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LANDSCAPE GARDENING AND THE METROPOLIS:  
REPTONIAN INFLUENCES ON JOHN NASH'S  
TRANSFORMATION OF ST JAMES'S PARK, 1814–30

*When, in 1800, Humphry Repton (1752–1818) fell out with his partner, the architect John Nash (1752–1835), after a dispute over the fact that Repton's contribution was not properly acknowledged and rewarded, Repton also withdrew his architect son, John Adey, who had been working in Nash's office. By this time, however, Nash had befriended his former partner's clients and absorbed his principles of design, which, besides to private estates, he applied to urban schemes and parks, aided in this by Repton's other son, George Stanley, who had joined Nash in 1802 and remained till 1818. Reptonian principles would also be applied for the improvements to transform St James's Park, London, into a modern public park. This paper investigates the design of the park in the context of provisions for the general public, and with respect to the overall concept as a pleasure ground as well as design detail, applied particularly to the shrubberies. The latter were to feature as an innovation in Prince von Pückler Muskau's Hints on Landscape Gardening (published in German in 1834) as being planted according to 'Mr Nash's method'. In historiography, this early prototype of a public park and its design influences have hitherto been overlooked but deserve critical review.*

By selecting one case study, this paper investigates Humphry Repton's influence on the design of public parks. His principles of design were communicated in his writings, his publications and his Red Books; they were imbued on his sons John Adey and George Stanley, who both trained as architects, but also were involved with landscape design. Additionally, Repton had a significant influence on his late eighteenth-century partner, the architect John Nash (1752–1835); he not only helped him recover his career but also communicated with him the principles of landscape gardening. Nash was resilient, ambitious and unscrupulous, which helped his recovery and also the way he obtained and approached his projects. Having gained the trust of the Prince of Wales, he soon found himself involved in an ambitious plan to transform London with quality housing and green spaces, initially centred on the Regent's Park area, later to include plans for the west side of London. The transformation of St James's Park from a royal park to a public park has to be seen within the context of the various metropolitan improvements, urban planning and architectural projects as initiated for the Prince of Wales, also known as the Prince Regent and later George IV (1762–1830). This was an ideal client for whom to project an expansive vision of the urban landscape, yet he was also highly interested in smaller projects of architecture and parks and gardens. Nash did it all, but of course he could not be everywhere at the same time, and he used others and their ideas to enable him to cover the broad range of work. Within his office

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Repton's sons must have been particularly useful as, like him, they were interested in larger scale projects, as well as the detail.

When St James's Park first became a separate project in the office as the location for a temporary event after the victory over Napoleon Bonaparte in 1814, George Stanley was still in Nash's office. In 1827, when the park was to be transformed for permanent public use, Nash was in his mid-seventies and relied on the Kew gardener William Townsend Aiton and his own gardener who cared for East Cowes Castle, the landscape of which had been designed by Repton. They used the concept of the pleasure ground with shrubberies in order to design the park area, the first such instance in Great Britain where hitherto freely accessible public parks consisted of gravel walks, grass and trees only. This paper investigates the conception and making of St James's Park in order to establish a design rationale for the improvements, as well as investigating the methodologies and techniques used, and how they related to Repton. The fact that this important prototype has thus far escaped critical examination is probably because in recent historiographies public parks have been narrowly defined as those that are municipally financed. In a world where this model is now being challenged, a wider definition to include sites provided by benefactors would make a welcome addition to knowledge.

#### THE LUNGS FOR LONDON

By the time Repton died in 1818, the notion of a freely accessible public park still seemed some time away; there were public walks, commons and in London some of the royal parks were open to the public, notably Hyde Park. This concept, however, was ultimately conceived as part of the metropolitan improvement schemes generated for the West End of London, with the purging and professionalization of the Office of Works in 1782, and changes within the Departments of Woods and Forests and Land Revenues. Owing to extravagant royal spending during the Napoleonic Wars, there was a need to maximize revenue and develop Crown land. In 1793, John Fordyce (1735–1809), Surveyor General of the Land Revenues of the Crown, had provided a grand scheme that envisioned the area of Marylebone Park to be developed for middle-class housing. Yet, circumstances prevented progress till 1811. At this point, in February, George III was declared insane, with the Prince of Wales becoming Prince Regent, upon which the architect Nash was asked to produce a plan for a park, together with a grand approach road. His initial idea was to eclipse the Napoleonic improvements of Paris in both scale and contents, with Marble Arch reflecting the Arc du Carroussel, and one of the terraces, proposed for what became Regent's Park, to a similar dimension as the Tuileries.<sup>1</sup>

Nash first adopted the geometry for Regent's Park that had been proposed years before, and extended that south to Carlton House, the residence of the Prince Regent, and to Charing Cross. This would have provided a formal, yet disjointed, approach, interspersed by squares etc. The area within the park was proposed as a housing area, with villas set within parkland. Yet, only a few years earlier similar proposals for eight villas in Hyde Park had met with formidable opposition from William Windham who emphasized the need for parks in a parliamentary debate and popularized the notion of parks being 'the lungs of London', something he said had come from the late Lord Chatham, the former prime minister. He saw parks as a place for exercise and recreation and 'any contraction [...] would be injurious to the health and comforts of this great metropolis'. The main concern within the polluted city was access to fresh air and Windham:

drew a moving picture of the disappearance that would be felt by a citizen walking from Whitechapel, to get a little fresh air in Hyde Park, and finding the area of it crowded with houses, vomiting smoke, and preventing vegetation.<sup>2</sup>



Figure 1. 'Plan of The Crown's Mary-bone Park Estate now called The Regent's Park'. The initial concept for Regent's Park was that of a housing development, but as William Windham's notion of parks being 'the lungs of London' became more integrated, various reiterations show a diminishing number of proposed dwellings until it was finally opened as a public park in 1841. John Nash's proposals c.1825 show a picturesque arrangement with villas obscured by vegetation and oriented in ways so they did not overlook each other. Courtesy: Royal Collection Trust/ © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2018, RCIN 702583

Within this context there would have been considerable pressure to retain open parkland. Successive plans for Regent's Park thus show a diminishing number of proposed dwellings, aided by a slack economy which restricted development, until it was finally opened as a public park in 1841 (Figure 1).

The reiterations in the development of Regent's Park are indicative of what was happening within other projects associated with the metropolitan improvements of the West End. Many of the decisions were determined by other factors related to economy or accident, rather than design, but achieved remarkable results nevertheless. For example, in 1827, Nash's scheme for Regent's Park was said to have 'embraced all the beauties of landscape gardening, which his friend, the late Humphrey [*sic*] Repton, so successfully introduced, with the splendour of architectural decorations, in detached villas'.<sup>3</sup> Repton approached his projects with both classical considerations and Picturesque ones; these classical ones were: congruity, utility, order and symmetry, and were generally considered 'adverse to picturesque beauty'. His other principles included Picturesque effect, intricacy, simplicity, variety, novelty, contrast, continuity, association, grandeur,

appropriation, animation, and seasons and times of the day.<sup>4</sup> Reptonian principles of landscape gardening were adhered to, to a greater or lesser extent, both within Nash's park designs and urban planning.

#### NASH AND REPTON

Repton had met Nash in the early 1790s, and despite being different personalities, they 'were charmed with each other', shared many ideas and saw the mutual benefits of collaboration. Nash, a millwright's son, had grown up in Lambeth and at the age of about fifteen had taken an apprenticeship at the office of the architect Sir John Taylor (1714–88). He was clearly a confident apprentice, who on completion set up his own business in Lambeth, where he designed and built houses, as an architect and speculative builder. Aged twenty-two he had married Jane Elizabeth Kerr, who provided him with two children, and they became quite prosperous. Yet, in 1778, his personal life was in turmoil, with Jane running up debts through an extravagant lifestyle and being discovered to have bought or otherwise acquired their two children. At the same time his business ventures failed, leading to bankruptcy in 1783, and even though he soon after managed to recover his position, his reputation was damaged and there was no option but to depart from the London scene. He moved to Carmarthen, a regional capital and then the largest town in Wales, where he initially set up as a contractor and supplier of building materials, being able to re-establish himself as an architect in the late 1780s. This reveals not only Nash's determination but also his resilience and adaptability to different circumstances and his willingness to take risks.

