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EDWARD KEMP (1817–91): 'AN ABLE AND USEFUL MAN'

Edward Kemp was one of the mid-Victorian period's most influential landscape gardeners and a respected author of several gardening publications. Despite this, details of his early life are sparse. Born in 1817 in Streatham, then Surrey, he was the son and grandson of Nonconformist tailors. Growing up in an area still essentially rural, his interest in plants led him to train as a landscape gardener at the London Horticultural Society Gardens in Chiswick, Middlesex, before moving to Chatsworth, Derbyshire, to work under Joseph Paxton. When Paxton was commissioned to design a park for Birkenhead, Wirral, the first publicly funded park in the world, Kemp was appointed to oversee its laying out, eventually being appointed its permanent superintendant. His writing combined with the growing reputation of Birkenhead Park brought him numerous private commissions. Despite this, Kemp remained firmly rooted in Birkenhead, remaining in the town for the rest of his life. In 1863, an assistant park superintendent was appointed and his role became that of 'Consulting Superintendent'. He never, however, severed his connection with the park, advising the authorities on park-related matters when well into his seventies and living in his house on its periphery until he died and was buried in Flaybrick, the cemetery he had laid out for the Birkenhead Commissioners some thirty years previously.

This paper seeks to reconstruct Kemp's life in order to provide a proper context within which to evaluate his professional career and achievements as a landscape gardener and author. It looks first at Streatham, the place where he grew up, and at what is known of his family background, before considering what might have been his early training. It reviews his time in the Chiswick gardens of the London Horticultural Society and then follows him to Chatsworth, examining in particular his work for Joseph Paxton. Finally, it takes him to Birkenhead, where he was appointed to undertake the laying out of the park on behalf of Paxton and where he was eventually to spend the rest of his life. His various publications, his superintendence of Birkenhead Park and his work as a designer of both public and private open spaces are not discussed in detail as they are covered in other papers.

To write about 'Kemp the man' presents a challenge as much of his life is a matter of conjecture. He died childless, outlived the immediate members of his family and left behind no portrait or photograph nor any journals or personal papers. Thus, any account of him is dependent on the information given in his obituaries and on details gleaned from his business correspondence.[1] Even the 'Biographical Note' provided by the landscape architect, Frank Albert Waugh, in his *Landscape Gardening*, the American revision of Kemp's work, written in 1911, noted how difficult it was to establish details of Kemp's life only twenty years after his death:

> Although I have employed two expert English antiquarians for the search and though I have myself visited the scene of his principal labours for the same purpose, it has not been possible to add any important facts to this meagre biography of an able and useful man.[2]

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To supplement this information, one has to rely on the sources available to any family historian. Baptism, marriage and burial registers, and the ten-yearly census returns provide details of the lives of both Kemp and his family, while local directories and tithe records give an insight into where they lived and worked. Further information can be extracted from those few examples of Kemp's correspondence that survive in public collections (traceable through the National Archives website), while more can be found among private muniments such as those of Chatsworth or the Eaton Estate.[3] To some extent this is a 'bricks without straw' exercise, but together these sources supply sufficient material to build at least a skeletal outline of Kemp's life.

STREATHAM AND THE SURREY HILLS

> Many a time in after life he recurred to the pleasure he derived from the botanical rambles of his boyhood and youth over the neighbouring country to Penge Wood, then quite a rural district, and the surrounding Surrey Hills and Dales.[4]

Edward Kemp was born in Streatham, then in Surrey (now London), on 25 September 1817. In the first decades of the nineteenth century it was a large village, straggling along the Streatham High Road, surrounded on either side by farms and fields, interspersed with stretches of common and best known for Streatham Park, a large mansion, the former home of Hester Thrale and once visited on a regular basis by Dr Samuel Johnson and for the pleasure grounds of Beulah Spa, laid out by Decimus Burton and opened in 1831. Like many of the settlements on the periphery of London, Streatham was growing. In 1801, it had a population of 2357. Ten years later it was still essentially rural, though numbers had risen to 2729, with just over four hundred houses occupied. In the next two decades, however, its size almost doubled as the tide of population swept out from the capital. By 1831, its population had risen to 5068, while the number of houses had reached 834, many of them quite recently built and including several substantial villas as well as numerous cottage-style properties. It was in this rapidly changing landscape that Kemp grew up.

The Kemps were a local family. Charles, Edward's grandfather, was a tailor. In November 1785, he is recorded as providing three coats, at nine shillings per coat, and three waistcoats, at five shillings each, to the Overseers of the Poor of the parish of Streatham.[5] He also supplied uniforms to the local Volunteers Association in the Napoleonic Wars. A list of the parish's inhabitants, drawn up by the incumbent in 1787, records Charles living in Wells Lane (now Sunnyhill Road), the letter 'N' by his name denotes him as a 'non-parishioner'. A generation later, Kemp's father, another Charles, was also a tailor, as was his uncle, Henry. The Streatham Tithe Apportionment of 1840 shows Charles occupying what was a small, weather-boarded cottage and garden at the High Road end of Greyhound Lane.[6] Five years later, the *Post Office Directory* records him as a tailor, still in Greyhound Lane, and it is as a tailor that he is described on Kemp's marriage certificate a few months later. Charles was self-employed and it is probably from his father that Kemp acquired his strongly developed work ethic.

Kemp was the middle of three children. His older sister, Mary Ann, had been born in 1816 and his younger brother, Charles, in 1820. All three were baptised not in the local parish church but as Nonconformists in the Independent Chapel at Tooting, a short distance from their home.[7] Little is known of the children's early years. There are no records of their schooling. For Streatham children there was St Leonard's Parish School, but the subsequent careers of all three suggest that their education went well beyond the elementary level a parish school could provide. Mary became a schoolmistress; Charles

Figure 1. Stanford's map of London (1862) showing Greyhound Lane and Streatham Common, Surrey (detail)

would become Clerk to the Clerkenwell Magistrates Court; and for Edward to be received into the Horticultural Society Gardens he would have needed to demonstrate that he had already received 'a certain degree of education'.

To what extent Edward was self-taught is difficult to say, but he was widely read and appears to have had a more than usual ability to absorb and retain information. Though Streatham was expanding, the vast unspoiled stretches of the Surrey countryside, with their wooded hills, were within easy reach of his home. It was walking here that he acquired the knowledge and love of plants that was, as his obituary records, to shape the pattern of his later life. In particular, it was here that he developed his love of trees (Figure 1):

> Passing up the road to Streatham Church, and turning along the old Brighton road, with splendid elm trees overshadowing it on both sides, and a good deal of park-like scenery on either hand, a walk of ten minutes will reveal Streatham Common, a beautiful grassy slope, environed with trees.[8]

At what point Kemp acquired his detailed knowledge of botany and his ability to give plants their Latin names remains uncertain. Books and periodicals abounded for private study; John Claudius Loudon, in his *Gardeners' Magazine*, was ready to give advice:

> The Books that we would recommend for perusal to a young man desirous of preparing himself are, all Dr. Lindley's works; more especially his *Outline of Botany*, *Outline of Horticulture*, and his *Introduction to Botany, to the Natural System*, and his *Ladies' Botany*. […] Davy's *Agricultural Chemistry* ought also to be studied, and Main's *Vegetable Physiology*, and Hayward's *Principles of Horticulture*.[9]

This was a tall order and whether Kemp read all or any of them is not recorded. What is not in dispute is that to be received into the London Horticultural Society's Gardens at Chiswick he would have to have been well educated and be ready to embark on a rigorous training. Kemp was both of these.

