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HUMPHRY REPTON: DOMESTICITY AND DESIGN

Humphry Repton developed a set of landscape principles over the course of his career, which he set out in his key publications, and that shaped ideas about designed landscape throughout the nineteenth century. These have usually been studied within the context of his position between the Brownian era of the late eighteenth century and that of the Picturesque of the early nineteenth. This paper, however, explores two of his late commissions, at Harewood House, Yorkshire, and Sheringham, Norfolk, through the lens of his formative years spent in the Netherlands. It suggests that although little is known of his time on the continent, it exposed him to a highly cultured society among one of the wealthiest merchant families: the Hopes of Amsterdam and Rotterdam. It then contrasts Repton's experience at Harewood with that at Sheringham and argues that the different approaches to the two landscapes, and his own reaction to them, were shaped by his social experiences, including in the Netherlands as a young man and with his own family. Domesticity becomes a key feature of his preferred landscape and architectural designs, and Repton locates this in smaller estates and houses, rather than the palaces of the nobility.

The increased level of interest in Lancelot 'Capability' Brown and his self-proclaimed successor Humphry Repton over the last few years has, among other things, drawn attention to the disparity between the sources available for Brown – who famously wrote nothing down about his methods or motivations – and Repton who was prolific in his output. In part, the difference between the two reflects the changing social and professional contexts within which they operated as landscape designers. Brown was lauded as the celebrity genius, the great man, whose company was sought by grateful patrons of the highest social standing during the late eighteenth century when the creation or redesign of the landscape park was at its height. Repton may have aspired to fill Brown's role and, in particular, to secure royal patronage, but his reputation both then and now was based largely on his Red Books – compiled for patrons throughout his career – and his five major published works, which received renewed and – importantly – international attention when they were republished in the mid-nineteenth century by John Claudius Loudon.¹ Repton was very much a man of his time and sits alongside other contemporary publicists, such as the agricultural reformer Arthur Young. In contrast to Brown, it is possible to construct a biography of Repton's life and achievements largely from his own words, although Repton's lamentations in later life, his professional sensitivity and a tendency to reflect on his own failings, have perhaps made him an easy target for criticism, and scholars have been quick to point to Repton's weaknesses and setbacks. However, some of the new research on Repton, occasioned by the bicentenary of his death in 1818, has begun to correct some of these assumptions, and point to the strengths of Repton's later career in difficult circumstances, as well as his lasting legacy on landscape design.

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This paper seeks to redress the balance by exploring Repton's sense of pleasure and contentment and how that was manifested in his designs and his writing. In particular, it explores his belief in domesticity as a positive force and how that was manifested within his work: domesticity is also a theme which is apparent within his garden and house designs and so was clearly a motivating force. His family correspondence from the early nineteenth century makes it clear that Repton, his children, their families and his siblings formed a close and intimate family unit which offered support and encouragement on both personal and professional matters, and within which Repton confided not only his worries but also his aspirations.

There are a number of landscapes through which to approach this kind of biographical life-writing about Repton, as Stephen Daniels demonstrated by overlaying Repton's biography on a 'Geography of Georgian Britain'. At Sustead in Norfolk, for example, Repton spent five years 'of uninterrupted domestic happiness' as a country squire botanizing, improving his small estate and working with the local lord William Windham at Felbrigg on his estate as well as his political career, including an ill-fated spell in Ireland.² This paper will focus on the relationships between three episodes in three landscapes – his brief spell in the Netherlands as a teenager and then two of his later professional engagements – in the footsteps of Brown at Harewood in West Yorkshire, and at Sheringham Bower, later Sheringham Hall, in Norfolk.

EDUCATION AND THE HOPES OF ROTTERDAM

Repton's seven years at Norwich grammar school within the cathedral close, at the west end of the church ended in 1764, when – aged twelve – his father 'thought it proper to put the stopper in my vial of classic literature; having determined to make me a rich, rather than a learned man'.³ Repton was to resume more practical studies in the Netherlands, learn Dutch, familiarize himself with the textile trade, and presumably establish contacts that would be beneficial to him as a textile merchant when he returned to Norwich. Norwich was, in the late eighteenth century, still one of the country's most important provincial capitals and the centre of an extensive trade network with the Low Countries. It enjoyed a booming consumer economy and was the centre of polite society, and boasted a new theatre (1758) and the grand Assembly Rooms (1754), as well as pleasure grounds, coffee houses and the first provincial weekly newspaper from as early as 1701.⁴ It was from amongst this wealthy urban mercantile class, that Repton was later to draw his first clients when he established his landscaping career, utilizing friendships and family ties to establish his reputation.

