

LANDSCAPE DESIGNS FOR ‘GENTLEMEN OF WEALTH’: EDWARD KEMP’S PRIVATE COMMISSIONS

Edward Kemp is best known today for his well-documented designs for public parks and cemeteries, located mostly in the north-west of England, yet these commissions formed only a small proportion of his output. It is less easy to build up a picture of his other work which went well beyond the laying out of villa gardens for the wealthy to include an impressive range of assignments. His private clients varied widely in terms of their location and social background and in the range and aim of the landscape designs they commissioned. To trace these commissions presents a challenge. Since Kemp left behind no personal records, researchers are forced to refer to the second (1858) and third (1864) editions of his How to Lay Out a Garden to see a selection of his designs. Some forty odd clients are referred to in the second edition and a further eleven in the third. Work for them varied in scale, from modest designs for a summerhouse to major landscaping projects. His clients, too, were varied. Drawn initially from Lancashire and Cheshire or with family or business connections with Merseyside, they belonged mainly to the professional or merchant classes. As his reputation grew, work came in from a wider range of clients, as far flung as Scotland, Northern Ireland and Devon.

Today Edward Kemp is best remembered for his pioneering role in laying out Birkenhead Park and for his major landscaping contracts to design cemeteries and parks in St Helens, Liverpool, Southport, Chester, Congleton, Crewe and Gateshead. Rather less well known are his commissions to draw up plans (not always executed) for public open spaces in Lancaster (Moor, later Williamson Park), Mold (Bailey Hill) and Edinburgh (Middle Meadow) and for Mersey Park in Birkenhead. In addition to these undertakings are the former country house grounds, initially laid out, in whole or in part, by Kemp, for private clients. These now serve as public parks and include both Victoria Park (Figure 1) and Haresfinch Park in St Helens, Town Park in Runcorn, Castle Park in Frodsham, Bodlondeb Park in Conwy and Pyrigo Park near Romford, London. The aim of this paper is to provide a broad overview of Kemp’s work, looking in particular at his commissions from private clients, at his plans for speculative ventures such as villa estates and at his involvement in the laying out of the grounds of institutions. His municipal undertakings will be covered in other papers.

Identifying Kemp’s private commissions is not easy. In contrast to his public undertakings, where the committee minutes of various improvement commissioners, town councils and local and burial boards are available for study, finding details of his private activities is often a matter of chance. None of his personal papers has survived, nor has any account book or bank ledger. Plans, letters and bills are scattered in various archive collections (Figure 2). He is sometimes referred to in newspaper advertisements and auction particulars for the sale of property, because phrases such as ‘the grounds laid out by Mr. Kemp, of Birkenhead Park’ could add to the attraction of the place being

Email: daveye1@yahoo.co.uk



Figure 1. Victoria Park in St Helens, Lancashire, laid out initially by Edward Kemp as the grounds for Cowley House, designed by Charles Reed (later Verelst). It is now known as the Mansion House. Photo: author, 2008

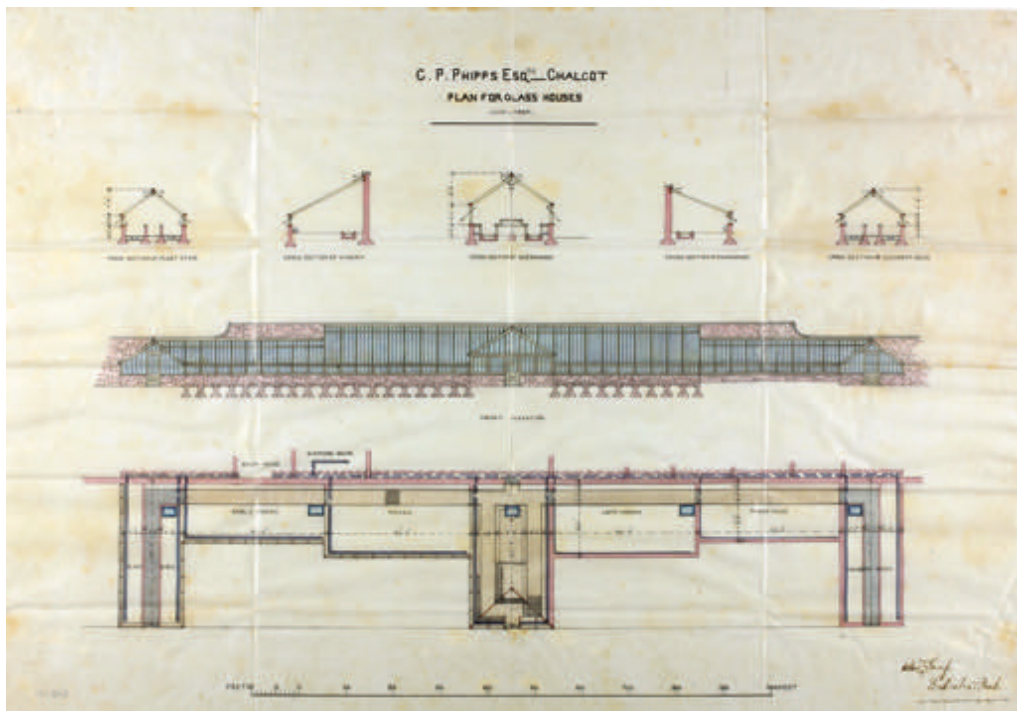


Figure 2. Edward Kemp's coloured, scaled and signed drawings of greenhouses (sections, front elevation and plan, dated June 1874), commissioned by C. P. Phipps, for Chalcot House in Dilton Marsh, Wiltshire. Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, Chippenham, 540/180 1872-1875

sold, but tracking down such commissions is a hit-and-miss affair and inevitably very time consuming.¹

COUNTRY AIRS AND RURAL PLEASURES

The main evidence for Kemp's private commissions comes from the 1858 (second) and 1864 (third) editions of his *How to Lay Out a Garden*.² Though not a comprehensive list, even for the period they cover, these books provide details of his work for some fifty clients, selected to illustrate particular aspects of landscape design. These range from quite minor projects such as a proposal for a rustic fence to 'shut off a cottage garden from a walk through a shrubbery' for the wealthy business man and Liberal Member of Parliament, James Morrison of Basildon Park,³ to more extensive projects such as the laying out of the grounds of Underscar, an estate in the Lake District belonging to the Liverpool general-merchant, William Oxley, whose residential address in 1851 at 86 Rodney Street, one of the most prestigious streets in Liverpool, provides evidence of his business success. In most cases the clients are named and the date is given when the work was carried out. A few, such as the 'Rosary at Dulwich' or the 'Octagonal Flower-garden near Maidenhead', are anonymous and cannot be traced. In contrast, the 'Rectory Garden in Worcestershire' can be identified as the garden of the large rectory at Alvechurch, designed by William Butterfield for the Revd John Sandford. A comparison of Kemp's plan with a large-scale modern map shows them to be one and the same.⁴

Kemp's official entry into private practice came in July 1847, with the agreement, if not the blessing, of the Birkenhead Improvement Commissioners whose minutes record that 'Mr Kemp be permitted to practice his profession in the neighbourhood.'⁵ Shortly afterwards he placed an advertisement in the press, offering his 'Services to Noblemen and Gentlemen in the vicinity of Birkenhead and Liverpool, or in any of the neighbouring districts and counties'.⁶ The services offered included designing, superintending and laying out 'Estates', as well as 'Public or Private Parks and Gardens'. In addition, he indicated that he was prepared to improve or remodel existing properties (Figure 3).

