

Hall Place Gardens before 1945

It is probable that the gardens at Hall Place are of relatively recent date.

The earliest plan of the estate, dated 1768, calls it "Hall Place Farm" and shows land that is now garden as meadows and yards, apart from a narrow strip fronting Bourne Road between the house and the bottom of Gravel Hill, which was labelled 'garden'. There was also a kitchen garden of 2 acres where the nursery and greenhouses are now. The area to the west of the house was a large meadow called Bowling Green Mead, a name which suggests that it had some recreational function. There was a pond in it where ducks were kept for the table and which was used as the site of the sunken garden in Mr. Eul's design of 1968. For the first seventy years of the nineteenth century Hall Place was used as a boys' boarding school, and the grounds were shared between it and the Mill that stood astride the Cray just to the south of the house. A print published in 1828 shows a cricket match in progress in Bowling Green Mead and the school probably modified the use of the rest of the grounds. A plan drawn up in 1829 shows a garden, where in 1768 there had been yards, namely the area before the east front of the house where the lawn is now.

The first edition of the 25" Ordinance Survey (1863) shows the part of Bowling Green mead nearest to the house as a fenced-off garden; by the second edition (1879) this garden had been extended southwards to include what is now the rose garden. Some updated photographs, probably from the late nineteenth century, show that the topiary did not exist at that time.

From about 1870 the house was let to a series of private tenants, who no doubt developed the gardens according to their tastes and means. The last of the tenants, the Countess of Limerick, who lived at Hall Place from 1943, was a keen gardener and it was she who initiated the topiary work. The war and her death in 1943 inevitably led to the gardens being neglected.