Repton made the crossing from Harwich to Hellevoetsluis, a fortified naval town south-west of Rotterdam, and travelled some fifty miles east to the provincial town of Woudrichem, where he was to be schooled.⁵ Given that his guardian for his time in the Netherlands was based in Rotterdam the party – made up of Repton, his father, John, and his sister Dorothy – or Dee as she was affectionately known – may have broken their journey in the bustling mercantile city. Repton's sojourn in the Netherlands is usually treated as an interesting but distinct episode of his early life, demonstrating the close mercantile links between East Anglia and the Low Countries, and a preamble to his unsuccessful attempt to live up to his father's aspirations.⁶ However, the biographical note published by Loudon, and thought to be based on a lost volume of Repton's memoirs, records observations of the curious canal-side gardens that he saw, with hanging parterres marked out with patterns akin to those drawn onto muslin for embroidery, and laid out sometimes with box – but generally without vegetation or planting. They were filled instead with red-brick dust, charcoal, yellow sand, chalk, broken china, and green glass –

‘like precious stones and Arabian Nights’ – intermixed with statues or flat boards painted with figures of men and women, and vases of lead painted in gaudy colours or gilded.⁷

While such plots or ‘gardens’ may have amused the young Repton he also recalled those of a less extravagant taste: ‘The lofty trees, though always planted in rows, and always cut to preserve the exact limit of their shade, were accompanied by ornaments of sculpture and marble; and the vases were enriched with real flowers, instead of gilded pineapples.’

‘Nature,’ Repton noted, flipping Alexander Pope’s epistolary advice to Lord Burlington:

was never consulted, they were works of art; and the lofty clipped hedges, and close overarching trees, were as carefully kept by the shears, as the walks were by the scythes and rollers. All was neatness; the effect of incessant labour. A Dutch merchant’s accounts and his garden were kept with the same degree of accuracy and attention.⁸

When considering these observations on Dutch gardens it is important to remember that Repton saw them in the mid-1760s, when Brown was transforming the idea of the English designed landscape – a task that Repton would eventually defend and attempt to take upon his own shoulders. Repton’s response to them is recorded retrospectively so it is problematic to try to gauge his response at the time, but his time in the Netherlands may have contributed to the development of his own style of garden aesthetics and in particular the flower gardens and terraces around houses and villas. Had he remained exclusively in England – as Brown did – Repton would not have been exposed to the variety of ornamental and formal styles that were displayed within the smaller periurban gardens of the Dutch bourgeoisie.

One other aspect of Repton’s stay in Rotterdam is worthy of mention here: he was happy. Even without what was by inference a lengthy description of his time in Rotterdam in the missing memoir, he gives enough clues to suggest that he was a young man enjoying the high life. Repton’s father had entrusted the money to pay for his son’s provincial schooling in Woudrichem with the Hope family.⁹ Originally from Scotland, the Hopes had been operating as financiers in Rotterdam since at least the 1660s when Archibald Hope (1664–1743), the founder of the Dutch banking house Hopes of Rotterdam and Amsterdam, was born in the city. Hope’s will, dated 1720, reveals that he owned three malting houses in Suffolk – in Ipswich, Stowmarket and, significantly, Bury St Edmunds, where the Repton family was based until the early 1760s.¹⁰ Repton’s guardian was Hope’s youngest son Zachary (1711–70), who, along with his elder brother Isaac, had been running the family business since the 1740s. Although most biographies of Repton mention that the Hopes were wealthy, it is perhaps important to grasp just how wealthy and significant they were and how they made their money. Dutch neutrality during the Seven Years’ War (1756–63) provided the opportunity for them to ‘rise to the summit of their profession’ raising loans for the British and paying subsidies to her allies, culminating in a peak turnover of forty-seven million guilders in 1762.¹¹ The firm rapidly became the richest merchant bankers of the age, based as they were in the continent’s financial capital. In the latter half of the century, Hope & Company expanded its concerns globally to include substantial dealings with the Russian court, and across the Americas and the Caribbean, as well as securing their position as bankers to the royal court at home.¹²

The business was organized, as was common among early financial enterprises, with different family members taking responsibility for different branches of business, using family relationships as bonds of trust in an uncertain and volatile financial market:

Thomas and Adrian Hope looked after the West Indian slave-trading interests, while Isaac and Zachary ‘specialized in the conveyance of emigrants to North America’.¹³ From the 1730s Dutch and English bankers were contracted to recruit migrants, usually impoverished Germans – the ‘Poor Palatines’ as Daniel Defoe called them – who were escaping repeated French incursions by travelling through the Netherlands to seek a new life in America, often via Britain. States and colonies such as Philadelphia employed merchant bankers, including Zachary, to finance migrant journeys across the Atlantic, where they sold themselves into indentured servitude to pay back the shipping company or the authorities.¹⁴

