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## HUMPHRY REPTON AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FLOWER GARDEN

*Humphry Repton was at the forefront of a significant change in garden design towards the end of the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century. In many of his commissions he would make proposals for flower gardens, sometimes of several different types in one scheme. This paper considers some of these proposals from an historical design perspective with Repton being seen as reviving the use of flower gardens, while also considering the great influx of new plants during the period and how they fit into his understanding of plants.*

### INFLUENCES ON REPTON AND HIS EARLY WRITING ON FLOWER GARDENS

Humphry Repton, through his prolific writing and published works along with the numerous Red Books, would have a profound impact on the designed landscape from the late Georgian and Regency periods. Having embarked on his new career of landscape gardener in 1788 and self-assuredly picked up the mantle of Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown, Repton became involved in a major change in landscape design.

Repton stated in his advertisement that:

Having for many years (merely as an amusement) studied the picturesque effects resulting from the art of LAYING OUT GROUND, [he] has lately been advised by many respectable friends (to whom he has occasionally given sketches for the improvement of their own places) to enlarge his plan and pursue professionally his skill in LANDSCAPE-GARDENING.<sup>1</sup>

The image at the base of the original advert became the trade card Repton used and would be inserted inside the cover of his Red Books.

Repton drew on a host of influences from home and abroad in his landscape designs. As his work developed, these influences would have an impact on his design and use of specific flower gardens in his proposals to clients. Before his decision to start his new career, Repton is quoted replying in a letter to Revd Norton Nicholls, who had received one of his adverts:

I have been advised to render my leisure profitable by a profession which since the loss of Brown and Richmond has been understood by no one so well as yourself [...] – Mason, Gilpin, Whately and Gerardin [*sic*] have been of late my breviary – and the works of Kent, Brown and Richmond have been my places of worship.<sup>2</sup>

A comprehensive list of people that Repton considered his influences. It is worth discussing some of these as they would have influenced him in different ways. The works of Lancelot Brown and Nathaniel Richmond provided guidance on the laying out of the wider landscape, settings for a house, approaches to houses and the planting of parks. Thomas

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Whately and René Girardin had written the essential books on landscape gardening, or 'Modern' gardening as Whately referred to it, in England and France respectively, while William Gilpin introduced Repton to the idea of the picturesque. Perhaps the most significant name in this list, when considering the development of the flower garden by Repton, is that of William Mason.

Repton bemoaned the fact that he had:

Experienced great difficulty and opposition in attempting to correct the false and mistaken taste for placing a large house in a naked grass field, without any apparent line of separation between the ground exposed to cattle and the ground annexed to the house which I consider as peculiarly under the management of art. This line of separation being admitted, advantage may be easily taken to ornament the lawn with flowers and shrubs, and to attach to the mansion that scene of 'embellished neatness', usually called a pleasure ground.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, Repton promotes the notion of a distinct pleasure ground that he suggests in many of his commissions. While pleasure grounds had been created by his predecessors, dressed primarily with shrubberies, it is Repton, particularly in the second half of his career, who promotes the concept of a distinct pleasure ground close to the house to create a range of gardens, including flower gardens, closer to the house. Repton outlined his views on what form a flower garden may be, stating that 'Flower gardens on a small scale may, with propriety, be formal and artificial; but in all cases they require neatness and attention'.<sup>4</sup>

He continued:

A flower garden should be an object detached and distinct from the general scenery of the place; and, whether large or small, whether varied or formal, it ought to be protected from hares and smaller animals by an inner fence.<sup>5</sup>

Repton outlined preparation of the ground and types of planting. His final comment covered situation, commenting that:

the flower garden, except where it is annexed to the house, should not be visible from the roads or general walks about the place. It may therefore be of a character totally different from the rest of the scenery, and its decorations should be as much those of art as of nature.

Repton had, in four pages of text in *Observations*, conveyed his views, and arguably a set of principles, on the setting out of flower gardens within a pleasure ground close to the house. A view that was considerably at odds with many of his predecessors. He recognized in using the words 'formal', 'artificial', 'different' and 'embellished neatness' that what he was proposing in many of his commissions was a perhaps radical move in landscape design. He proceeded to give examples where flower gardens had been developed, including Valleyfield in Fife, Bulstrode in Buckinghamshire and Nuneham in Oxfordshire. It is worth noting that from the examples he gives there must be some qualification as to his own involvement, but that each in turn underscores the influences, principles and objectives Repton was promoting in restoring and reviving the use of flower gardens to pleasure grounds or, more to the point, re-interpreting the use and design of flower gardens. The pleasure ground had been a place of 'embellished neatness' in some of Brown's work such as the designs for flower gardens at Blenheim and Lowther Castle. 'Embellished neatness' as well as an inner fence protecting the garden could also be seen in views of Lady Griffin's garden at Audley End by William Tomkins of 1788, the year Repton embarked on his new career.