Who were the 'Noblemen and Gentlemen' Kemp hoped to serve? Some were indeed members of the aristocracy or at least the landed gentry. For example, Kemp undertook some work in the 1850s for Sir Robert Tolver Gerrard, Bt, of Garswood Hall near Newton le Willows, Lancashire (the Commander of the Lancashire Hussars), as well as for Orland Bridgeman (1819–98), 3rd Earl of Bradford, on whose behalf he drew up plans for the siting of trees in Weston Park, Shropshire, in 1866 and for the proposed line of a new drive.⁷ The majority of his clients, however, were men who through the law, commerce or manufacturing had accumulated a sufficient fortune to establish a residence for themselves in the countryside. They were mill or mine-owners or styled themselves 'iron merchant', 'textile merchant', 'timber merchant' or just plain 'merchant'. A trawl through contemporary street directories shows them living, before they moved, at prestigious addresses close to the urban centre, a reflection of their personal wealth. This wealth brought them social standing and the opportunity to acquire a country estate. In addition, the spread of the railways and improvements in the roads meant they could, if they wished, continue to commute to their offices with relative speed. As Kemp observed:

Railways [...] with their annual contracts for conveyance, and the rapidity, ease and certainty of transit, are now gradually bringing other parts of the country within the range of selection, and enabling the town merchant or man of business to locate himself from ten to twenty, or even thirty miles from the town and thus get the benefit of country air and rural pleasures.⁸

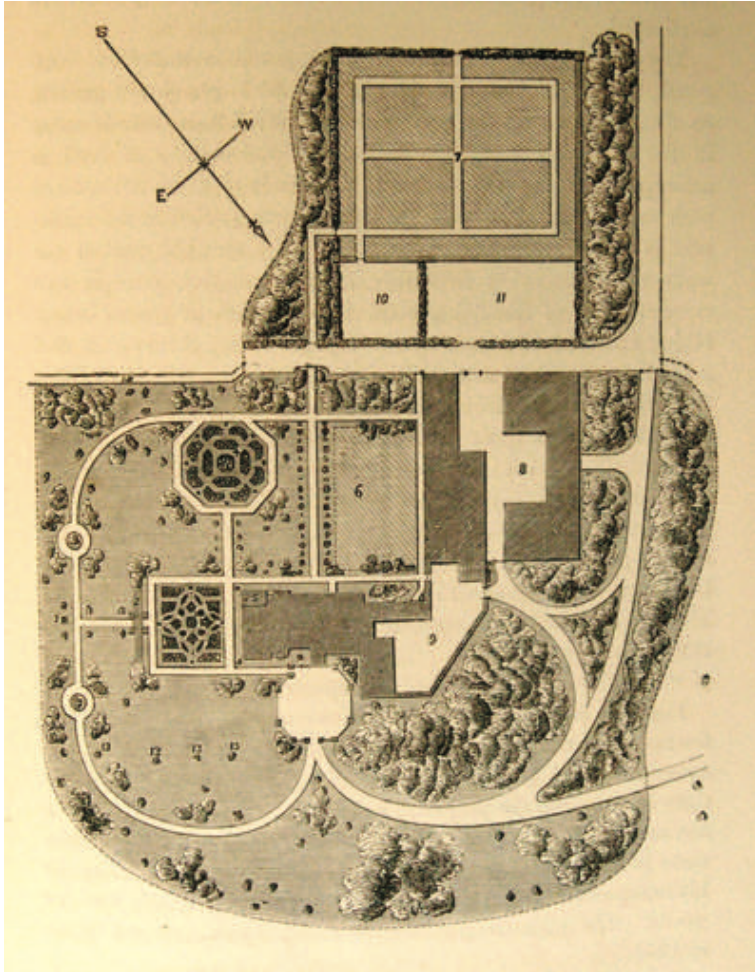


Figure 3. Edward Kemp's plan for Agden Hall, Cheshire, an existing estate remodelled for Sir Thomas Sebastian Bazeley; from Edward Kemp, *How to Lay Out a Garden* (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1858), p. 354

Agricultural land was comparatively cheap so Kemp's clients could afford to purchase or construct for themselves a house and grounds in a rural setting. The houses were often substantial, with a lodge or lodges, a range of offices, stables and outbuildings, a walled kitchen garden, conservatories and greenhouses for the cultivation and display of flowers, and sometimes a home farm. Adjacent to the house and visible from the principal rooms would be a formal garden with terraces and flowerbeds, often decorated with urns and statuary, and beyond that curving walks and plantations and, where space permitted, open parkland (Figure 4).

In some cases, Kemp was only required to create a new feature within an existing garden, as with the circular bowling green he designed for James Ball of Newton by Chester.⁹ Elsewhere he was asked to remodel an established estate such as that of Norley Hall, Cheshire, purchased by the Liverpool wine importer Samuel Woodhouse.¹⁰ In other instances, he was working from scratch on what had previously been open farmland. For example, development land became available in Wirral with the break-up of the Stanley estate. As the *Manchester Times* reported, 'Sir William Stanley has let a large portion of his estate, now occupied by small farmers, to gentlemen who propose to erect