Henry Hope (c.1735–1811) – Zachary’s American nephew– travelled from Boston to join the firm in 1762, just three years before Repton arrived, and in the aftermath of the Seven Years’ War was arranging loans to the Swedish, Russian and Bavarian governments. Such was Henry’s success that he set about building Villa Welgelegen in Haarlem as a summer house for his extensive art collection. Built between 1785 and 1789, on the model of the villas Borghese and Albani in Rome, it attracted visitors such as the Prince of Orange and Thomas Jefferson. It also sat north of Groenendaal Park – which belonged to Hope’s cousin and business partner, John – or Jan – Hope, and together with the appropriated state forest that adjoined Welgelegen, the trio formed an immense ‘borrowed’ ornamental landscape: Haarlem was the cultural centre of the Dutch designed landscape – and much of it belonged to the Hopes.

Although Welegelen was built after Repton had returned to England, it is clear that the young Repton was circulating within a much richer social and cultural context than has previously been acknowledged. Having called on Zachary Hope in person after a year or so in the Netherlands, he was invited to stay for a couple of days, during which the Hopes became convinced it was ‘impossible to part with young Repton’ and so he stayed – for five months. He was adopted by a family of unrivalled international wealth and power, who lived fashionably ‘*a la Francaise*’ and who referred to Repton as ‘*le petit Anglais*’; they took him to the celebrated society watering place of Spa and introduced him to the Prince of Orange.

In a telling passage from the *Biographical Note* Repton is described as being:

domesticated in Mr Hope’s family, a sharer in all the advantages of education with his only son, enjoying every pleasure and luxury which wealth could procure, and honoured by the friendship of other branches of that numerous and respectable name [so it seems likely he met Henry and possibly John Hope], which, both in Amsterdam and Rotterdam, had established a kind of rank which vied with the proudest families of other countries.¹⁵

This experience, so often separated from Repton’s later career, appears to have resonated strongly in terms of experiencing a privileged life of wealth and culture, the landscapes he saw, and in terms of the potential held by a rising mercantile class who adopted many of the cultural tastes and practices of the landed elite, with strong links to and between families, and with an international or global perspective. Repton certainly seems to have returned to England with a taste for the polite arts and these experiences arguably shaped his expectations, first when he took up the role of a gentleman at Sustead after his father died, and latterly when he established himself as a landscape gardener in 1788, aged thirty-six. Having developed this formative episode in Repton’s youth, it is possible to explore his ‘natural taste and inclination’ as expressed through two brief case studies of later landscape commissions: first, Harewood House in West Yorkshire, where Repton was engaged c.1800, and second, Sheringham Park in Norfolk, from 1812.

HAREWOOD: A 'PALACE OF PEACE AND LOVE!'

The commission at Harewood should have been one of Repton's crowning glories – a return to Yorkshire after nearly ten years since his previous commission at Mulgrave Castle, and a late commission from a noble grandee: Edward Lascelles, 1st Earl of Harewood. Edward had inherited from his cousin Edwin who had overseen the building of the new house between 1758 and 1771, and the laying out of the grounds over a slightly longer period, which had involved Richard Woods, Thomas White and Brown (Figure 1).¹⁶

Repton probably first visited Harewood in the summer of 1800 and in his own words 'found the large mansion filled with company', including two generations of the family, the young painter Thomas Girtin, and the abolitionist William Wilberforce.¹⁷ Repton arrived at ten o'clock, during breakfast, and is quite particular in describing it – twenty people gathered in the middle of the long gallery at a table covered in 'bread, cake and confectionary'; a table at one the end of the gallery offered meats, that at the other end tea, coffee and chocolate. The domestic staff are portrayed in the grand and slightly old-fashioned manner of a previous generation – the old housekeeper was dressed in the stiff brocaded silk, lace and cap of George II's reign, while the 'Groom of the Chambers' was a title only maintained in the very grandest houses. However, the formality of the staff structure is contrasted with the informality of behaviour. Repton noted that 'Newspapers and pamphlets were profusely provided, and after breakfast the company followed their various pursuits without restraint or ceremony, for every visitor was made to feel himself perfectly at home'.¹⁸

Repton's description of the sociability of the breakfast is echoed in one of his illustrations from *Fragments on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (1816). Fragment XIII 'Concerning Interiors' includes an image that contrasts 'the cedar parlour of former days' with the 'modern living room' (Figure 2). Jon Mee has pointed



Figure 1. South front of Harewood House, West Yorkshire. The house was altered in the mid-nineteenth century with the addition of an upper storey, the removal of the portico and the addition of the Italianate terrace. Photo: author, January 2019