Referring to Valleyfield, Repton comments in a footnote that it was his two sons, John Adey and George, who were entrusted with the development of the approach to the house. Repton had provided as a postscript to the Red Book of 1801 a design for a flower garden viewed through trelliswork, arranged around a canal or fishpond, stating that he felt he had to justify it. Commenting that a straight canal in a park where everything was natural would not be right, in a pleasure ground, where everything could be deemed artificial it could be justified. Using the comments from the Red Book in *Observations*, he noted:

At VALLEYFIELD, where the flower garden is in front of a long wall, the attempt to make the scene natural would be affected; and, therefore, as two great sources of interest in a place are *variety* and *contrast*, the only means by which these can be introduced are in this flower garden, which, as a separate object, become a sort of episode to the general and magnificent scenery.<sup>6</sup>

At Bulstrode, where he worked for the 3rd Duke of Portland, Repton comments on the scale of the development in the pleasure ground:

the gardens of every kind are on a great scale, and where, from the choice and variety of the plants, the direction of walks, the enrichment of art, and the attention to every circumstance of elegance and magnificence, the pleasure-ground is perfect as a whole, while its several parts may furnish models of the following different characters of taste in gardening: the *ancient garden*, the *American garden*, the *modern terrace-walks* and the *flower garden*: the latter is, perhaps, one of the most varied and extensive of its kind, and therefore too large to be otherwise artificial, than in the choice of its flowers, and the embellishment of arts in its ornaments.<sup>7</sup>

The comments made on Bulstrode, and the form of gardens noted, would return as features in many of his commissions.

While Repton had a long working relationship with the Duke of Portland at Welbeck and Bulstrode, which he visited in 1790 and again in 1801, research undertaken by the Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust casts doubt on the extent of Repton's involvement at the site.<sup>8</sup> He certainly drew up proposals for the laying out of drives, yet there is confusion between the plan Repton used in *Observations* in 1803 and a later plan of 1810 as to what exactly was undertaken. Many of the gardens noted had already been created, as shown in a plan of Bulstrode by F. Dowland dated 1784, by the 2nd Duchess of Portland who had passed away in 1785 and therefore some time before Repton's first visit, and when the 3rd Duke had taken possession. The Dowland plan shows that some of the earlier 'formal' features such as the star-shaped wilderness had been retained. The duchess then undertook the planting of her American plants, shrubbery, and a range of English plants and roses around these formal features. Repton's late contribution to the gardens apparently remained minimal, although G. Lipscombe notes: 'To the west of the Mansion is a fine old grove of trees, interspersed with walks, leading to the flower gardens and shrubbery.' A footnote records that 'these were the work of the celebrated Repton and are justly esteemed very creditable to his taste and judgement'.<sup>9</sup> This corresponds with Repton possibly undertaking work on the American garden, in the area of the old wilderness, the flower garden and the west terrace, thus justifying his comments in *Observations*. Whether or not he undertook work on these gardens, they contributed considerably to the palette of gardens he would propose in future commissions.

The move from the shrubbery to a discrete flower garden was a gradual process. By the mid-Georgian period there had been a dramatic increase in the number of flowering plants and shrubs available to gardeners. Shrubberies, while not devoid of colour, were

generally seen as theatrical planting using a mix of deciduous and evergreen shrubs and trees. Flowering shrubs and herbaceous plants would be used at the front of shrubberies and on the edges of groves. By the mid-eighteenth century, many more theatrical flowerbeds were being created. Many gardens could be used as examples to convey the move from shrubberies augmented with flowering shrubs, herbaceous perennials and annuals to distinct flower gardens in their own right. Flower borders were still used in less fashionable gardens of some of the gentry.

John Harvey, writing on the growth in the number of nurseries in the eighteenth century and an increased interest in flowering plants, comments on a range of gardens where flowering plants were being used.<sup>10</sup> Flowers were therefore still very much in use, just less prominently in the English landscape garden. He notes Batty Langley, in 1728, advocating underplanting trees with flowering plants; Brown underplanting with flowering plants and shrubs at Burton Constable; Richard Bateman planting his first informal flower garden at Grove House, Old Windsor, in the 1730s; and Philip Southcote's flower garden, including a rosary and flower borders, at Woburn Farm sometime after 1735. These gardens reinforce the point that Repton was building on a long tradition of flower gardens and re-interpreting them in his own style incorporating architectural elements within his proposals with fine examples seen at Woburn and Ashridge.

#### PLANT INTRODUCTIONS IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

The eighteenth century saw a dramatic increase in the plants available to gardeners and nursery catalogues offered a more comprehensive range of plants. Collections of new plants were becoming widely available from the 1730s onwards. The most well-known collector is John Bartram, who was sending seeds from America and being promoted in Britain by Peter Collinson, an enterprise that flourished for over thirty years. Collinson also actively promoted the work of Mark Catesby, who had been collecting and illustrating plants in the Carolinas and beyond during the same period.

A wide palette of native plants and many introductions were being used throughout the eighteenth century that would lead to developments in the form, shape, style and planting patterns in shrubberies and ultimately distinct flower gardens. To be at the forefront of design and style, landowners could be seen as gentlemen of taste through the way their gardens developed. What must not be forgotten is the role their head gardeners played in this development. As more introductions came there was a rise in books on plants, and notably flowering shrubs and herbaceous perennials, a useful addition to any library. More detailed plant catalogues became significant additions to the libraries and potting sheds of landowners and head gardeners alike.<sup>11</sup> Whether Repton owned any of the publications is questionable, but he would have been well aware of the growing number of plants that had become available by the time he started his new career in 1788. It is not stretching a point to say that some of his clients would have owned or had access to some of these published works.

