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THE ART OF CONCEALMENT AND THE CONCEALMENT OF ART

Humphry Repton's recommendations often involved the judicious removal of trees, which he described as undrawing the curtains. Conversely, he also 'drew the curtains' with planting to disguise service buildings or boundaries. His 'before' and 'after' views in his Red Books were adept at showing these and other devices and, through his publications, brought his methods to a wider audience. What did Repton chose to conceal or reveal in his Red Books and in his practice, and how did he conceal the art of the Improver?

THE PERFECTION OF LANDSCAPE GARDENING

In Humphry Repton's *Sketches and Hints on Landscape Gardening* (1795), he stated:

The perfection of Landscape Gardening consists in the four following requisites:

First, it must display the natural beauties, and hide the natural defects of every situation.

Secondly, it should give the appearance of extent and freedom, by carefully disguising or hiding the boundary.

Thirdly, it must studiously conceal every interference of art, however expensive, by which the natural scenery is improved; making the whole appear the production of nature only; and

fourthly, all objects of mere convenience or comfort, if incapable of being made ornamental, or of becoming proper parts of the general scenery, must be removed or concealed.¹

All these requisites relate to Repton's ability to conceal and reveal elements in the landscape and were central to his work. However, it is clear when looking at Repton's proposals for individual sites that he adapted his principles to meet the requirements of the place and client. There were always exceptions to his rules and some of his decisions were surprising. He prided himself on his commonsense approach and he ranked the comfort and convenience of the owners as highly as the aesthetic appearance of a site. As Repton said: 'the difference between a rural scene on canvas and a rural scene in reality is in the need to provide utility and comfort to the inhabitants'.²

A RAREE SHOW

Repton needed a flexible approach because of the challenging context within which he was working. His thirty years of landscaping practice coincided with a period of great political and financial uncertainty – George III's mental health problems, the Napoleonic Wars and their aftermath, high unemployment, the Corn Laws, extreme weather conditions, and famines in both 1795 and 1816 – the 'year without summer', following the eruption of Mount Tambora in Indonesia.³ The culmination of the consequential

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unrest was the Peterloo Massacre, alluded to by Shelley in his sonnet *England in 1819*.⁴ The Regency aesthetic drew a curtain across the distressed state of the country, but the precarious situation impacted on Repton's ability to secure commissions for work on the ground. His desire to secure work sometimes led to manipulative behaviour and this was particularly the case at Sheringham, Norfolk (Figure 1). The somewhat naïve and vulnerable client, Abbot Upcher, had first seen Sheringham in June 1811 and had been 'cruelly disappointed', but he visited a few days later and was taken by the place. The solicitor for the sale was Repton's son, William, and after signing the contract, Upcher was invited to dine with him, an occasion in which his father just happened to be present.⁵ What both Repton father and son knew was that the estate had been massively overvalued. An earlier potential sale negotiated by Humphry had fallen through because of the relative low value of the estate and lack of a proper house.⁶

Upcher found out about the value but never suspected that Repton knew about it and commissioned him to draw up plans for the landscape and a new house designed by John Adey Repton in 1812.⁷ The Upcher family moved into the old house, but left a few days later, with Upcher in a 'great depression', 'actively owing to the Estate for which he gave 50 thous[an]d'.⁸ Repton was instructed to offer it for sale, but nobody would offer more than thirty thousand pounds.⁹ Thankfully, Upcher recovered, decided not to sell and Repton started work again on the estate. Apart from a planned temple, the landscape was largely complete and the shell of the house had been built when Upcher became ill again in 1817.¹⁰ He died aged thirty-four in 1819, less than a year after Repton's own death. The family continued to live in the old house until 1839 when the new house – Sheringham Bower – was finally completed.



Figure 1. 'The Sea at Sheringham is not like that of the Bay of Naples'; from Humphry Repton, *Red Book for Sheringham, Norfolk* (1812). Felbrigg Hall, National Trust ID no. 3076480. Courtesy: NTPL Commissioned (NTPL), © National Trust Images

Conversely, it was also a period of innovation, such as the discovery that cast iron could be used for structural purposes, and global exploration. On a domestic scale, the ability to move around the country was aided by the improved road surfaces invented by Thomas Telford and John Loudon MacAdam and an increased range of carriage types with better wheel construction and suspension.¹¹ Exploration on a continental scale brought in new plants, which was combined with an increased interest in horticulture.¹² A rising wealthy merchant class gave Repton a broader range of clients and he adapted his practice to meet both the positive and the negative changes. He also adapted to the changing landscape aesthetic from the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth centuries: he introduced specialized gardens to showcase the new plants available in his early nineteenth-century garden designs¹³ and he adapted seventeenth-century orangeries¹⁴ built at a time when only orange-trees, myrtles and a limited range of greenhouse plants were grown, which required little light: 'Since that period, the numerous tribe of geraniums, ericas, and other exotic plants, requiring more light, have caused a very material alteration in the construction of the green-house.'¹⁵

Repton was often commissioned to work on established landscapes and his proposals sought to modernize and correct mistakes made in previous phases of work with the aim of making a united and harmonious design. As the Duke of Bedford told him when talking of Woburn, Bedfordshire: 'Much has been done here, but much remains to be done, and something, I think, to *undo*,' the latter in reference to Henry Holland's landscaping work.¹⁶ Repton's suggestions were often subtle, especially when shown in plan form or described in writing, so he used his method of moving slides and flaps in his watercolours to show the impact of these changes. What may have seemed a minor change was then shown to make a dramatic difference. Repton wrote that a painter 'sees things as they are' and a landscape gardener 'as they will be'. He was accomplished at both and that enabled him to see what was there (his before view) and what should be there (his after view). The illustrations gave the owners the confidence to make changes with which they might otherwise have been nervous and can be seen as the equivalent of an architect or designer producing a virtual reality walk-through today. The method was so successful that the Red Books and folios were sometimes commissioned solely as a conversation piece and the 'before' and 'after' views were emulated by Prince von Pückler Muskau and Nicolas Vergnaud in their popular publications in the 1830s.¹⁷

