

JAN WOULDSTRA

‘ONE OF THE ABLEST LANDSCAPE GARDENERS’:
EDWARD KEMP (1817–91) IN A NINETEENTH-CENTURY
PROFESSIONAL CONTEXT

*When Edward Kemp was born in 1817, the world of landscape gardening was still dominated by Humphry Repton, who had written the key works, which had also popularized the term ‘landscape gardening’ and provided a theoretical basis. In the years that followed, John Claudius Loudon provided some standard works for landscape gardening, including *The Suburban Gardener* (London, 1838), which translated the design principles into a wider range of properties, and catered for the middle as well as upper classes. The emerging profession also saw a considerable widening of its field of work in which designers were engaged not only in the design of country seats but also with public parks, cemeteries, housing, schools and other institutions. Kemp was very much part of this movement and he participated in the increasing number of design competitions, but not all his entries were successful. One instance when he contributed a design – the competition for Queen’s Park, Manchester – became a celebrated case that focused the debate around public park design. The debate clearly set out some of the parameters of the profession, which from this point onward was divided into two camps: the Paxton School (in which Kemp played a prominent role) and the Marnock School. This paper explores the contemporary debates and design principles that distinguished these schools and looks at how this debate played a critical role in the development of the landscape profession.*

When Edward Kemp was born in 1817 the world of landscape gardening was still dominated by Humphry Repton, who had written the key works, which had also popularized the term ‘landscape gardening’ and provided it with a theoretical basis. In the years that followed it was John Claudius Loudon who provided standard works for landscape gardening, including *The Suburban Gardener* (London, 1838), which translated design principles into a wider range of properties, and catered for the middle as well as the upper classes.¹ It provided both theoretical underpinning and practical information, was copiously illustrated and encouraged increasing professionalization. The emerging profession also saw a considerable widening of the field of work in which landscape gardeners were engaged not only in designing of country seats but also with public parks, cemeteries, housing, schools, and other institutions.

This period was characterized by an increasing number of design competitions, including the one in 1844 for Queen’s Park, Manchester, together with Philips Park and Peel Park (Salford), in which Kemp participated. It became a notorious case that focused the debate on public park design at a national level. The competition had been won by Joshua Major, a landscape gardener from Leeds, but John Lindley in his capacity as the

*Department of Landscape, The University of Sheffield, Arts Tower, Western Bank, Sheffield S10 2TN, UK
Email: j.woudstra@sheffield.ac.uk*

founding editor of *The Gardener's Chronicle and Agricultural Gazette* commenced a concerted campaign from the Joseph Paxton camp in which the layout was criticized. Major was given little opportunity to defend his proposals, but the landscape gardener Robert Marnock, the curator of the Royal Botanic Society's Garden in the Inner Circle of Regent's Park, facilitated a defence and mediated on the issue in his *Gardeners' and Farmers' Journal* in 1848. The debate clearly set some of the parameters for the profession, which from this point was divided into two camps: the Paxton School (which included Kemp, Edward Milner, John Gibson and Robert Glendinning) and the Marnock School (which included Alexander McKenzie, Joseph Meston, William Goldring and William Robinson).

By examining some of the leading public projects of the period, this paper will explore key influences on Kemp and his work, his position within the context of landscape gardening and its growing professionalization. An increased understanding of Kemp's background in the general context of professional formation better explains his progression from apprentice to landscape gardener. The design of Birkenhead Park, Liverpool, which he implemented and managed afterwards, provided a new standard for the concept of the public park that was soon challenged by the 1845 Manchester competition for three public parks which provided an alternative aesthetic. French influences became the vogue after Baron Hausmann's transformation of Paris from the 1850s onwards and as evidenced in England, especially in the design competition for Sefton Park, Liverpool. While none of these was designed by Kemp, they provide a statement of contemporary taste against which his designs can be contextualized.

KEMP AND HIS CAREER PATH

While little is known about Kemp's early life, enough can be deduced to extract a sequence of events. His father, Charles, a tailor in Streatham, Surrey (now London), was a Non-conformist who attached great importance to educating his children: his sister became a school mistress and his brother a clerk to Clerkenwell Magistrates Court.² This reveals a commitment to literacy which is also evident in the career of Edward, who, from the 1840s, was engaged in publishing. The announcement of his death in 1891 records that as part of his training he had 'passed into gardens of the Horticultural Society at Chiswick under the direction of Dr Lindley'.³ From the early 1820s this establishment ran a course for gardeners, in which students were treated as labourers and instructed by under-gardeners in the various departments in the gardens. The course was open to literate men between eighteen and twenty-six years of age, provided they were unmarried, and they were able to advance in succession through the different departments. After Lindley took on a second job as Professor of Botany at University College London in 1836, the training programme was revised. It now culminated in oral examinations at the end of two years, with topics that included accountancy, arithmetic, forest mensuration, plan drawing, geography, botany and vegetable physiology.⁴

The traditional way of becoming a professional gardener in Great Britain was by means of a three-year apprenticeship, between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one. Apprenticeships with master-gardeners responsible for large gardens were preferred over those with market gardeners, since the former required less labouring and provided more opportunities for instruction. An apprenticeship was followed by a period as a journeyman, during which any position would be held for a maximum of one year. This would be continued at least until the man was twenty-five and during this time he would generally earn less than a common labourer. After this he would seek a situation of master-gardener, being responsible for the management of a garden.⁵ In fact, most of the knowledge and skills were acquired through self-improvement. Loudon (1783–1843)

provided a range of publications intended to guide the student, but particularly his *An Encyclopaedia of Gardening*, which was first published in 1822. Apprentices were to keep three notebooks for their improvement: a weather book, or naturalist's journal; a journal or pocket memorandum book; and a journal of work done in the garden.

The initial training included the following: the names of things; their uses in gardening; how to use them in the best manner singly; and how to combine their use in performing the different operations of gardening. The *Encyclopaedia* was structured to provide the information in a logical fashion: knowledge of plant names; the use and history of gardening equipment; the uses of commoner plants; systematic and physiological botany; vegetable chemistry and geology; what would now be called crop protection; and knowledge of weather and the seasons. As Loudon considered landscape gardening as the 'highest part of the profession', he recommended that it should not be attempted until apprentices had progressed through all three stages first.