It is worth considering the works of John Hill and Nathaniel Swinden for a guide to what was available for the creation of flower gardens. Hill describes the move from the formality of knots and the planting of a distinct area for selected plants away from the pleasure ground:

The Flower Garden and the Pleasure Garden, though usually considered as the same are properly distinct: we do not mean by this that Flowers should not be planted in Pleasure Gardens; but that there should beside this be a particular piece of ground for the Beds of the select kinds.<sup>12</sup>

It could be argued that having a specific area or nursery for selected plants may be linked to the great influx of plants, including many exotics, coming in from both East and West. Rather than having new plants lost in a shrubbery or on the edge of a grove they could be raised, and seen, in their own right, in specific borders. Initially these could have been formal nursery beds, perhaps even in the beds of an old formal scheme, but ultimately a specific garden area. Development in shapes would come over time as planting on the edge of a serpentine border develops into formal square or rectangular nursery beds that are in turn softened into circles, ovals and kidney-shaped beds. Hill went on to write:

No edge becomes a Flower-piece like that of the Grass Walk, and they never appear so well as when they follow Meanders and rise in little Clumps and Clusters. This modern Taste has found, and there is nothing in the article of Gardening which does it too much Honour.<sup>13</sup>

In *The Beauties of Flora Display'd* (1778), one illustration perhaps exemplifies the ideas of Swinden in drawing together theories of theatrical planting promoted by some of the other writers noted by Harvey over the previous forty years (Figure 1). Many others had applied this to shrubberies, but Swinden uses the example of a circular flowerbed. The numbers correspond to plants, both tender and hardy annuals, in his own catalogue. Planting is graded from the outer circle inward by height to create a theatrical but rather cramped scheme. When you look at this image in association with the images of Nuneham by Paul Sandby of a year earlier you can see how the planting of separate flowerbeds was moving, even if Swinden's was probably a bit more crowded (Figure 2). This style of

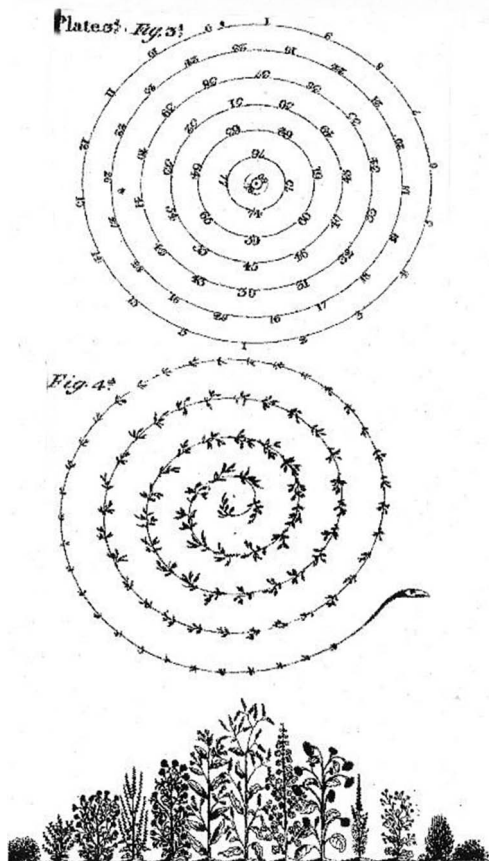


Figure 1. Proposal for planting a flowerbed; from Nathaniel Swinden, *The Beauties of Flora Display'd* (London, 1778), p. XX





Figure 2. Paul Sandby, *The Flower Garden at Nuneham Courtenay, Oxfordshire, 1777*.  
Courtesy: Private collection

tiered planting chosen by Mason to achieve relief in height and peaking at the centre of the border had been seen, albeit on a lesser scale of graduation in Bateman's planting at Grove House, noted above. Mason builds on this theme to create at Nuneham a more steeply graduated and theatrical planting in a series of flowerbeds approaching the style of planting suggested by Swinden. This form of planting could be seen in a flowerbed created at Shute Barrington's Christ Church in Oxford illustrated by Baptist Malchair c.1762–69. Introducing a series of flowerbeds in one garden would manifest itself in some of Repton's watercolours for flower gardens and flower baskets, particularly in the proposals for Brighton and the Red Books for Woburn and Ashridge. However, Repton's proposed use of multiple flowerbeds, while probably modelled on Nuneham, are often not as theatrical and dramatic in terms of height and density of planting as those seen at Nuneham. Instead, his flowerbeds in a range of shapes and forms including circles and ovals with conical planting appear flatter in comparison. The lower, flatter profile along with the introduction of basketwork around some flowerbeds creates a form of parterre and to a degree an element of formality to the gardens.

Swinden's book included a catalogue of suggested plants and, as identified in Figure 2, include a mix of perennials and half-hardy annuals, such as *Persicaria* to provide the height along with tobacco plant (*Nicotiana*), marigolds and larkspur. Marigolds had been available since the sixteenth century but by the end of the eighteenth century dwarf varieties such as *Tagetes tenuifolia* were being introduced from Mexico. Swinden also listed many tender plants that could be used in a similar planting pattern to create a more exotic feel. Plants listed in Swinden's catalogue that would have been known to Repton include many that had formed part of the influx of new trees, shrubs and perennials from

the 1730s onwards, including phlox, asters, candytuft, magnolias, bay, camellias and irises. Plants introduced after Swinden that might be seen in some of Repton's illustrations include new strains of foxglove and delphinium hybrids that could be used to add height to displays. Fuchsias were introduced from 1788. Swinden's catalogue is easy to read and as informative as many seed catalogues published today.

