth Centuries

In the 1530s the extensive monastic lands in Bedfordshire were seized by the King, much of this land was then sold to secular landowners or given to Oxbridge Colleges. The profits were placed in a special Court of Augmentations. These records for Bedfordshire for 1542 have been published by BHRS (Vols.63-64.) They make numerous references to topography as well as people. Incidentally they give a large number of references to gardens. Fifteen houses with gardens, for example, are listed among the tenants of will in the town of **Woburn**. The George had a garden and among its lands it had a garden plot between two closes. Francis Bryan held the farm of the site of the late monastery [i.e. Woburn Abbey] with three pightles of pasture & various gardens, orchards and lez Stewes and fish enclosed within walls of the said monastery.

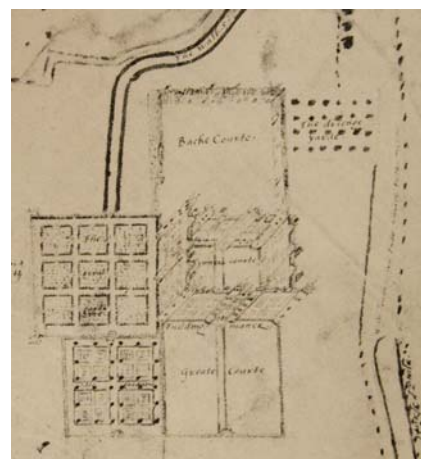
The description of **Warden Abbey** does not specifically mention gardens but gives a good impression of land use in the area of the old monastery.

The farm on the site of the late monastery with all outhouses & buildings & certain lands, meadows and pastures, late occupied to the use of the monastery, that is “1 Close called le greate Vyneyard, lytell Vyneyard & le barton [i.e. farm yard], containing 50 acres, 1 great pond with 2 little ponds adjacent. Amongst the land laid down to pasture etc were 6 acres called le Grove & 2 orchards called le hopyard and le ponyard.”

The field system is depicted on a map of circa 1750 (reference Z1125/1).

The Sixteenth Century saw the laying out of formal gardens for exercise (parallel to the Long Gallery in the main house itself). Herb gardens increased. Books were published on garden techniques and how to use plants for medicinal purposes, such as Turner's *A New Herbal*, published in three parts in 1551, 1562, 1568; the first in vernacular English. Orchards become more important both for fruit and preparing cider. Landowners began to see the relationship of their houses to the surrounding landscape.

A particularly grand house, **Toddington Manor** is shown on Ralph Agas's map of 1581, (Original British Library Add MS.38065; copy held BLARS X1/102/H (right)). It shows two blocks of formal gardens with smaller squares transected by walks. These were called the Great and Little Gardens respectively and were surrounded by walls. The wider landscape included a deer park, a rabbit warren, orchards and twenty fish ponds, well stocked with fresh fish. The house was probably built in c. 1545 and the garden laid out at the same time.



There had been parks throughout the Middle Ages, such as **Wrest**; first reference in 1330, (Victoria County History). They were used partly for hunting. James I made a number of trips to Bedfordshire to hunt at places such as **Bletsoe Park**. The Countess of Pembroke deliberately made her new house of Houghton House in the early 17C face north, so that she and her guests could watch the hunting. The park was seen as a suitable landscape setting for an important house.

Smaller parks were probably used as areas for grazing cattle etc. The **Luton Hoo** deed LHE199 of circa 1300 describes a piece of meadow in West Hyde in the parish of Luton as between the park that was of Walter atte Made of Wheathamstead and the park that was of Richard Eldhew's.

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The Manor of **Bromham** had been divided between the co-heiresses of John de Beauchamp, following his death at the Battle of Evesham in 1265. By the 16th Century all except one of these had fallen into the hands of the Dyve family. When the last division (based to the south of Bromham Church and thus surrounded by Dyve's land) came up for sale it was purchased by the their great rivals, the Botelers of Ford End, Biddenham. The case papers give a fascinating picture of the lengths the Dyves were prepared to go to shift the Botelers and be able to make a park, which in its turn formed part of a general enclosure of the whole parish. On 29 December 1588, John Dyve (son of the owner of Bromham Hall) and 16 or 17 others, being armed with swords and buckler, daggers, long pikes, staves, forest bills and other weapons 'as well invasive as defensive,' waylaid William Boteler as he was walking home from Biddenham Church to his house at Ford End. Boteler was left for dead 'in that he bled and was stricken down to the grounde.' Three of his servants were wounded: Peter Sampson was wounded in the gullet, Andrew Wright lost two fingers of the left hand and Robert Sampson was wounded in the right arm and elsewhere (TW1015-1062). In 1595 Boteler leased the ground known as Walnut Tree Close 'on which one walnut tree stands.' Agreement was finally reached between Sir John and Boteler's widow & son in 1605.



