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HUMPHRY REPTON AT WOBURN ABBEY,
BEDFORDSHIRE: BEFORE AND AFTER THE RED BOOK

What accounts for change in fashions? Who lays a foundation for fashion in gardening? So questioned Humphry Repton, formulating landscape-taste theory for publication after having rehearsed answers in his Red Books. The Red Book for Woburn Abbey, submitted to John Russell, 6th Duke of Bedford, in January 1805, is one of the longest and most lavish at ninety indexed pages and with forty-seven drawings, maps and diagrams. It puts forward a theory that Repton elaborated in his Enquiry into the Changes of Taste in Landscape Gardening (1806). Repton later claimed Woburn as his best-realized 'Improvement'. This paper reviews his theory and practice in the duke and duchess's pleasure ground as a before-and-after audit.

IMITATION: A 'LEADER' AND 'FOLLOWERS' AND MULTIPLE 'ENCOUNTERS'

A century before the publication of Thorstein Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), and two centuries before historians took up the idea of investigating theories of 'taste' in 'garden art', Humphry Repton ventured his theory of 'imitation'.¹ The opening of his Red Book for Woburn Abbey (1805) is titled 'Of Fashions in Gardening':

Altho' each individual may have the power of thinking, yet the general mass of mankind act without thought, and like sheep, follow a leader thro' the various paths of life. Without this natural propensity for imitation, every individual would hold a different opinion and the world would be at perpetual warfare; indeed every disagreement, from the enmity of nations, to the petty squabbles of a parish is caused and conducted by some leader whom the multitude follow, imitate, and support. This is the origin of change in customs and fashions of every shape; opinions are established by the leader, and followed by the multitude.²

For too long, Repton argued, the English had imitated 'Italian' and then 'Dutch' gardening fashions, the latter being introduced by 'King William III' and prevailing in England for 'half a century'.³ Lancelot 'Capability' Brown then came along and realized that the 'perfect regularity' of Dutch taste had 'lost its power of pleasing; and that every place was now become nearly alike':

Under his guidance a total change in the fashion of Gardens took place, and as the Dutch style had superseded the Italian, so the English garden became the universal Fashion. Under the great leader Brown we were taught that Nature was to be our only model.

However, Brown's imitators became 'mannerists', and 'the fashion of English Gardening was in danger of becoming more tiresome, insipid, and unnatural than the worst style of Italian or Dutch examples'. Moreover, after Brown's death, 'illiterate' followers crudely imitated the 'great master', producing 'the tedious length of Belts and drives' and 'the

tiresome monotony of shrubberies and pleasure grounds' – hence Richard Payne Knight's 'opprobrious epithets of "bare and bald"'.⁴

Historians have considered Repton's place in history in the light of the Picturesque Controversy, while Stephen Daniels has noted that Repton's collaboration with Henry Holland at Woburn Abbey, Bedfordshire, was a politic matter too:

Holland not only enjoyed royal patronage but was Capability Brown's son-in-law and sometime collaborator. As part of his attempt to redeem Brown's reputation, Repton published in 1803 a list of Brown's architectural works compiled from papers in Holland's possession.⁵

This paper, in considering Repton's relationship with Brown, leaves open the ambitious task of revisiting the Picturesque Controversy in the wake of Brown's work, or of contextualizing 'imitation' in early nineteenth-century aesthetic theory. It is clear, for example, that citing all examples in the Red Books of Repton's use of terms 'imitation' and 'imitative' would allow a historian to tackle Repton's contribution to a complex conceptual question in Western aesthetics. After all, it was an influential essay, 'Imitation in the Fine Arts' (1823), by the French academician A. C. Quatremère de Quincy (1755–1849), that prompted John Claudius Loudon (1783–1843) to develop his gardenesque as a counterpoint to the picturesque.⁶ Hence, Loudon's claim that 'Mr. Repton appears to have obtained a glimpse of the Theory of Imitation, so beautifully developed by Quatremère de Quincy' (i.e., well over five years before its publication) merits further investigation as part of a 'Loudonization of Repton' after the 'Reptonised Brown'.⁷