Beyond this new method of presenting his ideas, Repton saw it as his role to educate his clients and readers. Subjects such as composition, colour theory, perspective, scale and proportion, and the effect of light and shadow were written about and illustrated. In several Red Books, he referred to a landscape having drawn curtains, which he opened in his 'after' watercolour view. If the client proceeded with the work, he 'undrew' the curtains on the ground by felling trees or removing buildings. As a former playwright, Repton was aware of the theatrical impact of the curtain going up to reveal a change of set. His careful use of perspective allowed large objects to be concealed in what must have seemed like a magical illusion. He stated that it was:

the business of taste, in all the polite arts, to avail itself of stratagems, by which the imagination may be deceived [...] in landscape gardening everything may be called a deception by which we endeavour to conceal the agency of art, and make our works appear to be the product of nature only [...] we plant a hill, to make it appear higher than it is; we open the banks of a brook, to give it the appearance of a river; or to stop its current, to produce an expanse of surface; we sink the fence betwixt one lawn and another, to give imaginary extent, without inconvenience or confinement; and every piece of artificial water, whether it take the shape of a lake, a river, or a pool, must look natural, or it will fail to be agreeable.¹⁸



Figure 2 'Billy's Raree-Show or John Bull enlighten'd'. The flag reads: 'Licenced by Authority.

Billy Hare's Grand Exhibition of Moving Mechanism or Deception of the Senses', and the main text begins: 'Now Pray lend your attention to the Enchanting Prospect before you [...]' (published 15 August 1797). Courtesy: Artokoloro Quint Lox Ltd/Alamy Stock Photo, P6P16C

When a design was so successful that it looked natural, Repton argued that the deceit was accepted even when found out. He compared this to the performance of a great actor such as David Garrick or Sarah Siddons, who could incite feelings even when it was known they were acting.¹⁹ However, Repton believed that 'in works of ART every trick ought to be avoided' and for that reason he disliked sham ruins and bridges.²⁰

Sir Walter Scott found:

great amusement in reciting that description of between what is & what was which Mr. Repton exhibits by means of that ancient contrivance a raree show omitting only the magnifying glass & substituting his red book for the box and strings.²¹

A raree or rarity show was a peep box with pictures viewed through a magnifying glass or a hole in the box. The pictures could be lifted up and down on strings and the 'show' sometimes had biconvex lenses to manipulate the perspective or lights that could change

the picture from day to night depending on whether they were in front of or behind the picture (Figure 2). Repton's show was played out on the ground with the gradual revealing of previously hidden scenes.

WHAT TO VIEW AND HOW TO VIEW IT

'If the perfection of art consists in shewing beauties and hiding defects, it must be asked, from what point of view any object is to be seen?'; Repton considered the views from set positions: from the windows of the house; from the approach roads; and from the walks and drives.²² What needed to be concealed or how a feature was to be revealed depended on the kind of view, the angle it was seen from and the speed at which it was seen, according to the mode of transport. In the walks and drives, 'we are at full liberty to display good features, or avoid bad ones' by altering the line, and 'in the approaches we may do the same, yet under certain restrictions, because the roads must lead to the house'. However, the view from the house was fixed and needed to be carefully designed to work out which 'objects [would be] most desirable to form this permanent scenery, and how other objects may be introduced, to vary or enliven the same landscape, always seen from the same spot'.²³ The types of view Repton designed included the following.

Composed views

These were seen from the house or from stations along a drive or walk:

The road which conducts a stranger to the best points of view, should appear to be the most natural and easy line of communication from one object to another; some of these points of view may be distinctly marked by a building, a covered seat, or other striking circumstance to arrest the progress and fix the attention: but the *drive* should [...] present the beauties of the place, without fatiguing the eye by their frequency [...] and] with convenient resting places, it may be sometimes used as a *walk*.²⁴

Since any route could be taken across a garden or pleasure ground, the defined route was often a dry walk that could be taken in any season: 'these are all fenced in & may be kept as neat & trim as Ladys Sattin shoes may require'.²⁵ Along the walks Repton advised low-growing shrubs with some flowers in front, 'except in those walks which require shade, and there tall plants may be put close to the side of the walk'.²⁶ The best views were sometimes reserved 'for those who can walk to them, and who can climb steps or creep thro' caverns', but Repton also proposed others 'from the windows of a carriage with all the interest of surprise and novelty'.²⁷ While the approach drive was usually gravelled, he preferred the drives to be grass; levelled and occasionally mown. He generally did not like drives within belts unless the belt was wide enough to allow a varied winding course, giving views out on either side or of the trees through the centre.²⁸

General views

These were views that were not composed and were the type seen from a *Ride* (or riding), which required:

an open, airy, prospect, in which the same distant objects may continue in view for many miles without palling the eye, because exercise is the chief object of riding; and the character of the scenery should be so bold, that those who run may read them.²⁹

A burst

This was a method Repton used for the first view of the house from the *approach* road. He aimed to make this as dramatic as possible, concealing the view of the house until it



Figure 3 View from the approach road at Sheringham, Norfolk; from Humphry Repton, Red Book for Sheringham, Norfolk (1812). Felbrigg Hall, National Trust ID no. 3076480.

Courtesy: NTPL Commissioned (NTPL), © National Trust Images

was seen to best advantage, usually when rounding a bend in the road.³⁰ At Hatchlands, Surrey, ‘the most interesting views of park and distant country, will ascend a knoll, where it bursts upon the house’;³¹ at Wentworth Woodhouse, Yorkshire, ‘a small clump which will form a part of this great mass, and which now hides the house, till, by a judicious bend round that angle, the whole building burst at once upon the view’;³² and at Sheringham, Upcher and Repton rode out ‘and traced the road – quite made for us – at the end of which the first spot which Repton had fixed on, burst upon us, with Repton’s post chaise fixed in it representing the house’ (Figure 3).³³

Peeps

These were narrow views, usually cut through planting, and often of scenery or a feature about to be seen at a station. You were not meant to stop at these, just glance at them as you passed by. Because of the parallax effect, as you walk past a narrow viewpoint, the background of the landscape scrolls across, so each section is seen in turn but not together. Repton noted that in the approach to Burley on the Hill, Rutland: ‘every step varies the position of the several parts, as they advance or recede perspectively’.³⁴ Examples of peeps can still be seen at Sheringham and are described in the Red Book for Attingham Park, Shropshire (1798), where the walk or drive went ‘thro’ the plantation on the hill with occasional openings towards the park’³⁵, and then gave full views from the high ground towards Shrewsbury and the Wrekin.