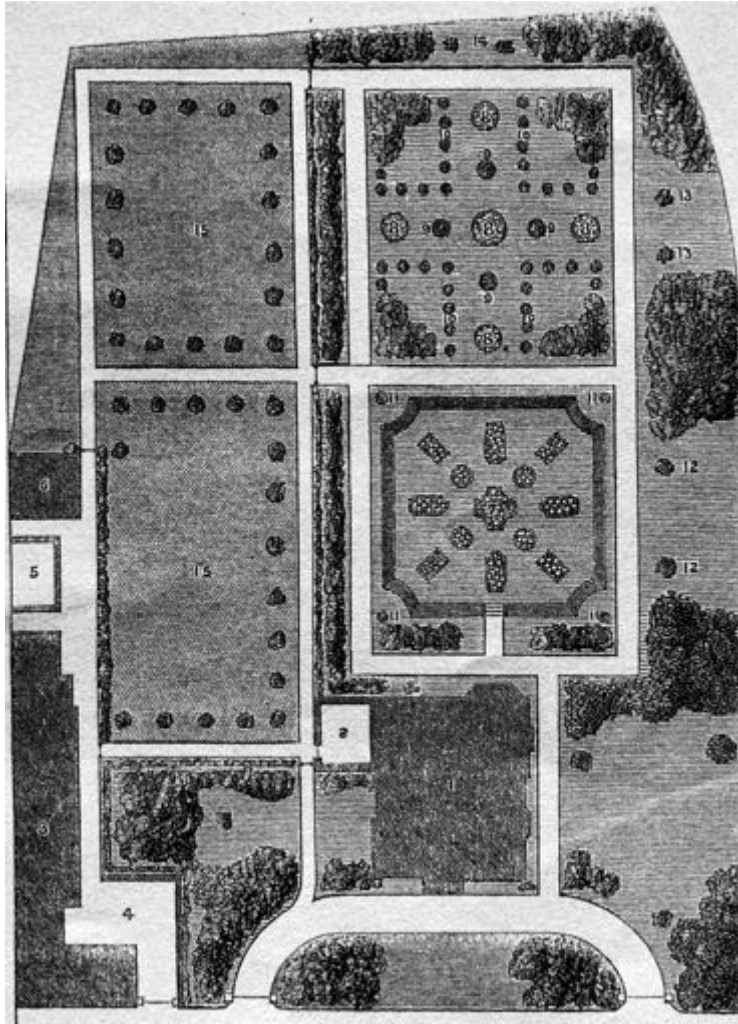


Figure 4. Edward Kemp's plan for the villa garden of Foxdale in Bunbury, Cheshire, a house in a rural setting but within two miles of the Chester to Crewe railway line, laid out for William Boulton Aspinall; from Edward Kemp, *How to Lay Out a Garden* (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1864), p. 352

mansions and villas on it.¹¹ One such mansion was Stanacres, Cheshire, designed by the architect Charles Verelst for the Liverpool timber merchant Owen Jones.¹² Kemp, who several times worked with Verelst, formerly Charles Reed, was commissioned to lay out its grounds.¹³ One obstacle he encountered and would meet with again with other of his Cheshire commissions were flooded marl pits, dug originally to reach the lime-rich subsoil used by farmers as a natural fertilizer (Figure 5):

The property, having no marked character I thought it desirable to fix upon [...] a rather remarkable group of abandoned marl-pits. These pits are exceedingly common in this part of Cheshire, and are always filled with clear water and often with Water Lilies of other pleasing aquatic plants.¹⁴

The marl pits at Stanacres were combined to make a water feature, as they were in the grounds of several other Cheshire properties including Halton Grange and Massey Hall, Thelwall (Figure 7).¹⁵

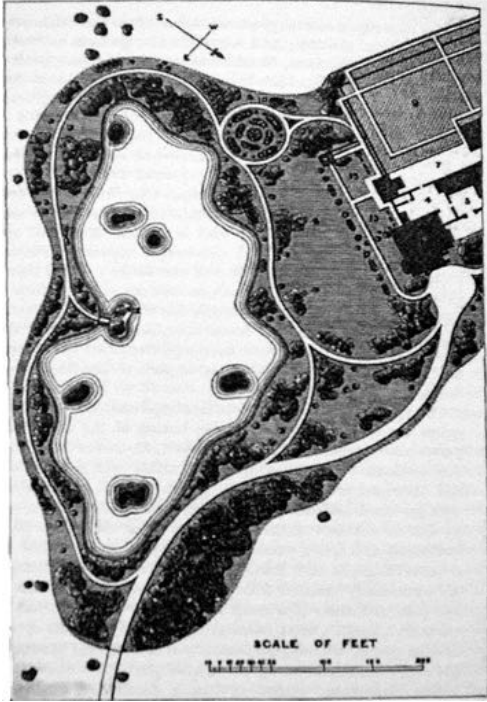


Figure 5. Edward Kemp's scaled plan of the lake at Stanacres, Cheshire; from Edward Kemp, *How to Lay Out a Garden* (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1858), p. 302



Figure 6. Edward Kemp's design for a summerhouse erected for David Bromilow of Haresfinch House at St Helens, Lancashire; from Edward Kemp, *How to Lay Out a Garden* (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1858), p. 311

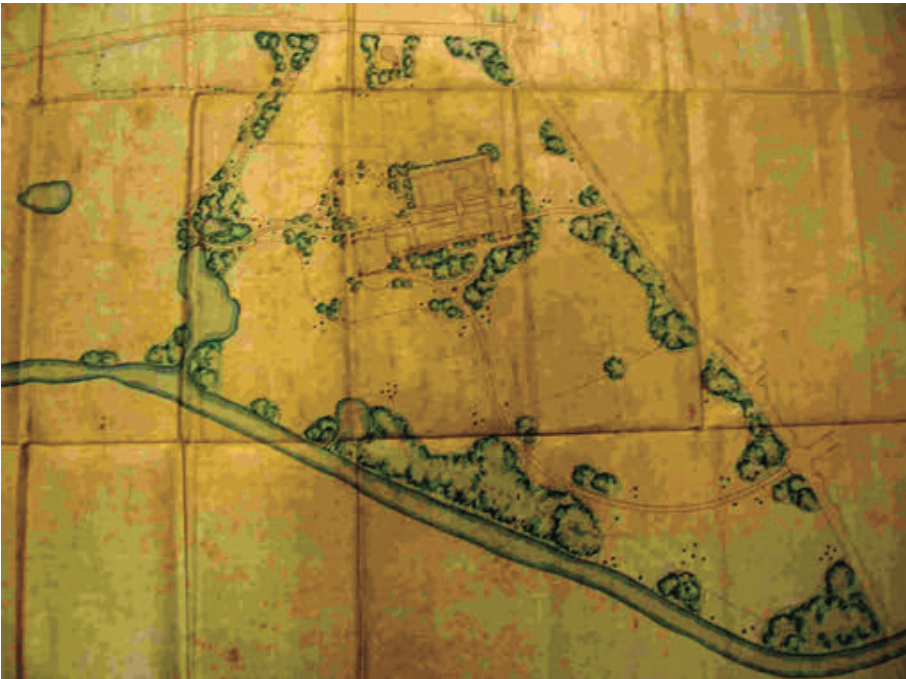


Figure 7. Edward Kemp's plan of Massey Hall in Thelwall, Cheshire, 1874, showing the marl pit. Warrington Borough Council Libraries, Heritage and Learning