The distinction between Repton's defining his 'imitation' in the Red Books as 'resemblance' (copying Nature or the processes and effects of Nature, copying an architectural style or ornamentations, copying weathering effects or using pencil to copy atmosphere etc.) versus his other notion of 'imitation' ('following' fashions slavishly, corruptly, capriciously etc.) is equally deserving of attention. It is critical to what follows. In the pleasure ground both kinds of 'imitation' could be at issue, but here the focus on copying a 'leader' and 'taste' or 'fashion' relates to the latter notion more exclusively: like interior décor, or dress, short-lived ornamental plantings in the pleasure ground were especially prone to modish change.

This paper looks at the pleasure ground in the narrow context of the Red Book and without further exploration of Repton's refined theory of 'imitation' in published works (Figure 1).⁸ The Red Book for Woburn Abbey includes sections entitled 'The Pleasure ground' and 'The Garden', both of which expand on Repton's relationship with Brown. The sections that follow – 'The Forcing Garden', 'The Dressed Ground', 'The Dairy', 'The Chinese Garden', 'The Arboretum &c.' and 'The Place of Sports, Botanic-garden, and Orchard' – also allow one to interpret Repton's exquisite before-and-after watercolours in the light of what came after him as well as before him. Was Repton 'followed' even if the Red Book was not followed?

The idea of a 'leader' and 'follower' is complicated by the relationship Repton had at Woburn with his most important patron in the last decade of his career, the 6th Duke of Bedford and his second wife, Georgiana (1781–1853). Repton also worked with the man who controlled the entire Bedford estate, William Adam, the 'auditor'. Meanwhile, Robert Salmon, clerk of works, prepared an implementation plan, and Dowdale, the site foreman, oversaw works. When Repton was designing Aspley Lodge at Woburn Abbey in 1810, George Sinclair already acted as 'botanist gardener', producing his *Hortus Gramineus Woburnensis* in 1816. After Repton's death in 1818, Woburn's new gardener James Forbes would come to oversee matters under the influence of architect Jeffry