Figure 2. Illustrations accompanying Fragment XIII, 'Concerning Interiors', in Humphry Repton, *Fragments on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (1816). Repton is drawing a contrast between the stifling formality of 'the cedar parlour of former days' and the polite sociability of the 'modern living room'

out that Repton borrowed the phrase 'cedar parlour' from Samuel Richardson's novel *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753).¹⁹ For Repton, the 'formal gloom' of the cedar parlour had no place in modern lifestyles, and should be replaced by the more sociable 'Modern Living Room' where, as Repton has it, 'Guests, to whim, or taste, or fancy true, / Scatter'd in groups, their different plans pursue' – just as happened after breakfast at Harewood. Mee contrasts Repton's celebration of the modernity of conversable worlds represented by 'scatter'd groups' with Jane Austen's nostalgic regret for the passing of 'deeper continuities', best exemplified in *Mansfield Park* (1814), which was published just two years before *Fragments*, and which famously references Repton as the archetypal 'improver', who destroys ancient avenues in pursuit of the improved modern landscape. In *Mansfield Park*, when the patriarch Sir Thomas Bertram is called away to deal with his West Indian interests, such 'scattered groups' flourish and the result is a breakdown of established social relationships.²⁰

Repton began his 'operations' at Harewood after breakfast with a tour of the apartments in the house, as well as the offices and kitchens in the basement – as was his usual practice. At the end he noted that from all four sides the views were unobstructed by 'unsightly objects' such as the stables and courtyards – and declared it a 'Palace of Peace and Love!'.²¹ In the evening he joined with the family and members of the household in further sociability at the nightly concert. Repton was an accomplished flutist and singer himself, but the highlight for those assembled was Wilberforce's clear tenor voice.²² It

seems clear that Repton was comfortable within the polite society offered at Harewood – which with the informality of the family gathering and the formality of the staff must have echoed many of his memories of the Hopes and Rotterdam. Repton and his sons stayed for about three weeks and were shown local sites and pleasure grounds by the Lascelles, including the nearby Plumpton Rocks, which was also owned by the family, as well as visiting the Lake District.²³

Wilberforce was at Harewood again when Repton returned in 1802 – the abolitionist had just been elected as MP for York alongside Henry Lascelles, an apologist for slavery, from a family whose fortune was made in the Caribbean and whose father (Repton's patron) Edward Lascelles had been born in Barbados. Repton, and the two politicians of very different convictions, took to Brown's lake at Harewood in a boat with Repton at the helm because he had 'different spots' that he wanted to view, with an eye to improvement. While his companions rowed, Repton 'sat at my ease observing the beautiful scenery and making notes of it at different points of view'.²⁴

Repton clearly cherished the time he spent at Harewood – but it was Wilberforce rather than Lascelles with whom he connected. The day before the boat trip the pair had toured the grounds in the 'low four-wheeled carriage with one horse' that had been provided to facilitate Repton's survey. They discussed the relationship between landscape design and poetry, before reading aloud from a volume of William Cowper's poems. Cowper's work, such as *The Task*, may have been regarded as a 'popular antidote to aristocratic excess', but he was also a keen gardener, as well as a campaigner and publicist for abolition – concerns that linked the interests of the two guests.²⁵ The two became so engrossed that they 'forgot the beauties of the Park' and eventually returned to the house.²⁶

Wilberforce came from a commercial background and came to represent the emergent political power of the manufacturers. They thus shared cultural interests and social backgrounds, which undoubtedly helped cement their friendship, but it also meant they shared a sensibility; they shared the same 'conversable world', including a preference for Cowper and William Mason, who linked the house guests as poets, gardeners and abolitionists. The changing tastes of the early nineteenth century – in terms of architecture and landscape – reflected the increasing influence of this new class of patrons and practitioners in Britain.

Writing to his wife Barbara on the day of the boat trip, Wilberforce extolled the wonders of the Harewood landscape: 'This really is one not only of the most magnificent, but also of the finest places in England. Great natural beauty, vast woods, expanses of water, a river winding through a valley portioned into innumerable enclosures' – expressing a touch of the picturesque.²⁷ However, Wilberforce was less taken with the grandeur of the house and described the interior as 'too gawdy for my taste'.²⁸ His dislike of the grand rooms there is contrasted in a letter he wrote the day before from Copgrove, the modest seat of his friend Henry Duncombe, where he had broken his journey from York. Wilberforce wrote that Copgrove was 'just such a place as you and I should like to live in, quiet and beautiful, without pomp'.²⁹ Both Wilberforce and Repton preferred the domestic, rather than the grand palace.