EARLY TRAINING

Since entry into the Horticultural Society Gardens could not be achieved until a would-be gardener had reached the age of eighteen, it seems likely that Kemp found a position

in a garden of some sort before he moved to Chiswick. One possibility was that he was taken on at the Springfield Nurseries of William Rollisson and Sons in Upper Tooting, just a couple of miles from his home in Streatham.[10] (A similar course of action had been taken by the young James Veitch, son and grandson of the Exeter nurserymen and two years Kemp's senior, who had been placed with Rollisson's for a year to gain horticultural experience.[11]) That Kemp was very familiar with Rollisson's is evident as it was one of only twenty-one 'Nurseries, Florists' Gardens etc.' he describes in his book on the parks and gardens of London, published in 1851.[12] A link with the nursery might also explain the disproportionate amount of space he devotes in that volume to the grounds of Burntwood Grange, the home of a young stockbroker, Harmon Grisewood, situated between Wandsworth Common and Garratt Lane, which he describes as 'recently redesigned and replanted by the established Tooting nursery of Messrs Rollisson'.

Unlike a modern guide book, Kemp's *The Parks, Gardens, etc. of London and its Suburbs* is not profusely illustrated. Predictably it includes views and plans of Buckingham Palace, Hampton Court and Frogmore. More surprising is that of its nineteen engravings, four show features of the 'small garden' of Burntwood Grange: the interior, the exterior and the ground plan of its conservatory and an engraving of a 'pretty dairy'. This suggests that Kemp, perhaps through Rollisson's, had some special link with the place. Certainly, a link with Harmon Grisewood was already established when, in 1855, Kemp was commissioned by him to lay out a flower garden, walk and rosary in his newly purchased estate at Daylesford and to provide plans for the rebuilding and landscaping of the estate village.[13]

CHISWICK

> His love of Nature with his love of flowers and their culture determined his career, and he was apprenticed and served in the Royal Horticultural Society gardens at Chiswick, then under the directorate of the eminent Professor Lindley, whose friendship he retained in after life.[14]

There is no confirmation of Kemp's apprenticeship or employment among the Horticultural Society's records – documents for the period when he might have been there are missing – but the evidence of his obituary seems proof enough, as is his detailed knowledge of the education and training provided by the society at the time.

Examinations for gardeners were introduced at Chiswick in 1836. Kemp, born in 1817, may well have applied at an opportune moment when the training of gardeners by the society was being put on a proper footing. No less a person than John Claudius Loudon had been a keen proponent of the better education of gardeners for over a decade, using his journal, the *Gardener's Magazine*, to publicize his views.[15] When, in 1836, the London Horticultural Society re-established its programme for the training of gardeners, Loudon described this move as a 'grand step'.[16] Kemp himself provides the detail:

> We must not omit to mention that the Society has done much for horticulture by endeavouring to raise the character and improve the education of gardeners in their establishment. Young men are only admitted to the gardens after undergoing an examination in various branches of the business, and they are subsequently examined as to their progress and proficiency.[17]

Examined or not, Kemp's 'progress and proficiency' must have impressed John Lindley as having completed his training he was taken on to work in the society's gardens. While

there he would have acquired a practical as well as a theoretical knowledge of gardening and been able to make good use of the society's library, which included the works of the great landscape gardeners, including Uvedale Price, Humphry Repton, Loudon and William Sawrey Gilpin, to whom he makes reference in his own publications.[18] He would also have had access to the gardens of the Duke of Devonshire at Chiswick House, the grounds of which abutted directly onto those of the Horticultural Society and with which Kemp appears to have been thoroughly familiar. His account of them in his *The Parks, Gardens, etc. of London* includes detailed descriptions of trees, plants, statuary and buildings and even a mention of a drawing of the water lily, 'Victoria Regis', hanging in a small room 'at the back of the conservatory' – all information which even the most assiduous visitor might not acquire. He also comments on recent changes in the garden and notes that some bays 'were much injured by the frost of 1837–8, which has greatly diminished their beauty'. This suggests he might have been present there at the time and observed the ill-fated bays at first hand.

CHATSWORTH

The lack of archival evidence among Paxton's papers at Chatsworth has made it difficult to confirm the date of Kemp's arrival there. What is certain is that his name is included among the list of Chatsworth gardeners who had contributed to a memorial to the ill-fated botanist and plant collector David Douglas who had died in what were then known as the Sandwich Islands (today Hawai'i) in unfortunate circumstances in 1834.[19] In 1836, requests for donations had been sent out to interested parties, but when these failed to attract sufficient contributions, subscription papers were sent out to gardeners and nurserymen. They appear to have responded more generously than those first approached as by 1839 the fund was sufficient to erect a monument to Douglas. In 1842, the *Gardeners Magazine* printed the names of all those who had subscribed to the memorial. Among the list of contributors from Chatsworth was Kemp. This would suggest that he had arrived there by 1839, in his very early twenties.[20]

The Duke of Devonshire …	£5..0..0
Joseph Paxton	£2..10..0
Andrew Stewart	0..2..6
Charles Edmonds	0..5..0
Peter Marnock	0..2..0
Edward Kemp	0..2..6.
William Wilson	0..2..0

For Kemp to be taken on as a trained, professional gardener at Chatsworth is proof of his capabilities. In moving to Derbyshire, he was to find himself in perhaps the most famous garden in England. Since 1826, when he was appointed as head gardener to the Duke of Devonshire, Paxton had transformed the place. By the time Kemp arrived the grounds had seen numerous ambitious innovations. A pinetum had been planted with an impressive range of coniferous species, to be followed by the much larger arboretum with over sixteen hundred and seventy different specimens, the largest collection of herbaceous plants in Europe. In addition, there were extensive ranges of greenhouses, forcing houses and specialized garden buildings, a vast glazed structure, the Great Stove, and a mountainous rockery. All these would influence Kemp in his later work.