Nash was initially in partnership with Samuel Saxon (1757–1831), who had been a pupil of Sir William Chambers (1723–96), the architect responsible for royal commissions at Kew and the Queen's House (now Buckingham Palace), and who had famously expressed his vision of the entire country through the invention of a Chinaman as a 'one magnificent vast Garden':

bounded only by the sea; the many noble seats and villas with which it abounds, would give uncommon consequence to the scenery; and it might still be rendered more splendid, if, instead of disfiguring your churches with monuments, our Chinese manner of erecting mausoleums by the sides of the roads was introduced amongst you; and if all your public bridges were adorned with triumphal arches, rostral pillars, bas-reliefs, statues, and other indications of victory, and glorious achievements in war: an empire transformed into a splendid Garden, with the imperial mansion towering on an eminence in the centre, and the palaces of the nobles scattered like pleasure-pavilions amongst the plantations, infinitely surpasses any thing that even the Chinese ever attempted: yet vast as the design appears, the execution is certainly within your reach.<sup>5</sup>

It is likely that some of this philosophy would have rubbed off on Saxon and therefore Nash.

Another influence was the Picturesque Movement, which rose to prominence in the early 1790s and whose main proponents were located in Wales and the Welsh Borders, including Uvedale Price (1747–1829), Richard Payne Knight (1751–1824) and Thomas Johnes (1748–1816). For Price, Nash designed Castle House, a marine villa in Aberystwyth, and for Johnes he variously altered the main house at Hafod, Cardiganshire. These and other projects emphasized the need for a greater integration of buildings with the landscape, rather than just the immediate surroundings of park and garden hitherto considered by Nash. These significantly affected the design of the buildings, yet at the same time he continued to design villas and other buildings in a more classical tradition as well as restore Early English architecture in St David's Cathedral, Pembrokeshire, providing evidence of his adaptability. Thus, these years in Wales became a formative

experience for Nash who had been able to experiment with new forms and concepts. He also learned how to defend himself and was seen in Wales as litigious, yet it enabled him to rebuild his confidence and when he decided to uproot and return to London he was able to distance himself from his earlier failures.<sup>6</sup>

Nash's return to London in 1796 was made possible by going into partnership with Repton, then the best-known landscape gardener with well-established contacts. Repton sent his son John Adey (1775–1860) to become his assistant. John, who was virtually deaf, had been a pupil at William Wilkins of Norwich, and was an accomplished draughtsman and architect. He was also well tuned into his father's principles of landscape gardening, and able to work up schemes independently, such as that for Corsham Court, though Nash was not a generous employer and never fully acknowledged his contribution.<sup>7</sup>

The arrangement with the partnership with Repton was that Repton should recommend Nash for any architectural work required for his own commissions, and that the latter should pay him two-and-a-half per cent of the costs. Thus, Nash soon rebuilt a clientele, including the Prince of Wales to whom Repton introduced him in 1797.

Unlike Repton, who approached practice as a gentleman and was not involved in the practice of implementing his schemes, as Nash did, the partnership proved quite lucrative, for Repton but more so for Nash, who proved to be financially astute. The latter was able to buy a substantial property on the Isle of Wight, building East Cowes Castle, with a landscape garden designed by Repton.<sup>8</sup> Yet, the arrangement was not to last and the partnership was severed in 1800 when Nash refused to pay Repton his share of the profits of the business. John Adey was withdrawn from the practice also, going in partnership with his father.

The rift between Repton and Nash was not, however, insurmountable and a few years later it had healed sufficiently for Repton to send his sixteen-year-old son George Stanley (1786–1858) as a pupil in Nash's office. The healing of the relationship may have been encouraged by the fact that to the outside world the two proponents were considered of equal status, for example, at Magdalen College, Oxford, where in 1801 each had been commissioned to draw up a scheme for a new quadrangle, which in the end turned out to be similar in concept.<sup>9</sup> Besides, Repton had continued with patronage from the Prince of Wales, being asked for designs for the grounds at Carlton House (the Prince's London residence) and also Brighton Pavilion. Unfortunately, a lack of resources restricted progress, and when George finally became Prince Regent in February 1811, Repton had just had a coach accident and was partially paralyzed for many weeks.<sup>10</sup> Nash, who had been joint salaried architect to the Office of Woods and Forests with James Morgan since 1806, was commissioned for new proposals for Marylebone Park, followed by the first designs for what became Regent Street. After the passing of legislation for Regent Street in 1813, the Prince Regent also commissioned Nash privately to design the Royal Lodge in Windsor Great Park, and, when later that year the architect James Wyatt (1746–1813) had a fatal coach accident, Nash was also commissioned to extend Carlton House.

George Repton remained with Nash from 1802 to *c.*1818 and ended up as his chief design assistant, while at times he also assisted his father with large or complicated projects. With Nash he was involved to an increasing degree with the various commissions during this period, including being wholly responsible for the Regent Street improvements.<sup>11</sup> These entailed the creation of a north–south connection from Marylebone (later Regent's) Park to Carlton House that cut through the existing urban fabric (Figure 2). The initial reiteration had been a series of straight sections jointed by squares and circuses to disguise the fact that it was not a grand formal approach to the palace.<sup>12</sup> However, in the event these classical contrivances were circumvented by a series of curves, unusual at the time, but which emphasized the Picturesque qualities of the street itself. The street itself not only contained