In 1624 the area around the Bushmead manor house, left, shows little in the way of gardens but may show an orchard with dovecote and ponds (GY4/1).

A survey of **Amphill Great Park**, made in 1639, describes the Great Lodge, its outbuildings and gardens

Which said Cappitall house & buildings advance ymselves up on a very pleasant hill w'thin ye sd pk as aforesd, having a delectable prospect over ye sd pk & country, the front whereof to ye southwards is beautified wth a convenient courtyeard & a Garden or young Orchard on ye west end thereof. And wth a kitchin Garden at ye east end theof, wch said orchards or Gardens are surrounded wth a non sawen pale. (R6/1/1/13)

However, it is to poetry that we have to look to get the best idea of an early 17th century landscape and garden. Thomas Carew wrote 'To my friends GN from Wrest' (transcribed in S.R. Houfe's *Through Visitors' Eyes*, Dunstable, 1990; copy in Searchroom: 160) in late 1639 or early 1640. The poem contrasts the peace of **Wrest** with the bleakness of the Borders during Charles's War with Scotland.

*But where more bounteous Nature bears a part
And guides her handmaid, if she but dispense
Fit matter, she with care and diligence
Employs her skill; for where the neighbour source
Pours forth her Waters; she directs their course,
And entertains the flowing streams in deep
And spacious channels, where they slowly creep
In snaky windings, as the shelving ground*

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*Leads them in circles, till they twice surround
This island mansion, which I' th centre placed,
Is with a double crystal heaven embraced;
In which our watery constellations float,
Our fishes, swans, our water-man and boat,*

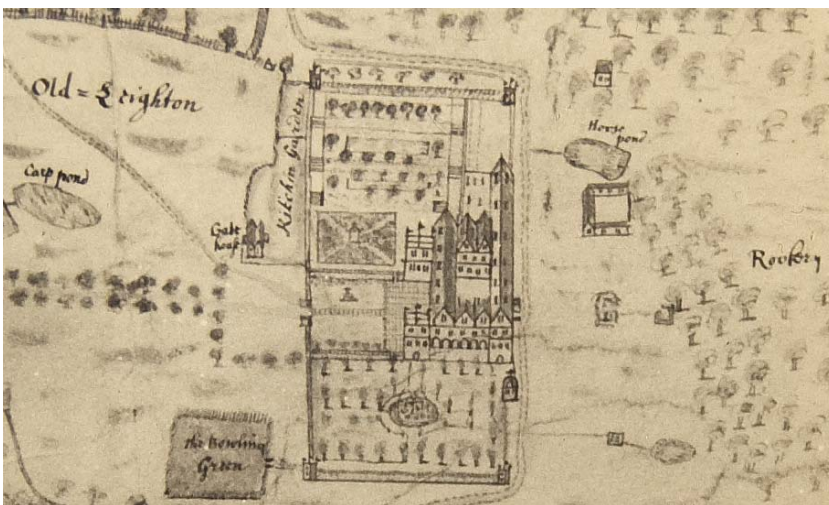
.....
*Whilst our increase in fertile waters here
Disport and wander freely where they please,
Within the circuit of our narrow seas.
With various trees we fringe the water's brink ,
Whose thirsty roots the soaking moisture drink:
And whose boughs in equal ranks
Yield fruit, and shade, and beauty to the banks.
On this site young Vertumnus sits, and courts
His ruddy cheeked 'd Pomona ; Zephyr sports
On th' other, with loved Flora, yielding there
Sweets for the small, sweets for the palate here.
But did you taste the high and mighty drink
Which from that fountain flows*

From this we can gather that Wrest had two moats and plenty of streams nearby, which were used for supplying fish. There were fine orchards (Pomona) and flowers (Flora). In addition there was the Old Park, which was based on the mediaeval park. Richard De Grey had made good his claim to have a park here in 1344. (Bedfordshire Victoria County History Vol. II page 331)

The Restoration; the Growth of the Classical Garden

The enforced exile of the future Charles II and his leading supporters in Europe laid them open to classical ideas in both architecture and garden design. The main influence was French, either directly or with Dutch and German influences in 1688 & 1714. While Inigo Jones had introduced classical themes into architecture before 1640, it was only after 1660 that these extended to gardens.