#### THE INFLUENCE ON REPTON OF THE FLOWER GARDEN AT NUNEHAM

Perhaps the finest garden, and possibly a great influence on Repton, is quoted as the third example in *Observations* as part of his comments in the Red Book for Valleyfield. This is the flower garden by William Mason in 1771/72 for Earl Harcourt at Nuneham Courtenay:

The flower-garden at NUNEHAM, without being formal, is highly enriched, but not too much crowded with seats, temples, statues, vases, or other ornaments, which, being works of art, beautifully harmonize with that profusion of flowers and curious plants which distinguish the flower-garden from natural landscape, although the walks are not in straight lines.<sup>14</sup>

The garden at Nuneham would develop over time with further additions by Mason for the 2nd Earl in 1777. The garden is celebrated as a fine example of the introduction of the picturesque to gardens, introducing an element of informality into the pleasure ground and flower garden. It was the genesis of the flower gardens we see today and was celebrated in Mason's poem 'The English Garden' (1781).<sup>15</sup> The original plans of 1771/72 have disappeared but a series of plans from 1785 and 1794 show the development of Mason's flower garden. Repton had visited Nuneham and used a watercolour he had painted for the engraving used in *Peacocks Polite Repository* of 1800 (Figure 3). Repton also possessed a watercolour of the garden that he had pasted into his copy of the guidebook to Nuneham.

The garden plan of 1785 is annotated on the back with a key to the planting: 'Clumps coloured Red and Yellow are Flowers only – The rest are Shrubs, except the Clumps on each side of the Temple, which are Flowers back'd by Shrubs' (Figure 4).<sup>16</sup> The significance of this statement is that the garden had developed and matured over

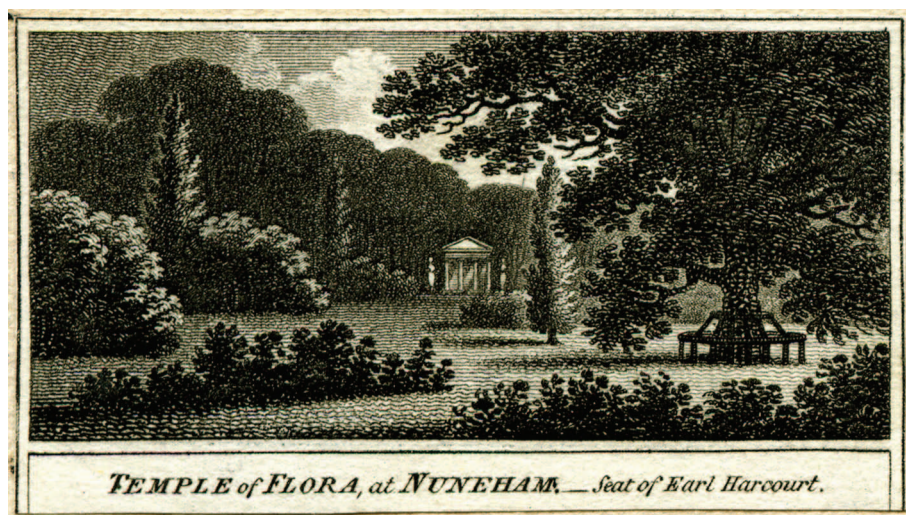


Figure 3. Humphry Repton, 'Temple of Flora, at Nuneham: Seat of Earl Harcourt', in *Peacocks Polite Repository* (1800). Courtesy: The Gardens Trust, Nigel Temple Collection





Figure 4. 'Plan of the Flower Garden ... at Nuneham, Oxon. ... belong:ing to the Right Hon:<sup>ble</sup> Earl Harcourt ... 1785 ...', showing William Mason's garden. Courtesy: Public Records Office, Kew, Works 38/349

the intervening thirteen years, but when we consider an almost identical plan of nine years further on it can be seen that the form of the garden, in circular, oval and kidney-shaped beds, had remained the same. However, some beds had matured enough and some expanded to coalesce with shrubberies to become 'flowers back'd by shrubs' near the temple. By the time of a later plan from c.1794, order had been restored and the flowerbeds were seen to be quite distinct from the shrubbery. It is the garden in this more mature form that Repton would have seen and drawn for *Peacocks Polite Repository* published in 1800.

The reference to Nuneham gives a clue to the possible direction in which Repton was moving regarding planting. The use of the word 'curious' is possibly a reference to a wide range of plants that were perceived, at the time, to be exotics that had been introduced in the later part of the eighteenth century. There was a wide range of plants being introduced from the Americas and the East that, while not being a modern idea of exotic, were possibly different enough to Repton's eye to be termed 'curious'. Repton was not renowned for his grasp of horticulture and his plant knowledge was believed to be limited.<sup>17</sup> That said, many of his proposals contain wonderfully colourful illustrations of proposed gardens but are accompanied by an, at best, vague list of plants to use. However, John Phibbs notes that in his analysis of the transcriptions he has made of the surviving Red Books, there are references to over one hundred different plants (see Appendix A).<sup>18</sup> While Repton may have included the names of a range of plants, it is doubtful whether he was knowledgeable enough to understand their cultivation. Equally, painting a picture of a plant, or group of plants, was not evidence of Repton understanding how they grew. Some of the images of plants in flower gardens created for the Red Books are difficult to identify. Other images of gardens such as the rosarium at Ashridge, Hertfordshire, convey an image of a garden that would be difficult to create with actual plants available at the time, as Richard Gorer commented.<sup>19</sup> Was Repton an illusionist as well as a 'Landscape Gardener'?