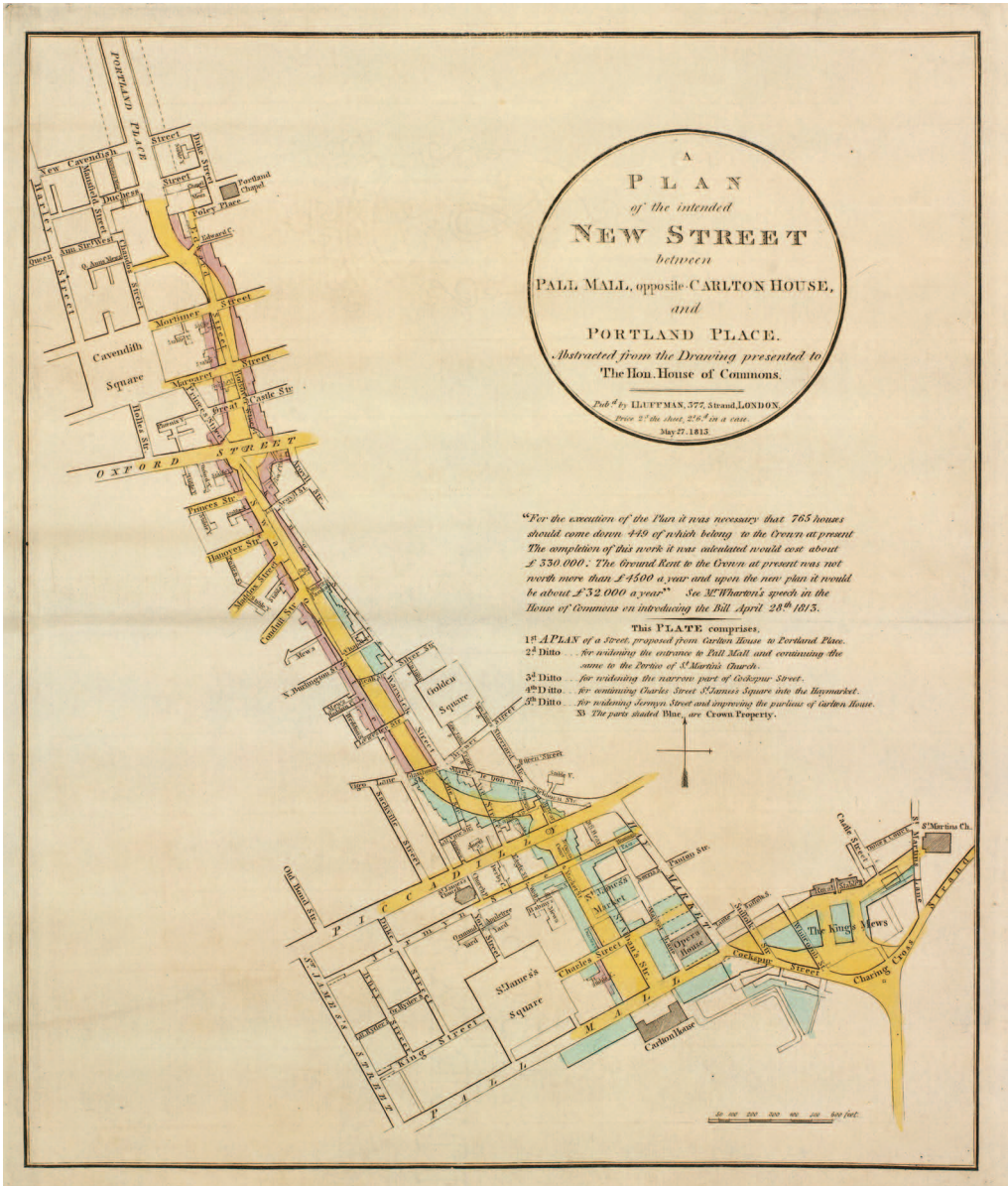


Figure 2. 'A Plan of the intended New Street between Pall Mall opposite Carlton House, and Portland Place'. George Stanley Repton worked for John Nash between 1802 and c.1818 and was wholly responsible for the Regent Street proposals that connected Regent's Park with Carlton House and was ultimately conceived as a series of curves, highly unusual at the time, but which emphasized the picturesque qualities of the street itself. Courtesy: Royal Collection Trust/ © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2018, RCIN 702518

shops but also an assortment of public buildings that terminated views and linked the various sections. The success of this unique approach is not measured just in the reporting as a model for urban improvement, but also by the fact that it became the new centre of civic life in London and initiated wider improvements in surrounding areas.

Carlton House became the southern termination of the new axis. It had been the residence of the Prince of Wales since 1783 and had an interesting history as a dwelling associated with the seventeenth-century royal kitchen garden and wilderness north-east in



Figure 3. Augustus Charles Pugin (1762–1832) (drawing) and T. Sutherland (aquatint), ‘Carlton House’. The approach from Regent’s Park terminated at Carlton House, which had been remodelled by Henry Holland, who provided a front with an Ionic screen. Courtesy: Royal Collection Trust/ © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2018, RCIN 702523

St James’s Park from which it was divided by the Mall. This was bought by Henry Boyle, later Lord Carleton, in 1700, and after his death in 1725, it passed to Richard Boyle, 3rd Earl of Burlington, owner of Chiswick House and Burlington House, Piccadilly, who in 1732 made the property over to his mother, Juliana, Dowager Countess of Burlington. Boyle had already substantially changed the garden but was asked to improve it further when it was handed over to Frederick, Prince of Wales, in 1732. William Kent designed the fashionable new layout, modelled on Alexander Pope’s garden at Twickenham.<sup>13</sup> The property was extended variously, also with adjoining buildings, assuming an ungainly appearance, with various attempts to modify this. For example, there was a proposal for a screen wall for Pall Mall by Robert Adam, but this was not carried out due to the death of the Dowager Princess of Wales in 1772. After it had been acquired as a residence for the new Prince of Wales in 1783, Chambers carried out some initial repairs, but he was soon replaced by Henry Holland, who remodelled the house and created a front with an Ionic screen (Figure 3). His survey of 1794 shows that the gardens as designed by Kent were still in place, though perhaps slightly outgrown (Figure 4).<sup>14</sup> When Humphry Repton was asked to improve the gardens in 1803 he noted:

The large trees near the Wall are become so naked & open below, that not only the Wall is seen, but the garden is exposed to the Mall: therefore, as no shrubs will grow under them it is proposed to take down a few of the Limes opposite the House, then raise earth towards the Wall & plant it with shrubs, over which a view of the Park and canal may be obtained without exposing the Gardens to the Publick.<sup>15</sup>