Prospects

These were bird’s-eye views from a higher viewpoint, giving a map-like vista overlooking the estate and beyond. They often included churches and villages or mountain ranges, seen in the distance: ‘An extensive prospect is most admired when the distant objects are most clear and distinct,’ while near objects are strongly represented, those further away usually recede.³⁶ Light objects, including water if it is reflective, recede less. However, ‘No beauty of prospect can compensate for the cold exposure to the north, the glaring



Figure 4. View to the pavilion at Hill Hall, Essex, animated by livestock; from Humphry Repton, *Red Book for Hill Hall, Essex* (1791). Courtesy: Essex Record Office, D/DU 640

blaze of the setting sun, or the frequent boisterous winds and rain from the west and south-west.’³⁷ Repton preferred to have a *Landscape View* from the house rather than a prospect. This was a view framed by a foreground of trees, which rose above the horizon.

Vistas

These were long views such as one along an enfilade, a straight glade or an avenue. At Bulstrode, Buckinghamshire, Repton had been asked not only to retain an avenue but also to place a bench at the end of it. He struggled with this, first because he disliked what he termed ‘eye-traps’, but also because the proportions were wrong, with the length ‘too great for the height’. He proposed a temple instead, but if it had to be a bench, it should be painted green to make it as invisible as possible.³⁸

The views from the drives, walks and approaches made the most of a moving viewpoint, and this provided variety to the scene. However, the views from the house and stations were static and here Repton suggested animation of some form: livestock, the glittering of water, the play of light and shade on planting, smoke rising from a cottage, a flag flying, a boat under sail, carriages along a drive, or people working in the hay meadows (Figure 4).

REQUISITE 1: IT MUST DISPLAY THE NATURAL BEAUTIES, AND HIDE THE NATURAL DEFECTS OF EVERY SITUATION

The display of natural beauties often involved the removal of formal landscape features, and this was especially the case with avenues. Although Mr Rushworth had suggested in *Mansfield Park* that ‘Repton, or anybody of that sort, would certainly have the avenue at Sotherton down’, in practice he often retained avenues, or at least the appearance of them, for:

a man of taste will pause [before cutting down an avenue], and not always break their venerable ranks, for his hand is not guided by the levelling principles or sudden innovations of modern fashion; he will reverence the glory of former ages.³⁹

Repton had worked out that:

the straight line might be preserved in appearance from the ends of a vista, or avenue, without actually filling up all the sides; and thus alternate openings of views to the country might be obtained', a method he termed 'breaking an avenue'.⁴⁰

Where it was necessary to hide buildings or other features, this was done by planting:

The height of the plants must be guided by the objects they are intended to hide, or the views they may obstruct. In those places where good prospects are seen over the walls, they need only be high enough to hide the walls; in others, where houses or other objects require to be concealed, they must be high in proportion.⁴¹

Repton initially supervised the work on the ground at Sheringham during his visits there, but from 1814, Upcher started to plant under his 'own auspices' following Repton's general plan. Upcher's journal, *Sherringhamia*, reveals the romantic names used by Upcher and the application of Repton's methods of hiding outbuildings, concealing designed features and buildings until seen to best advantage, peeps and bursts, and the effect of contrasting light and dark.⁴² In March 1814, Upcher planted:

spruce & silver firs to the right to darken the Wood, and exclude the view of the Temple in passing, in order that the Kelling Burst [the first sight of Kelling Heath from the approach drive] and Walter Scott [the signal station] may appear with greater effect. I also planted a thornery which we call Hawthornden, Laburnums, thorns, Acacias and Mountain Ash, also a great many spruce firs under the Rookery, and on Bluff Point, Beech, Sycamore and Mountain Ash. Behind Ashford's farm I also planted a Spruce Fir Belt with Mountain Ash, Larch and Oak in front. The latter end of April I had above an hundred very large hollies brought with balls of earth attached, to the Salvator Wood. [...] I also made a small Plantation to the left of our present house of spruce and silver firs & larch to plant out the Wall, and Mountain Ash, Sweet Chestnut, Beech & Sycamore, Lilacs and Thorns with a gravel terrace to walk on. [...] I also planted a few Beech, Laburnums & thorns with a hope of their hereafter excluding the view of the Roof of our Offices behind the new house.⁴³

Upcher's use of the name 'Walter Scott' for the signal station in Spy Wood behind the house, from which there were panoramic views, is appropriate. In 1813, work started in earnest at Sheringham, and this was also the year in which Sir Walter Scott was 'bit with the madness of the picturesque' while laying out his own landscape at Abbotsford, Roxburghshire, in 1813;⁴⁴ William Wordsworth was laying out Rydal Mount, Cumbria;⁴⁵ and J. M. W. Turner was laying out Sandycombe Lodge, Twickenham, Middlesex. Turner painted at least four Repton landscapes at around the time the Red Books were being drawn up for them and must have been aware of Repton and his picturesque landscaping techniques.⁴⁶

The garden at Sheringham marks a departure from Repton's normal recommendations (Figure 5). Because the new house faced away from the sea, there was little in the way of a sea view from it. To compensate, the garden was designed with the sea as the backdrop. However, in doing this, he introduced an artificial foreground to the natural landscape and partially obscured the beautiful topography with a screen to protect the garden from the north wind. He justified this by saying:

Near the mansion of elegance & neatness, we may endure formality [...] the principal Station is that from the house looking eastward, where the contrast betwixt the Sea & the flower garden will be so novel, that it is worthy of some contrivance to preserve it – This can only be done by planting such trees & shrubs as best bear the Sea exposure & perhaps by some artificial screen to appear as a stage for flowers in Summer.⁴⁷