Kemp was not the only trained, young gardener to work with Paxton at Chatsworth. His near contemporaries, John Gibson (1815–75), Edward Milner (1819–94) and George Eyles (1815–87), all served in the gardens at much the same time as he did and like Kemp would go on to make their mark in the world of landscape gardening. Between

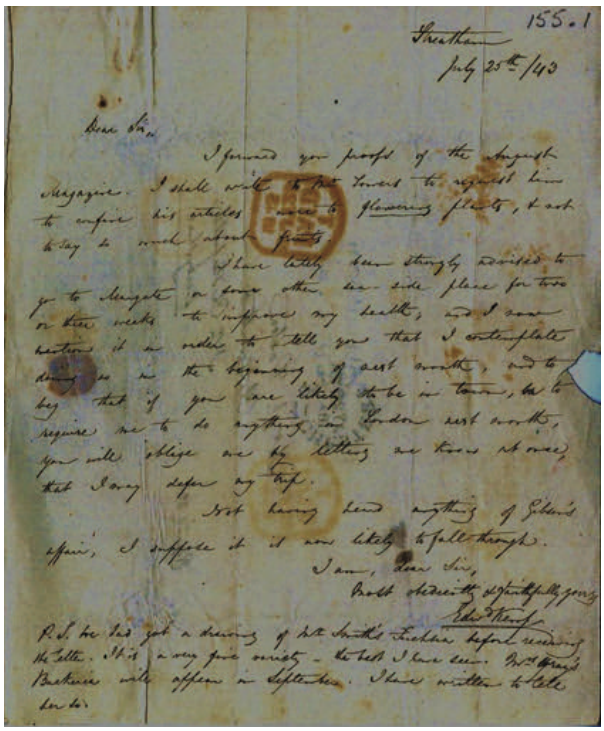

Figure 2. Copy of a letter from Edward Kemp to Joseph Paxton, July 1843. Courtesy: with kind permission of the Chatsworth Archives

them they were responsible for designing and managing the increasing number of public parks that appeared in the mid-nineteenth century. Eyles and Gibson, especially, were known for their work on several of London's public parks, while Milner would become principal of the Crystal Palace School of Gardening. Where Kemp stood apart from these contemporaries was as a respected and prolific author, being heralded in his day as one of the leading writers on garden design as well as for his lifelong commitment to Birkenhead Park.

At Chatsworth Kemp's literary abilities and his detailed knowledge of plants must soon have become evident. As Paxton's involvement in publishing increased his need for an assistant must have been pressing. Kemp, who in his obituary was described as 'Paxton's amanuensis', would have seemed the obvious choice. Whether he moved back to his parents' home to be nearer to the offices of Bradbury & Evans, Paxton's publishers, is not clear. The census of 1841 records him in Streatham, giving his occupation as 'gardener'. Was he living there permanently or just visiting? Either way 'Streatham' heads the only letter from Kemp to Paxton to survive in the Chatsworth archives.[21] In the absence of any other documentary evidence for the period and for the light it throws on Kemp's activities at the time, it is worth reproducing in full (Figure 2).

Streatham
July 25th / 43

Dear Sir,

I forward your proofs of the August Magazine. I shall write to Mr Towers to request him to confine his articles more to flowering plants, and not to say so much about fruits.

I have lately been strongly advised to go to Margate or some other sea side place for two or three weeks to improve my health, and I now mention it in order to tell you that I contemplate doing so in the beginning of next month, and to beg that if you are likely to be in town, or to require me to do anything in London next

> month, you will oblige me by letting me know at once that I may defer my trip.
> Not having heard anything of Gibson's affair, I suppose it is now likely to fall through.
>
> I am, dear Sir,
> Most obediently & faithfully yours
> Edwd. Kemp
>
> P.S. We had got a drawing of Mr Smith's Fuchsia before receiving the letter. It is a very fine variety – the best I have seen. Mrs Wray's Barkeria will appear in September. I have written to tell her so.[22]

The letter is important as it reveals the extent to which Paxton, now increasingly busy, depended on Kemp to see *The Magazine* through the press; he is writing to contributors, chiding them on the content of their articles and selecting items to be included in future issues. Given the time frame, though no references confirm this, it is possible that Kemp also assisted with the production of Paxton's *A Pocket Botanical Dictionary* (1840) and the *Gardeners' Chronicle*, which first appeared in 1841.

Returning to the letter of July 1843, irrespective of whether or not Kemp was able to spend time in a 'sea-side place', his career would soon take a significant turn and plunge him in the practical world of park design. The allusion to his poor health was not sufficient to dent Paxton's confidence in Kemp's abilities. Within a month of their discussion of *The Magazine*, Paxton would be walking the fields of Birkenhead and planning the first municipally funded park in the world.

BIRKENHEAD

By the early 1840s Birkenhead, with a population of only 8223, was a small but expanding township, a short ferry trip across the River Mersey from Liverpool and increasingly favoured as a place of residence for the well-to-do. Since 1833, it had been governed by Improvement Commissioners empowered to levy rates and with responsibility for 'paving, lighting, watching, cleansing and otherwise improving the Township or Chapelry of Birkenhead'. Their powers did not extend to the provision of public green space, the need for which was increasingly pressing:

> Bricks and mortar are […] so fast taking the place of green fields […] Birkenhead will soon no longer be in the country. It is therefore good policy to provide a healthy and agreeable place of resort to secure the permanent benefits of pure air and exercise, at a moderate distance from the town, while this can be done at a comparatively trifling cost.[23]

The solution to the vanishing fields was a public park. In 1843, Birkenhead's Second Improvement Act authorized the commissioners to purchase the necessary land. This was a landmark moment – the first occasion on which a municipal body was granted the powers to provide a park, to be paid for entirely out of public funds. Paxton was commissioned to provide a design. For a fee of eight hundred pounds he was to undertake 'to supply plans, sections, models, the superintendence to completion and to furnish an efficient superintendent to be permanently on the ground to watch and direct the whole details at three guineas per week'. The 'superintendent' was Kemp, who took up his post in September, still only aged twenty-five.

In designing a public park there were very few precedents. Paxton had to draw on his experience of managing a vast country estate and on the ideas he had already demonstrated in his plan for Liverpool's Princes Park, which included entrance lodges, a carriage drive, an ornamental lake, winding paths, areas of informal planting and stretches of open grassland. These features were repeated in Birkenhead, with the

Figure 3. Hillocks created from material excavated from the lakes, Birkenhead Park. Photo: author 2017

addition of a second lake, a rocky ravine and an undulating landscape of low hillocks, created from the material excavated from the lakes. It was the making of this landscape that Kemp was deputed to oversee (Figure 3). Kemp took up his post in September 1843 and began work almost immediately. By November, with the completed plan of the park and the sketches for the lodges approved, he began the work of converting farmland to greensward. The scale of the undertaking was vast, but Kemp seems to have taken it all in his stride. The accounts show he engaged local farmers for carting and employed over thirty labourers to remove fences, grub out hedges, fill in ditches and level banks. There were also payments for 'Ploughing, Harrowing, and Scarrifying' and for the purchase of drainage tiles, boulders for the rockwork and grass seed.

Over the winter of 1843–44 Kemp continued to be busy, handling a large budget and spending thousands of pounds on plants, including mature trees and shrubs, many bought from local nurserymen such as Dicksons' of Chester.[24] Though no actual planting schemes for Birkenhead survive, Kemp, writing a few years later, gives an indication of the principle underlying his choice of specimens, ideas he would incorporate in his own later work:

> Where ever old hedge-rows exist, and require to be removed and levelled […] the greatest care should be exercised in preserving the better part of the trees and bushes that may be in them, and in retaining these rather as broken groups than merely as single specimen.[25]

One aim in selecting what to plant or retain was to achieve 'greenery' throughout the year. A balance was therefore struck between coniferous and deciduous species, with a liberal use of holly for winter cover. Fast-growing trees were chosen for their immediate impact and to act as shelter for slower growing neighbours. Suitable hedgerow specimens were not grubbed out but incorporated in the landscaping, as Kemp advised (Figure 4).

