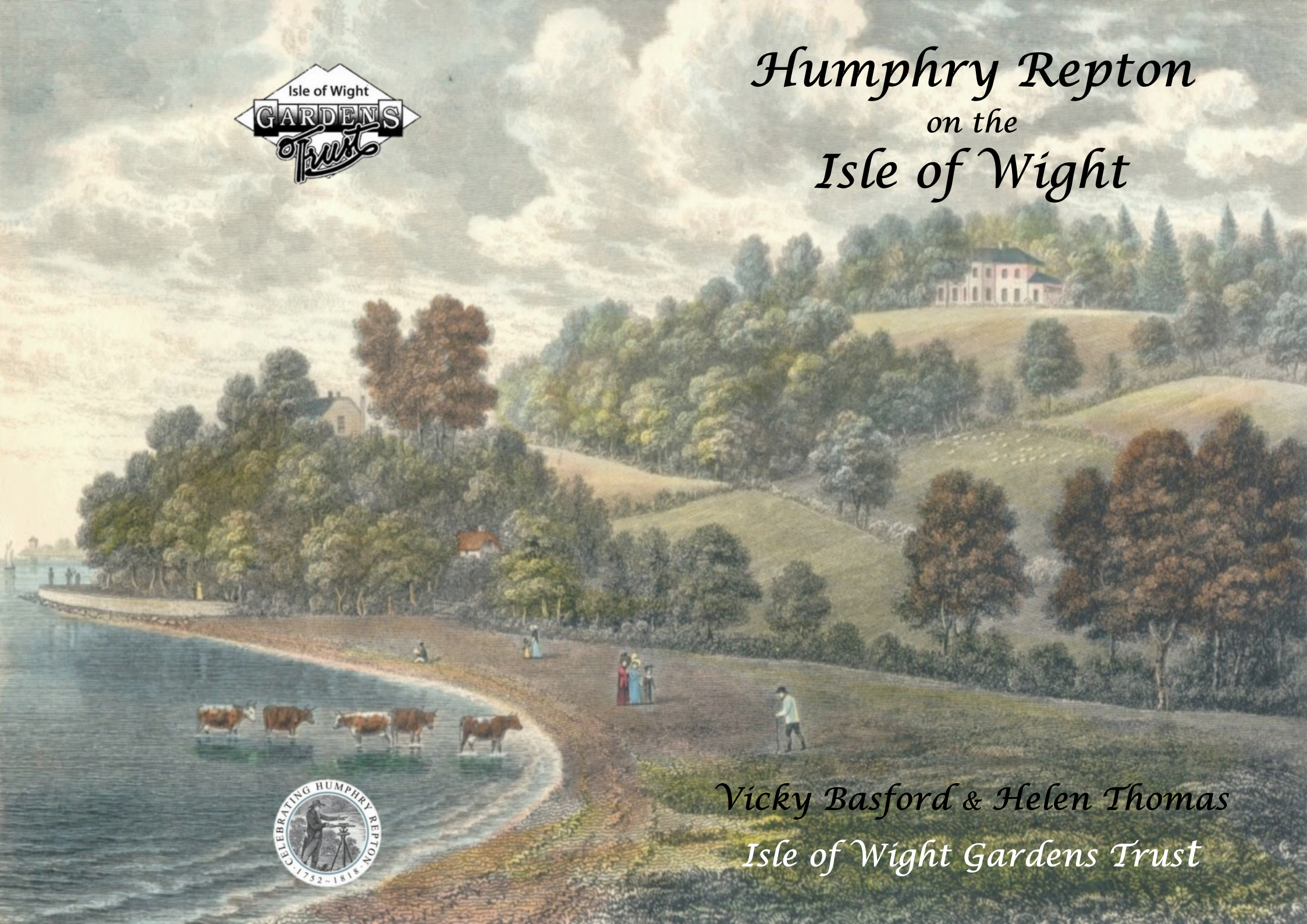




# *Humphry Repton* on the *Isle of Wight*



*Vicky Basford & Helen Thomas*  
*Isle of Wight Gardens Trust*

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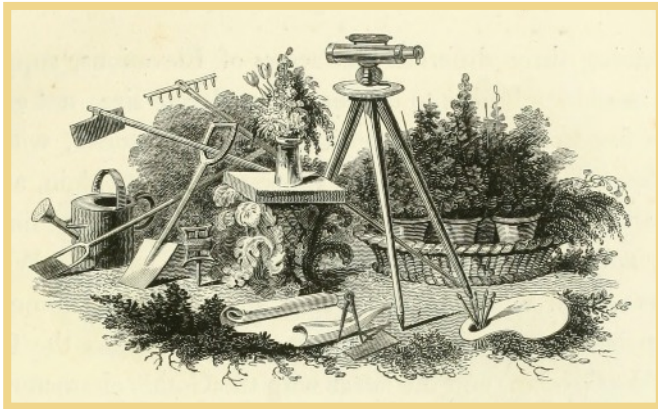
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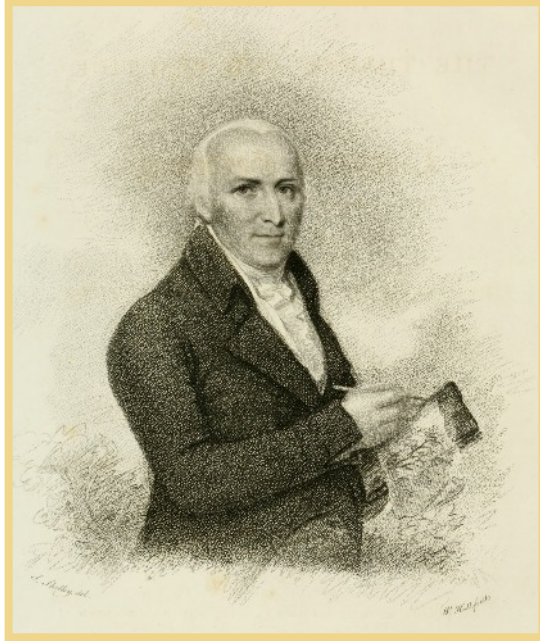
Illustration above from *Fragments on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*  
1816 by Humphry Repton