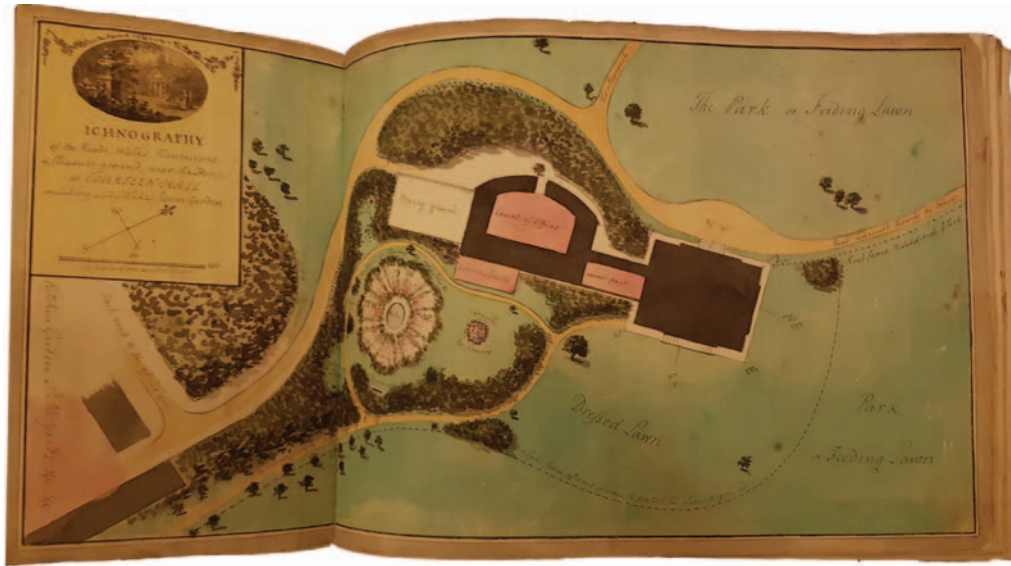


Figure 5. Lady Wake's Flower Garden; from Humphry Repton, *Red Book for Courteenhall* (1791). Courtesy: By permission of Johnny Wake, Courteenhall

There were other influences on Repton in his move to embrace proposals in many of his commissions for flower gardens. It has been noted by Mark Laird that some of the more formal influences on Repton included the use of *corbeille* (basketwork) for flowers, implying he was aware of various French publications illustrating designs for gardens.<sup>20</sup> The placing of small flowerbeds, often enclosed in basketwork, in an informal layout rather than within the bounds of a formal garden would be a feature increasingly used from the commencement of his career and a feature that would be adapted by his son, John Adey, in the form of the Hardenburg basket. Similarly, his device to create a *parterre* by surrounding a garden with some form of shrubbery showed an awareness of French and Italian design. This device was applied in gardens such as in the detailed design for Lady Wake's radial flower *parterre* and use of basketwork at Courteenhall, Northamptonshire (Figure 5). The *Red Book for Courteenhall* is generally dated 1791, but Phibbs suggests the date may be 1795 or later.<sup>21</sup>

#### FLOWER GARDENS PROPOSED BY REPTON

The proposal for a radial garden at Courteenhall was not new. Adopting the pattern for a flower garden that represents the petals of a flower had been used by many before. Laird has noted Repton may have been influenced by a range of designs for flower gardens by Jacques Mollet of 1652, by Thomas Wright's design for a rosary for Lord Barrington at Beckett Park, Berkshire, in the 1750s and, particularly, by Jean François de Neufforge in *Supplément au recueil élémentaire d'architecture* from 1772.<sup>22</sup> Other sources could include Langley's *New Principles of Gardening* (1728), which includes references and a possible template Repton could use for radial flower gardens. He would also have been aware of the radial flower garden by William Chambers at Kew, a garden that may have been inspired by the flower garden drawn by Langley some thirty-five years earlier. The watercolour 'View of the flower Garden and Aviary' by Thomas Sandby of 1763 shows a radial pattern of beds around a quatrefoil pool (Figure 6).<sup>23</sup> The interest in historical designs led to the increased use of flower gardens by Repton that used a range of styles. Basketwork, as noted above, was increasingly proposed and employed to define flowerbeds. In many garden proposals he opted for a return to the formality of the



Figure 6. Thomas Sandby (delin.), 'View of the flower Garden and Aviary' at Kew, 1763. The aviary was designed by William Chambers. Courtesy: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1925, 25.19.39

parterre. He seemed happy to apply elements of intricate design in many gardens while opting for irregularity and an element of the picturesque elsewhere.

Although flower gardens had appeared in some of Repton's early commissions, there was rarely a great deal of detail. By the time *Observations* had appeared he was starting to include flower gardens in more of his proposals. From 1800 onwards, flower gardens were proposed at Panshanger, Hertfordshire, in 1800; Bulstrode, Buckinghamshire, from c.1801 to 1803 (although the extent of his work is unclear); New Barnes, Hertfordshire, in 1802; Wood Hall, Norfolk, in 1806; Barningham, Norfolk, in 1807; and Blickling, Norfolk, c.1811. Four of Repton's most significant proposals were for gardens at Woburn in 1805, Brighton in 1808, Ashridge in 1813 and Endsleigh in 1814. These commissions can be used as examples to show the extent of Repton's use of the *corbeilles* and parterres in forming or framing regular and irregular, more picturesque, flower gardens.