Kemp's career path is not known in detail. Although the phrase 'passed into the gardens' (cited in his obituary) suggests that he may have been an apprentice in the gardens of the Horticultural Society, there is no supporting evidence. However, since he was at Chatsworth, Derbyshire, in 1839/40, and back at Streatham in 1841, by which time he was twenty-four, it is likely that his experience at Chatsworth was still part of his training, and that he worked there as a journeyman. Lindley and Paxton had been close for some time since the latter had been one of the early apprentices at the Horticultural Society's garden, and it is likely that Lindley would have recommended Kemp. Paxton clearly recognized the young man's qualities, using him for editorial work and keeping an eye open for a suitable position. This occasion arose with the development of Birkenhead Park, where in September 1843 he needed a reliable superintendent to implement his design. To Kemp the involvement with the first municipal park was a springboard that launched his career for which he would later be recognized as 'a landscape gardener of much taste and ability'.⁶

BIRKENHEAD PARK

Birkenhead Park was laid out on an irregular site, bisected by a road, with each half having a lake as a main feature. The creation of these lakes would provide soil and rocks that were shaped into mounds which separated and concealed the curvaceous walks and carriage drive. These mounds together with shrubberies constricted lawns into valleys, which followed Loudon's principles of design and planting based on his so-called gardenesque concept. Its implied 'axis of symmetry', which maintained that (Figure 1):

all the most beautiful objects or scenes in nature are symmetrical; that every symmetrical object forms a whole; and that every whole consists of at least three parts, a beginning, a middle and an end; or, in other words, a centre and two sides.⁷

It sought to adapt the English landscape garden tradition to a defined urban situation in a manner that served to channel views. This had been pioneered previously by the architect John Nash, who had also been influenced by Repton's design methods for the improvement of St James's Park, London, in 1827, but which relied largely on tree planting and shrubberies. It had also been trialled by Nash's protégé James Pennethorne in the initial designs for London's Victoria Park, started in 1841, and Battersea Park, in 1846. The planting of these latter two parks was soon after revised by John Gibson, a Paxton protégé.

Birkenhead Park was seen to herald 'the dawn of a new era in park decoration' where the innovation was that of importing 'the garden element into park scenery' in

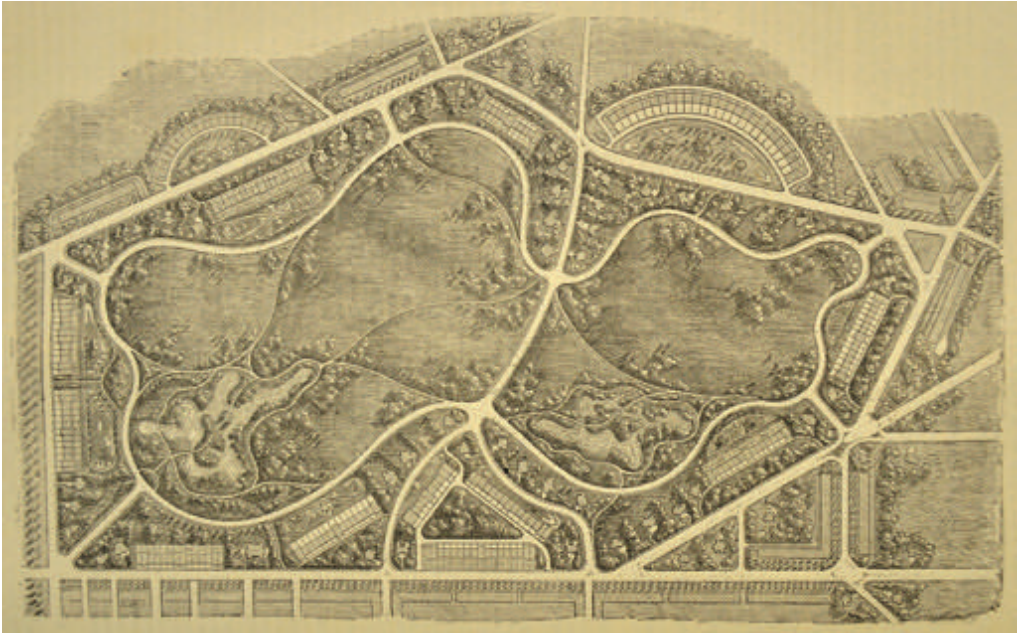


Figure 1. The creation of lakes in Birkenhead Park provided soil and rocks that were shaped into mounds which separated and concealed the curvaceous walks and carriage drive; from James C. Niven, 'Birkenhead Park', *The Garden*, 10 (1876), p. 551

a part of the park. This was considered to be a development that built on Loudon's principles and was characterized by James Niven, curator of Hull Botanic Garden:

as presenting combinations of foliage and tree development dealt with on flat surfaces. Here we had superadded artificial variations of surface combined with the same materials, and so happily were they blended that even in that early stage of development it was difficult to say where art ceased and where Nature herself took its place. Lights and shades, contrasts and harmonies, are the materials with which the landscape artists had to deal.⁸

Yet Niven was critical of the design because the area thus treated was limited, and:

it was in too great a measure isolated from the general park design, *i.e.*, there was a want of continuity and gradation of the design, whereby the broad expanse of park, which may be looked upon as Nature's share in the matter, failed in its harmonious blending with the park properly so called. This park is, at least, free from the disfigurement of a stiff diagonal line, which is one of the most faulty features of Battersea Park. There is at Birkenhead both grace and fitness in the lines, and where in certain parts artificial plantations have been formed, they have been carried out with taste and judgment; but the park portion is deficient in massive groups, which give boldness by broad contrasts, and enable the artist to avail himself of those varying tints and equally varying habits of growth, which the hundreds of forms of arborescent vegetation place at his command. Bareness and 'dottiness' (if I may coin a term) were in this case admirably expressive of the effect conveyed to the mind, and these characters were all the more intensified by contrasts with the manipulatory skill and ability shown in the more select portion of the park to which we have already alluded.

He continued, looking at the park in 1876, 'some of the objectionable matters [...] have been modified by alterations that have since been made, and also by the growth of the trees and shrubs, still our strictures are not inapplicable to the park as it now stands'.

Kemp, who was acknowledged as the person who laid out the park (Paxton was not referred to), was:

due the initiative of the new era as regards public park design, and although Birkenhead fails in the one important point to which we have alluded, it will stand as a lasting memorial of his good taste in dealing with the garden portion, including the water lines and arrangements, which are all that could be desired.

THE COMPETITION FOR THREE PUBLIC PARKS IN MANCHESTER

By 1845, Birkenhead was complete and Paxton's involvement came to an end, with him requesting that Kemp should be retained at a slightly reduced salary of a hundred and fifty pounds, instead of a hundred and sixty-five pounds, with free accommodation in the recently completed Italian Lodge. While this was being considered by the commissioners on 3 September 1845, Kemp also requested a three-week leave of absence 'on business of importance to himself'.⁹ He married Sophia, daughter of Henry Bailey, a former steward and gardener to the Spencer family at Althorp, Northamptonshire, on 5 September, and while the leave of absence is normally explained in relation to this marriage, it is more likely that he was now looking for possible alternative avenues of income in case the request was not granted. The competition for the designs for three new public parks in Manchester must have seemed like a wonderful opportunity and challenge. He probably participated through, or with, Paxton who applied for the competition details, but as the latter was heavily involved in the railway construction boom he would have been unlikely to have had the time to dedicate to these projects.¹⁰ This arrangement would have enabled him to participate without this being noticed by his prospective employers.

The advert, first published in *The Manchester Guardian* on 2 August 1845, had been dedicated 'to landscape gardeners and others', and offered two prizes for the best designs for laying out of the three sites; fifty guineas for the best and twenty-five guineas for the second best set of plans that had to be supplied with estimates. The deadline was 20 September with adjudication planned for 1 October. A total of fifty-six landscape gardeners, architects, surveyors, nurserymen and curators of botanical gardens applied for the particulars, which included lithographed plans and sectional levels of the three sites, together with a printed circular of information and instructions.