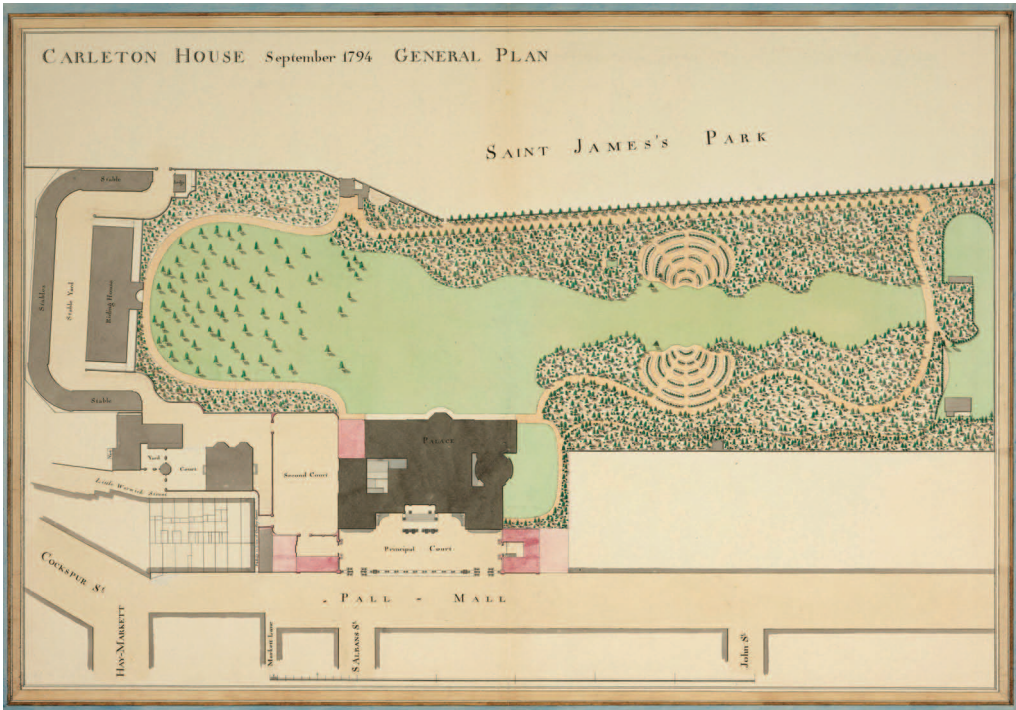


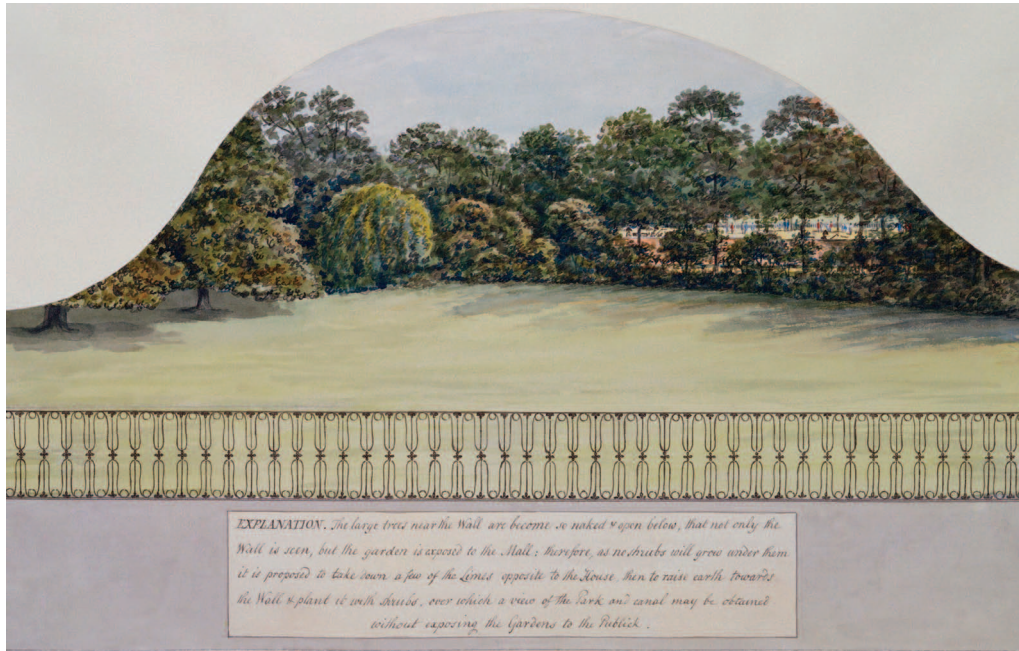
Figure 4. 'Carleton House September 1794 General Plan'. Henry Holland's survey of the gardens of Carlton House shows that the gardens designed by William Kent in the 1730s were still in place, though perhaps slightly overgrown. Courtesy: Royal Collection Trust/ © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2018, RCIN 918939

Illustrated in before and after views, Repton shows the improvements, with the immediate effect of the removal of trees in the Mall being the appropriation of St James's Park into the scenery, with views to Westminster Abbey across the park, and cattle either side of the canal within. The raised surface and low shrubberies within the gardens now obscured pedestrians along the Mall, while the undulations and new picturesque shrubberies on the lawn gave the appearance of elongation and thus visually extending the space (Figures 5 and 6).

In the event these proposals were not carried out, probably due to a lack of resources, and when George became king in 1820, he decided he no longer liked a house standing in a street.<sup>16</sup> By this stage various alternative positions for a new palace had been considered in Regent's Park, Hyde Park, Green Park, rebuilding St James's Park, before ultimately settling for the Queen's House (formerly Buckingham House) and in 1825 employing Nash to transform this to what was ultimately referred to as Buckingham Palace.<sup>17</sup> This would have provided the most rural situation, with Green and Hyde Parks to north, St James's Park to the east and its own gardens to the west. The Queen's House was last remodelled for Queen Charlotte in 1762 following designs by Chambers, and while Lancelot 'Capability' Brown was asked for designs for the grounds, instead improvements were implemented by Thomas Robinson following designs by the team that had also laid out Kew Gardens, probably by Lord Bute.<sup>18</sup> The layout was surrounded by a perimeter belt with sinuous walks circumferencing a large paddock with Kashmiri goats enclosed by a ha-ha. There was a separate oval flower garden with central quatrefoil pool near the house.

Nash's transformations included extensive remodelling of the garden with spoil from waterworks used to remodel the ground.<sup>19</sup> A lengthy account in the *London Courier* describes the progress, including the gardens, which equates Queen Charlotte's paddock





Figures 5 and 6. Humphry Repton's proposals for the gardens of Carlton House in 1808 included the removal of trees along the Mall, thus appropriating St James's Park into the scenery. The raised surface and low shrubberies intended to obscure pedestrians along the Mall, while the undulations and new picturesque shrubberies on the lawn gave the appearance of elongation and visually extended the space. Courtesy: Royal Collection Trust/ © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2018, RCIN 917091

with a 'common cow-field' and the 'extraordinary improvements' that had been made. The description of these works and the way a mound was used to mask a view is very much within the Reptonian manner, highlighting his influence within Nash's work:

With regard to the grounds, we are at a loss how to describe the extraordinary improvements that have been made, and the variety and beauty that have been produced by the talent exercised in laying them out. Not long ago this was a mere common cow-field, flat and covered with rank grass. It is now admirably undulating; assumes all the natural appearances of hill and dale, is finely wooded, diversified with flowering and evergreen shrubs, with fine lawns broken into parterres, and possessing a noble serpentine piece of water, so disposed as to give the idea of great extent. This water winds round clumps of forest trees, which have been preserved for the purpose, and all that could be retained of the previously existing scene. It is supplied from a large circular reservoir (near the top of the hill at Hyde Park-corner), which is fed by a main from the Serpentine River. This reservoir, almost like a Roman work for magnitude, may, we think, be made a beautiful feature in the new gardens; here, indeed, we should like to see what London is so miserably deficient in—copious and refreshing fountains! At the south-west side of the garden is an artificial mount, but of superb dimensions, which has been thrown up to mask the stables belonging to his Majesty at Pimlico. It is covered with young trees and the larger species of shrubs, so disposed as to present from the Palace windows an appearance very similar to some of the lake scenery of Westmoreland and Cumberland, where its features are not upon the greatest scale.<sup>20</sup>

These alterations had been carried out to considerable expense, with a total cost of twenty-two thousand two hundred and ninety pounds for this transformation, including fourteen thousand seven hundred pounds for 'Forming the ornamental water, and the mound to screen the buildings; puddling the ornamental water to secure it from leakage'; fifteen hundred and twenty pounds for 'Making drains to drain the wharfs, and a sewer to convey the superabundant water, and underdraining the whole of the gardens'; three thousand five hundred pounds for 'Making a brick reservoir at Hyde park corner, to supply the house and grounds with water from the Serpentine'; and three thousand two hundred pounds for 'Work done and doing for altering ground and planting'.<sup>21</sup>

With both Buckingham Palace and gardens completed at the end of 1826 the prospect and attention was to St James's Park and its setting. The main concerns of the public continued to be encroachment upon the park affecting space and air, since any proposed building was likely to increase smoke.<sup>22</sup> This is probably best expressed by a foreign visitor. Peter Josef Lenné, the director of royal gardens in Potsdam and a prolific landscape gardener, considered the 'foggy atmosphere' and 'the smoke of sea-coal' in London a considerable disadvantage, while public parks seemed to be more intended for 'the grazing of cattle than the enjoyment of man'. Yet, unlike the public walks in continental towns' public parks, except those around St James's Park and in Kensington Gardens, there was neither a seat nor a shelter and they could only be enjoyed by the wealthy taking 'exercise on horseback or in a carriage'. Examples of public parks quoted were the Tuileries in Paris, Prater in Vienna and Thiergarten in Berlin, which provided not only 'seats, arbours, and bowers of shelter but [also] places of refreshment and amusement'. He observed 'the trifold fence of the circus at the end of Regent's Street, and the double fences and locked gates of most squares, as truly English'. He noted how in comparison his king and other German princes 'throw open their gardens to the public at every hour of the day' and, for example, Potsdam was open 'at all times to all manner of persons; and the perfect preservation of which, shows that the people properly appreciate the favour of their monarch'.<sup>23</sup>

