

The Walled Garden



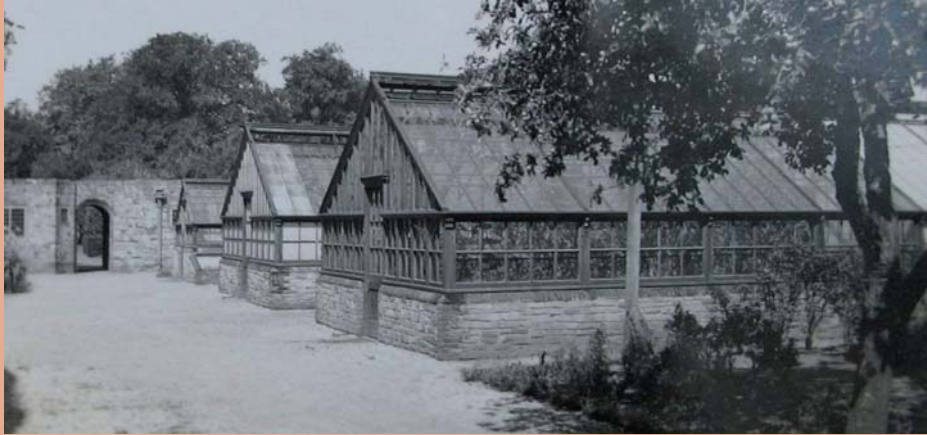
Although the structure of gardens can be permanent, with walls and buildings outliving the planting, much garden history is preserved only in the memories of those who have worked daily in the garden and experienced how it changed under their care and how tasks were carried out. The walled garden at Parham was probably created in the 18th century and paths and brick walls survive from that period. It must always have been a productive garden, supplying food and flowers for the household.

Ray Gibbs was head gardener at Parham for many years until his death in 2007. He communicated to our researchers some of his unrivalled knowledge, especially about the work done by the Pearsons between 1922 and 1965. Like the house, the garden incorporated the most up-to-date technology, not all of which survives or works.



"The 18th-century garden walls were continually patched and repaired. No major rebuilds were carried out unless serious problems developed. The north-east corner collapsed and was rebuilt in the 1950s. The centre of the west wall is supported by two picturesque brick buttresses built in the 1960s. Valerian, wallflowers, moss, and lichen were not removed, and in various places were actively encouraged."

"In 1923 new greenhouses were built in the south-east square of the garden, designed and constructed in teak by Mackenzie & Moncur Ltd [hothouse engineers of Edinburgh], the top people in their field and the most innovative. Victor Heal designed the rear greenhouse wall with its semicircular bay and the chimneystack for the coke boilers. ... At right angles to the greenhouse another block of buildings runs along the entrance border, creating a picturesque effect in Arts and Crafts style. The construction is anything but antique: reinforced concrete roof and floor, with metal supporting beams, all this hidden by leaded lights and decorative trim. These buildings were completely practical, providing a garden office, fruit store, tool room, potting shed, etc."



"The cross paths dividing the garden into squares were retained [from the 18th-century layout], also the path running a border's depth in from the perimeter wall. They had been partly cinder and soil, and were replaced by Fittleworth fill – broken pieces of sandstone that needs rolling regularly to stay smooth. Two men with a water bowser and four men with a roller carried out this procedure in the summer months on a weekly basis right into the 1960s."

"Perhaps the most inventive project in the garden was the new irrigation system. In the 1920s there were three wells, but no running water. A series of dipping ponds linked by underground metal ducts was built all round the garden. They were fed by various means: rainwater from the roofs of the greenhouse, office, and summerhouse was fed in, also from the new storm drains. But the main source was from the park by way of ditches fed into a pond and then pumped into the garden. It was all done by hand. The ponds needed constant checks to avoid leaf and rubbish blockages. The new system was very decorative but all the watering, from a few flowerpots to complete vegetable beds, still had to be done by hand."



"There were no decorative borders before the 1980s. Rose beds, flowerbeds yes, but for use, not display. All the borders were planted in blocks and rows consisting of vegetables, soft fruit, foliage, and flowering plants for use in the house. There were huge beds for chrysanthemums, sweet peas, artichokes, and fruit cages. The family visited the garden and took their guests, but it was not a particularly tidy garden."