Cover illustration: St John's in *View near Ryde* 1830 by George Brannon

# *Humphry Repton*

on the

## *Isle of Wight*



After a series of ephemeral occupations Humphry Repton (1752-1818) is said to have conceived the idea of a career in landscape gardening during a sleepless night in 1788 (Stroud 1986). Seeing himself as the successor to 'Capability' Brown (1716-83) he set out to become the most well known and prolific landscape designer of his day, advising at close to 400 gardens. His early work continued the Brownian landscape style, although rarely on such an extensive scale, but in his later career he reintroduced the flower garden and terraces around the house, instead of park lawns and livestock up to the windows (ibid, Rutherford 2018).

Repton's career coincided with a growing popularity of the Isle of Wight. Grand marine villas were built and the grounds of older properties re-worked in the modern style. Flowering shrubs in lawns around the house provided a frame for the wider landscape which frequently included sea views. Here we investigate the evidence for Repton's involvement with these Isle of Wight gardens and landscapes.

*Vicky Basford and Helen Thomas*

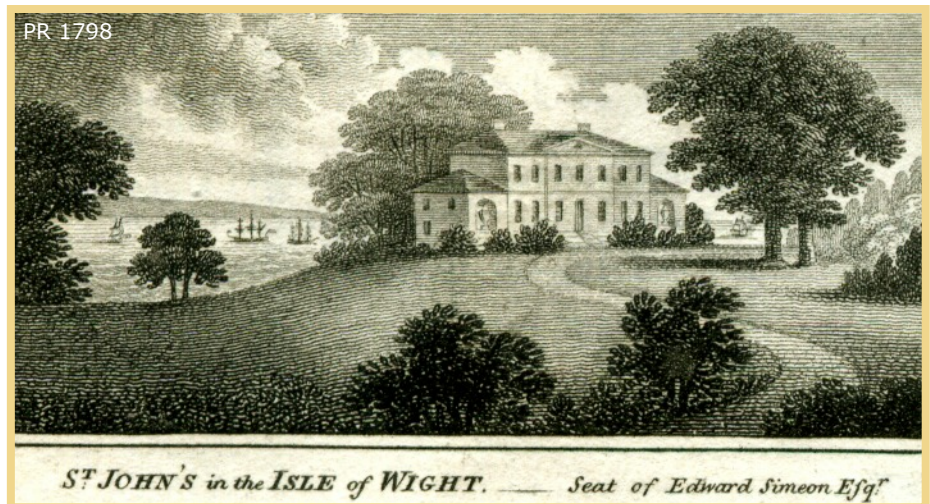
Illustration above of Humphry Repton in 1802 from his  
*Observations on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*

## Introduction

As part of the commemoration of the bicentenary of Repton's death in 2018 the national Gardens Trust published a spreadsheet of Repton-attributed sites (Phibbs 2017a). The entries include sites sketched by Repton and subsequently engraved for publication in *Peacock's Polite Repository*, a small yearly almanac- cum-diary, between 1790 and 1811. These were generally of places where he had provided advice or had been commissioned to prepare plans although it is thought that this was not always the case (Temple 1988a, 163). Repton was a great self-publicist leaving a legacy of books and individual reports to clients. The reports, often bound in red leather and now known as 'Red Books', included watercolours with lift-up flaps showing scenes before and after implementation of his advice. He charged for Red Books but often his advice was not followed. Unfortunately no Red Books have been discovered for any Isle of Wight landscapes so we are dependent on other evidence, including Repton's drawings for six Isle of Wight properties which were engraved for *Peacock's Polite Repository*. John Phibbs, an authority on Repton, is of the opinion that whilst the great majority of sketches in *Peacock's Polite Repository* were of places where Repton worked there are three areas where the evidence is less clear. These areas are around Hare Street in Essex, around Sevenoaks in Kent and in the Isle of Wight. In each of these areas there are a number of sites with no evidence for Repton's involvement besides *Peacock's Polite Repository*. Phibbs (pers comm) considers that for these sites 'it can be assumed Repton didn't carry out work unless there is a reasonable argument to the contrary'.