In many cases, Kemp, having carefully considered the nature of the site, was free to use his own ideas when producing his plans. This was not always the case: some clients, such as Joseph Stubbs, of Park Place (now Castle Park) in Frodsham, were keen horticulturalists in their own right. Travelling widely in both Europe and North America in connection with his file-making business, Stubbs was described by Kemp as 'enthusiastically attached to his garden' and 'an energetic and successful collector and cultivator of rare plants' who was 'constantly making little changes to accommodate new favourites'.¹⁶ Other clients, too, had their own ideas. Though nominally commissioned by Sir Edward Smythe to carry out work in the grounds of Acton Burnell Hall on the Shropshire–Welsh border, Kemp describes himself as working 'under the direction of Lady Smythe', a woman who clearly knew her own mind and what she wanted in her new 'flower garden belonging to a first class mansion'.¹⁷

One question posed by Kemp's work is how he came to be commissioned by his clients in the first place. The notice he had placed in the press would have advertised his availability for private practice while the growing reputation of Birkenhead Park and his own publications would have drawn attention to his capabilities. Nevertheless, word-of-mouth recommendations must have played an important part in getting him both private and public work. Many of his patrons were MPs and they would have been able to put in a word for him with their parliamentary colleagues. Other clients sat on committees or served on local boards and would have been in a position to recommend Kemp to their fellow members. An example of such networking was in St Helens. That Kemp was chosen to lay out and plant the town's new cemetery may have been at the suggestion of Sir Robert Gerrard from whom the cemetery lands had been purchased in the first place and with whom Kemp had already had contact. Alternatively, his name may have been put forward by David Bromilow of Haresfinch House, St Helens, a wealthy colliery owner and chair of the Burial Board, for whom Kemp had also worked (Figure 6).¹⁸

Where a new property was concerned, the choice of Kemp to lay out the grounds may well have been at the suggestion of the architect. Kemp, himself, in the preface to the second edition of *How to Lay Out a Garden*, comments on the importance of the relationship between architect and landscape gardener: 'It is much to be regretted that architects and landscape-gardeners do not more usually work together [...] from the very commencement of any undertaking in which they are jointly consulted'.¹⁹ As already mentioned, one architect who worked closely with Kemp was Verelst. At Stanacres, Kemp, having suggested that the house overlook a 'home lake', reported that 'the architect, Mr. Verelst, of Liverpool, concurring in this view, the house was placed as shown'.²⁰ Later he would work alongside Verelst on the grounds of other mansions: Cowley House in St Helens, Halton Grange in Runcorn and Underscar Manor in Cumbria. Another architect with whom he also cooperated was Walter Scott. Scott had designed Kemp's own house in Birkenhead and it was he who produced the plans for Ledsham Hall in south Wirral, the grounds of which were laid out by Kemp (Figure 8).²¹

Perhaps the most effective form of networking was familial connection. Kemp undertook work for Charles and William Longman, both members of the Longman publishing family.²² He also worked for several groups of brothers. Among his early clients were Robert and Thomas Gibbon Frost, flour millers of Chester, for whom Kemp produced a single layout for their adjoining gardens overlooking the River Dee. Another pair of brothers who awarded commissions to Kemp were John and Thomas Johnson, chemical and alkali manufacturers of Runcorn. However, the best example of family networking is that of the Fieldens, wealthy Yorkshire cotton spinners. Kemp worked for all three Fielden brothers, at Stansfield Hall for Joshua, at Centre Vale, Todmorden, for Samuel, and at Dobroyd Castle for John, where his involvement in landscaping the



Figure 8. Halton Grange in Runcorn, Cheshire. The grounds were laid out by Edward Kemp; the house was designed by Charles Verelst (formerly Reed). It is now Runcorn Town Hall.

Photo: author, 2008

grounds was heralded in the verse of a celebratory song:

The gardeners too, a sturdy band,
With KEMP'S good taste and CRAIG'S command,
Have made it seem a fairy land,
Around fair Dobroyd castle.²³

Later, when Joshua Fielden entered Parliament and moved south to Nutfield in Surrey, Kemp was again employed on his grounds. The Fieldens were exceptional, but personal or family recommendation of whatever kind seems to have ensured Kemp a continuous stream of clients. For whether, through pressure of work or poor health, he ever had to refuse a commission there is no evidence.

RESIDENTIAL PARKS AND WATERING PLACES

When Joseph Paxton drew up his plans for Prince's Park, Liverpool, he incorporated into his design a surrounding ring of housing, the proceeds of the sale of which was intended to pay for the upkeep of the park. A similar pattern was adopted for Birkenhead Park, so Kemp would have been very familiar with the concept. On a smaller scale but offering more privacy were the residential parks, often gated, which began to appear on both sides of the Mersey and in the growing suburbs of other large towns. Developed by individuals or land companies they were aimed at those who could afford to move from the centre of town to live in more open and leafy surroundings, often with marine views. Their growth was a response to improvements in public transport, steam ferries and roads, together with an expanding network of suburban railways, which offered merchants, bankers and leading professionals the opportunity to reside away from the town centre yet be within easy travel of their place of work.

Carlett Park

One example of a villa estate was Carlett Park. With Birkenhead Park nearing completion, Kemp became involved in an ambitious plan to develop a private residential park a few miles up-river from Birkenhead on the banks of the Mersey, just to the north of Eastham. The land, which was part of the Hooton Hall Estate, belonged to Sir William Thomas Stanley-Massey-Stanley, 10th Bt, who had inherited the property on his father's death in 1841. Stanley was an inveterate spendthrift and was happy to lease an area of farmland abutting the estuary to William Laird, third son and fourth child of the shipbuilder William Laird and brother to John and McGregor.