#### ST JAMES'S PARK

St James's Park had largely retained its formal layout with a grand canal dug in 1660 aligned on the Whitehall steps, and by the early nineteenth century the park was mainly

used for grazing and enclosed. There was a duck decoy in the south-east corner (Figure 7).<sup>24</sup> The Mall, one of the most popular walks, was to the north, and Birdcage Walk to the south. In 1770, the low-lying park had required extensive drainage with large culverts, and though Brown was commissioned and produced a plan of improvement, it was not realized, with his enemies using the delay of settling the new arches to invite a cheaper plan from Thomas Robinson. The intention of Brown's design had been to transform the canal into a serpentine lake and remove most of the trees on the east side in order 'to give a full View of Whitehall to the Queen's Palace, and also of Westminster Abbey' (Figure 8).<sup>25</sup> Robinson's proposals did remove the existing duck decoy but retained the formal canal.<sup>26</sup>

The first opportunity for Nash to engage with the park came at Napoleon's defeat in 1814 and the Treaties of Fontainebleau and Paris, which seemed to sign an end to the Napoleonic Wars.<sup>27</sup> This provided the incentive to celebrate the anniversary of the Battle of the Nile (1798) as well as the centenary of the accession of the 'Brunswick Family' – the House of Hanover – to the English throne.<sup>28</sup> Hyde Park and Green Park were opened entirely to the public, but the main events focused on St James's Park, where an entrance fee was levied, with tents for refreshments either side of the canal, which itself was used for a regatta.<sup>29</sup> A group of temporary exotic structures was erected in the garden of Carlton House and St James's Park, which included a single arch bridge over the canal with a span of eighty feet and rising to sixteen feet, topped by a Chinese pagoda, to be used as the focus for a firework display (Figure 9).<sup>30</sup> The popular spirit following the event encouraged a rethink of the general use of the park with the Prince Regent offering

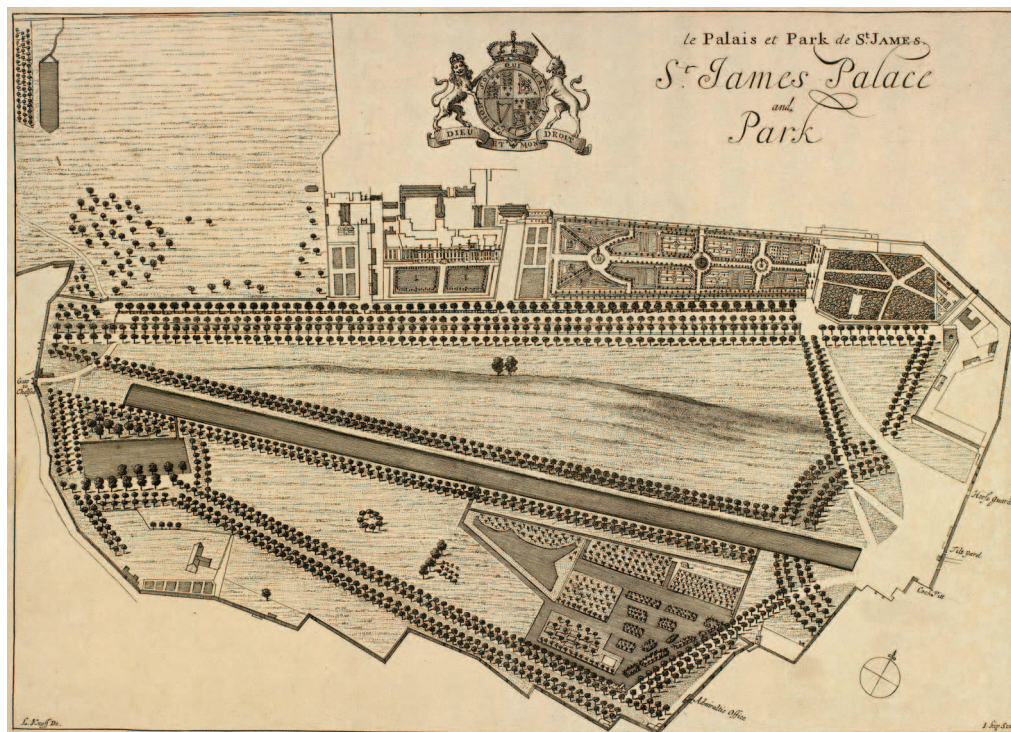


Figure 7. 'Le Palais et Park de S<sup>t</sup>. James/S<sup>t</sup>. James Palace and Park'. The grand canal in St James's Park had been dug in 1660, with the grass areas being used for grazing and enclosed.

There was a duck decoy in the south-east corner; from Leonard Knyff and Johannes Kip, *Britannia Illustrata or Views of Several of the Queens Palaces as also of the Principal Seats of the Nobility and Gentry of Great Britain* (London: David Mortier, 1707). Courtesy: Royal Collection Trust/ © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2018, RCIN 702564

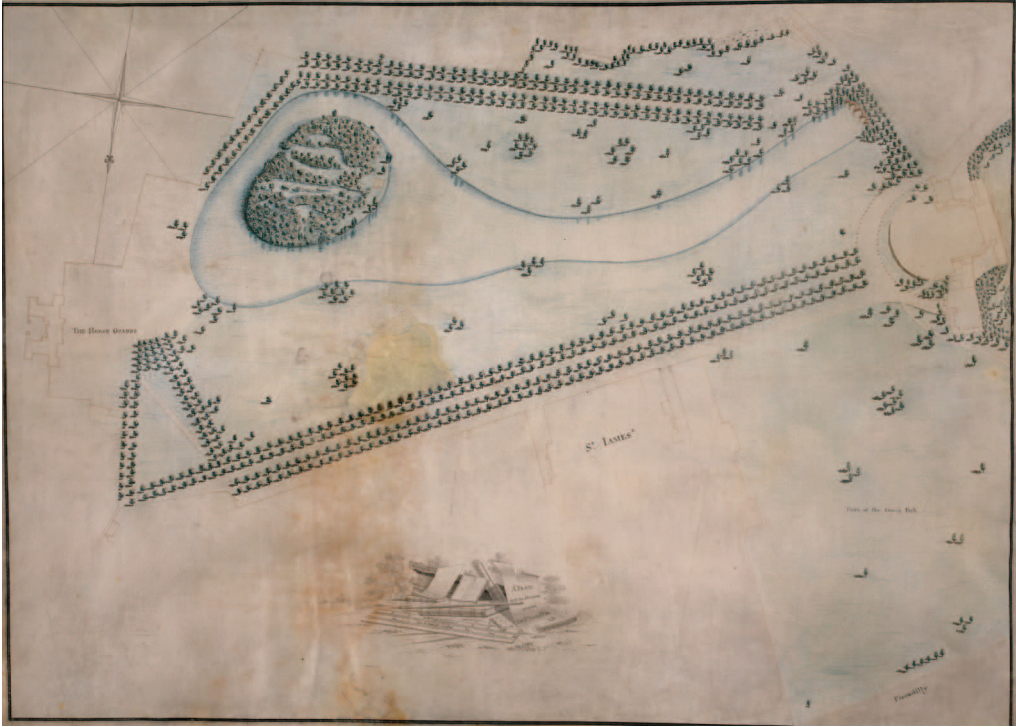


Figure 8. In 1770, Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown intended to transform the canal in St James’s Park into a serpentine lake and remove most of the trees on the east side in order to open views to Whitehall and Westminster Abbey. However, Thomas Robinson’s cheaper plan, which removed the duck pond but retained the formal canal, was implemented. Courtesy: Yale Center of British Art, B1975.2.485

to retain the structures in the grounds of Carlton House, with boundary walls proposed to be adjusted as far as St James’s Palace, which was to be rebuilt ‘in a national style of royal magnificence’. Suggestions had also been made to the prince:

to take up part of the rails round St James’s Park for a certain number of months, in order to afford the populace of the metropolis every opportunity of enjoying a walk on the grass without going so far for it.

It was argued that:

for the sake of feeding a few horses and sheep at intervals in the year, thousands of the inhabitants of London were deprived the enjoyment of walking near the margin of one of the finest pieces of water near town.