The variety of landscape surrounding an important house is shown by Thomas Moore's map the *Mannor of Woburn* in 1661 (X1/33/1 (below)).



The house was built round a courtyard, and would have included parts of the mediaeval building. The south wing, which looks Seventeenth Century, looked out on an enclosed area, which had a pond as its centrepiece and included a number of rows of trees. West of the house was a sundial and to the north of it a formal parterre with the paths in the shape of St Andrew's cross. North of this lay another wooded area. To the west of the

gardens proper, which were enclosed by a wall, was the kitchen garden and the Gate House. All this was small scale and in the immediate vicinity of the house.

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When Celia Fiennes visited Woburn in 1697 she described Woburn's garden as fine

there is a large bowling-green with 8 arbours kept cut neatly, and seates in each, there is a seate up in a high tree that ascends from the green 50 steps, that commands the whole parke round to see the Deer hunted, as also a large prospect of the Country; there are 3 large Gardens, full of fruite – I eate a great quantety of the Red Coralina goosbery which is a large thin skin'd sweete goosebery – the walks are one above another with stone steps; in the square just be the dineing roome window is all sorts of pots of flowers and curious greens fine orange citron and lemon trees and mirtles strip'd filleroy and the fine aloes plant; on the side of this pass under an arch into a Cherry garden, in the midst of which stands a figure of stone resembling an old weeder woman used in the garden, and my Lord would have her Effigie which is done so like and her clothes so well that at first I tooke it to be a real living body; on the flatts are fish ponds the whole length of the walke; above that in the next flat is 2 fish ponds, here are dwarfe trees spread of a great bigness.

Like Woburn, **Wrest** was developed in the second half of the 17th century. Beginning in 1658 and continuing through to the early 18th century it saw the creation of parterres, and the planting of fruit and avenues of trees. [see *Case Studies* for more detail]

At **Amphill Park** Lord Ashburnham was planting extensively from 1695 onwards. In November 1695 he ordered Mr Parker to 'have gotten ready on demand two hundred of the Dutch Standard Elmes you mentioned' In October he had mentioned purchasing limes and fruit trees, including six cherry trees from Sussex. He also says that 'he will have occasion for some excellent apara grasse, and all other things to plant and stock a kitchen garden having this last summer caused a plot of ground to be walled round for that purpose.'

Further letters show that additional planting was taking place a decade later. On 30 January 1706/1707 Parker had to 'goe to Battersea over against Chelsea, see among the gardeners there to procure one thousand setts, of the large sorte of Asparagus' On 1 March 1706/1707 in a letter to Nicholas Parker, Lord Ashburnham wrote from Amphill Park: 'I have present occasion for 30 lyme trees, large, well growen & rooted all of the Female kind and flowering trees which I desire you will send me downe to Amphill Parke by this next return the Carrier without fayle'. (East Sussex Record Office ASH/4461-66, BLARS Microfilm 180).



Colworth House, Sharnbrook, 1715, showing the gardens around the house just before the house was rebuilt. The redevelopment of the gardens and park followed in the mid 18th century. (GA2955)

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The Eighteenth Century

In the early 18th century a number of large houses were built or rebuilt in Bedfordshire and their new gardens obviously reflected the style of the day.

Between 1709 and 1714 **Hinwick House** was built for Richard and Diana Orlebar. A walled garden was created on the west side and an oval lawn with a sundial as its centrepiece on the south side. This is shown on a contemporary picture (reproduced in Country Life of 22 September 1960 copy in BLARS reference CRT130Podington3).

In 1725, Heylock Kingsley entered into agreements with local holders of common rights so he could impark the area round the **Hasells**, Sandy. It is likely that the terraces, including the Bowling Green at the bottom and two of the three wall gardens were part of this landscaping. Both features are explained by the particular problems of gardening on a ridge otherwise unprotected from the prevailing southwest wind.