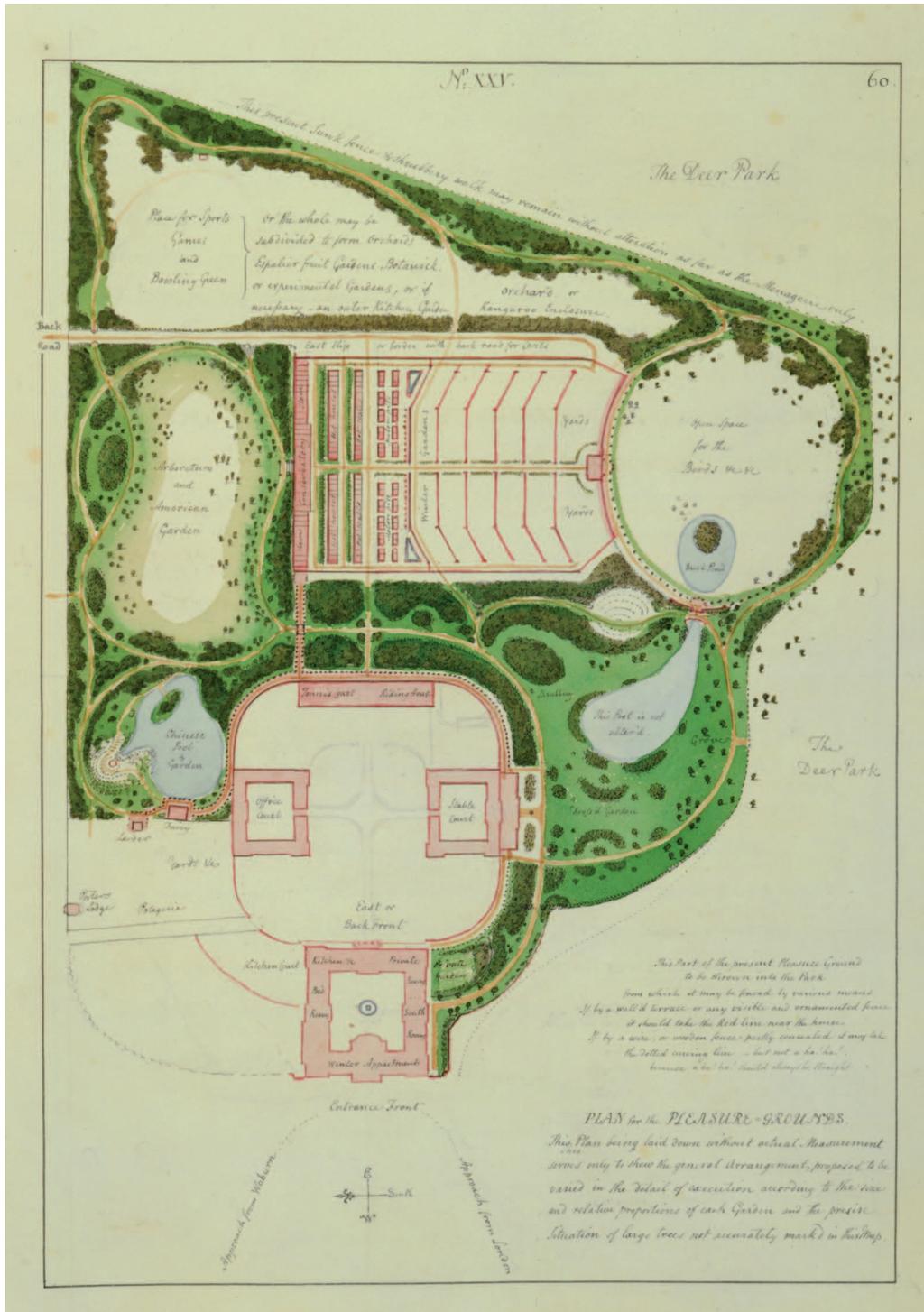


Figure 1. Humphry Repton, 'Plan of Proposals for the Pleasure Grounds'; from Humphry Repton, Red Book for Woburn Abbey (1805), pl. XXV. Unless otherwise stated, images are from the Woburn Abbey Collection. Courtesy: Reproduced by permission of His Grace, The Duke of Bedford and the Trustees of the Bedford Estate

Wyatville, and with the increasing involvement of Georgiana. Fashioning a pleasure ground, unsurprisingly, is not just a plain question of ‘fashion’, and hence this paper studies other ‘encounters’ beyond the dual interactions of ‘leader’ and ‘followers’.

LANCELOT ‘CAPABILITY’ BROWN AND ‘FOLLOWERS’: WOBURN ABBEY
BEFORE REPTON

In the Red Book’s section ‘The Pleasure ground’, Repton provided an historical context: how imitators or ‘followers’ of Brown replaced the notion of the ‘useful’ kitchen garden within the ‘ornamental garden’ with the bland notion ‘Pleasure ground’.⁹ That led to Payne Knight’s condemnation of the ‘dull, vapid, smooth, and tranquil scene’. Repton countered with an architectural vision:

The gardens or pleasure grounds near a House may be considered as so many different apartments belonging to its state, its comfort, and its pleasure. The magnificence of a house depends on the number as well as the size of its rooms, and the similitude between the house and the garden may be justly extended to the mode of decoration. A large lawn like a large room, when unfurnished, displeases more than a small one; if only in part or meanly furnished, we shall soon leave it with disgust, whether it be a room covered with the finest green baize or a lawn kept with the most exquisite verdure, we look for carpets in one and flowers in the other. If in its unfurnished state there chance to be a looking glass without a frame, it can only reflect the bare walls, and thus a pool of water without surrounding objects, reflects only the nakedness of the scene.