For this purpose, a walk on either side of the canal was called for, with royal approval being sought.<sup>31</sup>

The public demands do not appear to have been responded to, but the park remained open and there were gradual improvements. It was considered ‘the principal place in the metropolis where the merchant, the tradesman, and the mechanic, can breathe the air freely, and promenade after the labours of the day’, but at night it became a haven of crime. As a result, gas lighting was introduced in 1818 to make it safer, but a proposal to replace the pagoda bridge with a cast-iron one was abandoned since this provided the main access route ‘with the lower part of Westminster, inhabited by the very lowest of the people’ who generated the main source of crime.<sup>32</sup> In 1823, the canal was drained



Figure 9. Augustus Charles Pugin (drawing). On 1 August 1814 on the centenary of the accession of the Brunswick Family to the Crown of England and the anniversary of the victory of the Nile and over Napoleon Bonaparte, a grand jubilee was held. Hyde Park and Green Park were opened entirely, but the celebrations focused on St James's Park, where an entrance fee was levied, and around which a number of temporary structures were erected, including the pagoda bridge designed by John Nash, which crossed the canal. Courtesy: <https://janeaustenslondon.files.wordpress.com/2013/11/st-j-park0001.jpg>

and cleaned after it 'proved offensive'.<sup>33</sup> This expensive operation costing four thousand two hundred pounds suggests that then no immediate transformation of the park was considered. This may have been reconsidered the very next year, when an attack of what we would now refer to as Dutch elm disease affected the elms in the park, and particularly in the Mall and Bird Cage Walk, requiring whole-scale removal.<sup>34</sup>

The absence of trees may well have encouraged Nash the next year to encroach slightly upon the Mall and Bird Cage Walk to include the first line of trees and carriage road, pulling his buildings forward.<sup>35</sup> These proposals were sanctioned shortly afterwards, while nothing was revealed with respect to the park. Proposals for the latter were being considered and approved on 19 January 1827, but not published until October that year (Figure 10). The parks, the area 'now laid out in grass, and from which the public are excluded, will be thrown open (with exception of the parts to be planted) for the use of persons on foot'. To this purpose the park was to be 'planted as a Garden, with ornamental shrubberies, and serpentine paths' and 'Ornamental Water, containing three islands, planted with shrubs, and considerably above the surface of the water'. Instead of Carlton House, an opening was left in the proposed terrace as a 'Continuation of Waterloo-place, opening to the Park, with an ornamental Circus in the centre', forming the terminus for the Regent's Road axis that also highlighted the link with the park, both physical and visual.<sup>36</sup>

To Nash, who saw the city as a total landscape, the issue of the redesign of St James's Park was guided by a number of practical issues; the extended Buckingham Palace was oriented towards the mall, which had its carriage road on the outside to north. To make this work as a grand approach this had to be pushed centrally and aligned with the new triumphal arch in the forecourt. At the same time, to enable two fronts for the new development on the site of Carlton House, one towards Pall Mall, the other to the Mall,

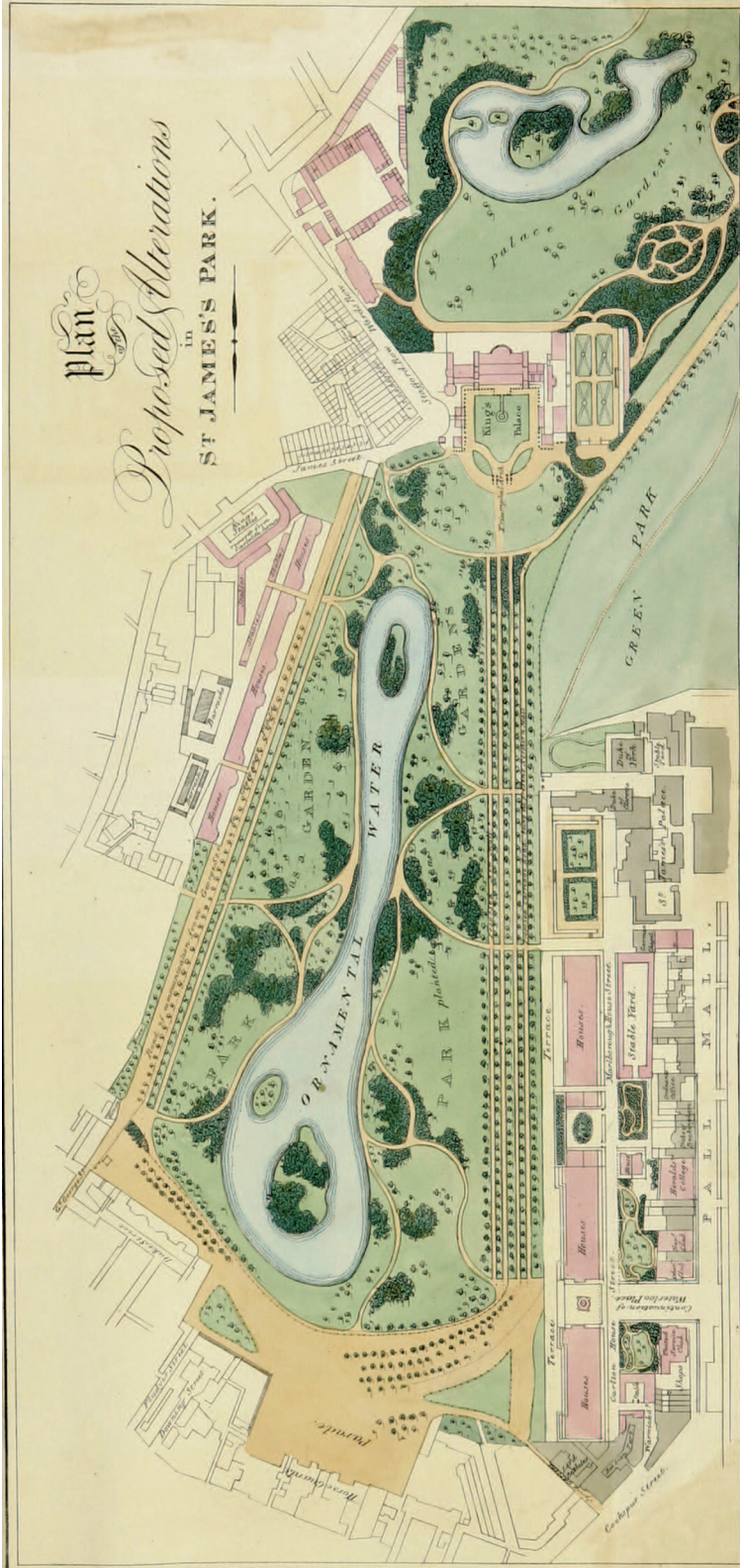


Figure 10. 'Plan of the Proposed Alterations in St. James's Park', no date. Lithograph. John Nash's proposals in 1827 envisioned the park to be opened as a public park, to be 'planted as a Garden, with ornamental shrubberies, and serpentine paths' and with a serpentine lake. Courtesy: Privatbesitz (Private collection)

some further space was desirable here also. To the south side of the park along Bird Cage Walk, further space was required to provide sufficient room for new buildings. The demolition of Carlton House had provided an opportunity to create a direct link from the town to the park. The area of the park thus became more constricted, and to prevent the sense of it feeling confined the proposals included no tree or shrubbery belt, unlike country estates or later public parks. Belts and clumps had become the laughing stock of the proponents of the Picturesque Movement and their exclusion here meant that the space leaked out below the trees in the avenues up to the new building facades, and thus provided a considerable sense of extension of space.

