

# A 17<sup>th</sup> Century Water Maze at Greenwich

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Recent research undertaken by the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England relating to the building of the Queen's House at Greenwich during the early seventeenth century, has led to the discovery of a previously unknown maze of a most unusual type; a water maze. Evidence from the building work accounts (now in the Public Record Office) show that it was sited in one of the inner courtyards of the old Palace. Its date of construction is unknown, but in 1614-15, Humfrey Lyddy, a founder, was paid:

*for mendyng the great stopcocks for the maze in the Conduit Court and oiling them.*  
[PRO E351/32491]

Eight years later, further repairs were carried out:

*mending and sodering [soldering] the pipes and cistemes of the maze [and for] sodering on diverse new branches to the maze.*

It appears that the water was carried in lead channels, filled from a reservoir controlled by the stopcocks. The water flowed through the design and was evidently surrounded by paved ground, as in 1622-3 an entry records:

*mending the paving... about the maze in the Conduit Court.*

In 1633-4, workmen were engaged in *working, squaring and laying Purbeck paving in the Conduit Court* perhaps replacing previously worn paths, or as a complete recasting and upgrading of the paving around the maze, part of the major replanting and refurbishment of the gardens of the old Palace and the grounds to the north of the Queen's House. [AO 1 2427/631]

The stone around the maze formed the paths around which one walked: in 1639-40 *stone walks* in the Conduit Court are mentioned in the accounts. In the same year further renovations to the maze were undertaken and it is clear that the channels of the water maze were linked to a fountain within the court as over £20 was paid for:

*paving with ragstones round about the fountain in the court which was broken up to lay the pipes of the maze.* [AO 1 2429/7 1]

Unfortunately, no plan or engraving survive that show the garden or the maze. Between 1610 and 1640, the gardens at Greenwich, under the patronage of the early Stuart Queens, Anne and Henrietta Maria, received much attention, including work by the most advanced Mannerist gardener of the day, Salomon de Caus, famed for his elaborate grottos, incredible mountains, waterworks and statuary. The water maze, although perhaps of earlier (Tudor) origin was unusual and interesting enough to be integrated into the new garden design, planted to compliment the newly built Queen's House.

It is not known when the maze was destroyed, but it is likely that it disappeared in the late seventeenth century when the site of the old Palace was cleared to allow the construction of Greenwich Hospital.

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