Repton's return to Harewood in 1802 was ostensibly to inspect the work being implemented at his suggestion, as set out in a brief *Memorandum* and a set of eight illustrations prepared during and after his previous visit.³⁰ The *Memorandum* is a relatively modest document, handwritten on five sides of paper, reflecting the fact that he was seeking to enhance or update Brown's designs rather than transform them. It deals with the approaches to the house from both London and Leeds; plantations beside the approach; shaping the ground; views from the house and some miscellaneous hints: all

standard late Reptonian concerns, with an emphasis on structural elements rather than the horticultural.

In lieu of a Red Book, Repton prepared and bound eight finished illustrations. They all depicted buildings, and half of them related to Repton's monumental new archway and entrance leading from the village into the park – a new entrance to grace his new approach to the house directly from the village as a continuation of the York road (Figures 3 and 4).³¹

One of Repton's key elements for a park, particularly those of status like Harewood, was that they needed an entrance that reflected 'the character of the house' and that the road system should appear to focus in on the house and park, reflecting its importance within the landscape.³² The entrance was an important element of his successes at Tatton Park in Cheshire and Wentworth Woodhouse in South Yorkshire during the early 1790s. Repton proposed a triumphal archway at all three, re-orientating the village onto the park to demonstrate the village's connection and relationship to the house and estate.³³ Harewood village had been rebuilt over the same period as the house, to classical designs by the same architect, John Carr, yet the entrance to the park was set back from the road and marked by a pair of lodges by Robert Adam, which seemed detached from the village and roads.³⁴ Annotations, including an ink blot, on Jonathan Teal's 1796 estate plan (Figure 5) may have been made by Repton as they show his proposed new approach road linking the village to the park from the east, but no other plans of the planting or landscape by Repton are known.³⁵

However, Repton's suggestions were not fully implemented. The new approach took a more direct route from village to house, the entrance screen was stripped away to leave just the arch, which was itself set back from the village – something that seriously upset Repton:

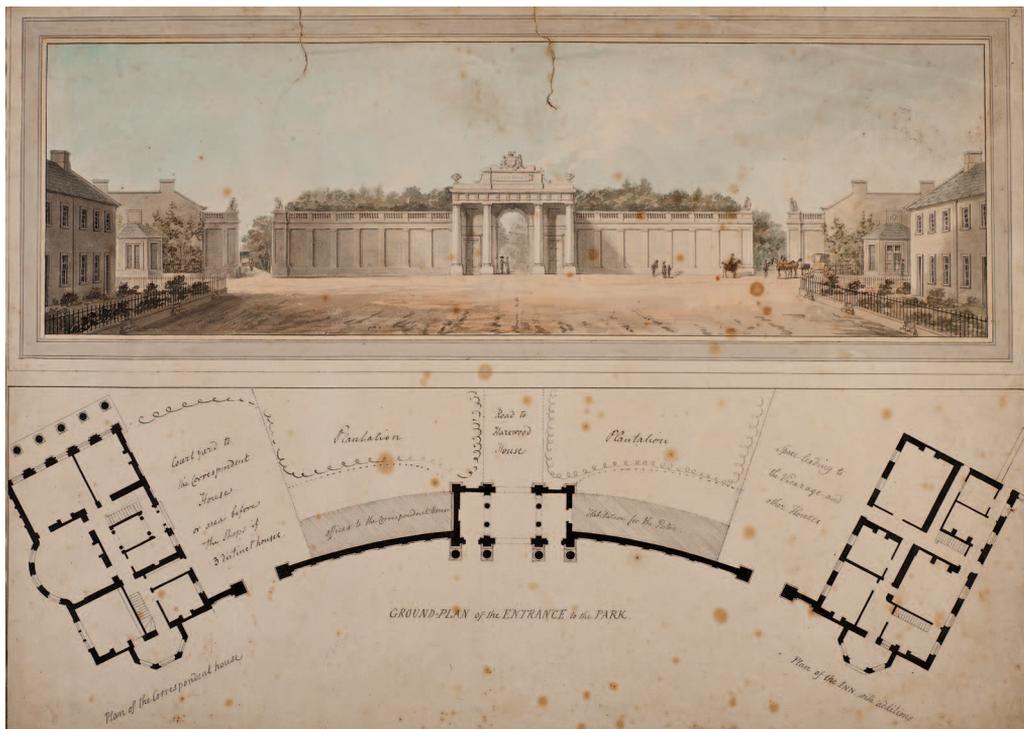


Figure 3. View and ground plan of the entrance to the park at Harewood (after Humphry Repton). This print shows the ambition of Repton's proposed screen and archway that created a fitting termination to the estate village and entrance to the park. West Yorkshire Archive Service, WYL250. Reproduced by courtesy of the Harewood House Trust

the whole building is placed very differently from what I intended for instead of being at the end of the village it is removed to an unmeaning distance isolated and detached without any relation either to the house or village.³⁶