By the summer of 1845, Paxton was concentrating on the last phase of the park, though very much at arm's length, since day-to-day decisions were being left to be made

Figure 4. Eighteenth-century oak at Birkenhead Park. Photo: author, 2008

by Kemp. Other work on the structures and buildings of the park was carried out by Paxton's assistant, the architect and draftsman John Robertson, and by a local architect, the young Lewis Hornblower.[26] Almost two years exactly from the scheme for the park first getting off the ground, Paxton was ready to hand over the reins to Kemp. Keen to ensure matters remained in good hands, he wrote to the commissioners recommending 'that Mr. Kemp be retained in his present position at a salary of £150 pr.an. (he now has £165) and the lodge No 2 be provided as a residence free of rent and rates'. Explaining the last point he observed that 'it is the almost invariable custom to allow head gardeners a free residence in the Place, its advantages being so very evident' (Figure 5).

Kemp can only have been grateful for Paxton's concern for his future, though, in the absence of all but one surviving letter, the exact nature of their relationship is difficult to assess. Sometime in the early 1840s Kemp was invited by Paxton to visit Derbyshire, not to work, but to holiday and spend some of his time sightseeing. Writing about the visit many years later he says:

> It is more than forty years since I visited Alton Towers. I was staying for a fortnight with Mr Paxton, at Chatsworth, and took the opportunity of going to notable places in Derbyshire and its vicinity. During a trip to Dove Dale and Ilam Hall, I passed on to Wootton and Alton Towers, at which latter place I had the advantage of being chaperoned by Mr. Forsyth[27], then in his prime.[28]

MARRIAGE

With both employment and accommodation secure, Kemp must have felt ready to embark on married life. At their meeting of 3 September 1845, the Birkenhead Commissioners' Finance Committee recorded a request from Kemp for 'leave of absence for three weeks on business of importance to himself'. With no explanation as to what such business

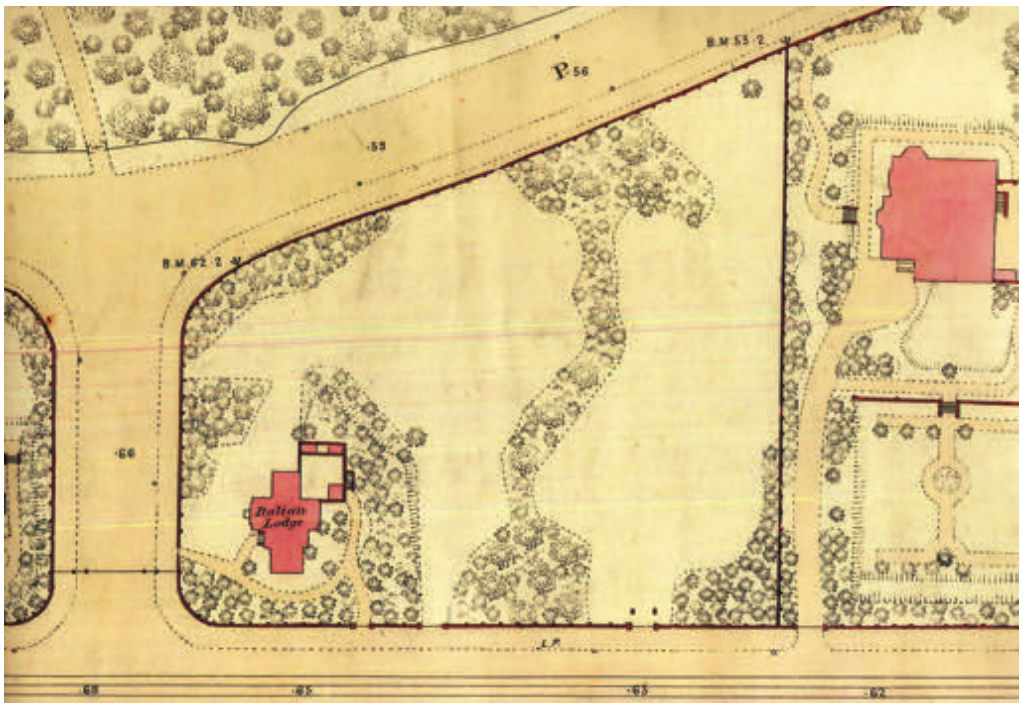

Figure 5. The Italian Lodge; from Ordnance Survey, Sheet XIII.3.11, Claughton cum Grange, Cheshire (Western Division), 10.56 feet to 1 statute mile (surveyed 1875) (detail)

might be, the request was granted. In fact Kemp was to be married. The wedding took place just two days later on 5 September 1845, at St John the Baptist Church, Croydon. Kemp's bride was Sophia Bailey. He was then twenty-eight and she just two years younger.

Sophia had been born in Northamptonshire and christened at Brinkton parish church on 6 July 1819, Her father was Henry Bailey, a respected landscape gardener, who had held the post of park steward and gardener to the Althorp estate since June 1811, having previously worked for seventeen years for the Wall family of Norman Court in Hampshire and for the Barings of Stratton Park. Sophia's mother, Martha Bailey, some twenty years Henry's junior, was his second wife; his first wife, another Sophia, and housekeeper to the Spencers, having died in 1816 at the age of forty-seven.

Sophia's childhood was spent at Althorp, where Henry Bailey remained in the Spencer's employment throughout the early 1820s. In 1825 he was said to have been planning for the career of his son, which involved him becoming a Freeman of the City of London. However, by 1838–39, the Baileys were living in Croydon and seem to have fallen on hard times; described as 'poor', Henry's 'impoverished' condition was partly attributed to some unwise loans he had made to Revd Thomas Dibdin, the Althorp librarian, and 'partly by other misfortune'.[29] Quite how Kemp and Sophia's paths first crossed is difficult to establish. The town of Croydon, her home, was a natural focus for the people of Streatham, but it can have been no coincidence that Henry Bailey had been an experienced and respected landscape gardener.[30]

The 1841 census records Henry Bailey, aged sixty-five, who describes himself as 'Independent', living in Middle Heath Lane, Croydon, together with his wife, Martha, forty-five, and his daughters, Sophia, twenty and Ellen, fifteen. There were no live-in servants. His son George was away at school, most probably in Wellingborough.[31] Henry Bailey died in 1841 and at some point after the wedding Martha Bailey moved to join the Kemp household in the Italian Lodge. She is recorded as being resident there in 1851

and seems to have continued living in Birkenhead until her death, aged seventy-three, in 1866, when she was buried in the Anglican section of the then newly opened Flaybrick Cemetery which Kemp had designed.

MANAGING THE 'NEW PARK'

In the mid-1840s public parks were still very new features of the municipal landscape. The Birkenhead Commissioners, responsible for the care of their pioneering park, had few precedents to follow. Understandably, what Kemp appreciated, but his employers often did not, was that the park was an ongoing commitment, which would always need support from the rates. This difference in outlook was a source of tension almost as soon as Kemp's appointment as superintendent was confirmed. In consequence, he found himself often in the position of having to justify expenditure on the park and at times to negotiate over his salary.