Besides Paxton, those who had applied for the details included Marnock, the curator of the Royal Botanical Gardens, Regent's Park, who in 1840 had also been responsible for laying it out (Figures 2 and 3).¹¹ Kemp later described these gardens as 'probably superior to anything of the kind in the neighbourhood of the metropolis', being 'particularly happy in the arrangement and planting'. In a manner that draws comparisons to contemporary descriptions of sections of Kemp's work in Birkenhead, he observed that:

Much has been attempted, especially in variation of the surface of the ground; and almost all that has been proposed is fully and well achieved. We would particularly point out the clever manner in which the boundary fence is got rid of on the northern and north-western sides, as seen from the middle of the garden; the beautiful changes in the surface of the ground; and the grouping of the masses of plants, in the same quarter; the artistic manner in which the rockery is formed, out of such bad materials, and the picturesque disposal of the plants upon it; and the treatment of the large mound, from which so many and such excellent views of the garden and country are obtained.¹²

Marnock would have been considered a formidable competitor, but, as was the case with Paxton, he did not appear on the shortlist drawn from the thirty competitors who finally submitted. These included: James Pringle, York; H. Bigland and Co., Manchester; Richard

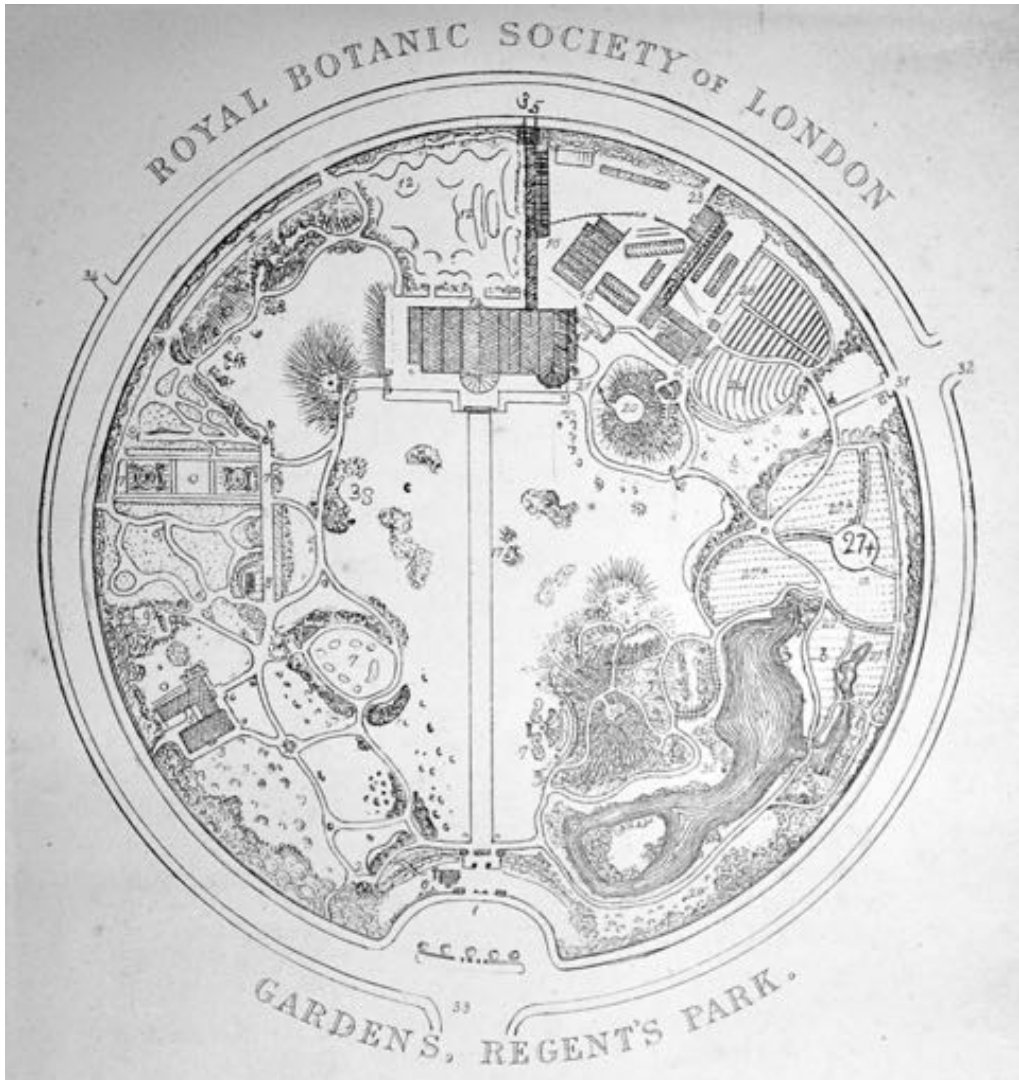


Figure 2. Edward Kemp described the gardens of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Regent's Park, as 'probably superior to anything of the kind in the neighbourhood of the metropolis'; from *Thirty-Second Annual Report of the Council of the Fellows of the Royal Botanic Society of London* (London, 1871) (detail)

Forest, London; Thomas Biggles, Singleton, near Manchester; Pim and Richardson, Higher Ardwick, near Manchester (and who later became the contractor for laying out the parks); N. Niven, Dublin; Robert Rea, Cirencester; George Towers, Rose Hill; and Joshua Major and Son, Knowsthorp, near Leeds.

Except for Major and Son, the ultimate prize winner, none was well-known as a landscape gardener. This may be a reflection of the process and the committee that made the ultimate selection; a press report noted the considerable difficulty experienced, especially by non-professionals, in coming to a decision in preference of any one plan or set of plans over the others. Reasons for this included that:

the plans are drawn to a great variety of scales; some are delineated in pencil or faint tracing, others in Indian ink, others again in sepia tint, and some are coloured, and hence made exceedingly attractive to the general eye. While most of the plans are strictly



Figure 3. Edward Kemp considered various aspects of the design for the Royal Botanic Gardens, Regent's Park, superior including 'the beautiful changes in the surface of the ground; and the grouping of the masses of plants'; from *Journal of Horticulture and Cottage Gardener*, 32 (1877), p. 235

ground plans, others represent trees, hedges, &c. in elevation; in one or two instances we have very pretty birds eye views of the parks, showing all their 'alleys green', their groves and arbours in full and luxuriant verdure.¹³

The competitors had been given a budget of four thousand pounds for the three new parks 'for laying out in planting, fencing, draining, &c. &c. (including the provision of seats)', but excluding the lodges and other erections. With strict financial constraints the committee had particular regard in their judgment on '*facility* and *cheapness* of execution', yet estimates ranged from two thousand to nine thousand eight hundred pounds.¹⁴

The brief for each of the parks included 'playgrounds, with due appropriation for archery grounds, quoit, skittle and ball alleys; a refreshment room, one or more fountains, retiring places, and sufficient lodges; and the places for these must appear on the plans'. Outbuildings 'may be possibly rendered available for some of the games contemplated'; while the 'utmost regard' had to be paid to provide 'ample room for promenading of large numbers of persons'. Furthermore, it was noted that:

The designers must keep before them the practical usefulness of the scheme, remembering that they are sketching a park for the *public*, to be constantly accessible, and not a private pleasure ground. A carriage drive round the parks would be desirable, but no carriage drive to intersect them. Footpaths or promenades will, of course, be suggested to the taste of the designers. [...] Competitors desiring to apprehend designs for lodges &c. are at liberty to do so, should they think fit.¹⁵

A journalist's assessment of the designs submitted provides an interesting reflection on popular taste and professional standards of design, and brings home the innovation of the concept of the public park:

Some of the plans seem to us very jejune performances, and in several instances, one great consideration seems to have been overlooked. About 30 acres being the average area of these parks, it becomes important to make the most of that extent of ground; to plan the walks so that as much space as possible should be gained within those limits. Hence straight lines, intersecting each other at right angles, should be avoided; and the winding curves, or what are called ‘serpentine’, seem naturally to suggest themselves. Yet, some of the plans look like the laying-out of the streets of a city, rather than the walks, and places of exercise and sport in a park. In one or two of the plans, artificial lakes are the chief features; in others, the fountains are made prominent objects; while in some the planting is so close as to resemble a maze. Only one or two furnish elevations for lodges, refreshment rooms, shaded seats, &c. One point seems to us worthy of consideration, – the retaining in one or more of the parks in one place a large extent of green sward, on which to congregate on particular occasions of festivity a considerable number of persons for a short time, as, for instance, to hear a short address from the civic authorities, or an open air concert, or to witness some display or exhibition suited to the scene. Some of the plans have been left some such space, especially in the Walness portion of Lark Hill Park [the two properties that were co-joined and later formed Peel Park in Salford]; others of the plans have filled up every portion of the area with walks and hedges, leaving only small patches of grass between the windings of the walks. Some of the plans resemble the figures seen in a kaleidoscope, all the curves to being made to converge to a common centre; others again, retaining the centre, having radiating straight walks, somewhat like the spokes of a cart wheel. Some of the candidates have sketched their designs on the small lithographic plans issued by the committee, and it is to be much regretted that all the competing plans have not been drawn to one scale.¹⁶

In his design Major had stuck closely to the brief and his general approach for these parks had been ‘to make the most of the ground we had to operate upon’, by designing ‘the pleasure ground as near as practicable to the skirts of the plot’.¹⁷ He then took ‘advantage of every nook or recess which was to spare for the different play-grounds’, i.e., sports facilities, ‘for archery, quoit alley, skittle ground, bowling green, climbing poles, gymnasium, marbles, see-saws, &c. for males; and see-saws, balls, skipping rope, the Graces, &c., for females’. In the centre of the site he proposed a ‘general play-ground’ or multifunctional area of about twelve or fifteen acres ‘for cricket, knor and spell, leaping poles, football, and foot-races, &c., and also for the purpose of large public meetings’ (Figures 4 and 5).¹⁸

QUEEN’S PARK, MANCHESTER

Major’s victory over his competitors led to envy and his designs were subjected to scrutiny, which focused on his work at Queen’s Park. *The Gardener’s Chronicle*, edited by Lindley, Paxton’s friend, published a polemic that took the form of pointing out the perceived deficiencies during a walk through the park.¹⁹ Queen’s Park had been adapted as a public park from Hendham Hall, a private estate about two miles north of the city centre, which was bought for the purpose in May 1844. The estate was located on an eminence, with extensive views over the Irk valley and towards Cheetham Hill. The park itself had an undulating surface, was well planted with trees and surrounded by a belt. An eighteen-foot-wide circumferential carriage drive provided a separation from the central open area and the various sports facilities. In the section adjoining Harpurley Cemetery there was to be a rosarium with standard roses on the lawn and dwarf varieties in beds, as well as some provision for annuals when the roses faded. An existing pond near the house was to be enlarged into a miniature lake, and the house itself was adapted to provide refreshments.

The polemic in *The Gardener’s Chronicle*, written by ‘A lover of landscape gardening’, conjures up a notion of hostility rather than that of a welcome environment, first by



Figure 4. Queen's Park, Manchester: the competition for three Manchester parks was won by Joshua Major, who designed the pleasure ground around the edge of the park, in which every spare space created was used for sports, with the central area being a multifunctional area for ball sports and public gatherings; from Joseph Adshead, *Map of the Township of Manchester* (1851), Chetham's Library, Manchester



Figure 5. One game envisaged by Joshua Major in the Manchester Parks was knor and spell, a traditional game that in Yorkshire retained its popularity till the 1970s and involved hitting a small marble or wooden ball as far as possible. This would have been a dangerous pursuit in public parks; from George Walker, *The Custome of Yorkshire* (London, 1814)

stating the gates and railings are surmounted by 'barbed daggers', transposing this to the landscape and noting the entrance is at 'right angles' to the public road, with the carriage drive being divided by a 'sharp triangular piece of ground', etc. There is mention of heart- and coal-shovel-shaped beds. Then there is criticism of a sixteen-yard-long bridge over a two-foot-wide stream, with the water only being visible on one side. A series of 'lakes' interconnected by the narrow stream are criticized for their minute dimensions, as is the lake near the house of forty by fifty yards in width with two islands and a further four miniature lakes seen from this point. In this light a waterfall of three feet over red sandstone is also considered to be a fault. Near the rustic bridge is a fountain 'resembling

a drunkard's head, discharging the contents of his last night's debouch'. Another aspect critically appraised was the grass strips of uniform width on either side of the walks.

In the next issue of the journal, Lindley used the editorial to reinforce his critical assessment of Major's design for Queen's Park and to rub more salt into the wounds, adding to and explaining the criticism of the 'lover': 'something more amusing still – something which we covertly confess perfectly baffles our comprehension; for we cannot imagine why a bridge was required at all'.²⁰ His views were disparaging: 'But is not all this disgraceful to such a town as Manchester?'; 'Who deserves the credit or the blame of this peddling, Lilliputianising system – this turning of a landscape into a child's plaything – devised in the worst possible taste?' Because it raised important issues about the direction of contemporary design principles, this event encouraged Lindley to commence a series of editorials on landscape gardening.²¹ Repton was featured the very next week in a piece that dealt with the qualifications required for landscape gardening and perhaps inevitably it finished with another jab at Major:

we cannot help devoting a little time in each day conjecturing what *could* have been the Education and the Habits of the man who designed the Queen's Park, Manchester, with the page of past experience open for his study, his warning, or his improvement?²²

It should be noted that all these comments were made without Lindley having been to the site, or providing an opportunity for Major to respond, which he did elsewhere, so a few issues later he provided further damning commentary, with others writing in also.²³

Thus far, Marnock had refrained from publically responding to the continued onslaught on Major, whom he had first encountered as a young foreman while at Bretton Hall in the late 1820s, and probably regarded as a father of the profession.²⁴ But in November 1847, his *The Gardeners' Journal* carried a rebuttal by Junius entitled 'Birkenhead Park, and the "Chronicle" reviewers; a few words upon', which took offence at Lindley's series of articles on landscape gardening when he promoted Paxton as the sole inheritor of good taste:²⁵

In my simplicity, for some time I considered these to be the effusions of some antiquated incognito, who, pleased with the productions of his own pen, no doubt, imagined the public were quietly giving their assent to what Byron somewhere calls – 'a pretty specimen, upon the whole,/ Of what the world calls rigmarole'.