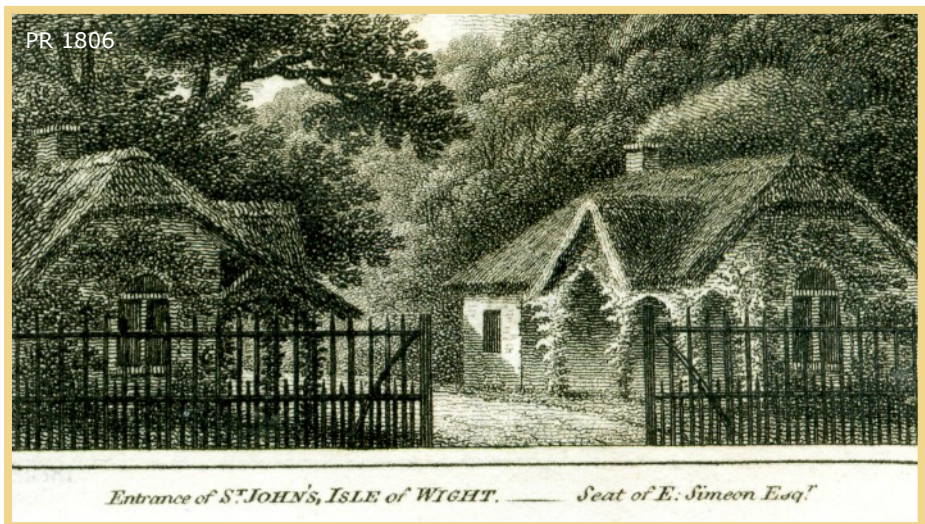
## St John's, Ryde

One landscape where we have definite evidence of Repton's involvement is at St John's House at Ryde, a property purchased by Edward Simeon in 1796. A survey and plan of the St John's estate in 1803 records that it comprised 307 acres although much of this was farmland rather than landscaped grounds (Isle of Wight Record Office/JER/BAR). Repton provided three watercolour sketches of scenes at St John's which were engraved and published in *Peacock's Polite Repository* between 1798 and 1806. The earliest shows the carriage approach winding through the pleasure grounds to the entrance front of the house with the Solent forming a backdrop. An engraving of St John's Marino in 1802 was followed by a view of the entrance lodges in 1806.



Repton was evidently working on the estate at about this time as confirmed in a letter of May 1799 from John Smith to Sir Nash Grose, owner of 'Priory' near St Helens (Pedley 2007, 280-283). Smith comments in this letter 'I never admired the taste, which Mr Repton sells to our neighbours by the spade full & the barrow full & the pole of upright paling'. He further recounts that 'Mr Simeon thought it necessary to build a new cottage for his labourer, & as in these days of elegance a thing must not be simply useful, the fertility of Mr R's genius suggested the idea of clapping a facade to the West end of the Cottage, which would look like a Temple & make an object from St John's, & of converting the back of the cottage into an alcove'. Smith describes this cottage as being in 'a field on the right side of the lane [presumably when approaching westwards from 'Priory'] where stood an old Barn and Cottage'. The building cannot be identified on historic Ordnance Survey maps. Repton similarly used a Doric portico to transform a red brick cottage at Langley in Kent (Repton 1803, 162) and also possibly at Swainston.

Two lodges flanking the new St John's entrance were described in an unflattering manner in the 1799 diary of the Rev. William Norris (Portsmouth Record Office: 11A/23/7 cited in Temple 1987, 96). His critique of these two 'Lodges in the Cottage stile' shows some awareness of theories of the picturesque style. Norris comments: 'There is too much ornament and Finery in these Cottages to render them pleasing or harmonious, tho' they are artificial Cottages they should still bear a close affinity to...natural ones and if such Consistency had been observed these would have had a much more pleasing effect' Norris does not name the architect but Humphry Repton's sketch was used for an engraving in the 1806 edition of *Peacock's Polite Repository*.



Repton had earlier praised the lodges in his *Observations on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (1803, 147), writing that 'two cottages, covered with flowering creepers, attract the notice of all who visit the island; and while one is a comfortable residence for a family, the other consists of a room near the road side, from whence the mind derives peculiar satisfaction in seeing the constant succession of visitors who leave their homes in search of happiness'. Although Humphry Repton does not claim the lodges as his own designs Temple (1987, 97) points out that he writes of them possessively and with thinly-veiled pride. It has been suggested that they could be by the architect John Nash or by Humphry's son George Repton (White 2018, 130). George was only thirteen in 1799 and it has also been suggested that the lodges were a Nash design redrawn by George as a training exercise after joining the Nash practice in 1802 (Sherfield 1994, 65).

William Cooke (1808, 86-92), writing about the St John's landscape shortly after work was completed, assumed that the lodges were by Humphry Repton and refers to them in a complimentary way, stating that 'the taste of Mr Repton has been conspicuous, giving to this estate an ornament beyond what a more laboured and costly edifice would have conferred'. The lodges were located close to the present-day junction between St John's Wood Road and St John's Hill. A new approach drive to the house from the two rustic lodges seems to have been created by Repton. This serpentine drive, typical of his style, wound through St John's Wood and entered the pleasure grounds around St John's House near to their south-west corner from where it continued to the house. Cooke noted that his published view of the house at St John's was 'taken from the commencement of the slope towards Ryde; where the shrubbery ascends from the cottage lodge (ibid). Differences in the 1st edition Ordnance Survey 25 and 6 inch maps published in 1865 and 1866 indicate demolition of the two lodges in this period, following nearby railway development, although the entrance to St John's Wood together with the approach drive winding through woodland belts remained. The St John's Park development of villas sited around a central communal garden was planned in the 1840s (Brownscombe 2012a) resulting in a section of drive possibly being altered and the woodland belt reduced. By 1898 the 1st revision of the Ordnance Survey 25 inch map showed no trace of the lodges or of St John's Wood.



St John's House and Park by William Cooke, 1808 (IM)

The landscaping of the coastal woodland at St John's is referred to by Cooke (1808, 87) who writes of this area: 'Here commences the great beauty of this estate, the fine wood which borders the shore for a considerable distance... The walks through this wood have been lately arranged with taste, under the superintendance of Mr. Repton. Several seats are well placed to command views of the opposite shore and shipping; and the whole is still more highly embellished by additions which form the subjects of the two following Plates, affording agreeable objects of distinct and contrasted style'.

In addition to the view of the house Cooke also provides plates showing the entrance lodges and, as a frontispiece to his book, an engraving of the 'Marina' at St John's. Cooke describes the Marina as a 'pretty Gothic, or Moorish Castle' and recounts how residents of Ryde promenaded through the woodland walks of the St John's estate on Sunday evenings, 'enlivened by a band of music' in the Marina.