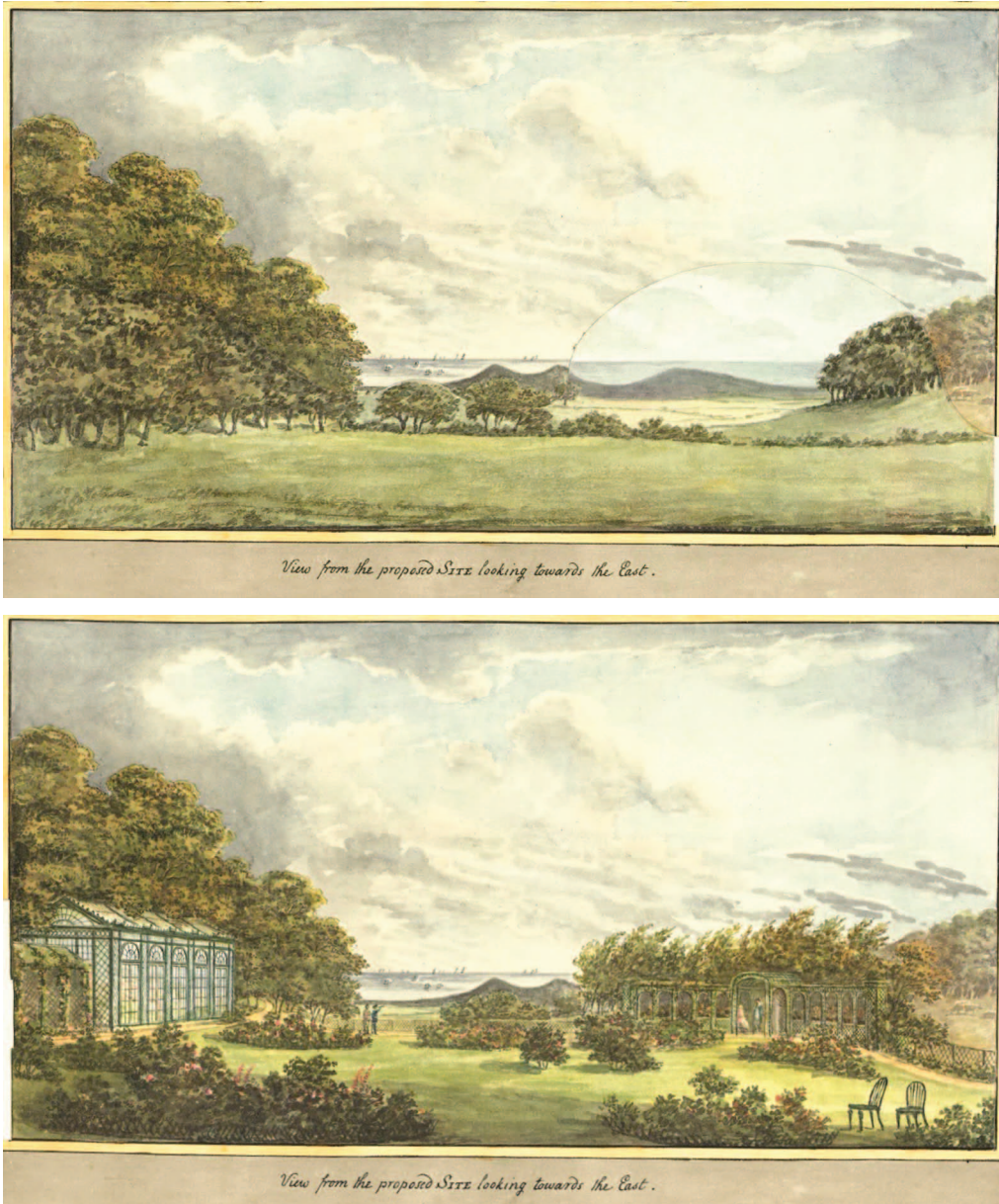


Figure 5 'Before' and 'after' views of the garden at Sheringham, Norfolk; from Humphry Repton, Red Book for Sheringham, Norfolk (1812). Felbrigg Hall, National Trust ID no. 3076480. Courtesy: NTPL Commissioned (NTPL), © National Trust Images

Artifice was not required at Little Green (alias Green Vale), West Sussex, where the view (Figure 6):

to the south-east is capable of greater improvement than a common observer would suppose possible, yet this improvement consists merely in removing certain objects with which art has injudiciously encumbered the view, there are, a clipped hedge, a small orchard or garden, and a lofty row of tall elms forming a curtain before the lovely scene [...] a gentle valley winding in the form of an irregular glade betwixt trees and brush wood, requiring little aid from Art to render them far more interesting than my pencil can describe. [...] In like manner the continuation of the valley thro' the farm yard is



Figure 6 'Before' and 'after' views of Little Green, West Sussex, showing the effect of opening the curtains; from Humphry Repton, Red Book for Little Green (alias Green Vale), West Sussex (1793). Courtesy: West Sussex Record Office, Add. MS 520

at present hid by apple trees and brushwood, which when removed will leave the great walnut tree a venerable foreground to the large elms which are indistinctly seen betwixt its branches.⁴⁸

REQUISITE 2: IT SHOULD GIVE THE APPEARANCE OF EXTENT AND FREEDOM, BY CAREFULLY DISGUISING OR HIDING THE BOUNDARY

The first of the great requisites in English gardening is, to banish all appearance of confinement, and to give imaginary extent of freedom, by invisible lines of separation, by a ha!ha! or sunk fences, &c. If this be difficult in territory of two or three hundred acres, how much more so must it be in a plot of three or four acres, enclosed by walls, and surrounded by neighbouring buildings? All we can hope to effect, is, to hide this boundary everywhere by plantations of such varied outline and depth, as to disguise what we cannot extend or remove.⁴⁹

In Repton's watercolours for the view from Claybury, Essex, he did not use before or after sketches but one to show the view with a belt and one to show how it would look better without (Figure 7).⁵⁰ He explained that:

the meaning of certain small plantations which on the map appear like very disgusting patches, but which I hope fully to justify. [...] A belt or girdle of plantation round an estate is often a very desirable mode of improving, but where the house is so elevated as to command a view of its whole extent, which would be the case of Claybury, such



Figure 7 Views of the park at Claybury, Essex, with a belt (above) or with a partial belt and plantations (below); from Humphry Repton, *Red Book for Claybury, Essex* (1791). Courtesy: Essex Record Office, D/DU 1113

a plantation could appear no better than a mere hedge. In the slide of the following sketch I have shown the effect of destroying all the hedges, and planting such a belt to unite the present woods and surround the premises: on removing the slide is shown, an irregularity of outline intended to be produced by the plantations.