One day, however, the film was cleared away, and our quondam friend's object became palpable enough. He boldly threw off the mask, and entered the lists, as the champion, of no less a personage than Mr. Paxton. There is something so repulsive and humiliating to honourable and upright minds, in having to parade another's merits before the public for a given object; something in it is so fulsome and egotistical, that I am willing to believe our author must consider Mr. Paxton entitled to that large share of adulation he lavishes so bountifully upon him; and he has brought that gentleman's name forward as the only reformer of bad taste, in Landscape Gardening, in the articles in question, I shall just take his *ipse dixit* for what it is worth, and proceed to examine his pretensions, as a master of the art, by what he has had executed, under his own direction.

Now, although I consider public gardens, like public men, fair subjects for criticism, I do not consider myself at all at liberty to discuss the merits of private gardens; they are, and shall be, sacred; I touch them not. It recognizes, in its fullest meaning, the principle of 'doing what we like with our own'; and in thus explaining my notions on the rights of private property, and private taste, I admit the right of Mr. Paxton to commit any absurdity whatever his Grace the Duke of Devonshire may think proper to permit within the pale of his own demesne.

The author then switched to 'a most overdrawn and unjustifiable attack on the

formation of Queen's Park at Manchester' for which he believed that Paxton was an unsuccessful competitor, but which in a note by Marnock was questioned whether this was correct. Birkenhead Park then became the subject of counter criticism, in which the author piles up similar critiques as had been levied for Queen's Park and Major, commencing with a number of rhetoric questions:

And what readers, will you find, on perambulating this 'creation of genius', which, in our author's estimation, has realized the Elysium fields of old; what, in reality, do we find in this oasis in Birkenhead to justify such high commendations? Any of those combinations of art and nature, in unison with each other, and practically subservient to the objects of recreation and enjoyment? Do we see any traces of the genius of a Brown, a Repton, or even a Nisfield [*sic*]? Anything to awaken the latent principles of admiration for whatever is truly grand in nature and art? In vain we look for the tangled thicket, or the rocky dell; the umbrageous grove, or the open glade. Where the distant prospect? The water, too, as our author has it 'illustrating the singular felicity with which a limited number of pieces of water are disposed!!!' – examine this by the ordinary rules of good taste, and then what becomes of the old adage, 'ars est celare artem'? Is there, I ask, anything to shew the triumph of principles, or to convince us that when dictated by artistic skill, and moulded by hand of genius, the most forbidding spots may be converted into scenes captivating alike to all classes, and which gave origin to that innate love of natural scenery belonging to us all? And yet, when it is considered how easily it might have been converted to a spot at once natural and enjoyable, the thoughts are naturally led to reflect how exquisite would have been the transition, from the turmoil; of the factory, and the counting-house, to revel in the midst of scenes brought from nature's storehouse, and dropped at the thresholds of our door. What, then, it may be asked, do we find in this much bepraised place, which has so overturned our author's propriety?

The author then continued to examine critically good taste in public facilities, using suburban tea gardens and two nineteenth-century pleasure gardens, one in London and another in Gravesend, Kent, as examples of popular taste but not refinement:

I am never very squeamish in expressing an opinion, and possess a great propensity for calling things by their right names; I, therefore, pronounce it to be about as pretty a piece of cockneyism as ever adorned a suburban tea-garden, or drew forth the exclamation: 'Oh! how pretty', from the wondering visitor to Cremorne or Rosherville. It certainly may be said that some of the features are tolerably happy efforts in this particular line of art, if art it can be called, which imitates this pandering after cockney's ideas of taste or refinement. But these features, pretty enough as they are in themselves, are squeezed together in defiance of those rules which constitute anything like harmonious effect and expressiveness of character, so desirable in landscape scenery.

This is then continued with specific criticism levied on the layout of Birkenhead Park:

The unmeaning turns of walks; the absurdity of having three bridges to cross a mere handful of water, each different in design, and all within sight of each other; the negative shapes of the pieces of water themselves, and of the groups of trees, &c., which, to a great extent, hide the water from view; is, we say, as incongruous as anything can well be imagined; and, to cover the whole, 'the visible mount in the centre', which, bringing the Mersey into view, only shows how really contemptible is 'this creation of true genius'.

It concludes by stating that Paxton 'is altogether incapable in carrying out those comprehensive principles which constitute all that is great and admirable in landscape scenery, or ornamental embellishments' and it questions the motives for promoting him for public work. In a note added by Marnock, he explained that he permitted *The Gardeners' Journal* to become a sort of ventilator for Major's plaintive notes, by inserting



Figure 6. The park of the Crystal Palace, Sydenham, designed by Joseph Paxton, was laid out in a grandiose baroque manner reminiscent of a Versailles, with a domineering central axis that separated formal, largely symmetrical halves, with fountains that provided the main feature; Jonathan Needham, lithograph (London: Day & Son, 1854)

what *The Chronicle* refused to publish. But as Marnock suggested closure on the issue, a few weeks later Robert Glendinning, a gardener and landscape gardener with connections with the Horticultural Society's garden at Chiswick (and thus with Lindley), where he reorganized the arboretum, provided a further critique on Queen's Park.²⁶

THE PAXTON AND MARNOCK SCHOOLS OF LANDSCAPE GARDENING

While Marnock had attempted to retain neutrality, by providing a voice for the down-trodden Major he had in effect created two distinct camps, or schools. The differences in the approaches of these schools were exemplified not only by Chatsworth but also, and particularly, at Crystal Palace, Sydenham Hill, which involved the re-erection of the famous structure of the 1851 Great Exhibition from its original position in Hyde Park, as well as the design of an ambitious park (Figure 6). The palace was at the top of the hill, with the park on the south-east-facing slope. This was laid out in a grandiose baroque manner reminiscent of a Versailles, with a domineering central axis that separated formal, largely symmetrical halves, with fountains that provided the main feature. The intention seems to have been to visualize the story of the creation of life on earth, starting with dinosaurs at the bottom of the slope to the accomplishments of mankind at top. Paxton envisaged such parks for all large towns and they were to be sufficiently large to contain public institutions and educational establishments for the arts in order to provide both instruction and amusement.²⁷

In 1879, many years after Paxton's death in 1865, his name would still be used to identify a school of landscape gardening, as an antipode to the Marnock style. The

anonymous author ('Hortus') of an article in *The Nottingham Guardian* was severely critical of Paxton, even though his critique did not take into consideration the Crystal Palace which was seen as 'the conception of an architect, and has nothing to do with Landscape Gardening'.²⁸ Paxton, or after 1851, Sir Joseph Paxton, was much lauded and considered as a 'king' among landscape gardeners, based largely on his work at Chatsworth and Sydenham, but for which he was also criticized as a 'faithful copyist' of the French style, which is 'straight, stiff and formal'. Indeed, this work was also criticized by William Robinson in *The Parks and Gardens of Paris* (first published in 1869), although it should be noted that he had 'done more to popularise Marnock's style than any other man living'.²⁹ But the author of the article was even more unforgiving and merciless:

There are from Versailles to Caserta a great many ugly gardens in Europe, but at Sydenham is to be found the greatest modern example of the waste of enormous means in making hideous a fine piece of ground. It has been called a work of genius, but it is only the realisation of misguided ambition to outdo another sad monument of great means prostituted to a base use – Versailles.