Before Repton's commission at Woburn, work had been undertaken on the house by Henry Holland Jr. His scheme added a conservatory, riding house, tennis court and Chinese dairy, all linked by a covered walkway. Repton used this walkway and extended it to link the gardens he proposed for Woburn. In front of the new conservatory he proposed 'The Dressed Garden', which comprised formal beds close to the building along with densely planted beds, enclosed by basket work, dotted around the lawn. These were designed to display the Duke of Bedford's collection of rare hardy plants. The view is across the pond toward a Doric arch that is the gate to the menagerie. The garden was not entirely laid out as proposed and was superseded by a more formal arrangement in 1822.<sup>24</sup>

In his *Designs for the Pavilion at Brighton*, Repton had prepared proposals for the Prince of Wales that were published in 1808.<sup>25</sup> The published work included a discussion on various architectural forms some of the new building might take. For the gardens, Repton returned in various parts of the site to flowerbeds enclosed by basketwork dotted around a lawn (Figure 7). Ultimately the proposal for Brighton was not undertaken at the



Figure 7. View from the proposed apartments; from Humphry Repton, *Designs for the Pavilion at Brighton* (1808). Courtesy: Royal Pavilion and Brighton Museums, ID no. 56077

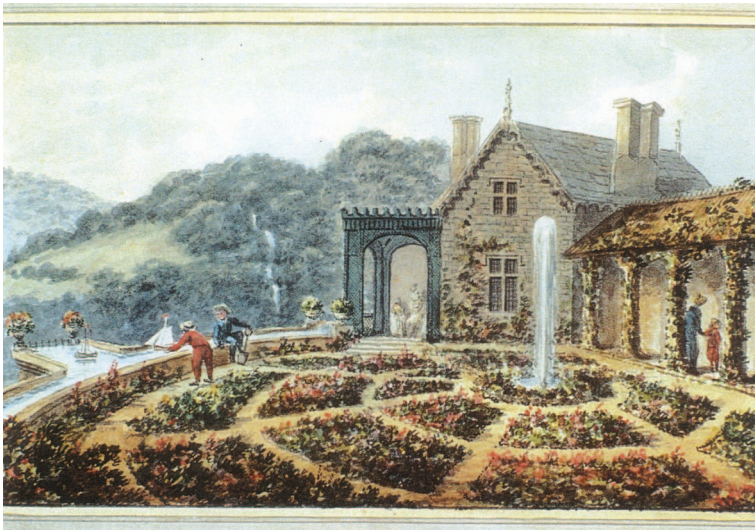


Figure 8. Children's Garden; from Red Book for Endsleigh (1814). Courtesy: The Woburn Abbey Collection. By permission of his Grace, The Duke of Bedford and the Trustees of the Bedford Estates

time but strikingly similar proposals were later undertaken by John Nash.

In 1814, Repton presented proposals for Endsleigh in Devon for the Duke of Bedford, on which he was working with his sons George and John Adey. The proposal for a picturesque cottage was not used but replaced by a remarkably similar proposal by Jeffry Wyatt. Proposals for the gardens, some of which were implemented, included a planted terrace and the floriferous Children's Garden in a form of radial parterre that used a pattern like that seen a year earlier at Ashridge (Figure 8). Although not as extensive in scale or number as those for Woburn and Ashridge, the gardens at Endsleigh bear comparison in parts in the style of planting. Of note is the fact that Repton recognized the requirement for specific children's gardens at Endsleigh and Woburn.

In his re-interpretation of the flower garden Repton has used the terms 'formal' and 'artificial' to describe gardens distinct from the surrounding scenery but also 'its decorations should be as much those of art as of nature'. Decoration could in many illustrations take the form of pots, urns or planters, but increasingly he proposed the



use of trelliswork. Repton claimed the rage for the use of trelliswork was down to him, preferring the more substantial French *treillage* over the flimsy English form.<sup>26</sup> Was he inspired by French publications? Could Repton have been aware of the *berceau* at Carlton House, a former residence of the Prince and Princess of Wales? The aviary overlooking the flower garden at Kew could have provided inspiration, and when considered with some of the proposals for Brighton that use *treillage* a link between two royal sites may be implied. In some instances, trellis was proposed as a means of covering part of a building (Montreal, 1812), in others as urns or obelisks through which to train plants (Uppark, 1810) or possibly in its earliest use by Repton, framing the view into the garden at Valleyfield in 1801 and finally appearing in the image 'Sunshine after Rain' in *Fragments* of 1816. Trellis could also be used to enclose a garden and thus create the division into separate 'apartments', the analogy used at Woburn, but also a device seen to good effect in the proposals for the Flower Garden and Rosarie at Ashridge in 1813.

At Ashridge, Repton put together proposals for the gardens for the 7th Earl of Bridgewater that included fifteen different gardens within what he referred to as the 'Modern Pleasure Ground'. This set of proposals was presented to the earl in March 1813. Repton's final book, *Fragments* (1816), brought together descriptions of many of his later works. He had asked to borrow the Red Book for Ashridge to refresh his memory, but was told it had been mislaid. Thus, in *Fragments*, he wrote from memory and added illustrations and, because of the popularity of the book and its wide circulation, made Ashridge the most influential model in popularizing the floral schemes that came next in the 'Gardenesque' and then the development of the High Victorian schemes. However, he also added the following to the text he used in the proposals which sums up his approach to Ashridge:

The novelty of this attempt to collect a number of gardens, differing from each other, may, perhaps excite the critics censure; but I will hope there is no more absurdity in collecting gardens of different styles, dates, characters and dimensions in the same inclosure, than in placing the works of a Raphael and a Teniers in the same cabinet, or books sacred and profane in the same library.<sup>27</sup>

