

Barshaw Park Peace Garden – an outline history

The garden was originally the walled **kitchen garden** of Barshaw House. Robert Smith, a Paisley yarn warehouseman, bought Barshaw Farm in **1798** and built his mansion looking south across parkland to the busy Glasgow Road. The kitchen garden was located out of public view to the north of the house, yet conveniently close to bring produce to the kitchen. Cultivated by a professional gardener, its three quarter of an acre would have provided enough fruit and vegetables to feed nine people all year round.

There were many such mansions with walled gardens around Paisley. Few of these mansions survive today, and this is the only remaining walled garden. It is typical of the walled gardens of the 18th and 19th centuries. The **high brick walls**, and surrounding **shelter belt of trees** create a **favourable microclimate** keeping out strong winds, foraging animals and thieves. To the west the shelter belt remains, with some of the original beech trees. The garden extends 210 ft east-west and 150 ft north-south, giving a long south facing north wall wall against which to grow espalier fruit trees and to build lean-to greenhouses. Brick was absorbing the heat of the sun better than stone. This oblong plan also allows more the lower morning and evening sun into the garden.

In the **original layout**, as shown on the **1861** Ordnance Survey (OS) plan, the entrance to the garden was through a gateway at the south east corner. Another gateway in the north wall gave access to the potting sheds and heating chambers. The path running round the perimeter of the garden gave access to one east-west and one north-south path dividing up the central area into four roughly equal rectangular plots. A greenhouse stood between the north gate and the north-south path.

In 1858 the wealthy draper James Arthur bought the property, extended the house and altered the layout of the garden. The **1897** OS plan shows no central east-west path, but the existing path close to the southern perimeter path. Greenhouses extended most of the length of the north wall, from the north east corner to a large semi-circular bay (now a seating area) opposite

the north-south path. This path had been divided into two paths around an oval bed. The 1913 OS plan shows the entrance to the garden had been moved to its current position. The southern wall was lowered to open up views into the garden through the railings.

The garden was becoming mainly a **flower garden**. Through the course of the 19th century, it became less important for growing fruit and vegetables, because a wider variety could be bought locally. Fresh produce was brought in from afar by the railway, which reached Paisley in the 1840s. With the spread of refrigerated transport from the 1880s, even exotic fruit became available.

In **1911** Paisley Borough Council bought the Barshaw estate from James Arthur's widow to turn the farmland into a **public park** and golf course. In 1914 the house was used to house Belgian war refugees, and then as convalescent home for wounded WW1 soldiers, and later a maternity hospital. The garden was maintained as a flower garden with a great display of bedding plants. In recent years their beds have been planted with herbaceous perennials, and the greenhouses demolished.

The garden was dedicated as a **Peace Garden** in **1986** by Bruce Kent of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Some plants were added to the perimeter beds associated with Hiroshima, the Japanese city destroyed in 1945 by a US atom bomb. These include the ginkgo biloba tree on the east side, the false acacia, the camphor laurel, and bamboo. The ginkgo tree is known in Japan as the *tree of hope* and *survivor tree* because from the charred stumps of the trees in Hiroshima, new shoots grew days after the city's destruction. Each year on **6th August** an event is held at the white peace pole to remember the victims of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. **Armistice Day** in November is marked with an Inter-Faith gathering.

The garden is now maintained by Friends of Barshaw Park volunteers - see www.friendsofbarshawpark.org.uk. Please join us.