It was noted that none had dared to vindicate Paxton's handiwork at Sydenham, which had also been repeated at Chatsworth, despite the fact that he had been 'too long blindly worshipped as an example of all that is worth imitating in gardening'. The cascade was meaningless without water; the tank for the 'Empress Fountain' was too narrow to allow it 'to play without doing serious injury to the lawn and walks'; trees obscured the views of the surrounding landscape and directed them to other stone beds and fountains which represented 'but a continuation of the same depressing and barren changeless style'. In contrast Marnock's style required little introduction:

Mr Marnock too, is an imitator, but he is an imitator of nature, 'or mends it rather'. The style is not his own entirely – he did not originate it, but it has reached its fullest development in his hands. Everything he does, when left to himself, is characterised by naturalness, by freedom, breadth, and repose, and a judicious but sparing use of an architectural and formal embellishments. His is, indeed, the 'English style', pure and simple.

It is clear from this savage criticism of Paxton (and, by definition, his school) that 'Hortus' was a dedicated supporter of Marnock's approach to landscape design. But by taking such a one-sided approach, the anonymous author – possibly Dean Reynolds Hole (1819–1904), who had received advice from Marnock for his garden at Caunton, near Newark, Nottinghamshire, and who remained his promoter – was unable to appreciate Paxton's fuller contribution to landscape design. This was equally the case in relation to Paxton's disciples, including Kemp and Edward Milner, the supervisor of Crystal Palace, who had also been in charge of laying it out. In fact, the increasing popularity of formality in gardens was particularly due to the influence of William Andrews Nesfield (1793–1881), who had been launched as a landscape gardener by Loudon in 1836, and was subsequently responsible for a number of public schemes that promoted the 'French style'. This included a commission at the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew in 1843, where he united different sections of the garden by introducing a Broad Walk as a main approach to the Palm House, which received its own terrace and parterres. It effectively became the centrepiece of the garden, having a formal pond to the south and a *patte d'oie* to the north, which created three important vistas. In 1860, he was commissioned to design the Royal Horticultural Society's garden in Kensington, which was laid out in a strict formal arrangement with parterres and extensive use of different types of gravel to provide



Figure 7. William Andrews Nesfield designed the Royal Horticultural Society's garden in Kensington in 1860. It was laid out in a strict formal arrangement with parterres and extensive use of different types of gravel to provide colourful effects, rather than vegetation, an approach that would soon generate criticism, and a drive for more natural approaches; from Andrew Murray, *The Book of the Royal Horticultural Society* (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1862–63). Courtesy: Day & Son/RHS Lindley Collections

colourful effects, rather than vegetation, an approach that would soon generate criticism, and a drive for more natural approaches (Figure 7).³⁰

SEFTON PARK, LIVERPOOL

Nesfield, however, remained a prominent figure and in 1867–68 acted as an arbiter for the proposals for Sefton Park, a new public park in south Liverpool, which were being debated.³¹ Sefton Park had been acquired from the Earl of Sefton for the public benefit in 1866, and its design was opened to competition. In the meanwhile, the provision of a further two parks had been proposed, with the development of Newsham Park (1864–68) to the east and Stanley Park (1866–70) to the north, both of which had been designed on commission by Kemp. However, Sefton Park with two hundred acres was intended to be the prime site that would be regarded by 'the Liverpooldians as their Hyde Park'.³² A competition for the best design was opened with a first premium of three hundred guineas, and a second of a hundred and fifty guineas.

The strict conditions that were set out suggest that certain lessons for competitions had been learned in order to achieve uniformity; facilitate a direct comparison of the entries; and determine the ownership of drawings. Plans were to be produced at a scale of 176 feet to one inch; there were to be 'complete sections, a detailed specification, a bird's eye view, a report of the design, and an estimate of the cost of carrying out the work and the applicant's 'own expected remuneration in case of being employed therein'.³³ Details were required relating to the roads, surface drainage, ornamental water, &c. It was suggested that 'a road 75ft. wide, either straight or very slightly curved, be carried from the point A to the point B (see plan), and treated as a boulevard'. It also included an area of a hundred and sixty additional acres for residential development 'arranged along the margins of all roads, where practicable'. Ornamental water for boating and aquatic sports was to be provided, at least one cricket and review ground

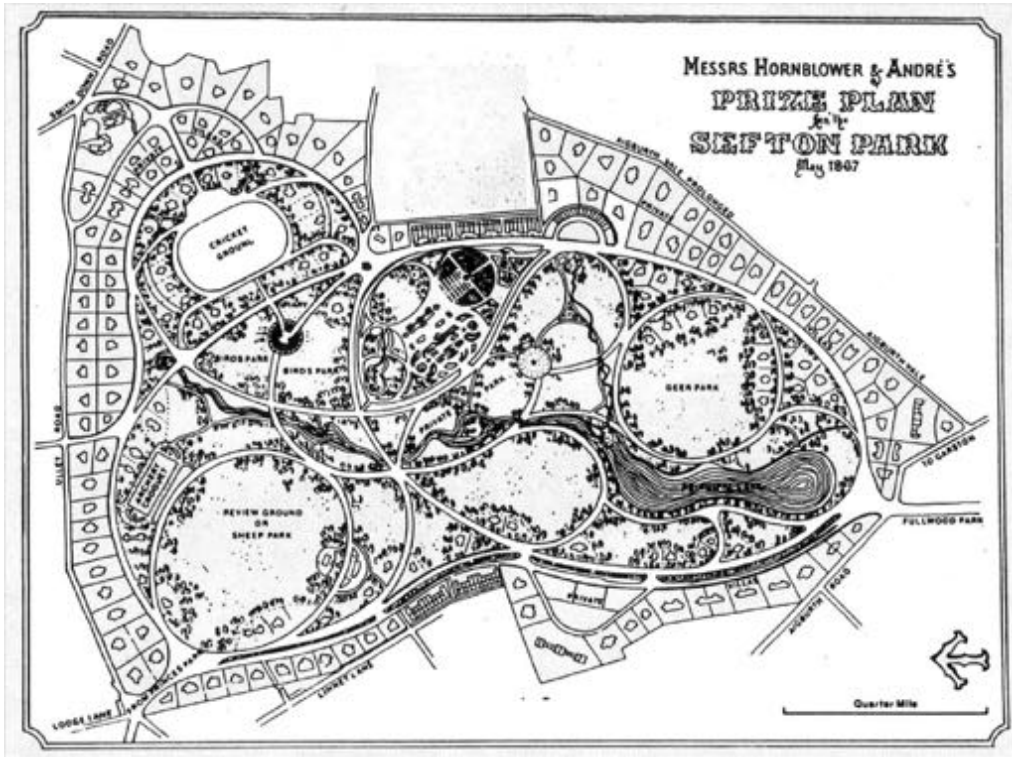


Figure 8. The 1867 design competition for Sefton Park, Liverpool, was won by Edouard André, who collaborated with the local architect Lewis Hornblower and conceived the layout in a typically French manner with walks running through the landscape in long ellipses and curves; https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1867_design_of_Sefton_Park_with_marks.jpg

and a botanic garden of some twelve to twenty acres. There should also be private grounds and gardens for the residents in the park villas, who were to have keys, in line with the established practice for many of London's residential squares.