By 1845, the key elements of Paxton's plan were in place and surviving accounts show that the focus of activity was shifting from landscaping to the more mundane tasks of day-to-day park management. There were still trees and plants to be ordered from local nurserymen and placed in the ground, and a tree lifter had been purchased in the autumn of 1844 for that purpose. The pastures also had to be let for grazing. The minutes of 12 April 1848 record that:

> Cows and sheep have access to the 16 acres of the upper part of the Park and to the 7 acres hurdled off at the lower end and sheep only to the middle portion of 2/3 acres in the centre.

Two of the recently appointed park policemen would need uniform and equipment – 'shoes, hats and trousers and rattles and handcuffs for night duty'. This was all essential but unexciting work. Excitement came with the official opening of the park, deferred until 5 April 1847 to coincide with the opening of the docks. Thousands flocked to Birkenhead for the occasion, stamping the creation of the 'New Park' firmly on people's consciousness, something from which Kemp would benefit when he first began to seek work on his own behalf.

Even before the official opening of the park there were rumblings that all was not well in Birkenhead. It, like many other towns, had been hit hard by the economic crisis of the late 1840s and consequently the expected sale of the house plots round the park's periphery had been slow. In addition, the cost of laying out the park had run into many thousands. Economies had to be made and one saving the commissioners considered was dispensing with the post of park superintendent entirely. For Kemp that would have been catastrophic and as an alternative he proposed to take a cut in salary, on the condition that he would be allowed to 'undertake private work' and, ever practical, have 'the privilege of using any spare corners' of the Park Nursery 'to grow a few vegetables for his own consumption'. The committee agreed and Kemp was now free to embark on what were to become two successful subsidiary careers: those of author and of private landscape consultant.

The financial crisis continued and Kemp was ordered to reduce spending on the park. Looking to the future, he pointed out that cutting the labour force was a false economy and would only create additional and unnecessary work 'for the next six to seven years'. A compromise was reached, but with their debts continuing to mount the commissioners looked for other ways to economize. In February 1849, they considered the radical option of dispensing with Kemp's services outright. This was a blow, but Kemp was already beginning to attract private commissions and being able to style himself 'of Birkenhead

Park' was a factor in his success. Furthermore, if he lost his job, he and Sophia would have been homeless. His response was to offer 'to continue in the superintendence […] free of any salary' provided he was permitted 'to remain in the occupation of his present residence and the small plots of land' he had been allowed 'to cultivate rent free'.[32] The commissioners agreed with this arrangement and with his position now assured, at least for twelve months, Kemp could concentrate on the minutiae of the day-to-day affairs of the park: gravel was needed for the walk to the principal entrance, there were too many swans on the lakes and half should be dispensed with, a 'shelter was needed for the park roller especially during the winter' and a supply of wheat straw required to thatch its roof, the lakes were in a sorry state and the damaged railings had to be repaired or replaced.[33] These were all matters with which Kemp could manage with ease, but none engaged his full capabilities. This would come as his horizons widened.

PRIVATE WORK AND PUBLICATIONS

As early as 1846, Kemp had been approached by William Laird, the third son of William Laird, the shipbuilder, to design a large villa estate on the banks of the Mersey, to the north of the village of Eastham. Always a hard worker, he may well have drawn up the plans in his own time, but nevertheless this apparent moonlighting displeased the commissioners. They had already allowed him to undertake some minor private work the previous December, but this was a step too far. They 'Resolved that in future Mr. Kemp be not permitted to undertake any other employment than that of the Township'.[34] The scheme for a villa estate came to nothing and it was only in 1849 that he is recorded as undertaking more private work when he designed a 'Rose garden' for James Barrett, in the grounds of Lymm Hall, Cheshire (Figure 6).

Paxton has been described as a workaholic and at times Kemp seems to have inherited some of his inexhaustible energy. The year 1850 provides a good example when, on top of his private landscaping and his work in Birkenhead Park, Kemp brought out the first edition of his *How to Lay Out a Garden* and an updated version of the Bradbury & Evans publication *The Handbook of Gardening*.[35] He also spent time gathering material for John Weale's monumental *London Exhibited in 1851*.[36] With some nine hundred pages and over two hundred illustrations, the publication was brought out to coincide with the Great Exhibition and covered in detail every aspect of London's life, industry and culture, with Kemp contributing the section on 'Gardens, Conservatories, Parks etc.'.

Working on this section must have given him much pleasure. Approached by Weale in the autumn of 1850, he travelled to London to inspect at first hand many of the parks and gardens he describes. Having accumulated far more information than could comfortably be included in the original publication, Weale then produced Kemp's section as a stand-alone volume: *The Parks, Gardens, etc. of London and its Suburbs: described and illustrated for the guidance of strangers*, which came out in March 1851. One passage in the book seems prophetic:

> From the astonishing quickness with which the suburbs of London are becoming filled up with streets and houses, not-withstanding the tendency which railways have to draw off the people further from town, every attempt to snatch a clear piece of country from the general fate, and to provide a belt of pure air, or the means of obtaining it, entirely around the crowded seats of business, should be delightedly hailed, and strenuously fostered.[37]

It would be seven more years before Kemp again produced a book. In the intervening period, those very railways, which were drawing off people from the towns, had created

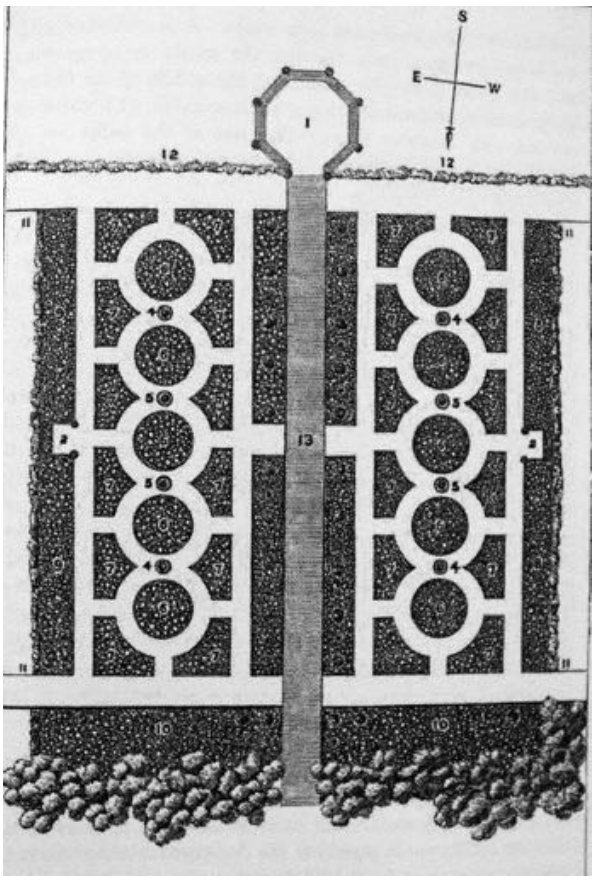

Figure 6. Edward Kemp's plan for a 'Rose Garden' at Lymm Hall, Cheshire; from Edward Kemp, *How to Lay Out a Garden*, 2nd edn (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1858), p. 267

opportunities for landscape gardeners, such as himself, to design new gardens, providing him with material for a second edition of his *How to Lay Out a Garden*, this time more grandly entitled *A General Guide to Choosing, Forming or Improving an Estate from a quarter of an acre to a hundred acres*, the epithet 'Small Garden' having been abandoned.