The scheme was advertised as encompassing '200 acres of land, well wooded [...] laid out to a fixed plan for the erection of double and single villas in convenient sized lots'.²⁴ This land, as the Wirral historian William W. Mortimer records, had been 'taken by Mr William Laird, of Birkenhead, from Sir William Stanley, with the intention of forming a Park'.²⁵ He describes the process: 'Fences have been removed, ditches filled up and the entire laid out under the direction of Mr Kempe [*sic*] landscape gardener, Birkenhead.' Mortimer was optimistic: 'CARLETT PARK – will soon become one of the most favourite places of residence near Liverpool, from which it is only distant about five miles, being within ten minutes' walk from the Railway Station, and less from the Eastham Ferry.' Despite Mortimer's predictions, there was no take up and so some forty lots were put up for auction. The financial crisis of 1847 had struck and there were no buyers for the villa plots, despite the 'salubrity' of their situation. William Laird, who had only leased the land, failed to sell on the underleases and was declared bankrupt in 1849. Sir William Thomas Stanley-Massey-Stanley, who had amassed extensive gambling debts, was unable to meet the demands of his creditors and so the Hooton lands, including the 'beautiful and valuable estate' of Carlett Park, came under the hammer.

The sale particulars of May 1849 (there was a later sale) are of interest as they show how far Kemp had progressed in turning farmland into a park, much as he had done previously in Birkenhead:

The sub-division fences were a short time since taken up, Roads laid out and formed, a neat Lodge erected and Lodge entrances and Gates opened and put up at proper and convenient places, under the direction and superintendence of the celebrated Landscape Gardener John Paxton Esq.²⁶

Even with Paxton's name incorrectly and mistakenly appended to their description, the lots failed to attract any buyers and it was only in November that the Hooton estates, which included Carlett Park, were sold in their entirety to Richard Christopher Naylor, a wealthy Liverpool banker and cotton trader (Figure 9).

Birkdale Park

Kemp's next foray into villa development was somewhat more successful. In 1848, he became involved in a venture linked to the opening of the Liverpool, Crosby and Southport Railway (LC&SR). The line, which received parliamentary assent in 1847, was to pass through the village of Birkdale, just to the south of Southport, greatly improving communication with Liverpool. Eschewing the not uncommon wrangles with railway companies over access to their property, the landowner, Thomas Weld Blundell, sensing the potential the railway offered him for development, gave the LC&SR the land required. Work began in early 1848 and the line opened in July. In September, an item appeared in the local press publicizing Weld's plan for a new residential suburb to be called Birkdale Park.²⁷ In the event this was not to be a gated park, with lodge gates at



Figure 9. Carlett Park, Cheshire. Edward Kemp's landscaping is now incorporated into a golf course. Photo: author, 2008

its entrance, but an elegant seaside town, laid out with substantial villas set in their own spacious grounds. In order to realize his objectives, Weld sought 'the superintendence of eminent surveyors and landscape gardeners'. How Kemp was selected is not recorded, but he went on to produce a plan for the new development, many of whose elements survive in the layout of Birkdale today.²⁸

The key elements of Kemp's design were two curving roads, Westcliffe Road and Lulworth Road, which swept south from the boundary with Southport, meeting Weld Road, the main route from the railway station to the shore, at right angles. The plan shows nearly one hundred villas, occupying individual plots. It includes a square with an ornamental garden, intended as the focus of the park on its seaward side, and elegant terraces running off Weld Road. (The latter never materialized because terraces proved unpopular, as had been the case at Birkenhead Park.) A belt of sand dunes separates Birkdale Park from the shore, so there was no case for providing an esplanade or promenade, as was customary in some seaside towns.

The planting shown on the plan is aspirational. Unlike Carlett Park, the area was not well wooded and it was left to the owners of the new villas to plant out their gardens for themselves. Kemp offered them little comfort in this venture. As he said, when discussing the problems of 'Seaside Gardens':

Certain localities, in the neighbourhood of the sea-coast are so liable to a visitation of violent gales, bringing with them such quantities of saline matter, that scarcely anything in the way of trees and shrubs can be induced to live in them, much less to become ornamental.²⁹

To add to these problems, the land, as he pointed out, 'is composed entirely of sand'. Birkdale was slow to fill up, but, after the debacle of Carlett Park, Kemp must have been moderately pleased with its progress. It brought him welcome publicity and at least one of the new residents, Mr Alan Kaye, the solicitor to Thomas Weld Blundell, would commission him to lay out his own garden.³⁰

Ormeau Park, Belfast

It would be nearly twenty years after his work in Birkdale that Kemp was again commissioned to design a residential park, this time in Northern Ireland on demesne land belonging to the Marquis of Donegal situated alongside the River Lagan. In 1865 he drew up plans to convert one hundred and seventy-five acres of land into forty-two lots for substantial villas and gardens and a single terrace. The scheme was advertised but failed to attract buyers, and, following the passing of the Public Parks (Ireland) Act 1869, the Belfast Corporation acquired part of the holding for a city park.³¹

Rowley Park

A commission for another villa-park came from the Stafford Land Building and Improvement Co. Ltd, established in 1866. The location of this venture was the Rowley Hall Estate on the western outskirts of Stafford. In 1808, Rowley Hall had been bought by a Stafford solicitor, William Keen, who demolished the original hall and built a substantial Regency mansion in its place. The hall and its lands subsequently passed by inheritance to a solicitor in the same firm, Robert Hand. He was unable to sell the hall at a good price, so he sold it, in 1866, to his own enterprise, the Stafford Land Building and Improvement Company with the aim of laying out the park with villas and pleasure grounds. To this end, William Morgan, the company secretary, approached both William Barron and Kemp for designs. Barron, over ten years Kemp's senior, was, by this stage in his career, a well-known nurseryman and landscape gardener, with numerous commissions to his credit, including his work at Elvaston Castle. In his letter to Barron, Morgan suggests that what he was looking for was something 'in the style of a Hastings or Brighton Square, with a croquet ground'. Barron, perhaps unsurprisingly, appears to have made no response, so it was Kemp who was eventually selected.

He paid his first visit to Stafford in the autumn of 1867, sending precise details of the time of his train's arrival – 11.25 a.m. precisely. Following the visit, though after some delays ('I have fallen off a stepladder'), he produced plans and a detailed planting scheme:

Specification of work to be done in draining, laying out and planting a garden on the Rowley Hall Estate, near Stafford, according to plan and sections supplied herewith and prepared by Mr Edward Kemp of Birkenhead Park, Landscape Gardener.³²

The work was broken down into sections:

Draining, Lodges and Cesspools, Grubbing up Trees, Trenching the Ground for Plants and Planting, Digging and Scraping the Ground for Lawn etc, Croquet Grounds, forming bed of walks, Ramping sods for edge of Walks, Material for Walks, Sods and Sodding, Plants and Planting, General Conditions.

The list of plants required was lengthy and might have challenged the resources of even the most enterprising of nurserymen as well as stretching the purse of the developer. A total of 2410 separate specimens of one hundred and nineteen different species were mentioned plus '870 thorn whips' and '870 privet whips for hedging'. Kemp was also specific as to the condition he expected the plants to be in when they eventually arrived.