'Isolated and detached' is the key phrase for a designer who was determined to articulate social relationships through his landscape and architecture. The lack of a Red Book, the obvious disappointment that Repton felt about the archway and the fact that he failed to forge a relationship with the 'aristocratic' earls have all tended to colour interpretations of



Figure 4. Entrance archway, Harewood. The scheme was revised and partially executed with the archway set back from the road and without the screen. Photo: author, January 2019

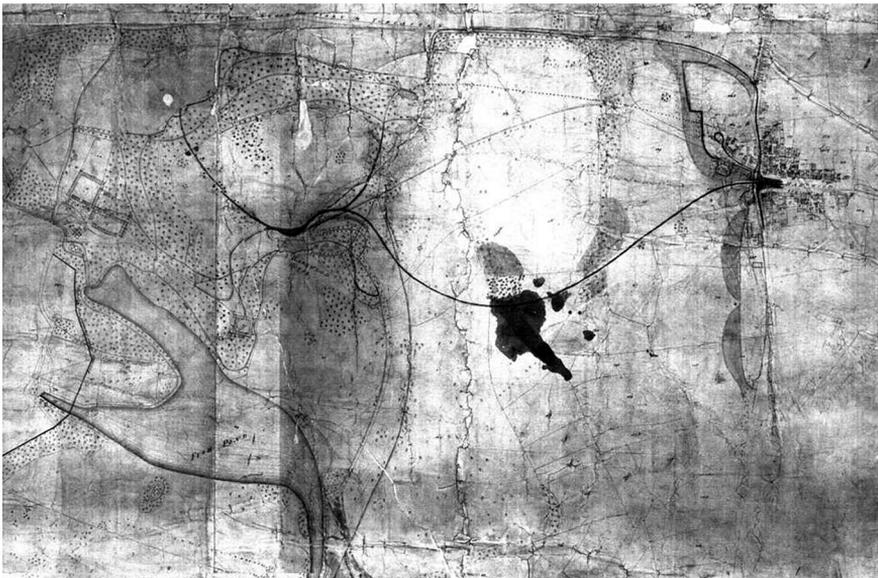


Figure 5. Jonathan Teal, Part of the townships of Harewood and Weardley belonging to Lord Harewood, 1796. The darkest ink line (and blot) mark Humphry Repton's proposed approach leading from the village to the east. The faint line to the north, almost a reflection of Repton's line, was the existing drive. WYAS, Leeds, WYL250/3/Map/44. Reproduced with kind permission of Harewood House Trust

his relationship with the Harewood landscape. Repton's account of his visits and the regret over the execution of his ideas suggest that he struggled to connect with the Lascelles – an ultra-rich family that had risen rapidly in status through the Atlantic world of global finance, and who were in many ways similar to the Hopes. Repton's memories of Harewood were focused instead around the sociability and the 'conversable worlds' of Wilberforce – 'truly a character worth studying' rather than his host and patron, or the landscape.³⁷

SHERINGHAM, NORFOLK: 'THE DELIGHTFUL INTERCOURSE OF
CONGENIAL MINDS'

Repton's experience at Harewood can be contrasted with those at Sheringham in Norfolk, for which he produced a Red Book in 1812, although his interest in the site began around 1808, six years after he had left Harewood. He proclaimed the virtues of Sheringham from the outset of the Red Book:

After having passed nearly half a century in the study of natural scenery and having been professionally consulted in the improvement of many hundred places in different parts of England, I can with truth pronounce that Sheringham possesses more natural beauty and local advantage than any place I have ever seen [...] this may be considered my most favourite work.³⁸

This was not just the anticipation of a commission for a landscape and a new house during something of a hiatus in his work. This was a man in the final phase of his career, newly aware of his own frailties having suffered a spinal injury in a carriage accident months earlier, and returning to the county he loved most – 'the Prophet's Own'. Repton's previous home at Sustead, of which he had such fond memories, was only six or seven miles away, and he spent time with his sister Dee and her husband John Adey in nearby Aylsham. He was able to re-immersede himself in the landscape of north-east Norfolk: its gently undulating topography and its fertile and mixed agriculture, which were distinct to those further to the west, where the vast rectilinear fields of improvement on the Holkham estate stretched across the lighter sandy soil. Sheringham nestled amongst small hills that accommodated an agricultural regime on a smaller, more domestic scale (Figure 6).³⁹