In a catalogue to the 1982 Repton exhibition the Marina is described as a specially built structure for bathing and admiring the seascape (Carter *et al* 1982, 155). A similar gothic style lakeside building was proposed and illustrated by Repton in his 1800 Red Book for Bayham Abbey in Kent, but not built. An engraving of *Mr Simeon's Marino* from a Repton sketch appeared in *Peacock's Polite Repository* for March 1802, suggesting that it also formed part of his landscaping work at St John's. Intriguingly, Repton's watercolour sketch for the engraving has survived and shows the building as having a somewhat different form. The watercolour is shown below above the published engraving.



PR 1802

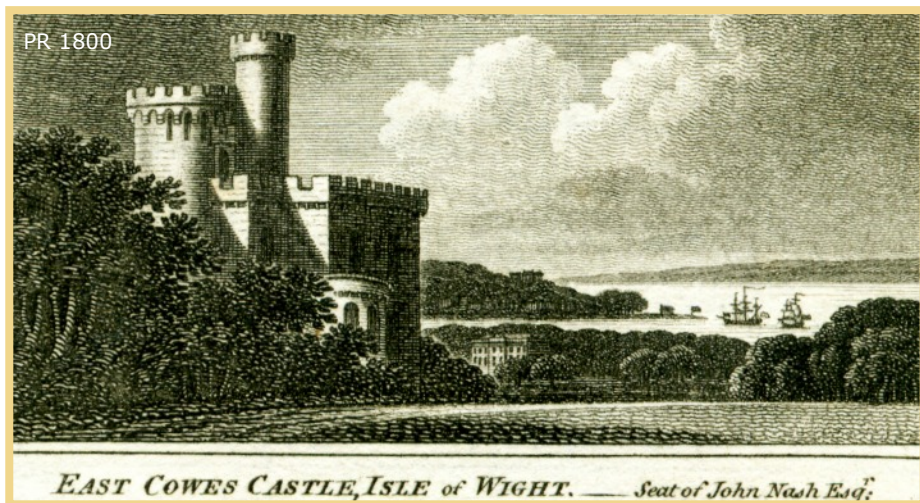


*M<sup>r</sup> SIMEON'S MARINO. — Isle of Wight.*

Other work by Repton at St John's may have included the extension of an existing turnpike road to the Marina on the sea-shore (Carter *et al* 1982, 155) and the removal of hedge boundaries to create a parkland setting (Brownscombe 2012b). Much of the St John's estate was sold off in the 19th century and the Marina seems to have been demolished during this period. Today St John's House and the area of former pleasure grounds around the house is occupied by Oakfield C of E Aided Primary School but little evidence of Repton's design survives other than the boundary to the pleasure grounds.

## East Cowes Castle

Between 1796 and 1802 Humphry Repton was in partnership with the architect John Nash and Repton's two sons John Adey and George Stanley were assistants in the practice. The partnership ended acrimoniously and John Adey joined his father but George remained with Nash to become his chief assistant. During his years with Nash George Repton kept several notebooks. Two of the notebooks include Isle of Wight subjects, throwing light on the local commissions given to John Nash for which George Repton prepared drawings (Temple 1987 and 1988).



In 1798 Nash started to build East Cowes Castle as his Isle of Wight villa residence. Repton's illustration of East Cowes Castle was reproduced in *Peacock's Polite Repository* for November 1800. This engraving and his partnership with Nash suggest that Repton may have advised on the design of the grounds, perhaps on an informal basis as a friend (Phibbs pers comm). Nash only learned the principles of landscape gardening during his partnership with Repton (Batey 1995, 70) even though at a much later date, in 1816, Nash's design for the re-modelling of the Royal Pavilion at Brighton and its grounds was preferred over one prepared by Repton (perhaps on the grounds of cost). Dorothy Stroud (1962) felt that the illustration of East Cowes Castle in *Peacock's Polite Repository* implied that Repton 'devised the plantations of elm and beech, the banks of rhododendrons and azaleas, which fringe the grassy slopes and winding paths of Nash's pleasance'. However, although Repton was good at the design ideas for plantations and shrubberies he was not a horticulturalist and did not specify the actual plants. It is therefore likely that the ornamental shrubberies shown on George Brannon's 1824 engraving of East Cowes Castle are the work of William Townsend Aiton, the royal gardener. Nash worked with Aiton at Brighton Pavilion and Aiton is known to have sent plants from Kew to Nash for his East Cowes Castle garden (Batey 1995, 43, 71).

The large square tower of East Cowes Castle was not yet completed in 1808 when the grounds were described as being 'singularly striking, sloping downwards, possessing a park-like appearance, though on no very large scale, abounding with groups of elegant foliage...the elegant villa of Mr Auldjo terminates the sylvan scene...on either hand...the lofty turrets...command a prospect of unrivalled beauty' (Cooke 1808, 141). Auldjo's villa can be seen set amongst trees in the 1800 *Peacock* engraving.



George Brannon in his 1824 *Vectis Scenery* noted that the grounds 'are happily interspersed with oaks and other flourishing wood' with the foreground to the castle 'enriched by a very beautiful display of flowering shrubs, which, for luxuriance of growth in the open air, is rarely equalled'. J M W Turner stayed at East Cowes Castle in 1827 and made dozens of sketches of the house and grounds. These, together with those of the same period by Thomas Hastings, the Customs Collector at East Cowes, suggest a less formal landscape than Brannon depicts in his published view.



*East Cowes Castle* 1824 by Brannon,  
*In Mr Nash's Grounds* c1826 by Hastings and  
 Turner's *Steps below the Conservatory with the  
 River Medina and Cowes to the North-West* 1827  
 (RO, YC & TL)

East Cowes Castle was demolished in the 1960s – the most serious architectural loss suffered on the Island in the last hundred years (Lloyd & Pevsner 2006, 38). The grounds are now covered by a housing estate; only North Lodge, the ice house and a pillar from the entrance gateway survive.