Perhaps Kemp's plans were too ambitious. Perhaps the park was too far distant from the centre of Stafford. Perhaps the attractions of living in a gated villa estate were dwindling. For whatever reason, the scheme was not successful and the company was wound up in 1871. The plan appears to have never been properly implemented and one wonders if Kemp was ever paid his fee of ten guineas, since he only submitted his account on 5 January 1871. By that time the company was facing financial problems and within a

month was considering voluntary liquidation. Eventually its affairs were wound up and its shareholders appear to have sought an allotment of land by way of compensation. The gateways survive as does some of the original planting, but only a few of the planned villas were ever built. As with Carlett and Ormeau parks, the Rowley Hall venture must have been a disappointment to Kemp.

Seascale

The spread of the railway network, which was encouraging the growth of suburbs round the periphery of towns, also brought cheap and speedy access to parts of the country that had hitherto been less easy to reach. One such area was the Irish Sea coast of Cumberland. Here a line, later extended, had opened between Whitehaven and Ravenglass in 1849. Seascale, with a station on the line, offered open beaches and distant views to the Isle of Man, but it was still only a small farming community until plans to develop it as a seaside resort came in 1879. The Barrow industrialist, Sir James Ramsden, managing director of the Furness Railway Company, then engaged Kemp to produce designs for a 'watering place' to be laid out in an area known as Seascale Banks (Figure 10).

The plan depicts an ambitious layout, which included a large hotel, a promenade and housing in the form of terraces, crescents, and individual detached and semi-detached villas, the latter arranged along a series of sweeping carriageways, very much Kemp's hallmark. Practical as ever, there was also a builder's yard. Of the original scheme, only

SEASCALE ESTATE
A NEW WATERING PLACE,
ON THE
COAST OF CUMBERLAND,
BETWEEN
Barrow-in-Furness † ‡
 † ‡ **and Whitehaven.**
 — † ‡ —

S EASCALE has of late years been much frequented during the summer months, and its natural bathing advantages and beautiful stretch of firm sands at all states of the tide, have been universally admired. It is within view and easy access of the Cumberland mountains, being about seven miles from Wastwater Lake; and delightful drives and walks, with distant views of the Isle of Man, Coast of Scotland, &c., in clear weather, can be obtained.

The estate has been laid out for building, in lots to suit purchasers, and considerable progress has been made in the erection of houses near the station. A thorough system of drainage has been completed; gas has been laid down, and a constant service of water from the gravel and sandstone is supplied to each house. The land is to be sold freehold, and no charge is made for the construction of roads and sewers.

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*Further particulars as to purchase of sites, &c., can be obtained from*

**THE SECRETARY, Furness Railway,  
 BARROW-IN-FURNESS.**

Figure 10. Advertisement for Seascale Banks on the Seascale Estate; from Ward & Lock's *Illustrated Guide to and Popular History of the English Lakes* (London, 1884)



Figure 11. Edward Kemp's scaled plan for the Seascale Estate commissioned by the Furness Railway Company. Brockbank and Helder Collection, Cumbria Archives and Local Studies Centre, Whitehaven, DBH/17/13. Courtesy: by kind permission of Brockbanks Solicitors

the most southerly part was actually built, but Kemp's vision for his seaside resort can still be seen in the curving lines of one of the roads, Sella Bank.<sup>33</sup> What his commission fee was or how long it took him to complete the work has not been established (Figure 11).

#### LANDSCAPES OF HEALTH, WELFARE AND EDUCATION

In the present artificial state of society, with every species of business conducted in an anxious and hurried manner, and so many people devoting themselves to mental or sedentary pursuits, all sorts of out-door exercise and amusement become additionally needful and salutary.<sup>34</sup>

Though the bulk of Kemp's work was for private individuals or municipal authorities, newspapers of the time show that he undertook commissions for other corporate bodies. Among these were organizations linked to the provision of health, welfare and educational facilities. Here those responsible for planning the institutions were increasingly recognizing that the design of the grounds as well as the buildings was important and to achieve this were employing landscape gardeners. Kemp, himself, had noted the value of access to the outdoors in contributing to people's health and well-being.

#### *The Northern Counties Asylum for Idiots and Imbeciles: 'The Royal Albert'*

One institution, where the landscaping of the grounds was taken into account, was what would eventually be known as The Royal Albert Asylum for the Care, Education and Training of Idiots, Imbeciles and Weak-Minded Children and Young Persons of the Northern Counties (Figure 12). The idea for this asylum, plus an initial donation of two thousand pounds came from a Lancaster Quaker and businessman, James Brunton, in 1864. A committee was formed and a fund set up, chaired by a local physician, Dr Edward Dennis de Vitre, with the intention of building an asylum in Lancaster. Some sixty-seven acres of land, a mile to the south of the town, was purchased and, in October



Figure 12. 'The Royal Albert Asylum for Idiots, Lancaster'; from *The Builder*, 26 (27 June 1868), p. 477

1866, the local paper reported that the grounds were to be 'laid out under the supervision of Mr Kemp'.<sup>35</sup> In securing Kemp's services as a landscape gardener, the committee was following an established pattern. The first half of the nineteenth century had seen major changes in the public's attitude towards the mentally ill and those with disabilities, and this was reflected in the design and choice of the setting of asylums. No longer would the emphasis of a building be on containment and restraint but rather on providing patients with a therapeutic environment where they would have the opportunity for work therapy outdoors. When the Lunacy Act 1845 made it a legal requirement for counties to make provision for the county's lunatics, the new asylums, albeit situated behind high walls, were often set in substantial and attractive grounds, with all the trappings of a country estate: 'Extensive areas were provided for therapeutic use by the patients, and also for their recreation and that of the staff. Views beyond the estate were believed to be therapeutic, too, and to lift the spirits.'<sup>36</sup> The Royal Albert Asylum was no exception. The foundation stone of the building, designed by the Lancaster architect E. G. Paley, was laid in 1868 and the first patients admitted to the asylum in December 1870.

#### *The Liverpool Convalescent Institution*

At the same time as he was carrying out work in Lancaster, Kemp was involved with an undertaking somewhat closer to home. The outbreak of the American Civil War in 1861 had seen the ports of the Southern states blockaded and supplies of cotton to Britain interrupted. The resulting 'Cotton Famine' brought the mills of Lancashire to a standstill and caused intense hardship to thousands of millworkers as they were laid off and became unemployed. In response to the great distress that this caused, appeals were made and funds set up to assist them. One of these was the Liverpool Cotton Famine Relief Fund. A substantial sum of money was raised, and when the war ceased and raw materials again reached the mills, a significant balance still remained.