This similitude might be extended to all the articles of furniture for use or ornament required in an apartment, comparing them with the seats and buildings and sculpture appropriate to a garden. Thus the pleasure ground at Woburn requires to be enriched and furnished like its Palace where good Taste is every where conspicuous.¹⁰

In his section ‘The Garden’, he states further:

In the middle of the last century, almost every mansion in the kingdom had its gardens surrounded by walls in the front of the house. To improve the landscape from the windows, Brown was obliged to remove these gardens, and not always being able to place them near the house they were sometimes removed to a distance. This inconvenient part of his system has been most implicitly copied by his followers, altho’ I observe that at Croome and some other places, where he found it practicable, he attached the kitchen garden to the offices and stables &c behind the mansion, surrounding the whole with a shrubbery: and indeed such an arrangement is the most natural and commodious.¹¹

With the benefit of recent studies of Brown, scholars can review Repton’s two propositions relative to Repton’s date of birth (1752): ‘similitude’, on the one hand, and ‘garden banishment’, on the other. In *Lancelot Brown and the Capability Men* (2016), David Brown and Tom Williamson point out (with Badminton in mind) how Brown worked in a ‘positively Rococo’ way close to the house.¹² If Thomas Wright’s 1750 proposal for Badminton is considered alongside Brown’s c.1752 alternative, the precedence for Repton’s ‘similitude’ is all the more obvious. Wright created a sequence that went from an evergreen saloon-like space to a ‘Chinees Temple wing’d with umbrellos to shade the Auricula and other curious kinds of flowers’.¹³

In the history of gardening at Woburn Abbey, Keir Davidson has made some ‘educated guesses’ on the location of features in the pleasure grounds that are mentioned in the accounts, 1742–57.¹⁴ Philip Miller, for example, designed a new garden with orangery in 1746. The sequence of privy garden, menagerie, orangery garden, pheasantry and duchess’s garden implies a system of linked garden enclosures, not unlike the ‘apartments’ Repton advocated. The reference to a ‘Chinese Temple for

the Pleasure Grounds' in 1749 coincides with the introduction of Chinese wallpaper to the abbey interior, and many of the same craftsmen working on the abbey interiors were also used to detail features in the grounds.¹⁵ In short, there appears local and specific precedence for what Repton put forward in the Red Book: 'apartments' corresponding as a 'similitude' inside and outside.

The difficulty in further assessing what preceded Repton's proposals is clear from Davidson's comprehensive coverage in *Woburn Abbey: The Park & Gardens* (2016): namely, that maps and views of Woburn Abbey in the second half of the eighteenth century are lacking. Between Thomas Browne's 1738 map and Repton's 'Plan of Proposals' – plate II of the Red Book – there is a dearth of visual evidence. Salmon's surveys of the 'Old Evergreens' (a plantation of 1746, altered by the 5th Duke in the 1790s, then by the 6th duke, 1802–05) are exceptions. The plantation shapes were much as shown on Repton's 'Plan of Proposals' (Figure 2). Repton's Red Book view of these 'Evergreens' above Drakeloe Pond confirms, then, that the plantings were to be kept largely unchanged around the original 1747 Chinese Temple. Evidence of what followed Repton's proposals points to the 6th Duke himself devoting much attention to a renewal of the 'Old Evergreens'. His final publication of 1839 was *Pinetum Woburnense*.¹⁶ In short, Repton's planting proposals were heavily weighted towards the intensive 'apartments' rather than towards extensive pleasure grounds.

Divisions in the 'Plan of Proposals' (fruit garden and arboretum, winter garden, and menagerie) echo the eighteenth-century pleasure ground (Figure 2). In other words, Repton's theoretical stance has to be measured against predecessors' work and especially Brown's work at Croome. Repton was right to point to Croome as a model for inserting a kitchen-cum-productive garden into a pleasure ground. But this occurred elsewhere. John Phibbs has argued that Brown's kitchen gardens, in late work at Berrington, Heveningham, Kimberley and Weston, appear as a great climax to the experience of the pleasure ground, while in the early work at Wotton, the walled garden is next to the house and the pleasure ground winds around the outside.¹⁷ At Longleat, the sequence from pleasure ground to kitchen garden was clearly made part of a visitor circuit.