When the plan with proposals was finally published, it was produced in conjunction with two lithographs, showing before and after views in the manner of Repton (Figures 11 and 12). Here, however, the before view emphasized the view to Horse Guards to



Figures 11 and 12. J. S. Templeman, 'View of the Canal previous to the Improvements: looking towards the Horse Guards' and 'View of the Canal with Improvements: looking towards the Palace'. Lithographs. John Nash's proposals were published with before and after views in the manner of Humphry Repton, but with a twist. The before view emphasized the view to the Horse Guards to the east, whereas the after view subtly revealed the new Buckingham Palace.

Courtesy: Privatbesitz (Private collection)

the east, whereas the after view to the west subtly revealed the new Buckingham Palace. The proposed layout enhanced the views from the palace towards St Paul's Cathedral. It emphasized a Picturesque or rural character in planting and went as far as to include a rustic fence in the foreground. In this context the planting within the park had been so arranged that the formal avenues were viewed as background, experienced from the park as groves. The extended landscape and sense of openness generated by this approach required the necessity of a fence to separate riders from pedestrian, and rails were proposed to do this with minimal visual effect.

Yet, in the absence of these plans, which were not published till late September and October, by which time the work was in progress, public opinion was apprehensive, resulting in a general '*Anti-Nashional* feeling', as a general sense of a lack of accountability with Nash's projects.<sup>37</sup> At St James's Park there was concern about further encroachment and curtailment of the park, and also Nash's general approach 'to ruralize the Canal' was questioned since its formality and that of the straight avenues was so 'peculiarly well suited to a city' and 'more in character':

Instead of this, Mr. Nash insists upon twisting the water, and clumping the ground, and making an English garden with serpentine walks, which will suit about as well with the surrounding avenues, as a modern round hat would with a full-dress coat, bag, and sword. With regard to the water, it can never be made to look well, communicating as it does with sewers, and forming as it does from its situation the actual sink of the town.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, it reveals that technicalities were questioned as well as detailing, clearly noting that not all alterations could be considered improvements. The walks were highlighted by one observer since they had traditionally been covered with loose gravel:

carefully made more loose from time to time, the walking on which is the most disagreeable mode of using the feet with which we are personally acquainted. The Green and Hyde Parks are specimens how much preferable an open space, covered with turf, is to these imitations of the sea-beach; and the Inner Temple garden, to say nothing of foreign instances, is an example of what may be done in the way of an ornamental garden in a much more confined spot than St James's Park.<sup>39</sup>

By September 1827, excavations of the serpentine lake were on their way at the end nearest the Horse Guards, where a 'great number of men' were employed to increase the width of the original canal, leaving two islands.<sup>40</sup> A temporary wooden bridge was constructed near the middle of the canal, with a railway laid across it leading to the site of Carlton House, where a terrace was formed with the excavated ground. From the south side of the canal the ground was transported there with one-horse carts.<sup>41</sup> During the works the park remained open, with a sign noting:

The public are most respectfully requested, during the operations which are designed for the increase of their own gratification, not to injure the carts and tools of the workmen, and to avoid as much as possible the part where the men are at work.

Yet, after work, boys wheeled each other about in carts and barrows, and girls seesawed on long planks.<sup>42</sup> However, work progressed swiftly and by February the planting of trees and shrubs proceeded rapidly due to favourable conditions with mild weather.<sup>43</sup> Half a year later the park flourished:

The young plantations in the inclosure in front of the Palace are healthy and thriving, and the recent improvements in laying out the grounds and making the most of the



sheet of water, are now seen to great advantage, and do infinite credit to the taste of those who planned and executed them. Some very fine swans have taken up their residence there.<sup>44</sup>

By this point Nash's responsibility, competency and his competitiveness with respect to finances were questioned by a Select Committee of the House of Commons as part of a wider inquiry into the operation of the Office of Works and Public Building. This revealed some interesting detail about how the design for St James's Park was accomplished. According to Nash, a landscape gardener could not have done this project as 'they merely give designs', providing the example that 'Repton used to be paid by the day and for his drawings, but he never executed the work, and of course could not charge a commission'. Charges for laying out the ground included 'forming all the grounds for plantation, but not shrubs' for which a commission was to be taken upon the total expenditure.<sup>45</sup>

William Townsend Aiton (1766–1849), the superintendent in charge of the royal gardens at Kew, was consulted with respect to which shrubs do well in London conditions for the gardens of Buckingham Palace, with the same list being applied to St James's Park. Nash's own gardener at East Cowes Castle (who had the care of Repton's plantings there) superintended the planting, identifying plants and ensuring they were properly planted. Of a total estimate for the improvements in St James's Park of nineteen thousand two hundred and fifty-three pounds, the ornamental water, gravel walks, &c. had cost eight thousand three hundred and fifty pounds; iron railings, &c. seven thousand seven hundred and three pounds, with shrubs being additional.<sup>46</sup> Nash's commission on this amount was five per cent, which the reporter considered 'an extortion of which even "Capability Brown" would have been incapable', believing that: 'We do not think a landscape gardener could have done it.'<sup>47</sup> In the event, Nash survived the inquiry and continued his work until the death of George IV in 1830, retiring afterwards to East Cowes.

#### ST JAMES'S PARK AS A PUBLIC PARK

It appears, however, that Nash's position somewhat weakened after the inquiry, and progress had slowed. For example, the entrance from Regent Street into the park was not accomplished until 1831, after Nash had gone.<sup>48</sup> It was not until 1834 that the Duke of York's monument was agreed to be placed here, following designs by Benjamin Wyatt (Figure 13).<sup>49</sup> With having had no prototypes of this kind of public park, as a pleasure ground it would have been difficult to foresee the various issues that arose and that needed to be addressed as part of the maintenance. In 1829, a new railing was proposed to enclose the interior, or pleasure ground area, replacing a wooden fence; the formation of a carriage way along Bird Cage Walk; and draining and improving the grass.<sup>50</sup> In 1835, the 'abrupt declivity of the embankment' of the lake, particularly on the south side, was addressed as it caused 'great danger' to the public, 'particularly children'. A dwarf iron railing of twenty inches in height was thought to address the issue and would have 'a seemly appearance of security'.<sup>51</sup> In 1836, a collection of water birds was introduced, courtesy of the St James's Ornithological Society.<sup>52</sup> In the same year, five lodges, including a stove in each, were built for the keepers at each of the entrances; and a cast-iron bridge was proposed on the site of the pagoda wooden bridge to enable more direct passage for those crossing the park.

These additions reveal that the nature of a park of the pleasure-ground type, as opposed to the common-field type with grass and trees, was not generally anticipated. Nash's application of the picturesque-Reptonian conception of a pleasure ground for a public park continued to be challenging, with one observer complaining of:



Figure 13. The new entrance from Regent Street had been envisioned by John Nash, but was not implemented till 1831, after he had gone, and the Duke of York's monument was not agreed to be positioned there until 1834. Photo: author, 2018

all the Petitesse and Cockney Prettynesses which have disgraced the stately avenues of St James's Park with little Lakes, and little Islands, and little Clumps of pretty little Shrubs! Very fit Improvements for the twenty or thirty acres of a wealthy Shopkeeper in the vicinity of London, but utterly unsuited to the Character of a Great Park in the Centre of a Great City.<sup>53</sup>

However, a visit by John Claudius Loudon in 1842, where he noted that the trees and shrubs had all been labelled, disagreed with such narrow-minded comments, and commented that St James's Park was 'perhaps the best work that Nash the architect accomplished'.<sup>54</sup>