The new and enlarged version of *How to Lay Out a Garden* appeared in 1858 with some one hundred and forty engravings 'drawn from the author's own practice' and including plans of various gardens he had been commissioned to design. These had been prepared by a J. W. Chapman of Dulwich and suggest that while Kemp may have passed on copies of his plans to his clients he had retained duplicates for himself. It is these plans, meticulously drawn to scale, which are the main source of information for Kemp's private commissions in the period between 1849 and the early 1860s. With the permission of their owners, Kemp provides details of numerous gardens and estates with which he had been associated. Though to some extent aspirational, a comparison between Kemp's plans and early editions of the Ordnance Survey show that many of the designs he suggested were actually executed.[38]

Though working on the second edition of *How to Lay Out a Garden*, Kemp must have found time to visit Biddulph Grange, a large and unusual garden, laid out by James Bateman, just across the Cheshire border in Staffordshire. This visit formed the basis of a series of articles that appeared in the *Gardeners' Chronicle* between 1857 and 1862. These included detailed plans of the gardens and were subsequently published as a small monograph entitled *A Description of the Gardens at Biddulph Grange: abridged from the account published in the Gardeners' Chronicle in the years 1857–62* (London: Bradbury

Figure 7. Edward Kemp, pull-out plan of Biddulph Grange, Staffordshire; from Edward Kemp, *A Description of the Gardens at Biddulph Grange: abridged from the account published in the Gardeners' Chronicle in the years 1857–62* (London: Bradbury & Evans)

& Evans) (Figure 7).[39] In 1864 came the third and final British edition of his *How to Lay Out a Garden*.[40] Embellished with a further forty-five woodcuts, it contained examples of Kemp's work completed in the years up to 1864. Kemp must have always had plans to produce a further edition as when, in his will, he left its copyright to his cousin,

John Greaves, he mentions that the most recent edition had been out of print for some time but that there were notes for 'additions and improvements' ('which I have partially prepared').

LIVING ON THE PARK'S PERIPHERY

In 1845, with his position as park superintendent confirmed, Kemp was allocated the Italian Lodge, one of the park lodges, as his residence. Designed by Robertson in an Italianate style, it was attractive to look at but seems to have been less than satisfactory as a home. In January 1854, Kemp complained that it was 'smoky and very damp' – for a building not even ten years old this was surprising, though the height of the Belvedere may have made it difficult for the chimneys to draw properly and its open sides allowed rain to build up and penetrate the roof.

Five years later Kemp must have felt sufficiently confident of his income to embark on building a house of his own. In May 1859, plans and an elevation for a single villa to be built on one of the few remaining plots adjoining the Upper Park were submitted to the commissioners by his friend and sometime colleague, the Birkenhead architect Walter Scott. Constructed of brick in neo-gothic style, it was larger and very different from the Italian Lodge. A datestone of 1859 bearing Kemp's and Sophia's initials, 'ESK', is on the gable, though the household did not move into its new home until 1860 (Figure 8). The garden, lying to one side of the house, was not in a position Kemp would have recommended, as he advised:

> Should a house be so unfortunately placed as to look obliquely upon one of the boundaries […] variety may be occasioned by drawing lines from the best windows, […]

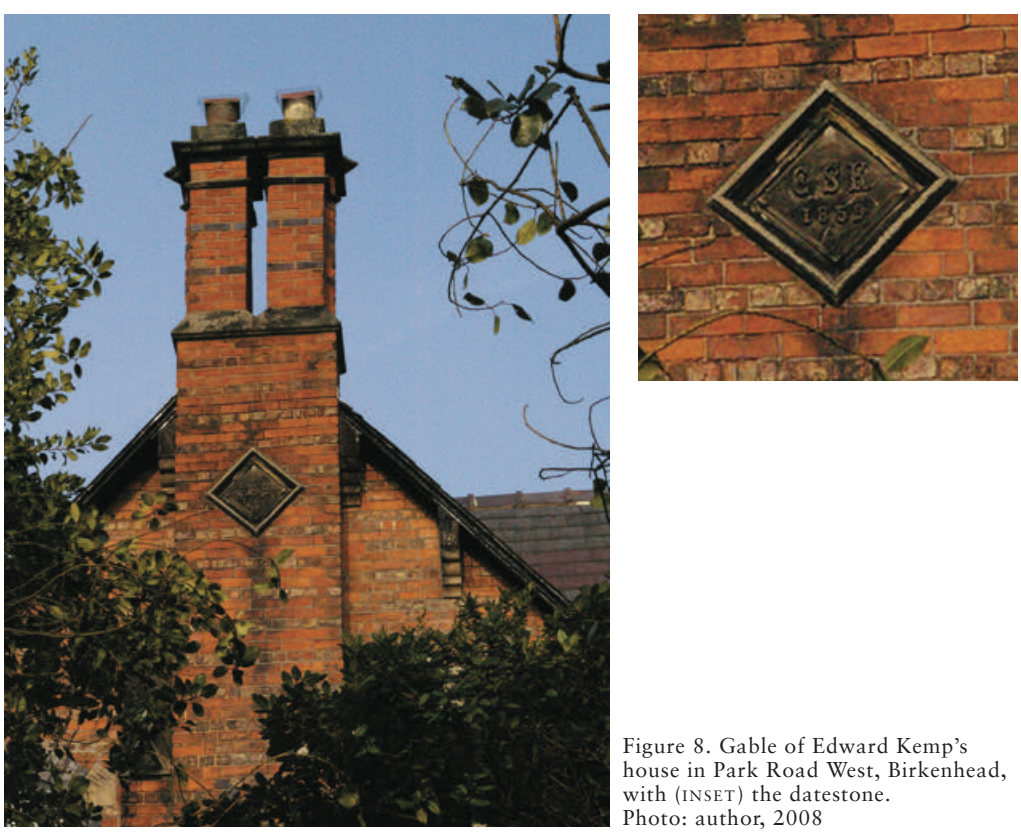

Figure 8. Gable of Edward Kemp's house in Park Road West, Birkenhead, with (INSET) the datestone. Photo: author, 2008

Figure 9. The 'unfortunately placed' garden of Park Road West, Birkenhead, in winter. Photo: author, 2008

> in the direction of that boundary and jutting forward the plantation or specimens along some of these lines into the lawn.[41]

A comparison between the Ordnance Survey map of the 1870s with the garden today shows little has changed. The conservatory, presumably erected by Samuel McGerrow, has gone, as has the little octagonal summerhouse at the end of the garden, perhaps similar to the one he designed for the coal proprietor David Bromilow of Haresfinch House, St Helens.[42] As might be expected, the planting makes good use of holly, partly as screening from the road and partly to provide colour and greenery in winter. The outline of the lawn follows a series of curves and an individual specimen of weeping oak, placed in its centre, gives it an almost oriental air (Figure 9).