Repton used Sheringham to articulate a scheme that improved the parkland, the woodland and the village, and which had, at its core, a new house, whose situation respected the forces of nature and one which was designed for the modern, more domestic, way of life. It is perhaps the most complete expression of Repton's mature view of landscape, and the fundamental role it played, underpinning the social order. The key to Repton's satisfaction was his relationship with the new owners at Sheringham: the Upchers. A couple in the ascendancy, they admired the park at Holkham, where Repton had worked and provided a Red Book for Thomas Coke, 1st Earl of Leicester, in 1789, and it was Coke who encouraged the Upchers to buy Sheringham, thus connecting them to the very top of local society.⁴⁰ Yet, the Upchers themselves were free from the 'pomp' of Harewood or Holkham. Abbot Upcher's late father was born in Bury St Edmunds in 1751, only a year before Repton was born in the same town; the Upchers were connected to Suffolk and Essex, as was Repton; and Abbot Upcher was twenty-seven when he bought Sheringham, only a year older than Repton had been when he moved to Sustead with his own young family. There were therefore considerable resonances between their lives and it is clear that while working for them, Repton reminisced about his own life and family. Just as he warmed to Wilberforce in a manner that drew on his formative years, so he found in the Upchers a modern family with whom he could feel at ease, and with whom he could engage with 'the delightful intercourse of congenial minds'.⁴¹



Figure 6. 'View of Sheringham Hall After Improvements'; from Red Book for Sheringham, Norfolk (1812). This image, with Humphry Repton sketching in the shade, shows the park with cattle and the house sheltered from the coastal weather behind the wooded hill.
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The Upcher's evangelical leanings also positioned them in the same liberal milieu as Wilberforce. Upcher's grandfather had been a clergyman in Sudbury, Suffolk, and he had once discussed buying land in Philadelphia with Benjamin Franklin to build a school for the purpose of 'educating negro children' during the mid-1760s. Subsequent generations of the family remained within a group of religious reformers, though now in Norfolk, who worked against the slave trade. Upcher's daughter, Charlotte Mary, married Edmund Charles Buxton, nephew of Thomas Fowell Buxton, the anti-slavery campaigner, who took over the campaign from Wilberforce. After Upcher's untimely death in 1819, his young widow Charlotte was supported by Fowell Buxton and Hannah his wife who moved first to Cromer Hall in 1821 and then on to Northrepps Hall, another of Repton's early commissions from 1792, and which shares some similarities with his ideas for Sheringham.⁴²

Repton's regard for the Upchers was built on his belief in the importance of strong domestic foundations, as well as on his admiration for a young evangelical family on the threshold of their lives together. The fact that the two men felt at ease with each other at an early stage, is best demonstrated by the fact that Upcher and Repton signed the agreement for the work at Sheringham after they had dined together at Repton's son's house in Aylsham.⁴³ The Red Book for Sheringham (1812) has been noted as having a strongly paternalistic tenor, referencing the 'stable community', but it is also littered with references to family and domesticity: 'All planters delight most in woods of their own creating, as parents are most fond of their own progeny.' This comment is then struck through with a clear biographical lament: 'In proportion as the trees become attached to the Soil so we become attached to them, while our children leave their homes, forming new attachments.'⁴⁴

Repton placed the family at the centre of his landscape philosophy, and he presented his gardens as being for family use and private recreation, with flower gardens and terraces, rather than landscapes of 'learned allusion', such as Stowe, Buckinghamshire, for example, so revered by garden historians, where in the early eighteenth century visitors

were expected to exercise their classical learning and political wit while promenading past lines of allegorical statues.⁴⁵

At the centre of the landscape at Sheringham was a new house designed by Repton and John Adey Repton (Figure 7), and his description of it is clearly based on his belief in modern family life. The Red Book includes architectural sections through the house that include figures of the family, servants and gardeners going about their daily routines, demonstrating that the house was a busy home, rather than a seasonal seaside villa or a stage for political networking (Figure 8). At first floor level, Repton even provided direct access from the suite of rooms which formed the nursery out into the ‘Children’s gardens, Play ground &c’ that were terraced into the hillside behind the house, thus emphasizing the central role of the children to the household and gardens. A similar emphasis on children and family life can be seen in the Red Book for Endsleigh in Devon, which was a contemporary commission.⁴⁶ Further evidence of Repton’s commitment to the modern ways of domestic life are evident in the complex arrangement of the rooms on the ground