## Norris Castle, East Cowes



Norris Castle in c1800 by an unknown artist (YC)

The site of Norris Castle lies less than 1 km to the north-east of East Cowes Castle. In 1795 Lord Henry Seymour, a retired politician, purchased what was then the small farm of Norris. Plans for a villa estate at Norris were probably being drawn up the following year when it was noted that 'the grounds rising from East Cowes will shortly be ornamented with the houses of Lord H. Seymour and Captain Thompson' (Tomkins 1796, 106). The architect James Wyatt was appointed to design a castellated model farm, and the main house, Norris Castle, was constructed from c1799 at a cost of £190,000. A landscaped park covering 124 acres with an oval loop of carriage drive was created from former fields and is shown on the 1810 1st edition one-inch Ordnance Survey map. Norris Castle was among the earliest marine villas on the island, taking advantage of a position which offered spectacular views across the Solent and Spithead (Historic England 2016).



In 2016 research into the history of Norris Castle was undertaken by consultants in connection with development proposals. This research informed the revised register entry published by Historic England in 2016 and the upgrading of Norris Castle to Grade I status on the register of historic parks and gardens. The revised register entry concluded that 'the inclusion of a view of Norris by Humphry Repton in the 1805 edition of *Peacock's Polite Repository* suggests his likely involvement in the design'. Humphry Repton's son, George Stanley Repton also made seven drawings of Norris Castle in a sketchbook of c1798-1805 now preserved in the RIBA Library. All of these drawings relate to the castle itself but four also show the landscaped grounds around the house.

In a series of online posts on *The Repton Gazette and Brown Advisor* website, John Phibbs has analysed the landscape of Norris in detail. He considers that the view of Norris Castle appearing in *Peacock's Polite Repository*, although not published until 1805, was actually made by Repton in 1798-99 while he was at East Cowes Castle. The sketch shows one tower of Norris Castle with a conical roof that was never built. Phibbs has concluded that Repton must have seen James Wyatt's original drawings for the castle, and copied the roof detail from these, probably while working with Wyatt on the estate (Phibbs 2017b). It is however also possible that the engraver misinterpreted the sketched conical ironwork detail shown on the tower in other contemporary views.



Norris Castle from the Solent by George Brannon, published in 1844 (IM)

Between Norris Castle and the Solent there was a forest lawn of the kind that Repton described at Luscombe Castle, where he was working with John Nash in 1799. However, the lack of flower borders on the terraces above the sloping forest lawn is surprising and is not consistent with Repton's work of the late 18th century (Phibbs 2017c). In addition, the buildings, aside from the Castle, were all placed on the boundaries of the estate whereas Repton would not have adopted this inflexible approach (Phibbs 2017d). In other posts dealing with Norris Castle on *The Repton Gazette and Brown Advisor* Phibbs puts forward various arguments for and against Repton's involvement but finally concludes that he did work there. 'Besides the illustration in *Peacock's Polite Repository*, so much of what happened at Norris was recommended by Repton at Plas Newydd (1799) and Hooton (1802), where he was working at more or less the same time. It is as if he was trying to see how the same suite of ideas would play out with different buildings in quite different parts of the country' (Phibbs 2017e).

## Osborne, East Cowes

An engraving 'Scene at Osborne' from a sketch by Repton was included in *Peacock's Polite Repository* for May 1809 (Temple 1988a, 172). This shows parkland and woodland on either side of the valley to the north-east of the house with views of the Solent beyond.



Osborne was adjacent to Norris but had a longer-established landscape park created by Robert Pope Blachford, probably in the 1770s (Phibbs *et al* 1983, 8-11; Historic England 2005a). The history of the Blachfords at Osborne has been chronicled by family descendants (Blachford 2014). Robert Pope was born in 1742, married Winifred daughter of Sir Fitz William Barrington of Swainston and replaced the Tudor house at Osborne with a Georgian villa. Husband and wife both died in France 1790 when their eldest son Barrington Pope Blachford was only six years old. Under the patronage of his uncle Sir John Barrington he became the Member of Parliament for Newtown, Isle of Wight in 1807. Known as 'a man of profuse expense' and for his 'gambling and misconduct' Barrington Pope's marriage in 1812 brought him a welcome £16,000 (Thorne 1986). In 1815, as the owner and sailor of the 52 ton cutter 'Sybil' registered at Cowes, he was a founder member of 'The Yacht Club' (which became the Royal Yacht Squadron) but died of consumption in 1816 leaving an impoverished widow and two small children, (*ibid*; Blachford 2014).

Field work and the 1841 tithe map suggest that the park was extended from 1810, including extensive new plantations such as Ladywood, the Clump in Mortuary Field and the belt at the west end of Grieves Field (Phibbs *et al* 1983). Could Barrington Pope Blachford have sought advice from the fashionable Humphry Repton? We shall probably never know unless new evidence turns up and it may well be that Repton simply sketched the landscape at Osborne whilst visiting the Island.

However, one intriguing but ambiguous clue suggests involvement at Osborne by a Repton family member. The clue is provided by a Coalport dish depicting a cottage orné and inscribed on the underside 'Osborn Cottage I of W 1805 ER'. This appears to correspond with drawings by George Repton, son of Humphry, made whilst working in the office of John Nash after his father's partnership with Nash was dissolved (Temple 1988b, 100-101).

Is it possible that architectural work done by George Repton on the Osborne estate led to a landscaping commission for his father thirty-five years before the acquisition of the estate by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert? When the royal couple were making their own improvements to the estate Osborne housed their first Clerk of Works before being demolished in 1856 and replaced by the present Osborne Cottage on York Avenue (ibid).