Repton explained the ‘disgusting patches’ as follows (Figure 8): plantations A and B ‘serve to divide the lawn’; C sheltered the kitchen garden and screened it ‘from many parts of the grounds particularly from a seat under the large Elm on the Knole’; D was a small clump which broke the line of the sunk fence between B and E; E united the wood with the slip N-N and flanked the sunk fence, ‘a plantation must always guard [a sunk fence’s] extremities’; F stopped the slip from looking like a hedge; G was a small clump to break the outline and lead ‘the eye into the deep recess, in which a keeper’s lodge or Cottage would have a good effect, serving to mark the distance and continuity of property’; H united the plantations O & P and made it clear that they were part of the estate; I & K screened ‘the intended Lodges and Entrances’; L ‘shut out the sky in the approach’; and M was a small clump to ‘hide a red house unfortunately too conspicuous from an opening in the hedgerow of Elms’.

A plantation was the best method for hiding the pales but in some cases it would ‘hide more than is required’.⁵¹ At Hatchlands, Surrey, three rows of large trees ‘neither do nor ever can hide the pale, which appears as perfectly betwixt their stems as if the trees were not there’.⁵² The long shadows cast by the trees drew attention to the boundary and made the view gloomy. Pales could be hidden by making them of light materials such as slender iron and wire painted green; sinking the fence; or the use of a light hurdle instead of paling. In a

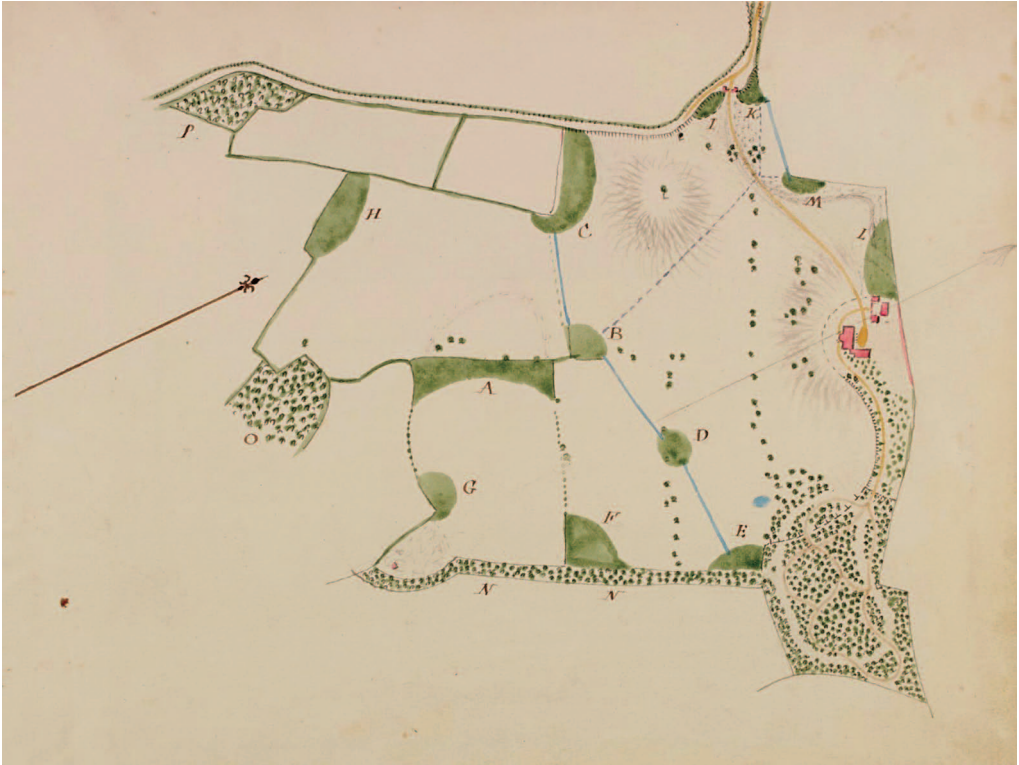


Figure 8 Plan of Claybury, Essex; from Humphry Repton, *Red Book for Claybury, Essex* (1791).
 Courtesy: Essex Record Office, D/DU 1113

small villa landscape, a belt could ‘confine the landscape, by the pale to hide the road; then by the shrubs to hide the pale; and lastly, by the fence to protect these shrubs’.⁵³

REQUISITE 3: IT MUST STUDIOUSLY CONCEAL EVERY INTERFERENCE OF ART
 [...] MAKING THE WHOLE APPEAR THE PRODUCTION OF NATURE ONLY

This requisite had several meanings and consequent requirements: artificial landscaping, such as the remnants of formal gardening, should be removed or softened; the artificial means of making landscape look natural should be hidden; and devices to show the landscape to best advantage should not be obvious. At Ferney Hall, Shropshire, Repton proposed that a venerable hanging wood should be reflected in the water at the bottom of the slope, but pointed out that still water situated in a dark recess ‘can only be made visible by the reflection of some white object on its opposite bank’. He proposed a small bath house, which would be reflected in the water and seen through an opening between trees:

I am sure I am not deceived in my expectations from this spot, because by bending aside a few boughs & breaking off twigs, I got a clear line of sight with the help of a Telescope which I use for such purposes. This opening must be made to appear accidental, & not a hole cut thro’ the wood on purpose.⁵⁴

He also proposed to ‘destroy the formal terraces which disfigure the beautiful prospect’ and the walls that flanked the view from the front of the house. But because the view to the distant mountains was almost too extensive, he suggested keeping the fruit garden, with a shrubbery to hide it, to ‘enrich the foreground in the home Scenery & make a sort of balance to the hanging wood which bounds the opposite side of the Landscape’.⁵⁵

Repton objected to avenues in general because they ‘will often act as a curtain drawn across to exclude what is infinitely more interesting than any row of trees’.⁵⁶ He noted that it was in ‘undrawing this curtain’ by cutting down some chestnut trees in the avenue at Langley, Kent, that would ‘let in the hill, richly covered with oaks’.⁵⁷ Opening up avenues was especially important in uneven ground and when the avenue was seen sideways on. He sometimes kept the structure of the avenue but proposed cutting into it, so that it still looked like an avenue at either end but not from the sides. However, he also appreciated that there was so much ‘ancient grandeur’ in old avenues and concluded that, at Langley, he did not want the avenue to be ‘further disturbed’.⁵⁸