Figure 7. Sheringham Hall, from the south. Photo: author, January 2019

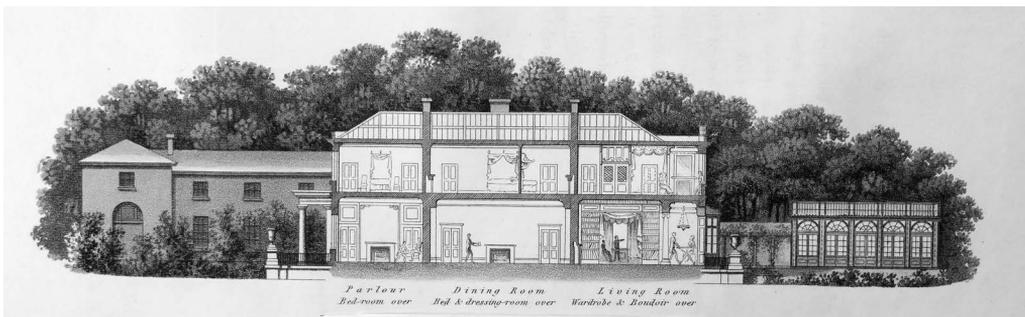


Figure 8. Section through Sheringham Hall showing graphically how the focus of comfort and sociability was in the east (right) of the house around the living room with its connection to the gardens. [sic] The illustration accompanies Fragment XXXIII, ‘Extracted from the report on Sherringham [sic] Bower, Norfolk, seat of Abbot Upcher Esq.’, from Humphry Repton, *Fragments on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (1816), after p. 212

floor: 'it consist[s] of a well proportioned dining room & a room a little larger for books, music & Pictures as a general living room; and no useless Drawing room'.⁴⁷

The use of the term 'living room' rather than parlour was a relatively new development at the time and is used in distinction to the 'useless' drawing room. This passage is a direct assertion of Repton's ideal 'modern living room' – the social successor to the 'cedar parlour' and the 'useless Drawing room'. The modern living room, he wrote, should be capable of opening:

into each other, en suite, by large folding doors; and the effect of this enfilade, or visto, through a modern house is occasionally increased by a conservatory at one end. [...] Because] of all the improvements in modern luxury, whether belonging to the Architect's or Landscape Gardeners department, none is more delightful than the connection of living-rooms with a green-house or conservatory.⁴⁸

Thus, Sheringham – with its *en suite* modern living rooms, folding doors and a conservatory that connected the house and the gardens – exemplifies and defines Repton's ideas for modern living – living which integrated landscape and plants; houses and domesticity. Sheringham has a clear place within the landscapes authored by Repton because it encapsulated so many of his principles and aspirations in their most mature form, including, critically, the relationship between domesticity and the landscape. Rather than emphasizing Repton's belief that the paternalistic estate and its owner stood as a bulwark to social discontent and social change, it is, perhaps, more significant that he saw domesticity as the means to that end. He saw his ideal of domesticity expressed through the Upcher's family relationships; their cultural interests, their engagement as social leaders with the local community; and their global interest in the abolition of slavery fired by their religious convictions.

Repton did not live to see his vision of Sheringham realized. He died in March 1818 only six years after completing the Red Book, and work at Sheringham came to an unexpected halt when Abbot Upcher died suddenly a year later in 1819, aged only thirty-five. The house was finally finished and inhabited by Upcher's son, Henry Ramey Upcher, in 1839, but it then remained in the family until 1986 when it was acquired by the National Trust. In one final twist, the Regency-style interiors that grace the building today were the work of Thomas Upcher who decorated and furnished the house during the mid-1950s in the Regency Revival style, which drew extensively on the designer Thomas Hope (1769–1831), great-nephew of Zachary Hope, Repton's guardian and mentor in Rotterdam over two hundred years earlier.⁴⁹

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has sought to offer new insights on Repton's landscapes by placing them within the context of his formative time with the Hopes in the Netherlands. This episode is usually treated in passing as distinct from his career as a landscape designer, but it is argued that the taste of cultured life among the very wealthiest merchants, with their connections to European courts, as well as the landscapes Repton experienced, could have influenced his subsequent attitudes to both social relationships and landscape design. His disappointment at Harewood cannot be explained solely by the fact that his designs for the new entrance were not executed according to his plans, since that was not unusual. More convincing is the fact that the Lascelles appeared to reject the social reasoning for the designs, which sought to connect the house to the village in a meaningful way. It is also significant here that the plans for such a substantial landscape focused exclusively upon the built environment and its approach, rather than upon planting. It might be

tempting to suggest that Repton was honouring one of the best Brownian landscapes, but it might equally reflect the patron's own wishes. What is notable is that even among the social milieu at Harewood, which Repton would have recognized from his time in the Netherlands and from other commissions for the nobility in England, he engaged with Wilberforce more than the Lascelles. His shared 'conversable world' with Wilberforce was one that stretched out to include the Upchers at Sheringham. Repton undeniably recognized, or chose to see, parallels between the young couple and his own past life – echoes that were amplified by the location near to his family and to his previous home at Sustead. Sheringham becomes a landscape of memory for Repton, and the Red Book draws together his belief in the family, but also his engagement with the gentry rather than the nobility. At Sheringham the landscape and the planting is closely tied to the domestic household, something not seen at Harewood. It was a landscape imbued with the roles and relationships of the Upchers as a family, as local social leaders.

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