What to do with this surplus posed a problem. With the permission of the Charity Commissioners, it was agreed that the moneys could be spent on another purpose. On 22 May 1868, *The Liverpool Mercury* reported on plans to provide a convalescent hospital, subsequently known as the Liverpool Convalescent Institution, using the residue of the fund, money collected for the 'Gladstone Testimonial' and financial help from the Rathbone family.<sup>37</sup> Kemp was to be commissioned to lay out its grounds of twenty acres. The aim of the establishment, more generally known as the Woolton Convalescent Institution, was to provide a facility 'to restore to perfect health and strength those who



Figure 13. 'Liverpool Convalescent Institution', showing terraces; from *The British Architect* (27 March 1874)

have been prostrated by sickness' and intended 'chiefly for patients who have been treated at the Liverpool Hospitals', although a private wing was also to be provided. Although there was a gradual increase in the number of patients accommodated from five hundred in 1877 to six hundred and eighty-eight in the following year, it was still not running at full capacity.

The site selected was a large estate in Woolton Wood, to the south of Liverpool. Covering some sixty-five acres, it was well wooded and sloped fairly steeply to the south-west. The profusion of trees must have heartened Kemp and he overcame the problem of the slope of nineteen feet by creating three terraces, two linking the central building with the side wings and a lower one to be used as a croquet lawn 'for the use of the inmates'. Indeed, it was reported that the 'inequality of the ground' had been 'ingeniously utilised by Mr. E. Kemp, landscape gardener of Birkenhead', as the terraces provide a 'commanding view of the luxuriant valley' (Figure 13).

The architect was to be Thomas Worthington (1826–1909), who was commissioned to design an elaborate, red brick, 'E'-shaped building in Gothic Revival style. Progress was slow. Though the grounds had been prepared by late 1869, construction work was deferred until February 1870 and the official opening did not take place until 1873. An illustration in *The British Architect* (27 March 1874) shows the completed building and gives some idea of the landscaping work Kemp had undertaken. What he was paid and how he came to be commissioned is not recorded.

### *Birkenhead School*

Shortly after completing his work for the Convalescent Institution, Kemp was commissioned to lay out the grounds of a school close to his home. Most school grounds and playing fields were of necessity functional, although they were sometimes planted with specimen trees around their perimeter. This was the case with Birkenhead School. On 3 November 1871, *The Liverpool Mercury* announced the 'Opening of a new Public School'. The buildings were new, but the school, as an institution, had existed since 1860, when, known as the Birkenhead Proprietary School, it had occupied leased premises, Royden House, in Park Road North, Birkenhead. The house, a large, classically

proportioned stone-faced building, was one of the private dwellings designed as part of Paxton's original scheme, and overlooking the park.

At first pupil numbers were small but by the end of the school's first term they had swelled to thirty and continued to grow. From its inception the school and Kemp had had close links, as the Parks Committee minutes record. In the tradition of the larger public schools, the Birkenhead boys were encouraged to participate in sport:

23 August 1860: Application from the Proprietary School for use of the cricket ground previously used by Rev. W. Wales's school.<sup>38</sup>

27 October 1864: Application from the pupils of the Proprietary School for permission to hold foot races and athletics in the Upper Park in the month of November – permission granted.<sup>39</sup>

These arrangements suited the school in its early days as its gardens, too small for organized sport, abutted directly onto the Lower Park. However, by 1870 the school had eighty-five pupils on roll and larger premises were needed. To this end the school authorities purchased some five acres of land belonging to the Earl of Shrewsbury in the nearby and still partly rural township of Oxtan.

The choice of Kemp to lay out the new school's 'pleasure and playgrounds' was an obvious one. He was already well known to the school authorities and understood what provision needed to be made for the boys. He was also well known to Charles Lucy, the architect originally commissioned to design the school's buildings (he had worked with him and his partner, Charles Littler, on both Anfield and Flaybrick Cemeteries) and with Scott, who took over the role of architect on Lucy's untimely death. The new school building was formally opened on 2 November 1871, with *The Liverpool Mercury* reporting that 'the pleasure and playgrounds are being tastefully laid out by Mr Kemp of Birkenhead Park'. There were further developments when a headmaster's house opened in 1878 and a chapel was added in 1882, but the essential layout of the site remained the same for some years (Figure 14). Though the grounds are now much altered, evidence of Kemp's planting scheme survives in the variety of mature trees that encircle the school today. These still flourish, though the 'playgrounds' have changed. Kemp was working on quite steeply sloping land, with all the problems that that entailed for the provision for organized sport. In 1899, after Kemp's death, the situation was remedied and the grounds levelled to create a better cricket pitch.



Figure 14. Birkenhead School, c.1870; from *Birkenhead School, A Pictorial History, Part 1, 1860–1960* (Birkenhead, 2016), p. 9

## CONCLUSIONS

Commissions such as that for the grounds of Birkenhead School are often overlooked. Taking solely the examples cited in the second and third editions of *How to Lay Out a Garden*, it is tempting to conclude that, with the exception of the municipal authorities for whom Kemp worked, his patrons were all ‘gentlemen of wealth’. This broad overview has attempted to show that this was not always the case, and that though his private clients were very much in the majority, Kemp, ever industrious, was prepared to cast his net widely and undertake the designing and laying out of a great variety of landscapes. Nevertheless, he was primarily employed by private individuals, mainly drawn from the ranks of the newly wealthy, who having bought land in the countryside were prepared to lavish some of their capital on their ‘pleasure grounds’, often on a grand scale. These clients, owing their fortune to trade and commerce, were anxious to assume the trappings of country gentry and they commissioned Kemp to turn their aspirations into reality. Kemp, in his turn, and based in Birkenhead, was ideally located to meet their needs, since the North West had played such a critical role in generating wealth from the Industrial Revolution. For Kemp it was, to some extent, a seller’s market.