Burley on the Hill was another landscape where he kept the impression of the rides and avenues from the vistas from the house, but made them look more natural in other places by removing trees. However, he wrote that ‘If the woods and the natural shape of the ground have been mangled and distorted by the absurdities of Geometric gardening, the water has not escaped its formal influence’.⁵⁹ There were two vast fishponds that were in a poor condition. Repton proposed that ‘instead of restoring these unsightly basons, I would [...] give the water a natural shape’. This involved removing the old bridge and narrowing the channel to a dam, which was disguised with planting and the facades of a (sham) bridge.⁶⁰ Two years before this, he had proposed removing the eighteenth-century sham bridge at Kenwood, Middlesex, because it was ‘beneath the dignity’ of the site.⁶¹

In the view to the south at Burley on the Hill, Repton supposed that the improvement should be:

by strict adherence to those parts of ancient gardening which contributed to its magnificence as a work of Art, but not in those instances where proper advantages can be taken of the natural beauties of it situation. And here a very happy line of separation presents itself, the upper great terrace on which the house stands, is partly natural and partly artificial, The whole of this ought to be preserved and acknowledged as a work of Art, because it would be impossible to make it appear natural.

If the terrace be allowed as a proper artificial object, it should be embellished with ornaments becoming the character of the house, instead of the low red brick wall, it should be a balustrade. [...] Having considered the effect of the terrace as a foreground or artificial frame to the picture, I should now wish to obliterate all traces of Art.⁶²

Repton stated that ‘a Foreground is so essential both in the picture and in reality’ and he therefore proposed a terrace, balustrade or rail to mark the distinction between the dressed ground and the park at many of the sites on which he worked.⁶³

REQUISITE 4: ALL OBJECTS OF MERE CONVENIENCE OR COMFORT, IF CAPABLE OF BEING MADE ORNAMENTAL [...] MUST BE REMOVED OR CONCEALED

Hare Street in Gidea Park, near Romford, Essex:

stood originally within five yards of the high road: this area was often covered with droves of cattle, of pigs, or geese. I obtained leave to remove the paling twenty yards further from the windows; and by this appropriation of twenty-five yards of garden, I have obtained a frame to my landscape; the frame is composed of flowering shrubs and evergreens; beyond which are seen, the cheerful village, the high road, and that constant moving scene.⁶⁴

Repton took ‘some pains to hide’ the butcher’s shop, giving preference ‘to a basket of roses’. He used this as an example of how much might be altered by the foreground:



Figure 9 'Before' and 'after' views of the entrance front of Wimpole Hall, Cambridgeshire; from Humphry Repton, *Red Book for Wimpole Hall, Cambridgeshire* (1801). Wimpole Hall, National Trust ID no. WIM/D/490. Courtesy: NTPL Commissioned (NTPL), © National Trust Images/A. C. Cooper

'how a very small object, aptly placed near the eye, may hide an offensive object ten times as large; whilst a hedge of roses and sweet-briars may hide the dirt of a road, without concealing the moving objects which animate the landscape'.

Of the cottages at Wimpole Hall, Cambridgeshire, Repton wrote that 'What pleases the eye in Art or Nature, we are often more indebted to the colouring than to the design'.⁶⁵ There were two sets of cottages in the park: one set was symmetrical but composed of a 'glaring assemblage of red brick' and the other set was a 'melee mixture of red and white'. He remedied the first by suggesting a wash over the bricks and trellis with a few laths over the roof to improve it. The second set of cottages was 'broken and concealed by planting a few large trees [...] to enclose the yards which are now too often rendered unsightly by linen and other nuisances'. He described the stables at Wimpole as 'ugly and so conspicuous' but did not wish them to be removed until the ground behind them was 'more worth to be shown'. In the meantime, he suggested that a few trees should be planted before the stable, the church and the east wing of the house to 'connect the whole together and make them less objectionable' (Figure 9). He also suggested colouring all the service buildings and the church with a wash of the colour of Sussex or Suffolk bricks to bring a 'uniformity of colour'.

Repton disliked red brick because it was 'utterly incompatible with all ideas of picturesque beauty'.⁶⁶ He quoted Lancelot Brown in *Observations on the theory and practice of Landscape Gardening* (London, 1805 edn): a red brick house 'puts the whole valley in a fever' and advised stone or stucco if possible, otherwise yellow brick.⁶⁷ Red and other warm colours do not recede and fade in colour with distance, unlike green and