#### ST JAMES'S PARK AS EXAMPLE

In 1833, the Select Committee on Public Walks endorsed the importance of the park in a 'connected line' of St James's Park, Green Park and Hyde Park for the benefit of public walks. The latter two parks were 'open to all classes', whereas in St James's Park, which had 'lately been planted and improved with great taste', the 'interior' could be accessed by 'all persons well behaved and properly dressed'. The committee was pleased to see 'the advantage' afforded to the public, and noted the ease of access to the park provided by the new staircase at the bottom of Regent Street.<sup>55</sup> Thus, as a public park, St James's became an immediate prototype for other such spaces, with it being included, in conjunction with the gardens of Buckingham Palace, as the main project in Jonas Dennis's *The Landscape Gardener: Comprising the history and principles of tasteful horticulture* (1835).<sup>56</sup> Also, in 1835, an American visitor, expounding on what

he found here, provided a description that both understood the intention and provided a description of the salient features:

I fell upon St James's Park, – and indeed I thought I was in paradise. Here in the heart of the city is the *rus in urbe*, – a charming Lake, artificial though it is – the most beautiful lawn I ever saw – walks as delightful as fancy can desire, – trees of magnificent foliage – a little wilderness even of wild bushes, aye all of fascinations of country life, and this too open to the public in the heart of the city! You have but to wander a short way from the turbulence of the Strand, or the bustle of Pall Mall, or *Pell Mell*, as they call it here, – and you are all alone, with the birds, chirping most merrily over your head, the lamb frisking about you, and the fish with his shining sides in the lake at your feet./ Before I had seen prettier things, I fancied Boston Common to be the most charming place on earth, of the kind; but St. James's Park is as much its superior beauty, as that is superior to the common field. About it, there is a most delusive regular irregularity. Art has so managed, as to conceal itself in Nature. The trees have seemed to come up as they pleased. The bushes apparently have their own way. The margin of the Lake is not as on Boston Common of regularly laid stones, but stones apparently tumbled in by some chance or other. In all these things the English so much excel us, that we have the lessons of years to learn. The Parks in and about London are many – some public, some private; but all like little Edens, made admirably beautiful by art, and enjoyed the more as in such a wide spread city.<sup>57</sup>

Prince von Pückler Muskau, who stayed in England for a number of years to search inspiration for the management and design of his own estate, was in London while the work at St James's Park was being carried out, during which he inspected the site daily acquiring 'a great deal of technical information here'.<sup>58</sup> In his treatise *Hints on Landscape Gardening* (1834), he noted how 'Mr Nash' had established some of the most magnificent examples of pleasure ground plantations for George IV, with Buckingham Palace and Virginia Water being selected as key examples. These shrubberies had traditionally been arranged in:

either oval or round clumps on the lawn and draw long wavy lines (or have strips of grass of an even width) along the paths, which are always marked off by a clean-cut border, and back of this appears the black soil of quite elevated beds which are carefully raked clean.

The planting is regimented:

The shrubs are then so severely pruned that they hardly touch one another. Flowers are set here and there in order to give more colour to the plantation, but the result of it largely is that one sees so much black earth instead of green colour that a disagreeable vacillation between formality and natural irregularity is apparent.

This type of planting is contrasted by that promoted by Nash, who 'masses the shrubs more closely together, allows the grass to disappear in wide sweeps under the plants, or lets it run along the edges of the shrubs without trimming them'. Additionally, 'he sets a number of isolated trees and shrubs on the lawn beside the plantation in order to interrupt the lines naturally from all sides'. On the maintenance he comments that these shrubberies are 'neither raked nor trimmed except where necessary for their growth'. As a result of this management, 'they soon develop into a thicket that gracefully bends over the lawn without showing anywhere a sharply defined outline, just as bushes in the wild state grow and shape themselves on the edge of a meadow'. Pückler Muskau refers to this as 'Mr Nash's method', the innovation of which he considered was that this applied the 'same principles that hold good in all wild wood

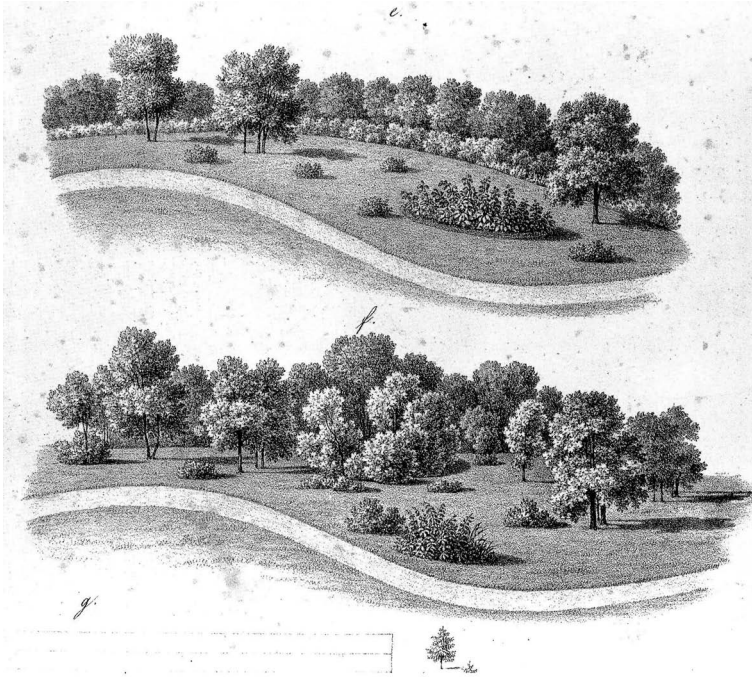


Figure 14. Prince von Pückler Muskau, in his seminal *Hints on Landscape Gardening* (1834), noted a distinction of old-fashioned shrubbery planting in a graduated manner versus that according to the principles of Mr Nash, ‘Kantenpflanzung nach des Herrn Nash Prinzip’. Pückler was clearly unaware that these principles were developed by the proponents of the Picturesque Movement and by Humphry Repton; from Hermann Fürst von Pückler Muskau, *Andeutungen über Landschaftsgärtnerei* (Stuttgart, 1834)

and shrub plantations’ to the pleasure ground (Figure 14). He observed that:

the true line of beauty of the exterior of a plantation must lie in imperceptible transitions, sharp angles, and deep recesses, here and there in almost straight lines, broken, however, by single projecting trees and shrubs which bind them loosely together.

Clearly, Pückler Muskau was unaware that this method was rooted in principles developed by the proponents of the Picturesque Movement and by Repton. Bedding flowers were delegated to separate flower gardens ‘where regularity is entirely in order’, but with the limited space available such feature had not been included in St James’s Park.<sup>59</sup>

#### CONCLUSIONS

This paper has clearly revealed the early nineteenth-century transformation of St James’s Park as part of a much more expansive vision of London as a ‘ruralized’ metropolis to compete with other major centres on the continent. This vision as championed by Nash had been influenced by notions of Picturesque landscapes and Reptonian ideas. These had been absorbed by Nash during his partnership with Repton and became part of his working practices through Repton’s sons, whom he employed.

New housing was essential, and so were parks, public access to clean air and exercise and therefore the linking of parks, but this had to be balanced with royal demands for seclusion and privacy. The redevelopment of the Queen’s House into Buckingham Palace was the instigation towards the physical improvement of St James’s Park and turning this into a public park. This was a trial where the concept of a Reptonian pleasure ground was used to create a space with varied walks, access to grass and the water’s edge, and animated

scenery for the general public. It also enhanced the views from the palace simulating a notion of rural countryside. Within the prospect of the palace it was important that any people in this space would behave properly and be dressed appropriately; this was the kind of polite landscape advocated by Repton.

One of Nash's strengths, in contrast to Repton, was that he carried out his own projects, and it is here that due to his position entrusted by the Prince Regent that he managed to accomplish his vision. Owing to being employed through the Office of Works and answering to the prince/king, this was a difficult position, which at times clearly was challenging, and it is to be commended that he managed to achieve such innovative concepts. That his accomplishments have often been overshadowed by claims of misappropriation to fund his excessive lifestyle is unfortunate. It is now time to reassess this phase in the development and give this the due attention it deserves.

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