Meanwhile the established gardens at, for example, Woburn and Wrest were adapted in various ways. The mid 1720s probably saw the peak of the formal designing of the gardens at Wrest.

A useful summary of the shape of a number of Bedfordshire landscapes is provided by Thomas Jeffreys's map of 1765. There are drives through **Chicksands** Wood but not close to the house. **Luton Hoo** had an extensive park including an obelisk. In East Hide were two formal avenues with formal plantations behind; similarly there were two formal plantations either side of access drive at **Stockwood**, Luton. **Odell** Great Wood was already divided into formal drives based on the design of the wheel. There were formal drives also in Potton Woods. To the north of **Houghton House** two double avenues extended beyond the road from Houghton Conquest. At **Toddington Manor** there are three ponds being fed by a tributary of the Flitt. They look like fishponds and may be part of an earlier landscape. To the north east of **Melchbourne Park** were two double avenues of trees but not leading up to the house, on west woods dissected by formal drives. However for some houses, such as Hinwick House and Hall, no landscaping is shown.

As the century progressed many of the large gardens changed with fashion, some employed the best-known garden designers others were influenced by them. The garden style most attributed to England is that of the 18th century landscape garden; a sweeping away of the formal continental styles, culminating in the relaxed informal lakes, lawns and woods of Brown and Repton.

Gardens of 1720-1740 Kent and Bridgeman influenced

Wrest, (Langley)
Southill (Badeslade)
Hasells

Lancelot Brown

Wrest, limited designs by Brown 1758-60 to soften the edges
Southill, (between 1765-1779)
Luton Hoo, designed by Brown, c1768
Amptill, designed by Brown, 1771
Hasells (influenced?)
Colworth (influenced?)
Woburn extension of Park to Husborne Crawley 1760 (after enclosure)

Humphrey Repton

Hasells (1791)
Moggerhanger (1792, 1798)
Woburn (c1807)
Battlesden (before 1808)

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Brown was not the only landscape gardener of the 1760s and 70s. At the **Hasells**, Sandy, the 1760s saw the extension and completion of the work that had been done during Heylock Kingsley's time and between 1765 and 1767 Colonel Parker and Nathaniel Richmond were involved in this. Nathaniel Richmond was paid £17, 6s, 6d for 11 days attendance at Hasells and it is thought he was the designer of the landscape improvements (Francis Pym *Sentimental Journey*, 1998 p24). At the end of the terraces, pavilions were erected for William Pym and the walled gardens built. The bricks cost £6s 6d per thousand. The park was enlarged again in the 1770s.

Brought over 69. 0. 3 1/2

Dec 14th Labourers from Noor 6th in the new kitchen garden & taking up trees 4. 11. 5 1/2

25th Do in alterations in the Orchard 2. 5. 8 1/2

28th Do & garden 1. 19

27th John Waters upon account for making bricks 2. 12. 6.

80. 8. 11 1/2

Labour in the new kitchen garden at Hasells, 1765 (PM2380)

Names of the closes & the reasons of the Demerues lands of Hasells continued.

Number of acres		1770.	1771.
12	Dovehouse close	} with part of the garden, now lawn. Sweard	Sweard
8	Horse close		Sweard <small>with the lawn drain</small>
30	L. Wood closes	Sweard	Sweard
8	Dame's Orchard	Sweard	Sweard

The Dovehouse close and Horse close became part of the garden lawn in 1770, more ground was added to the lawn in 1775 and by 1786 two groves and the wood had also been added. (PM1571)

In 1772 John Parker was paid £4 17s, 11d for digging the river below the bridge at **Colworth** in Sharnbrook parish for William Lee. In 1776 Parker started work on a section of the top lake. The

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six men were paid £141 for six months work. Nearly 700 trees were delivered from Kennington Nursery in 1778 (UN252).

The 1794 Map of Cardington (W2/6/1) shows a transitional garden at **Howard House**, which had a formal centre with walks at right angles, forming a cross and winding paths on the outside. The centre must always have been sunken with the winding paths on higher ground. The ha-ha at the east end of the present garden may well date from this period. A garden opposite the church consists of a circular walk round a wooded area.