A total of twenty-nine schemes were submitted by landscape designers, including Milner, Gibson, Joseph Newton and Alexander McKenzie, one of Marnock's men. Kemp did not submit a scheme because he was already heavily involved in laying out Stanley Park. The most notable entry, and one of the more elaborate schemes, was that by the French landscape gardener Edouard André. The submission was a collaboration with the local architect Lewis Hornblower, who had previously worked with Paxton on Princes Park and Birkenhead Park (Figure 8). They illustrated their scheme 'by a series of well executed pictures, besides a large portfolio of drawings exhibiting different features in the plan'.³⁴ There was provision for a 'deer park, a review ground, a cricket ground of 10 acres in extent, archery and croquet grounds, a lake of 12 acres (surrounded by a drive), a botanical garden (with conservatory), children's playground, &c'. The proposal included:

cascades and waterfalls upon the stream running through the grounds, Moorish kiosks and rustic bridges, an ornamental windmill upon an elevated site from whence to view the surrounding country, handsome pavilions upon the cricket and other grounds devoted to special sports, fountains in gardens, two restaurants for different classes of visitors, a pavilion near the centre for a band of music, a model sheepfold, a shepherd's house, and other erections of a rustic and ornamental character.³⁵



Figure 9. Edward Kemp's design for Hesketh Park, Southport, in 1868 adopts ovoid curves for the walks and reveals how he absorbed and developed new trends; Ordnance Survey, Lancashire LXXV.6 (Southport) (1894) (detail)

The scheme was reviewed eight days later in *The Building News*, where the greatest fault was considered to be 'the want of grand leading lines; ovoid curves of all sizes are everywhere, but good leading lines meeting and *rondes pointes* are painfully absent'. André (1840–1911) was a leading French landscape gardener who had learned his trade during Baron Hausmann's transformation of Paris under Adolphe Alphand and later codified this in his *L'Art des jardins: Traité générale de la composition des parcs et jardins* (Paris, 1879). In this he explored the concept of the landscape garden and popularized walks running through the landscape in long ellipses and curves. The park became one of the many international commissions of André after he and Hornblower won the competition. Despite the twenty-nine entries for the scheme, including several by well-known designers, *The Building News* concluded in its review of the competition with the regret that 'in so much that there should be so little'. They considered that 'the old race of landscape gardeners is extinct' and that there was 'no species that has succeeded them', observing that 'so little combination or knowledge of effect is seldom shown with so much labour'. They noted that Nesfield had been asked to adjudicate on the plans and still hoped that a better-quality scheme might be conceived, probably considering a more architectural scheme. In the end the André and Hornblower scheme proved successful and it was also immediately influential, as can be noted in Kemp's work, particularly in his design for Hesketh Park, Southport, in 1868 which in the adoption of ovoid curves for the walks reveals how he absorbed and developed new trends (Figure 9).³⁶

In *How to Lay Out a Garden* (London, 1858), Kemp had recognized three principal styles in landscape gardening: 'the old formal or geometrical style; the mixed, middle or irregular style, which Mr. Loudon called the gardenesque; and the picturesque'.³⁷ He considered the mixed style 'with a little help from both the formal and the picturesque' to be 'altogether best suited for small gardens'. He did, however, believe that an 'absolute adherence to one style, is not [...] to be reckoned among the paramount virtues of art; but only one style should *predominate*, and either of the others be quietly introduced, and gradually blended, as subordinate features' (Figure 10).³⁸ This is also clear in Kemp's



Figure 10. Edward Kemp did not adhere to one style only and often adopted the formal and the irregular style, such as at Knightshayes Court, Devon. Photo: author, 2018

public parks, though at Hesketh Park there is a seeming preference for picturesque approaches.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

After having been established by Repton, the profession of landscape gardening was ultimately launched by Loudon. He set out specified career paths, stipulated training requirements and provided the reference books and periodicals that all early Victorian practitioners must have consulted. Loudon's intention was to place landscape gardening on an equal footing to architecture, with young men specially prepared for the task. Kemp's career provides an insight into a typical career path as a master-gardener and, when the occasion arose, as a landscape gardener. This was supported by his early education in a literate household, and it was his writing skills that set him apart from others because he was able to report and convey techniques easily. His books make it clear that Kemp was a practical gardener, someone who understood the issues and requirements. Unlike others, he was not a great philosopher; neither was he flamboyant nor charismatic. Neither was he an ambitious self-promoter, such as Paxton, Nesfield or André. The fact that there are no known depictions of him suggest that he was a modest man, even though he must have been aware of the tremendous influence the later editions of his book on landscape gardening had on contemporary landscape designers. From 1850, *How to Lay Out a Garden* became a popular guide for garden owners. It was arguably also the most important textbook for landscape gardening of the second half of the century, both in Britain and the United States.

Besides private gardens this period saw an expansion in opportunities in public works, particularly municipal parks and cemeteries. This work required greater accountability which was reflected in professional practice with more extensive reporting, estimates, specifications and contracts. Until the establishment of formal education at the School

of the Art of Landscape Gardening and the Improvement of Estates at Crystal Palace by Milner in 1881, this would have been learned through practice and assimilation from other professions, particularly surveyors (including engineers and architects). Kemp's literary abilities must have been an asset in being able to adapt to this process of professionalization.

Kemp never shook off the association with Paxton as one of his disciples; in fact, he promoted this, advertising himself as a landscape gardener and garden architect with the responsibility of 'the entire practical execution of Mr. Paxton's plans for the Park at Birkenhead'.³⁹ He remained a close associate, but clearly 'graduating' with a series of articles on landscape gardening, published in *Paxton's Magazine of Botany* in 1849.⁴⁰ In these articles, as in his later books, practicality domineers and he clearly had an eye for detail, understanding both issues of planting, but also – as he proved elsewhere – of built form, eager to credit those who collaborated with him. While there were others who attained similar standards, and there can be no doubt that Kemp's landscape work was of a very good standard, he was perhaps not an innovator, or someone who would naturally take the lead.