*Osborne House: distant view of  
the old house from the park*  
1825-1845 by J Tayler

and

*Old Osborne House*  
1833 by H M Sinclair  
(both RCT)

## Swainston, near Calbourne

The house at Swainston was rebuilt in the first half of the 18th century by the Barrington family and was enlarged for them, by then related to the Blachfords at Osborne, in 1798. Their architect was William Porden, a pupil of James Wyatt.

Swainston  
by  
George  
Brannon,  
1834 (IM)



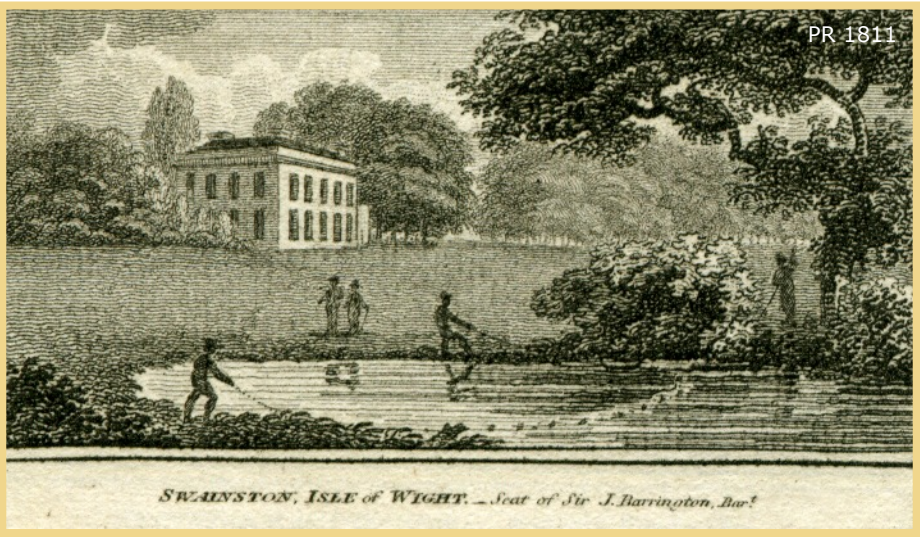
Illustrations of Swainston appear in *Peacock's Polite Repository* for July 1809 and May 1811 (Temple 1988a; 169, 172-3). Although the 1811 illustration is not credited in the publication it has generally been accepted as being taken from a sketch by Repton (Daniels, 1999, 261). It has been suggested by Phibbs (pers comm) that the existence of two sketches of Swainston in different years makes the attribution of advice or work at this site to Repton more robust than in instances where only a single sketch of a property by him is known.



The 1809 illustration shows the classical portico and entrance front to Swainston House with sea-glimpses beyond woodland to the north-west of the house. An ornamental fence to the south-west of the house is also shown on the illustration, suggesting the existence of an enclosed area, and indeed an Ordnance Survey drawing of c.1793-4 shows what appears to be a formal walled courtyard to the west of the house.

Today the gardens surrounding the house are contained within a ha-ha to the north, west, and south and this layout is shown on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey 25 inch map of 1866. The area within the ha-ha appears to be larger than that of the enclosed courtyard shown on the 1793-4 Ordnance Survey drawing. In contrast with the designs of Lancelot (Capability) Brown, whose landscape parks swept right up to the main house, Repton favoured the use of gardens around the house to provide a foreground for the landscape. It is perhaps possible that he may have made suggestions for remodelling the enclosed grounds around the house at Swainston. David Lloyd (in Lloyd & Pevsner 2006, 280-281) has speculated that Repton may have provided advice about the parkland south of the house where irregular clusters and scatters of trees are shown on mid 19th century maps. Historic England (2005b) point out that the present approach to the house over a stone bridge appears to have become the main one in the early 19th century when a small lake was created south of the bridge to match an existing pond to the north of the bridge. Lloyd goes further than Historic England in suggesting that the lake and bridge may have been part of a scheme by Repton. The 1811 illustration in *Peacock's Polite Repository* may show the pond to the north of the bridge.

On the southern edge of the parkland at Swainston stands the Temple (listed grade II), built in the form of a Doric temple. The frontage, which survives intact, has a deep plinth of stone rubble with three steps up and six ashlar Greek Doric columns surmounted by an entablature with pediment and triglyph frieze.



Historic England suggests that the temple building dates from c. 1790, possibly reusing the foundations of an existing estate building in the grounds of Swainston. However, a sketchbook of the locally-born artist John Buckler dated June 1799 includes a drawing entitled 'Temple in the Woods at Swainston' which depicts a gothic building with an ogee arch (British Library Additional Manuscripts 36403)<sup>1</sup>. Is it possible that Repton's landscaping at Swainston included a remodelling of the Temple? The existing structure is very similar, although with more columns, to Doric portico features designed by Repton in 1792 for Stoke Park in Herefordshire and in 1790 to alter the appearance of a cottage in view from the house at Langley Park in Kent (Repton 1803, illustrations following 148 and 162).



The Swainston Temple in 2014  
and Repton's illustration of  
*A Cottage Altered in Langley Park*  
published in 1803

<sup>1</sup>John Buckler's sketchbook also includes a drawing entitled 'The Hermitage in Swainston Woods' depicting three small buildings with hipped roofs and oval arched entrances on each side.

## Mr Mackenzie's Garden, Cowes

An illustration of 'Cowes Harbour from Mr Mackenzie's Garden' appears in *Peacocks Polite Repository* for January 1810. Temple (1988b, 100) suggests that although not attributed the engraving is probably after a sketch by Repton and Daniels with Phibbs (1999, 261) agree with this attribution.



