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Garden, Orchard and Shaws

The Museum has undertaken the creation of features in the curtilage and landscape around Bayleaf with the intention that the immediate surroundings of the house will have the character, and in many respects the detail, of its original setting in the early 16th century.

The garden and orchard

Medieval pictures and documents tell us much about contemporary gardens, but very few of them refer to the gardens of rural farmhouses such as Bayleaf. It seems likely, however, that Bayleaf's garden would have been largely devoted to vegetables, fruit and herbs for use in the household. The vegetables were mainly brassicas such as cabbages and turnips, with leeks or onions, peas and beans, lettuce, and spinach beet. Many of the greens would have been used for boiled pottage or soup. A wide variety of herbs were grown, and there would probably have been gooseberries, raspberries and wild strawberries in addition to hedgerow fruit such as blackberries, crab apples, plums and damsons. The orchard contains apple and pear trees.

The shaws

A shaw is the name given to small woodlands found in the Weald of Kent, Sussex and Surrey. They are usually long and narrow, and lie along a field border. They are believed to be the remains of primeval woodland, left when fields were first reclaimed from the Wealden forest, but maintained and developed with later planting. Their true purpose is unknown, but it is clear that they provided shelter for stock in the fields, and that they were intensively managed to produce both timber and underwood. Since the 18th century shaws have been gradually removed to give bigger fields and narrower hedges, but many still exist and are now being closely studied to discover their history and purpose.

Many shaws existed in the vicinity of Bayleaf in its original location in Kent, and at the Museum three areas have been planted with appropriate trees and shrubs. Two of them are based on the shaws closest to Bayleaf's original site, known as Bayleaf Shaw and Batfold Shaw, and the third contains common species found in other Wealden shaws. Oak and ash are the main timber trees, and other species include hazel, hawthorn and field maple. In years to come, when they have matured and developed, the shaws will give an authentic picture of the wooded landscape of the original Bayleaf area.