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The Nineteenth Century

As in the 18th century, the 19th saw Bedfordshire gardens moving with the times. At the beginning of the century **Old Warden Park** was being developed by Robert, 2nd Lord Ongley. In the first decade Repton was at work at **Woburn** and **Battlesden** and in 1813 James Wyatt was redesigning the **Chicksands** Priory estate. The 1820s and 1830s saw the laying out of the Swiss Garden at Old Warden by Robert, 3rd Lord Ongley.



Battlesden Park, c. 1813 from a watercolour by Thomas Fisher (Slide209)

One of the Bedfordshire landscapes most altered in the first half of the Nineteenth Century was **Flitwick Manor**. The 1793 Map of Flitwick (LL4/1) shows that the Manor House was split from the church by a road. To the south east of the house was a slim area of pleasure ground beyond this was the Paddock including the formal water, which had a different shape from that shown on the 1880s Ordnance Survey map. To the west of the house lay a Grove. From 1816 the garden was redeveloped. John Thomas Brooks' draft will of 1834 specifically mentions his greenhouse and hothouse plants (HN2/B3/9) and in a memorandum to the will (HN2/B3/10) he observes "Having spent much time attention and money in improving the Family Mansion & its Grounds and the Estate generally; it is my hope and wish that my child who succeeds me in it will take an equal interest in the place and it is my particular wish and hope that he will continue, and preserve and perpetuate the museum and the Botanic Garden the arboretum, especially, of which, will, if thus kept up be in after generations of great interest and value."

Other gardens that were developed in the 19th century included Hasells and Ickwell Bury.

Early Victorian gardens include the building by Samuel Charles Whitbread of a wall garden to the south east of the transitional garden at **Howard House, Cardington**. The 1880s Ordnance Survey map shows this but the date stone in the wall itself gives a date of 1840. Documents cannot give all the answers. It is essential to check what is on the ground with what you can find in the archive.

The late 19th and early 20th centuries saw the large estates continue to change their gardens. Glass houses were built on a grand scale at Colworth and Luton Hoo amongst others.

By the end of the century the Arts and Crafts movement was beginning to influence the gardens of the upper middle classes who were having houses built. Barrington House, **Biddenham** was designed in 1900 by C E Mallows for his father in law, Mr Peacock, in the Arts & Crafts style and his design extended to the garden, which included kitchen gardens, a tennis lawn, a wilderness and a formal garden surrounded by hedging.

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Public and Private – gardens in the 19th & 20th centuries

In the towns the late Victorian and early 20th centuries saw the rise of the public pleasure gardens. **Bedford Park** opened in 1888, which was followed by **Russell Park** ten years later. Meanwhile the riverbanks of the Great Ouse were being enhanced for public enjoyment. The suspension bridge opened on the same day as Bedford Park even though it was still under construction and the Embankment and St Mary's gardens were planned, expanded and improved from the turn of the century to the 1920s. Meanwhile in Leighton Buzzard **Page's Park** opened in about 1894 and in Luton **Wardown Park** was acquired by the council in 1904.



Private gardens continued to develop, for example Gertrude Jekyll produced designs for **Putteridge Park** in 1911 and **The Old House, Ickwell** in 1926-27, and between 1934 and 1948 the gardens at Sandy Lodge were revitalised by Sir Malcolm Stewart and his wife. **Hinwick Hall, Luton Hoo** and **Stockgrove Park** also saw changes.

On a smaller scale some landowners were keen to ensure that estate cottages at least had some means to raise food for their families. The Duke of Bedford's cottages had 'little plots in front and large allotments either at the back or close by' even in Woburn where gardens next the public street were limited in size, they had plots sufficiently large 'to allow of flowers, pot-herbs, or even beds of cabbages to grow' (R1/1029/1).



Improvements in lawn mowers and other tools and the increased availability of seeds and plants at low prices from High Street shops such as Woolworths meant that gardening could become more of a hobby for the lower middle classes who did not rely on it for food.

Bedfordshire had several well-known nurseries. Laxtons of Bedford began in the 1890s and specialised in fruit, while the Godber nurseries in Willington were known for their chrysanthemums and, although these businesses closed, the late 20th century saw the rise of the large garden centre, including those at Podington, Milton Ernest and Willington.