Today many of the mansions whose grounds Kemp landscaped have vanished and their sites redeveloped for housing. Sometimes all that is left as evidence of their former glory is some peripheral planting or a lone cedar or monkey puzzle tree. Nevertheless, that so many of the elements of his designs still survive, particularly in the case of his public works, is a tribute to the care and skill he applied to them originally. Always hard working, he was still concerned for his commissions almost until the end of his life. Perhaps significantly his last recorded private engagement was in Surrey, where he was asked to lay out the grounds of the home of Sir Henry Doulton, Woolpits, in Ewhurst, south-east of Dorking. Following Kemp’s death, a note from the Woolpits’ head gardener writing to the *Gardeners’ Chronicle* reported that

Mr Kemp, although he had retired from active work for some few years, undertook, as a mark of regard and friendship, to lay out the estate and plan the gardens at that place. The work was begun in 1884, and he came down to see the progress that had been made in 1887. This was his last visit.<sup>40</sup>

At his funeral in 1891, the mourners were given a memorial card bearing a verse from a poem by the Wigan poet John Critchley Prince (1808–66), presumably selected as eminently suitable for Kemp:

He made the Landscape meet the eye  
With Beauty: and turned the barren wastes  
To noble Parks and Gardens of the Lord.  
Thus Nature’s rugged face  
By art he wreathed with winsome smiles  
That woo’d the children of the City, and the Sons  
Of grimy toil and gave delight to all.

Though many of the ‘Parks and Gardens’ Kemp designed are lost or have suffered unwelcome change, there are still sufficient examples among both his public and private commissions to appreciate the major contribution he made to landscape gardening over some forty years.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With thanks to Barbara Moth, Maria Luszak and members of the Cheshire Gardens Trust, Trevor Preece, Jane Bradney of the Gloucestershire Gardens and Landscape Trust,

Glynis Shaw of the Welsh Historic Gardens Trust, and the staff of numerous record offices and libraries.

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<sup>1</sup> Advertisement for Ledsham Hall, Cheshire, *The Liverpool Mercury* (25 May 1871).

<sup>2</sup> Edward Kemp, *How to Lay Out a Garden: intended as a general guide in choosing, forming, or improving an estate, (from a quarter of an acre to a hundred acres in extent,) with reference to both design and execution*, 2nd edn, greatly enlarged, and illustrated with numerous plans, sections, and sketches of gardens and garden objects (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1858); *idem*, *How to Lay Out a Garden: intended as a general guide in choosing, forming, or improving an estate, (from a quarter of an acre to a hundred acres in extent,) with reference to both design and execution*, 3rd edn, greatly enlarged, and illustrated with numerous plans, sections, and sketches of gardens and garden objects (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1864).

<sup>3</sup> Kemp, *How to Lay Out a Garden*, 2nd edn, p. 161.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192.

<sup>5</sup> Birkenhead Improvement Commissioners, Road & Improvement Committee; Wirral Archives Service (WAS), Birkenhead, B/017/2.

<sup>6</sup> *The Liverpool Mercury* (6 August 1847).

<sup>7</sup> Staffordshire Record Office, Stafford, D1287/8/6 (M/322); *Southport Visiter* (17 June 1858). The 3rd Earl was a courtier and politician who was admitted to the Privy Council in 1852.

<sup>8</sup> Kemp, *How to Lay Out a Garden*, 2nd edn, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Kemp, *How to Lay Out a Garden*, 3rd edn, pp. 286–7.

<sup>10</sup> Kemp, *How to Lay Out a Garden*, 2nd edn, p. 331.

<sup>11</sup> *Manchester Times* (4 October 1845).

<sup>12</sup> As an indication of the wealth of Owen Jones, there were ten people in his household in 1861, five of whom were servants.

<sup>13</sup> In addition to Stanacres, Kemp worked with Charles Verelst (1814–59) on Cowley House, in St Helens, Halton Grange in Runcorn and Underscar in Cumbria. He may also have been involved with some of the smaller properties Verelst designed in Birkenhead.

<sup>14</sup> Kemp, *How to Lay Out a Garden*, 2nd edn, pp. 70, 302.

<sup>15</sup> The grounds of Massey Hall were laid out for Peter Rylands Member of Parliament, Justice of the Peace and owner of the wire drawing works in Warrington. The original plans for the park, now housed in Warrington Library, are signed by Kemp and dated January 1874.

<sup>16</sup> Kemp, *How to Lay Out a Garden*, 2nd edn, p. 351.

<sup>17</sup> This is the only time Kemp records himself as working for a lady gardener.

<sup>18</sup> Kemp designed a rustic summerhouse for Bromilow, described as 'made simply of unbarked Larch, and thatched with heather, the interior seat and lower part being lined with dressed and stained deal'; Kemp, *How to Lay Out a Garden*, 2nd edn, p. 310.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 301.

<sup>21</sup> *The Liverpool Mercury* (25 May 1871).

<sup>22</sup> Charles Longman (1810–73)

commissioned Kemp to lay out the grounds of his newly built house, Shendish, near Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, in 1854–55. William Longman (1813–77) engaged Kemp to provide plans for a flower garden at Chorleywood Place, Hertfordshire, a year or so later, in 1856; Kemp, *How to Lay Out a Garden*, 2nd edn, pp. 241, 269.

<sup>23</sup> *The Builder* (24 July 1869), pp. 582–3.

<sup>24</sup> *The Liverpool Mercury* (17 July 1846).

<sup>25</sup> William Williams Mortimer, *The History of the Hundred of Wirral, with a sketch of the city and county of Chester, compiled from the earliest authentic records* (London: Whittaker & Co., 1847), p. 410.

<sup>26</sup> Stanley Sale Particulars; CALS, D 2903/5. They also show how Paxton was occasionally credited with work that was in fact Kemp's own.

<sup>27</sup> *The Liverpool Mercury* (26 September 1848).

<sup>28</sup> Harry Foster, *New Birkdale: The Growth of a Lancashire Suburb, 1850–1912* (Birkdale: Birkdale & Ainsdale Historic Research Society, 1995).

<sup>29</sup> Kemp, *How to Lay Out a Garden*, 2nd edn, p. 340.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 341.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Scott, *A Breath of Fresh Air, The Story of Belfast's Parks* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 2000), p. 14.

<sup>32</sup> Staffordshire Record Office, D1798/674/46.

<sup>33</sup> Seascale – plan of a new watering place on the coast of Cumberland situated on the Furness Railway, c.1890; The National Archives, Kew, RAIL 1033/159.

<sup>34</sup> Kemp, *How to Lay Out a Garden*, 3rd edn, p. 286.

<sup>35</sup> *The Lancaster Gazette* (13 October 1866).

<sup>36</sup> *Institutional Landscapes: Register of Parks and Gardens Selection Guide* (London: Historic England, 2018), 2.

<sup>37</sup> The Gladstone Testimonial was a fund raised for the erection of a 'Gladstone Hospital'.

<sup>38</sup> WAS, B/017/6, BIC, R&IC 1858–1863.

<sup>39</sup> WAS, B/017/7, BIC, R&IC 1863–1867.

<sup>40</sup> *Gardeners' Chronicle* (14 March 1891), p. 338.