Mr Mackenzie's garden appears to have been at Debourne Lodge, which stood on Cowes Parade (Temple 1987, 98), not to be confused with the small Northwood Park entrance lodge of the same name which survives at 218 Baring Road. The Mackenzie family of East Cowes were merchants specialising in the rice trade with North America (Martin 2004). From the 1760s the business was known as James Mackenzie and Co with James named as the head in 1779 (Brading 1994, 17). He or his son, another James born in 1772, are also associated with the Orchard, one of two 'lately constructed fancy cottages' which Albin (1808) reported as having been built on the road towards St Lawrence. The Mackenzie family and their connections with these Island properties are discussed by Temple (1988b, 85-92). James senior died in late December 1815, aged nearly 80.



*View of West Cowes with the Volunteers on the Parade in 1798*  
by Richard Livesay and detail of Mr Mackenzie's house (BM)



On 8 Jan 1816 the *Hampshire Chronicle* reported Mr Mackenzie's funeral procession to Whippingham Church followed by the family carriage of George Ward. In Dec 1818 Mrs Mackenzie's contents of Debourne Lodge, including 1200 books, were put up for auction. The Lodge was acquired by George Ward of Northwood House (Temple 1987,98) who, as widely reported in the press, sold it to the Prince Regent (from 1820 George IV) in 1819 for 5000 guineas. It is not known whether George IV ever stayed there but the property became known as 'The King's House' even after reverting back to the Wards (*Salisbury & Winchester Journal* 15 April 1843). A house plan survives in the IoW Record Office (1059-1067: 1061). The *Hampshire Advertiser* for 9 Sept 1854 records that 'on Saturday afternoon a fire broke out in the stabling of Mr Davids, Surgeon, situate near the site where the King's House formerly stood, and which was also burnt down some few months back'. The accidental destruction of Debourne Lodge seems to have occurred when Parade Terrace was being built in front of it, allegedly because workmen set fire to the carpenters' shavings (Brading 1994, 62). A view in Brannon's 1856 *Vectis Scenery* shows Parade Terrace completed although the outdated text still mentions 'a delightful villa called Debourne Lodge, embowered in thriving trees and shrubs' immediately next to the large castellated Royal Yacht Squadron Club House, later known as 'The Gloster'. Numbers 1 and 2 Parade Terrace are now occupied by the Royal London Yacht Club but the other four houses in the terrace were demolished in 1935 to make way for Osborne Court (Groves 2004, 18-19).



*West Cowes* published by George Brannon in 1829  
and detail of Mr Mackenzie's house (IM)

Debourne Lodge can be seen in various late 18th and early 19th century engravings including a number by George Brannon. Those dating from 1823 and later all show the house with a gabled elevation and veranda set back from a line of boundary trees set behind a garden wall and facing onto the Parade and harbour. The trees in the foreground of the 1810 illustration for *Peacocks Polite Repository* appear to correspond to those shown in front of Debourne Lodge in early 19th century engravings.



If Repton advised on work at Debourne Lodge his scope for landscaping would have been very limited. The Brannon engravings depict a modest front garden with the house set a little way back behind the trees. At the rear of the property there may have been a larger area of garden extending as far as the back lane now called 'The Grove' but this could not have been much greater than half an acre. Any possible work may have been architectural but the specific reference to 'Mr Mackenzies garden' in the 1810 drawing can only really confirm that Repton visited and admired the view so much that he recorded it in a drawing. On the other hand Repton's own home was a relatively modest cottage at Hare Street in Essex and the grounds, even when the front garden was enlarged by enclosing a piece of grassy land beside the road in 1802, were of fairly limited extent. Nevertheless, Repton found it worthwhile to refashion his property to reflect his status and publicize his profession (Daniels 1999, 59-65). 'Before' and 'after' views of the front garden are included in his *Fragments on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* where he wrote 'that in many cases great effect may be produced by a very contracted quantity of land, and not unfrequently that almost every thing depends on the foreground' with 'a few shrubs or flowers to form a frame to the picture' (Repton 1816, 232).



Before and after views of Repton's Essex garden from *Fragments*, 1816

## Isle of Wight Connections

Humphry Repton seems to have been a regular visitor to the Isle of Wight, perhaps to see his son George who continued working with John Nash after 1802 (Daniels 1999, 93). Whilst on the Island he would have taken full advantage of introductions offered to him by acquaintances in the small society where all people of influence knew and socialised with each other. These introductions would facilitate access for sketching purposes and might lead to the provision of advice, whether paid or unpaid.

Documentary evidence demonstrates the interconnections between local gentry. For instance a list of 'Members of the Club Balls' at Newport, Isle of Wight in 1802 included amongst others Lord Bolton (Governor of the Island), Lord Henry Seymour, Sir William Oglander of Nunwell, George Ward Esq. of Northwood House, James Mackenzie Esq., Edward Simeon Esq., Major Blachford and three members of the Worsley family (Isle of Wight Record Office 1901 OG/CC/2085B). Sir Richard Worsley of Appuldurcombe is not included in the list and it is understood that he spent his later years living in seclusion at his Sea Cottage near St Lawrence. Another example of social interconnection is contained in the 'Records of admission as burgesses' to the rotten borough of Newtown, Isle of Wight in 1805. The four names on the list included Barrington (the family which owned Swainston Manor), Pope Blachford of Osborne and James Mackenzie, the East Cowes merchant who owned Debourne Lodge.

In the 1780s a business connection had existed between James Mackenzie Senior and Thomas Auldjo, another East Cowes merchant. James Mackenzie recommended Thomas Jefferson (American Founding Father and author of the *Declaration of Independence*) to Thomas Auldjo, when the former needed an introduction and a place to stay in East Cowes on his journey through to France in 1786 and again in 1789 (Martin 2004). In c1790 Jefferson wanted to appoint Auldjo as American Consul in East Cowes (to ease dealing with Customs) but the British Government vetoed this idea at the time. By 1795 Thomas Auldjo was occupying a villa called 'The Lodge' (Brading 1990, 52), adjacent to the site where John Nash built East Cowes Castle from 1798.