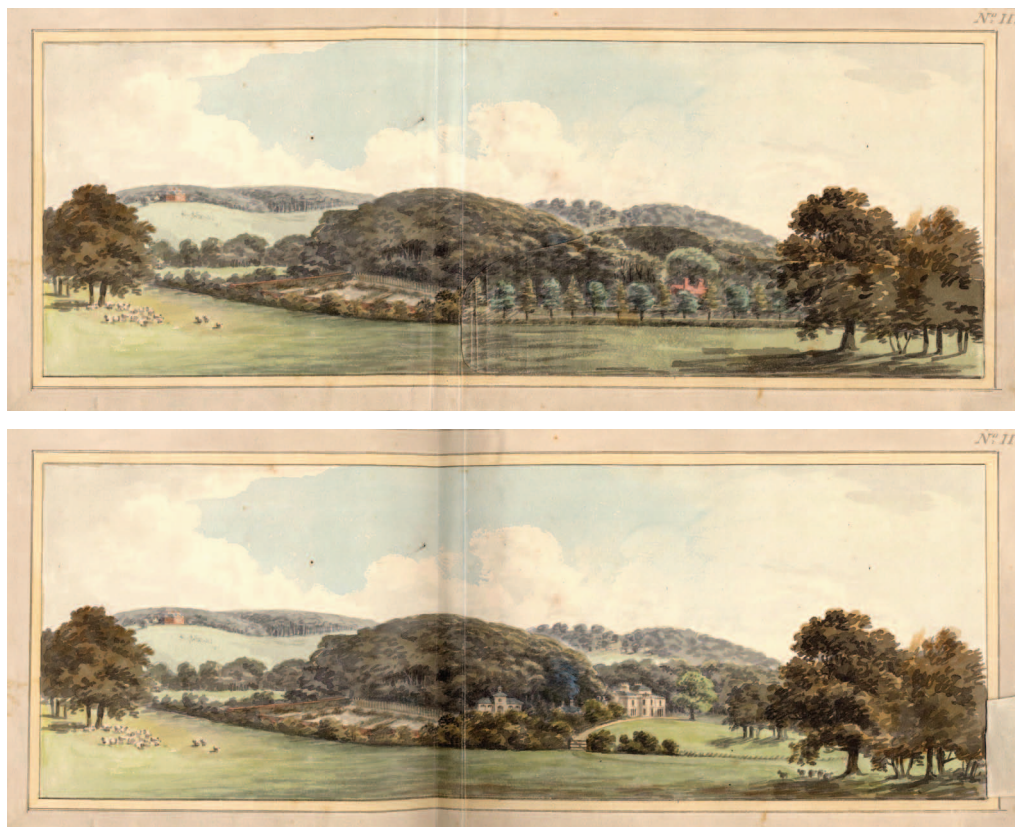


Figure 10 'Before' and 'after' views of Little Green, West Sussex, showing the retention of the kitchen garden; from Humphry Repton, *Red Book for Little Green (alias Green Vale)*, West Sussex (1793). Courtesy: West Sussex Record Office, Add. MS 520

other cooler colours, which fade with distance to become a neutral tint. Repton would use red in his watercolours when he wanted something to stand out, such as a red cloak or coat worn in a miniature portrait of his client. He advocated the use of particular colours for certain features, including dark colours for the interior bars of sashes and window frames; white for the exterior bars (cottages could have green bars); gilding could be used on sashes; wooden gates should be painted white, but cast-iron ones should be painted green, ideally with copper or gold dust to appear bronze; and fences should be a dark (or invisible) green, so that they recede.⁶⁸

In Repton's *Red Book for Little Green*, he gave the house a distinct character from neighbouring Uppark. This was so that it did not appear to be a farmhouse or steward's house associated with the larger estate. He surrounded it with trees so 'that the whole will never be seen from the same point of view, and of course the house will appear larger than it really is'.⁶⁹ He changed the size, colour and position of the house; enlarged the lawn in front; increased the planting to the sides; removed a row of alternate scots and spruce fir; and partly concealed the offices, yards and stables with a plantation. Repton did not conceal the kitchen garden because he said it would not be 'very offensive provided there be no wall built near the Grove'. He noted that while kitchen gardens would normally be hidden, in this instance it would be better to show it to make it clear that Little Green was an independent establishment to Uppark (Figure 10).

REQUISITES CONCLUDED

Repton's principles were laid out in his published works, but in practice his recommendations for individual sites sometimes deviated from his general rules. Even when the client intended to complete Repton's full scheme, this was rarely the case in reality and at many sites the client never intended to carry out the design proposals in full or even in part. These factors raise particular difficulties when seeking to restore Repton landscapes, especially when it is not certain what was carried out at the time of Repton's suggestions. What Repton chose to reveal or conceal at a site where his scheme was followed may have been irreversibly altered over time. Is it appropriate to follow his guidelines for the site when seeking to restore a Repton landscape or should we apply his general rules, closing views that are no longer attractive, concealing new buildings, and revealing areas of later but attractive design?

REFERENCES

- ¹ Humphry Repton, *Sketches and Hints on Landscape Gardening* (London, 1795), repeated in *An enquiry into the changes of taste in landscape gardening* (London, 1806).
- ² Humphry Repton, Red Book for Hill Hall, Essex (1791). Essex Record Office, D/DU 640.
- ³ Many farmers and land agents kept weather diaries during this period, but notable ones include those by Abbot Upcher for 1813–16; Norfolk Record Office, UPC 155; the farmer, Peter Pegge-Burnell: National Archives, DD 311/1–6; and the agriculturalist, Robert Lowe: National Archives, DD/SK/217/1–26.
- ⁴ Percy Bysshe Shelley, *England in 1819* (available at: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45118/england-in-1819>) (accessed 10 October 2018).
- ⁵ Emma Piggott, *Memoir of the Honourable Mrs Upcher of Sheringham* (London: Harrison & Sons, 1860).
- ⁶ Humphry Repton Papers, Huntington Library, HM 40837, 40858.
- ⁷ Humphry Repton, Red Book for Sheringham, Norfolk (1812); National Trust.
- ⁸ Humphry Repton Papers, Huntington Library, HM 40837.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ The temple was not shown on later plans and was probably not built at this time. There are references to going to 'the temple' and eating sandwiches there, but this seems just to refer to the site planned for it or possibly a temporary structure, such as a tent; Piggott, *Memoir of the Honourable Mrs Upcher*. The temple was finally built in 1973 by Tom Upcher (Abbot Upcher's great-great-grandson) on a site closer to the house than the position chosen by Repton. It was scaled down in size to appear the same size when viewed from the hall.
- ¹¹ The phaeton, curricle, gig, cabriolet, Sociable, Sociable-Landau and barouche were all introduced between the 1780s and 1810s. See also Jane Bradney, 'The carriage-drive in Humphry Repton's landscapes', *Garden History*, 33/1 (2005), pp. 32–3; George A. Thrupp, *The History of Coaches* (London: Kerby & Endean, 1877); and National Trust, *The National Trust Carriage Museum at Arlington Court* (National Trust, 2009, revd 2011).
- ¹² The Royal Horticultural Society was founded in 1804 as the Horticultural Society of London.
- ¹³ Such as those at Woburn (1805) and Ashridge (1813).
- ¹⁴ Such as those at Dyrham (c.1802) and Wimpole (1809).
- ¹⁵ Humphry Repton, *Observations on the theory and practice of Landscape Gardening; including some remarks on Grecian and Gothic Architecture* (London, 1805 edn), p. 104.
- ¹⁶ Humphry Repton, Red Book for Woburn (1805); private collection.
- ¹⁷ Prince von Pückler Muskau, *Andeutungen über Landschaftsgärtnerei* [Hints on Landscape Gardening] (Stuttgart, 1834); Narcisse Vergnaud, *L'Art de Creer les Jardins* [The Art of Making Gardens] (Paris, 1835).
- ¹⁸ Repton, *Sketches and Hints*, p. 34.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 34–5. David Garrick (1717–79) was an actor and playwright who promoted a natural style rather than the bombastic style than was fashionable in the 1740s. Sarah Siddons (1755–1831) was the best-known tragic actress of the eighteenth century. The plays referred to are Edward Moore's *The Gamester*, originally produced in 1753 with Garrick playing the gambler, Beverley; and Thomas Otway's *Venice Preserv'd*, with Siddons winning acclaim in the character of Belvidera in 1774.
- ²⁰ Repton, *Observations*, preface, p. 14.
- ²¹ See <http://www.walterscott.lib.ed.ac.uk/etexts/etexts/letters.html> IV (1815–1817), p. 292 (accessed 10 October 2018).
- ²² Humphry Repton, *Fragments on the theory and practice of Landscape Gardening* (London, 1816), p. 153.
- ²³ Ibid., p. 154.
- ²⁴ Humphry Repton, Red Book for Shardeloes, Buckinghamshire (1794); copy at Amersham Museum, PHO1206h.
- ²⁵ Red Book for Ferney Hall, Shropshire (1789); The Morgan Library, New York.