Kemp's move from the Italian Lodge, where he had been living rent and rates free, raised the matter of his lack of salary, something he was swift to point out to the Roads and Improvement Committee, suggesting that the lodge 'would readily let to a tenant' and that in consideration of his services as park superintendent the commissioners should allow him an annual consulting fee. The sum agreed on was thirty guineas a year. Kemp would continue his supervision of the park, but his work for private clients would continue, too. The level of his consulting fee did not rest there but was a recurrent theme in his dealings with his employers. Though more a matter of pride than of financial necessity, one can only speculate what Kemp felt when, in January 1871, the fee was cut to twenty guineas. This level of payment continued until 1874 when once again his old fee of thirty guineas was restored. At the same time the salary of John Cowan, assistant park superintendent, was increased from a hundred and thirty-five to one hundred and fifty pounds per annum.[43]

This situation continued until 1877 when Birkenhead became a borough and a change in administration may have prompted Kemp to ask for an increase. He was unsuccessful. The response of the council was predictable: 'in view of the present conditions of trade and the high rates now levied in the Borough it is undesirable

that there should be any increase in the corporate expenditure and that therefore Mr. Kemp's application be not granted'. Further indignities followed when responsibility for running the park was transferred to the Health Committee. In July 1882, this committee required the head of each department to provide it with the names and salaries of all their employees with a summary of their duties. In response to this, the minutes record a letter from Kemp 'as to the duties which he considers that the annual payment to him of the consulting fee of £31.10s covers'. What precisely these duties were is not recorded, but Kemp was still continuing to deal with park-related matters including plans for a park in Tranmere.

THE FINAL YEARS

The later 1880s were a sad time for Kemp. In the summer of 1885 came the death of his unmarried sister, Mary Anne, aged sixty-nine. She had been living with the Kemps in Park Road West since at least 1871. Suffering from heart trouble and dropsy, she died on 12 August and was buried in the Non-conformist section of Flaybrick Cemetery. Two-and-a-half years later, as Christmas approached, his wife Sophia contracted pneumonia. Only ill for a short time, she died on 17 December. She, like her sister-in-law, was only sixty-nine at the time of her death and was buried in the same grave in Flaybrick. Following Sophia's death, Kemp redrafted his will, calling on two colleagues, James Richardson of 9 Rosemount, Oxton, the park manager, and William Parkinson, of 102 Upton Road, the working park superintendent, to witness his signature. His executors were his cousin, John Greaves, a solicitor in the City of London, and John Townsend, of Lingfield, Wimbledon, a successful local builder and developer.

Kemp had a strong sense of family. His cousin Henry, later to be ordained, was a witness at his marriage, as was his brother Charles and his young sister-in-law, Ellen Bailey. Despite his move to the north Kemp stayed in contact with them, inviting them to visit Birkenhead or staying with them on his trips to London. Ellen was a member of his household recorded in the census of 1861, while a letter written to Charles Phipps on 27 April 1872, regarding fencing timber to be supplied to Chalcot House was sent from his brother's house in Islington, 20 Canonbury Place. Lacking any children of his own, the beneficiaries of his will, apart from Greaves, were Sophia's brother and sister, George and Ellen Bailey, and various members of the Kemp family, including his cousins Revd Henry Kemp, Sarah Kemshed, Elizabeth Best and Rebecca Fletcher, and the offspring of his deceased cousin, Sarah Fletcher. The estate would be valued at £10,548. 17*s*, the equivalent of over one million pounds in today's currency. He had come a long way since, when as a young gardener at Chatsworth, he had contributed half a crown to the memorial fund for the great plant hunter, David Douglas.

Life at No. 74 must now have seemed very lonely. Work had still been coming in but his health was failing.[44] In 1887, Kemp had been involved in planning Queen's Park in Crewe. It was to be his last public venture. In March 1891, four years after Crewe had opened, he died, aged seventy-four. Suffering from acute bronchitis, his death was registered by his sick nurse and he, like his wife and sister, was buried in the cemetery at Flaybrick, laid out by him some thirty years previously. His headstone carries the words:

> He suffered much but was deeply grateful for God's goodness to him and wished to have inscribed on his tomb 'His mercy endureth for ever'

CONCLUSIONS

The response to his death would have pleased Kemp. The local papers carried fulsome tributes to 'A talented and much respected townsman'; the Liverpool authorities, for

Figure 10. Informal vista across 'greensward', Birkenhead Park. Photo: author 2017

whom he had worked on several occasions, noted the loss of 'A man of strict integrity and dignified conduct'; while his obituary in the *Gardeners' Chronicle* described him as 'A landscape gardener of much taste and ability'. The final word, however, must go to the *Birkenhead Advertiser*: 'Birkenhead has lost in him one of its oldest and worthiest citizens for to him she is certainly in a great measure indebted for one of the most beautiful public parks ever made.'[45] His parks and gardens are his true memorial (Figure 10).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With thanks to Birkenhead Reference Library, Devonshire Collection – Chatsworth, Lambeth Libraries, Northamptonshire Record Office, The Royal Horticultural Society Lindley Library, Wandsworth Heritage Service and Wirral Archives Service.

REFERENES

[1] Following Kemp's death, fairly lengthy obituaries appeared in two local papers on the same day, the *Birkenhead Advertiser* and the *Birkenhead News* (7 March 1891), both giving details of his life and career. A briefer account was published in the *Gardeners' Chronicle* (7 March 1891), p. 311.

[2] Frank A. Waugh, *Landscape Gardening or How to Lay Out a Garden – Principles, Styles and Practical Considerations, from the author's everyday intercourse with gentlemen who are either laying out new grounds or are seeking to amend errors in design formerly committed, he is also enable to perceive that sound and useful information … by Edward Kemp, edited, revised and adapted to North America* (New York and London: John Wiley & Sons, 1911).

[3] Significant collections of Kemp's letters are held in both the Stafford Archives, Stafford (Ref. 01798/674/48) and the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, Chippenham (Ref. 540/180).

[4] Obituary, *Birkenhead Advertiser* (7 March 1891).

[5] Lambeth Archives, Camberwell, P/S/2/60/3a.

[6] The cottage is illustrated in the *Streatham Society Newsletter*, 229 (Summer 2017).

[7] Janet Waymark, 'Kemp, Edward (1817–1891)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[8] Edward Kemp, *The Parks, Gardens, etc. of London and its Suburbs: described and illustrated for the guidance of strangers* (London: John Weale, 1851), p. 28.

[9] *The Gardener's Magazine and Register of Rural & Domestic Improvement*, 2 (1836),

p. 610.

[10] The Springfield Nursery, Upper Tooting, was founded by William Rollisson (*c.*1765–1842), who was succeeded by his sons, George (*c.*1799–1879) and William (1802–75). It was famous for its wide range of ornamental plants, in particular orchids, and was eventually purchased by Messrs Veitch; Ray Desmond, *Dictionary of British and Irish Botanists and Horticulturists including Plant Collectors and Botanical Artists* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1977).

[11] James Veitch, *Hortus Veitchii – A History of the Rise and Progress of the Nurseries of Messrs. James Veitch and Sons* (London: J. Veitch & Sons, 1906).

[12] Kemp, *Parks, Gardens, etc. of London*.

[13] For a detailed account of his work at Daylesford and Moor Court, see Jane Bradney, 'Edward Kemp (1817–91) in Gloucestershire', *Gloucester Gardens & Landscape Trust's Newsletter* (Summer 2017), pp. 20–37.