## End Note

In addition to the illustrations for *Peacock's Polite Repository* we have Repton's written impressions of the Isle of Wight's 'boasted scenery' (Thomas 2017). These occur in his 1813 Red Book for Sherringham Bower in Norfolk, owned by Abbot Upcher, from which extracts were included for a wider audience in his *Fragments on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* published in 1816. Repton regarded the Isle of Wight as a model for Sherringham but one that the Norfolk estate might surpass. Repton comments in the Red Book that in summer on the Isle of Wight 'every Cottage is deck'd with flowers, & every house is marked by that attention to Elegance, Comfort & genteel habitation; in which Sherringham is at present woefully deficient; but which it is the object of these pages to provide'. He attempts to persuade his client that Sherringham might have superior attractions to the Isle of Wight, especially in winter when visitors were gone, noting inside one Island cottage 'Great Coats and Oilskin Umbrellas' that indicated dismal conditions outside the holiday season (Daniels 1999, 93-4).

The Upchers had visited the Isle of Wight in September 1811. At this time Repton was also on holiday there with his architect son John Adey, who was deaf, staying at the New Inn in Ventnor (ibid). Humphry was still convalescing from a serious carriage accident in 1810 but his cheerful and upbeat personality shines through in a long comic poem written to his wife from Ventnor which deals with the temporary deafness he experienced due to the roar of waves on a boat trip. The poem makes a virtue of John Adey's deafness, praising the superior powers of sight

*But when from Steephill's  
height, Ocean appears*

*I gaze in silent Adoration  
- till my ears*

*Are roug'd by stories of French  
Privateers...*

Repton's continuing pride in his work is clear in lines near the end of this poem which quotes from a letter by Abbot Upcher

*Where Nature smiles to see, by  
Repton's aid*

*A sweeter landscape than  
herself had made.*



*The New Inn - the Hillside Hotel at Ventnor  
1790-1810 by John Nixon (CC)*

# Isle of Wight places sketched by Humphry Repton - for business or pleasure or both?



Humphry Repton's business card, designed by Repton and engraved by Thomas Medland

and

a part of William Cooke's 1808 map of the Isle of Wight (IM)



- |                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| <b>1</b> St John's, Ryde           | <b>4</b> Osborne, East Cowes              |
| <b>2</b> East Cowes Castle         | <b>5</b> Swainston, near Calbourne        |
| <b>3</b> Norris Castle, East Cowes | <b>6</b> Mr Mackenzies Garden, West Cowes |

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## About the Authors



**Vicky Basford** grew up in Northamptonshire. She studied history as an undergraduate at Queen Mary College, University of London and archaeology as a postgraduate at Durham University. Vicky came to the Isle of Wight in 1976 on a one year contract to prepare an archaeological survey. This was published as 'The Vectis Report' in 1980 but Vicky has not yet succeeded in leaving the Island. She worked as Sites and Monuments Officer at the IoW Archaeological Centre in the 1980s. Vicky also wrote 'Historic Parks and Gardens of the Isle of Wight' for the IoW County Council in 1989 and in the same year became a founder member of the Isle of Wight Gardens Trust.

Between 2002 and 2006 she prepared a Historic Landscape Character Assessment of the Island for English Heritage and the Isle of Wight Council. Between 2006 and 2008 she was Project Officer for the Isle of Wight Historic Environment Action Plan. More recently Vicky has studied for a doctorate at Bournemouth University and was awarded a PhD in 2013 for her thesis 'The Isle of Wight in the English Landscape'. She is currently a Trustee and Research Officer of the Isle of Wight Gardens Trust and is also a member of the Isle of Wight AONB Steering Committee.



**Helen Thomas** has been visiting family on the Isle of Wight since she was a toddler and made a permanent move to Shanklin in 2010. She has studied at four universities collecting two degrees in architecture, an MA in Architectural Conservation and PG Certificates in Garden History and Archaeology with Heritage Management. As an architect partner in private practice she specialised in the restoration and conversion of a variety of historic buildings ranging from the Pankhurst Centre in Manchester to large Cheshire country houses.

As a consultant she worked for English Heritage in the early 2000s on the 'Register of Historic Parks and Gardens' and for mainland Local Authorities as a Conservation Officer. As a volunteer with the Isle of Wight Gardens Trust she led the 2014 walled kitchen garden project, has acted as a consultant on planning matters, worked in conjunction with the Isle of Wight Council on assessing Local List sites and between 2015 and 2017 produced twice yearly newsletters. She is a retired member of the Institute of Historic Building Conservation, contributing occasional book reviews to its magazine 'Context', and remains a long-time member of the Gardens Trust, formerly the Garden History Society.

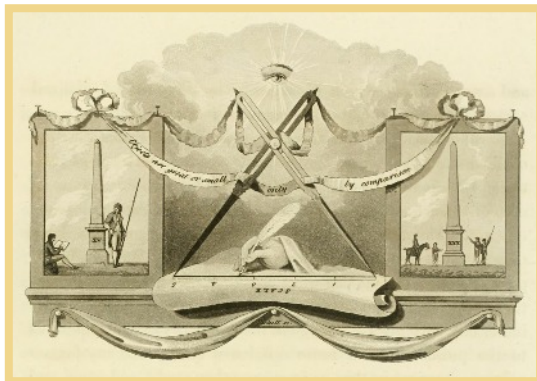


Illustration from Repton's 1803 *Observations on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*  
'Objects are great or small only by comparison'