At Ashridge, in dividing the garden into 'Ancient Garden' and 'Modern Pleasure Ground', Repton was alluding to its religious and monastic past. Within the pleasure ground the fifteen small gardens proposed, with a variety themes, layouts and plants, was unique for the time. Close to the house he had proposed the 'Broad Sanctuary', a garden comprising a formal parterre set around a 'Holie Well', drawn by John Adey and dedicated to St Benedict. Stephen Daniels wrote: 'within the compass of the plans for Ashridge are described deeper and wider historical and geographical worlds, both ancient and modern, retrospective and prospective, traditional and experimental'.<sup>28</sup>

Not all the gardens reflected the focus on the medieval and monastic past. Some of the gardens proposed suggest Repton was keen to accommodate new styles and planting. This represents a subtle change in design. No longer was it possible to include in your garden a compendium of plants, as the vast range of new plant introductions made this increasingly difficult. Gardens that reflected the new and innovative and looked to the future with the wide range of plants being introduced to Britain would allow better definition and themes. Thus, the gardens proposed included an arboretum of exotic trees, a specific garden for magnolias and American plants, and a grotto and garden for rock plants. Some of the gardens such as the rosarium, monks garden and flower stove, referred to as an 'embroidered parterre', still looked to the past in their designs (Figure 9). Ashridge in the range and some of the themes of gardens proposed bears some similarity to those proposed for Woburn. However, the gardens at Ashridge were probably the most innovative and extensive 'collection' of gardens Repton had proposed. Here he used a





Figure 9. The Rosarium; from *Red Book for Ashridge* (1813). Courtesy: Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, 850834

combination of formal layouts alongside the informality of the countess's flower garden and the proposed planting around the Souterrein. Allowing for slight modifications that Jeffry Wyatt (later Sir Jeffry Wyatville) made in laying the gardens out, Ashridge remains the most extant example of Repton's work.

Even accepting the general medieval and religious theme, the gardens that were proposed and ultimately created could accommodate the current fashions in style and choice of planting as far as Repton's limited plant knowledge allowed. This could be seen in the Countess of Bridgewater's flower garden, where he returns to a similar format to the proposals for Woburn and Brighton with a range of small flowerbeds enclosed by basketwork dotted around a lawn (Figure 10). At Ashridge we see the 'artificial' re-interpretation of a flower garden. Where at Woburn Repton had made reference to making 'apartments', at Ashridge the analogy relates to displaying different styles of painting in the same cabinet or 'sacred and profane' books in the same library, thus reinforcing the 'artificial' with the range of gardens proposed. By also introducing trelliswork to enhance, enclose and divide parts of the garden adds to the artifice in the proposals.

The flower garden at Ashridge also bears a distinct resemblance to the Sandby painting of Mason's Nuneham garden, although fifty years divide the two images (Figures 2 and 10). At Ashridge, the temple becomes the gazebo, and whereas the Nuneham image is framed by two trees, Repton's image is framed, roughly, by structural trellis, but the path follows the same line in both images, trellis or glass from the left in the Nuneham image and trellis in Repton's. Flowerbeds follow the same style in both images, although those proposed at Ashridge are not quite as theatrical as those at Nuneham. Itinerant workers appear in the Nuneham image but not in Repton's as it was the Countess of Bridgewater's private garden. It is also worth noting the flower garden at Hartwell, created by Lady

## Flower Garden

*This sketch is supposed to be taken from the East Entrance of the Souterrain shewing the sort of Cabinets de verdure, composed of more massives trellis, than that described in the Rosariums.*



Figure 10. The Countess of Bridgewater's Flower Garden; detail from the Red Book for Ashridge (1813). Courtesy: Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, 850834

Elizabeth Lee c.1799. Lady Lee was the sister of the 2nd Earl Harcourt and it is believed that her flower garden was directly influenced by the garden at Nuneham. The flower garden at Hartwell also bears similarities to the Countess's Flower Garden at Ashridge, although it is not certain whether Repton had seen the garden at Hartwell.<sup>29</sup>

During the second half of his career as a landscape gardener, Repton led the way in returning flower gardens, both formal and informal, close to the house where they could be seen and enjoyed. He recognized that as the design, layout and use of houses had changed, that by bringing flower gardens closer to the house, often accessible directly from the main rooms via a decorated terrace, there was scope to enhance the appearance of the immediate environs of a house. Bringing floriferous gardens closer to the house

rather than being completely cut off by a lawn was an innovative way of developing the pleasure ground. Flower gardens would continue to be developed around houses, particularly as they became smaller in scale or built as villas. In building on the designs and use of the precedents set by earlier flower gardens through his re-interpretation of flower gardens Repton made a significant contribution to garden design with Ashridge recognized as possibly his most significant work and the culmination of his career. Through these developments in the re-interpretation of gardens Repton's own work arguably created precedents for gardens and landscape gardeners that followed.