[14] *Birkenhead Advertiser* (7 March 1891).

[15] *Gardeners' Magazine*, 1 (1896), pp. 8–9.

[16] Ibid., 12 (1836), p. 612.

[17] Kemp, *Parks, Gardens, etc. of London*, p. 54.

[18] Edward Kemp, *How to Lay Out a Small Garden: Intended as a guide to amateurs in choosing, forming, or improving a place, (from a quarter of an acre to thirty acres in extent,) with reference to both design and execution* (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1850), p. x.

[19] Anon., 'Proposals for erecting a Monument to the late Mr. David Douglas', *Gardeners' Magazine*, 12 (July 1836), pp. 384–6.

[20] Every subscriber who contributed over one shilling could have a free lithograph of the memorial, measuring ten by seven-and-a-half inches; *Gardeners' Magazine*, 8 (1842), p. 293.

[21] Devonshire Collection, Chatsworth Archives, Chatsworth House, Derbyshire, 155.1.

[22] This was a Mrs Wray of Oakfield, near Cheltenham, as a note accompanying the illustration of the Barkeria explains. 'We owe our drawing to the obliging attention of Mrs. Wray, Oakfield, near Cheltenham, whose gardener, Mr. J. Brewster, we have also to thank for the following particulars. "The plant was imported from Guatemala in July, 1841, when it immediately began to grow; and, late in autumn, it showed flower-scapes"'; *Magazine of Botany, and Register of Flowering Plants*, 10 (1843), p. 169.

[23] *Liverpool Courier* (10 August 1842).

[24] Dickson's Nursery was established in the Newton area of Chester in 1820 by two cousins, the Scotsmen James and Francis Dickson. In 1853, the partnership split, each cousin establishing his own firm and both having shops in both Chester and Manchester. Because the two businesses are sometimes referred to as simply 'Dickson's', it is not always easy to distinguish them. To confuse matters even further, the firms later amalgamated, continuing to trade until 1933.

[25] Kemp, *How to Lay Out a Garden*, p. 373.

[26] Robertson (1809–52) worked as Paxton's assistant for several years, drawing the plans for both Princes and Birkenhead parks. He is credited with the design of the park lodges in Birkenhead, including the Italian Lodge, Kemp's home until 1860. Hornblower (1823–79) was a local architect, most famous for his plan for Sefton Park, which he designed together with the French landscape architect Édouard André. He was appointed by the Birkenhead Commissioners to 'superintend the erection of the Lodges, the fencing and all Mechanical work connected with the park'. He also designed the park's Roman boathouse, its bridges, railings and gates and, finally, with some modification, its grand entrance.

[27] Alexander Forsyth (1809–85) was a rather overlooked Victorian landscape gardener, despite the fact that he was successively gardener to Lord Stanley of Alderley at Alderley Park, Cheshire, to the Earl of Shrewsbury at Alton Towers, Staffordshire, and, from 1848, to Isambard Kingdom Brunel at Watcombe Park, Devon, where he landscaped the grounds. He was also a regular contributor to the gardening press and the inventor of a combined level and plumb line.

[28] *Gardeners' Chronicle* (26 February 1887), pp. 289–90.

[29] *Althorp Upper Servants' Contract Book. 1803–1848*; transcript in Northamptonshire Archives, Northampton.

[30] In June 1822, he had exhibited some Black Hamburg grapes from Althorp at a Horticultural Society dinner and, in the following year, he was listed as a member of the society. In addition, among the Baring Papers in the Lewisham Archives are plans, sections and elevation drawings for new buildings on Sir Francis Baring's Lee estate, then in the historic county of Kent, including details of a 'pinery' designed by Henry Bailey; Lewisham Local Studies and Archives, A/88/3/8.

[31] He would later attend Trinity College, Dublin, and be ordained into the Anglican Church, serving for many years as chaplain to the Croydon Workhouse. In 1891, recently retired from this post, he travelled north to Birkenhead in order to officiate at Kemp's funeral.

[32] Birkenhead Improvement Commission, Road and Improvement Committee, 1847–1850 (Minutes refer to Letter – 13 March 1849); Wirral Archives Service, Birkenhead, B/017/3.

[33] Robert Lee, *The People's Garden? A History of Birkenhead Park* (Birkenhead: Friends of Birkenhead Park, 2013).

[34] Minutes of the General Board Birkenhead Improvement Commissioners (6 June 1846); Wirral Archives Service, B/008/1.

[35] Kemp, *How to Lay Out a Small Garden*.

[36] John Weale, *London Exhibited in 1851* (London, 1851).

[37] Kemp, *Parks, Gardens, etc. of London*, p. 26.

[38] Barbara Moth, *Kemp's Parks and Gardens in Cheshire* (Congleton: Congleton Museum, 2017).

[39] Edward Kemp, *A Description of the Gardens at Biddulph Grange: abridged from the account published in the Gardeners' Chronicle in the years 1857–62* (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1862).

[40] Kemp, *How to Lay Out a Garden, greatly enlarged and illustrated with numerous additional plans, sections, and sketches of gardens and garden objects*, 3rd edn (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1864).

[41] Kemp, *How to Lay Out a Garden*, 2nd edn (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1858), p. 74.

[42] A handbill of the 1870s, produced by McGerrow, describing himself as 'Horticultural Builder of Knotty Ash near Liverpool', lists Kemp among the nobility and gentry 'for whom he has erected Horticultural Buildings'; Chalcot House Papers, Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, 540/180.

[43] Extract from the Park Committee Minutes (28 April 1863): 'The Park superintendent attended and reported that John Cowan engaged by him on a trial had given satisfaction during the time he had been in the park. Resolved that he be appointed assistant Park Superintendent at a salary of £100 a year terminable by either party giving to the other three months' notice at any time.' Cowan continued as such until his death in 1886.

[44] Kemp's death certificate, dated 3 March 1891, reports that he had been suffering from 'chronic bronchitis and heart disease for (say) ten years'. Despite his love of the outdoors, he seems never to have been robust. Even as a young man he was writing to Paxton: 'I have lately been strongly advised to go to Margate [Kent] or some other sea-side place for two or three weeks to improve my health' (25 July 1843). Again, in the Preface to the third edition of *How to Lay Out a Garden*, he explains the delay in its production has been due to pressure of work and his own poor health. In the absence of any real evidence it is difficult to assess how serious were his ongoing health problems. That they did, at least sometimes, impinge upon his work is evidenced by a series of letters he wrote to William Morgan, Secretary of the Stafford Land, Building and Improvement Company, in the autumn of 1867: 9 October: 'I am at present unwell and I have a great many engagements'; 24 October: 'I have had a bad accident ten days ago, having fallen from a ladder and greatly shaken and bruised myself. This has disturbed all my engagements'; 20 November: 'I was obliged to go into Cumberland and Scotland and [...] have only just got back, with a violent cold'; 28 November: 'I have been so unwell for the last week that I have been unable to complete the specification for the garden in the Rowley Hall Estate until yesterday'; Staffordshire Record Office, Stafford, D17898/674/48.

[45] *Birkenhead Advertiser* (7 March 1891).