Regency dress of neo-classical gowns, lightweight muslins, walking dresses, riding habits, spencers, pelisse and pattens or half-boots for outdoor wear for women, and tailcoats, pantaloons with hessians or top boots for men had made riding and walking easier. Women were often encouraged to take more passive forms of exercise in a carriage drive or sedan chair rather than a vigorous walk, but some women walked considerable distances and were out walking for several hours each morning if the weather permitted. For contemporary literary examples, see Fanny Burney, *Cecilia or Memoirs of an Heiress* (London: T. Payne & Son; T. Cadell, 1782); *Camilla* (London: T. Payne; T. Cadell Jun. & W. Davies, 1796); and *Jemima Yorke*, Marchioness Grey's correspondence at Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Records Service, L30/9a/6.

²⁶ Repton, *Fragments*, p. 90.

²⁷ Humphry Repton, Red Book for Blaise Castle, Gloucestershire (1795–96); Bristol Museums Galleries Archives, Mb2400.

²⁸ Repton, Red Book for Woburn.

²⁹ Repton, Red Book for Shardeloes.

³⁰ I am indebted to John Phibbs for his observations on this subject and for pointing out the fact that the effect of the burst was increased by the use of a slight rise or fall in the road followed by a level area as the final bend was rounded, allowing the carriage to slow and the best view be obtained.

³¹ Humphry Repton, Red Book for Hatchlands, Surrey (1800); The Morgan Library, New York.

³² Repton, *Observations*, p. 14.

³³ Abbot Upcher's diary in Piggott, *Memoir of the Honourable Mrs Upcher*.

³⁴ Repton, *Observations*, p. 133.

³⁵ Humphry Repton, Red Book for Attingham Park, Shropshire (1798), repr. in Edward Malins, *The Red Books of Humphry Repton* (London: Basilisk, 1976).

³⁶ Repton, *Observations*, p. 74.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

³⁸ Letter from Humphry Repton, Hare Street, Romford, Essex, to W. H. C. Bentinck, 3rd Duke of Portland (September 1801); Nottingham University Manuscripts and Special Collections, Pl C 52/141.

³⁹ Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park* (London: T. Egerton, 1814).

⁴⁰ Repton, *An enquiry*, p. 19. An alternative method was 'clumping an avenue', but Repton only did this when there was an attractive view behind the trees and he disapproved of the clumps being formed into regular 'platoons'.

⁴¹ Repton, *Fragments*, p. 90.

⁴² Upcher kept a commonplace diary and a diary recording the work undertaken at Sherringham between 1813 and 1816; The

Journal of Abbot Upcher, *Sherringhamia*; Norfolk Record Office, UPC 155. The former was published with the addition of extracts from Charlotte Upcher's diary in Piggott *Memoir of the Honourable Mrs Upcher*. The diaries are very detailed and are a valuable source for Repton's methods and planting.

⁴³ Upcher, *Sherringhamia*.

⁴⁴ See <http://www.walterscott.lib.ed.ac.uk/etexts/etexts/letters.html> III (1811–1814), p. 240 (accessed 10 October 2018).

⁴⁵ Wordsworth had also designed a winter garden at Coleorton in 1806.

⁴⁶ Rosehill, Sussex, with Repton there in 1806 and Turner in 1810–16; Chalfont House, Buckinghamshire, with Repton and Turner both there c.1799, and Thomas Girtin c.1797–1800; Endsleigh, Devon, with Repton and Turner both there in 1814; and Harewood House, Yorkshire, with Turner there in 1797–98, Repton in 1800 and Thomas Girtin in 1801.

⁴⁷ Repton, Red Book for Sheringham.

⁴⁸ Humphry Repton, Red Book for Little Green (alias Green Vale), West Sussex (1793); West Sussex Record Office, Add. MS 520.

⁴⁹ Repton, *Fragments*, p. 87.

⁵⁰ Humphry Repton, Red Book for Claybury, Essex (1791); Essex Record Office, D/DU 1113.

⁵¹ Repton, *Observations*, p. 80.

⁵² Repton, Red Book for Hatchlands.

⁵³ Repton, *Fragments*, p. 71.

⁵⁴ Repton, Red Book for Ferney Hall.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Humphry Repton, Red Book for Langley, Kent (1790); RIBA Drawings Collection, SKB246/1.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Humphry Repton, Red Book for Burley on the Hill, Rutland (1795–96); private collection.

⁶⁰ The work on the lake at Burley on the Hill was not carried out at the time, but when Rutland Water was created some one hundred and eighty years later in 1976, the ponds gained a natural edge when they became subsumed in the edge of the reservoir.

⁶¹ Humphry Repton, Red Book for Kenwood, Middlesex (1793); Scone Palace, NRAS776, Vol. 722.

⁶² Repton, Red Book for Burley on the Hill.

⁶³ Humphry Repton, Red Book for Higham Hill (Highams), Woodford, Essex (1793–94); Waltham Forest Archives, W72-2 Highams/1.

⁶⁴ Repton, *Fragments*, p. 236.

⁶⁵ Humphry Repton, Red Book for Wimpole Hall, Cambridgeshire (1801); National Trust.

⁶⁶ Repton, Red Book for Ferney Hall.

⁶⁷ Repton, *Observations*, p. 210.

⁶⁸ Thanks to Kate Felus and Jonathon Finch for their observations on this topic.

⁶⁹ Repton, Red Book for Little Green.