APPENDIX A: PLANTS REFERRED TO BY HUMPHRY REPTON IN A REVIEW  
OF KNOWN RED BOOKS UNDERTAKEN BY JOHN PHIBBS

*Specific plants*

Acacia, acer, alders, aloe, apples, arbutus, ash, asparagus, aucuba  
Barberries, beech, birch, bird cherry, box, bracken, briar, broom  
Cabbage, cauliflowers, cedar, cherry, chestnuts, choice trees, coppaea? (probably cobaea)  
scandens, cowslip (American), crab tree, cucumber, currants, cypress  
Daisy  
Elm  
Filberts, fuchsia, furze  
Gooseberries, gorse  
Hazel, heather, holly, holm oak, hollyhock, honeysuckle, hornbeam, horse chestnut,  
hydrangea  
Ivy  
Jasmine, juniper  
Laburnum, larch, larkspur, laurel, laurustinus, lavender, lilac, lime  
Magnolia, maple, melon, mountain ash  
Oak, oranges  
Parsley, passion flower, pear, pineaster, plane, pollard, poplar, Portugal laurel, potato,  
privet  
Raspberry, rhododendron, rose  
Scots pine, silver fir, spruce, strawberry, sweet chestnut, sycamore, syringa  
Thorn, tulip tree, turnip  
Viola, vines  
Walnut, water lilies, willow, woodbine  
Yew

*General references to plants*

American plants, American evergreens  
Creepers  
Evergreens, exotics  
Flowering shrubs  
Herbaceous plants  
Low growing trees  
Nut-trees  
Rock plants  
Winter plants, wood of low growth



## REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> Humphry Repton, photocopy of an original advertisement in the archive of Kay N. Sanecki at Ashridge, Hertfordshire. Source unknown.
- <sup>2</sup> Letter from Humphry Repton to Revd Norton Nicholls, 26 August 1788; Bristol University Library, 180/1.
- <sup>3</sup> Humphry Repton, *Observations on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (1803); from John Claudius Loudon, *The Landscape Gardening and Landscape Architecture of the Late Humphry Repton, Esq.* (London, 1840), p. 213.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.
- <sup>8</sup> Sarah Rutherford (ed.), *Humphry Repton in Buckinghamshire and Beyond* (Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust, 2018), pp. 88–9.
- <sup>9</sup> G. Lipscombe, *History and Antiquities of the County of Buckinghamshire*, Vol. IV (London, 1847), p. 507.
- <sup>10</sup> John Harvey, 'The Georgian garden: nurseries and plants', *Georgian Group Journal*, 1 (1986), pp. 55–66, at 58.
- <sup>11</sup> Examples of publications included Robert Furber, *Twelve Months of Flowers* (London, 1730); Philip Miller, *Catalogus Plantarum* (London: Society of Gardeners, 1730); Mark Catesby, *The Natural History of Carolina, Florida and the Bahama Islands* (London, 1731–47); John Hill, *Eden* (London, 1757); and Nathaniel Swinden, *The Beauties of Flora Display'd* (London, 1778), which included a catalogue of flower seeds with design advice bundling groups of plants together for particular purposes.
- <sup>12</sup> Hill, *Eden*, p. 621.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>14</sup> Repton, *Observations*, p. 215.
- <sup>15</sup> William Mason, *The English Garden*, 4 vols (London, 1772–81).
- <sup>16</sup> Annotation on the back of William Mason's plan of the flower garden at Lord Harcourt's Nuneham Courtenay (1785); Public Records Office, Kew, Works 38/349.
- <sup>17</sup> Mark Laird, 'Corbeille, parterre and treillage: the case of Humphry Repton's penchant for the French style of planting', *Journal of Garden History*, 16/3 (1996), pp. 153–67.
- <sup>18</sup> John Phibbs, personal communication, August 2018.
- <sup>19</sup> Richard Gorer, 'The puzzle of Repton's roses', *Country Life* (11 March 1982), pp. 654–6.
- <sup>20</sup> Laird, 'Corbeille, parterre and treillage', p. 155.
- <sup>21</sup> Phibbs, personal communication, December 2018. The Courteenhall Red Book had been taken apart sometime after 1793 and the illustration used in Figure 5 inserted. Repton quotes Kames and Montesquieu in *Sketches* without reference to Courteenhall, but in a similar context in a discussion on symmetry. The page from Courteenhall summarizes this argument suggesting it was written later (i.e., after 1795). This date, Phibbs suggests, is important as it looks like the beginning of Repton's reintroduction of formal gardens and seems sure to be the first time Repton gives an argument for doing so.
- <sup>22</sup> Laird, 'Corbeille, parterre and treillage', pp. 162–3.
- <sup>23</sup> The original album of 'Plans, elevations, sections, and perspective Views of the gardens and Buildings of Kew' by Sir William Chambers was used as the basis to produce engravings published in 1763. Where missing, like the image of the flower garden, replacement images were supplied by artists including Paul Sandby.
- <sup>24</sup> See Mark Laird, 'Humphry Repton at Woburn Abbey, Bedfordshire: before and after the Red Book', in this issue, fig. 7.
- <sup>25</sup> Humphry Repton, *Designs for the Pavilion at Brighton ...* (London, 1808).
- <sup>26</sup> George Carter, Patrick Goode and Kedrun Laurie, *Humphry Repton: Landscape Gardener 1752–1818* (Norwich: University of East Anglia, 1982), p. 66.
- <sup>27</sup> Humphry Repton, *Fragments on the Theory and Practise of Landscape Gardening ...* (London, 1813), p. 147.
- <sup>28</sup> Stephen Daniels, 'Ancient and modern: Repton and son at Ashridge'. Paper presented at the 'A Celebration of the Life and Work of James Wyatt and Humphry Repton, Ashridge, Hertfordshire, 27–28 July 2013.
- <sup>29</sup> For a detailed study of the flower gardens at Hartwell and Nuneham, see Mark Laird and John Harvey, "Our equally favourite hobby Horse": the flower gardens of Lady Elizabeth Lee at Hartwell and the 2nd Earl Harcourt at Nuneham Courtenay', *Garden History*, 18/2 (1990), pp. 103–54.