Within the context of the debate between the Paxton and Marnock Schools he would therefore not stand out. The competition and envy of the Royal Horticultural Society (i.e., Lindley) over the successful horticultural exhibitions at the Royal Botanical Society, which Marnock organized in the society's garden in Regent's Park, manifested itself also within landscape gardening. Both societies trained gardeners, and some of them became



Figure 11. Edward Kemp's designs evidenced his 'good taste, which means good sense and absence of crotchets', such as at the kitchen garden at Knightshayes Court, Devon.
Photo: author, 2018

landscape gardeners who were typecast for their allegiance. Though this was expressed stylistically, the real differences between these two schools – but for the few exceptional grand projects – appear to have been rather overstated. Thus, within various projects there was a commonality between the schools, and Kemp was not someone who would be controversial and draw attention to himself. He knew that much of the importance of landscape design was in the detail. While there were sometimes issues with his projects locally, they did not resonate nationally. Were it not for his book on landscape gardening, he might have been delegated as being a regional landscape gardener. Yet, as a result of this publication evidencing his ‘good taste, which means good sense and absence of crotchets’,⁴¹ as well as his association with Paxton and his position as superintendent of Birkenhead Park, he was one of the leading professionals in the second half of the nineteenth century, an ‘eminent landscape gardener’,⁴² someone others recognized as ‘one of the ablest landscape gardeners of the time’ (Figure 11).⁴³

REFERENCES

¹ John Claudius Loudon, *The Suburban Gardener and Villa Companion, comprising the choice of a villa residence, or of a situation on which to form one, the arrangement and furnishing of the house, and the laying out ... of the garden and grounds* (London, 1838).

² Elizabeth Davey, ‘“A complete and constant superintendence”: the Cheshire parks and gardens of Edward Kemp (1817–1891)’, *Cheshire History*, 50 (2010–11), pp. 71–99, at p. 72.

³ Anon., ‘Edward Kemp’, *Gardeners’ Chronicle*, S3/9 (1891), p. 311.

⁴ Brent Elliott, *The Royal Horticultural Society: A History 1804–2004* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2004), pp. 314–16; Jan Woudstra, ‘The rise of formal education for gardeners in Prussia and Great Britain’, in Heiner Krellig and Michael Rohde (eds), *Prussian Gardens in Europe: 300 Years of Garden History* (Leipzig: Edition Leipzig, 2007), pp. 308–13.

⁵ John Claudius Loudon, *An Encyclopaedia of Gardening* (London, 1822), pp. 1200, 1327.

⁶ Anon., ‘Edward Kemp’.

⁷ John Claudius Loudon, ‘Landscape-gardening’, *Gardener’s Magazine*, 16 (1840), pp. 620–4, at p. 620; see also Brent Elliott, *Victorian Gardens* (London: Batsford, 1986), pp. 36, 53–4.

⁸ James C. Niven, ‘Birkenhead Park’, *The Garden*, 10 (1876), p. 550.

⁹ Davey, ‘“A complete and constant superintendence”’, p. 77, which quotes the minutes of the Finance Committee (3 September 1845).

¹⁰ Anon., ‘Plans for the public parks’, *The Manchester Guardian* (22 October 1845), p. 5; see also ‘Manchester, Buxton, Matlock & Midlands Junction Railway’, *The Guardian* (7 June 1845), p. 7, which lists Paxton in Committee of Management; and ‘Isle of Wight Railway’, *The Manchester Guardian* (26 July 1845), p. 3, which lists Paxton as provisional director.

¹¹ Anon., ‘Laying out the parks’, *The Manchester Guardian* (20 September 1845),

p. 7.

¹² Edward Kemp, *The Parks, Gardens, etc. of London and its Suburbs* (London: John Weale, 1851), p. 66.

¹³ Anon., ‘Plans for the public parks’, *The Manchester Guardian* (22 October 1844), p. 5.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5. For a modern account, see Hazel Conway, ‘The Manchester/Salford parks: their design and development’, *Journal of Garden History*, 5/3 (1985), pp. 231–60; Brent Elliott, ‘The Manchester/Salford parks: two additional notes’, *Journal of Garden History*, 6/2 (1986), pp. 141–45; and Allan R. Ruff, *Manchester’s Phillips Park: A Park for the People, Since 1845* (Stroud: Amberley, 2016), pp. 7–18.

¹⁷ Joshua Major, *The Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (London: Longham, Brown, Green & Longhams, 1852), p. 193.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ A lover of landscape gardening, ‘Queen’s Park, Manchester’, *The Gardeners’ Chronicle* (1847), p. 191.

²⁰ [John Lindley], ‘Saturday, March 27, 1847’, *The Gardeners’ Chronicle* (1847), pp. 203–4.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, p. 219.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 267; A lover of landscape gardening, ‘Queen’s Park, Manchester’, p. 269; H. J. H., ‘Queen’s Park’, p. 284; [Lindley], ‘Saturday, June 5, 1847’, p. 371.

²⁴ David Baldwin, ‘Joshua Major’, *Journal of Garden History*, 7/2 (1987), pp. 131–50; Jan Woudstra, ‘The influence of Robert Marnock on Bretton Hall, 1825–34’, *Garden History*, 41/1 (2013), pp. 96–115.

²⁵ Junius, ‘Birkenhead Park, and the “Chronicle reviewers”; a few words upon’, *The Gardeners’ Journal* (1847), pp. 291–2.

²⁶ Robert Glendinning, ‘Queen’s Park, Manchester’, *The Gardeners’ Journal* (1847), p. 780.

²⁷ George F. Chadwick, *The Park and the*

Town: Public landscape in the 19th and 20th Centuries (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), p. 80.

²⁸ Hortus, 'The Paxton and Marnock School of Landscape Gardening', *The Nottinghamshire Guardian* (4 July 1879), p. 2.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Brent Elliott, 'Nesfield in his Victorian context', in Christopher Ridgway (ed.), *William Andrews Nesfield: Victorian Landscape Architect* (York: Institute of Advanced Architectural Studies, University of York, 1996), pp. 9–14.

³¹ Anon., 'Sefton Park', *The Daily Post* (13 June 1867); 'Town Council', *The Daily Post* (3 September 1868).

³² Anon., 'Sefton Park, Liverpool', *The Building News*, 14 (1867), pp. 275–6.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Anon., 'Sefton Park competition, Liverpool', *The Building News*, 14 (1867), pp. 283–4.

³⁷ Edward Kemp, *How to Lay Out a*

Garden, 2nd edn (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1858), p. 82; 3rd edn (1864), p. 91.

³⁸ Kemp, *How to Lay Out a Garden*, 2nd edn, p. 94; 3rd edn, p. 120.

³⁹ [Advert], 'Edward Kemp, landscape gardener and garden architect, Birkenhead Park'; and see also the article 'Landscape gardening', both in *Liverpool Mail* (14 August 1847), pp. 1, 2.

⁴⁰ Edward Kemp in *Paxton's Magazine of Botany*, 16 (1849): 'On ornamental planting', pp. 23–5; 'On ornamental planting', pp. 54–6; 'On forming and treating home plantations', pp. 82–5; 'On improving old plantations', pp. 114–17; 'A hint or two about annuals', pp. 141–2; 'On disposing plants in shrubberies and plant-houses', pp. 167–70; and 'On beauty of lines in gardening', pp. 276–9.

⁴¹ Anon., 'Landscape gardening', *The Gardeners' Chronicle* (1859), p. 872.

⁴² Anon., 'A "Waterloo cup" capua', *The Sportsman* (25 September 1882).

⁴³ Anon., 'Grange floral and horticultural exhibition', *Lancaster Gazette* (7 July 1866).