The 1786 survey of Tottenham Park, Wiltshire, confirms the practice continued to the end of Brown's career; and at Tottenham, Brown's planting style resembled that of Repton.¹⁸ Richard Woods, who was not a 'follower' of Brown so much as a very competent rival, produced layouts in which a productive garden was part of the sequential garden spaces: Goldsborough, Little Linford, Cannon Hall, Wardour Castle, and Audley End, where Woods worked after Brown and before Placido Columbani (Figure 3). Brown proposed a menagerie to complement a flower garden and extensive shrubbery walks in his 1771 plan for the pleasure ground of Lowther Castle. William Chambers's royal gardens of Kew, made for Princess Augusta and later altered by Brown for George III and Queen Charlotte, combined aviary and menagerie in Chinese styles. Indeed, as precedent for Repton's 'Forcing Garden' at Woburn, Kew's 'Physic and Exotic Gardens' are key because they were in essence a botanical nucleus. That a 'Kangaroo Enclosure' is in Repton's proposal for Woburn is key too, for it shows a familiarity with the Kew menagerie. Kangaroos were kept there until 1806, and George Stubbs's *The Kongouro from New Holland* (1772) records these first marsupials soon after arrival at Kew.¹⁹

LUMINARY: HUMPHRY REPTON'S PLANTING VISUALIZATIONS

Much as Repton's planting ideas are derivations, they also show innovation. He was not simply and slavishly imitating Kew. An innovative sensibility is evident by comparing the



Figure 2. Humphry Repton, 'Plan of Proposals'; from Red Book for Woburn Abbey (1805), pl. II

two watercolours of the Chinese Dairy Pond to preceding views in the Chinese manner, for example, the view of William Chambers's octagonal Chinese pavilion in the Kew menagerie pool. Thomas Sandby shows it in 1763 in all its 'neo-classical' elegance. Forty years later, Repton's vision for the Chinese Dairy Garden has assumed a romantic



Figure 3. William Tomkins, Elysian Garden in a *View from the Tea Bridge*, Audley End, Essex, 1788. Courtesy: Archive Service, Historic England

dressing, as if draped with sumptuous fabrics (Figures 4 and 5). The lush surrounding vegetation and the marginal plants with water lilies seem to anticipate the Picturesque of Scotney Castle. Repton wrote explicitly in his section ‘The Dairy’:

There have of late been so many Chinese plants naturalized in England that it would not be difficult to enrich this spot with the productions of that Country only. The Hydrangea, the Acuba, the Chinese roses, and Holly oakes, and many others will bear the open air, and a few of the more tender kinds might be brought out in pots to ornament this gay but novel scene.²⁰

Hydrangea macrophylla ‘Joseph Banks’ was introduced via China in 1789, while *Aucuba japonica* ‘Variegata’ was the form first introduced from Japan in 1783, and the repeat-flowering *Rosa chinensis* was available from the late eighteenth century. The element of fantasy and whimsy in Repton’s vision was grounded, then, in an awareness of changing horticultural ‘fashions’. The pink/blue coloration of the Chinese hydrangea, replacing the white/cream of the North American *Hydrangea arborescens*, the bright red of ‘Slater’s Crimson China’ superseding the pinks of old-fashioned roses, and the yellow-spotted leaves of the *Aucuba*, much stronger than variegated hollies, meant a new gaiety or cheerfulness was possible – what Repton called the ‘riante’ effect in his section ‘The Chinese Garden’.

Removing the 1747 Chinese building from the ‘Drakelow pond’, he argued further in that section of the Red Book, would allow it ‘to be surrounded by the most gaudy flower garden, which reflected in the water would make the View from the Dairy cheerful beyond the pencils power to represent’.²¹ The view ‘Chinese Dairy Pond’ (Figure 4) represents how his pencil power had dressed up the original ‘neo-classical’ Chinese temple. This was a more decorative Chinese-type structure. It also reinforces the idea that Repton was shifting attention from the periphery of the park to the heart of his pleasure ground: the proposed ‘apartments’.

Cheerfulness combined with comfort to create the ‘Winter Garden’, which was the



Figure 4. Humphry Repton, 'Chinese Dairy Pond' (after); from Red Book for Woburn Abbey (1805), pl. XXX



Figure 5. Humphry Repton, 'The Lakeside by the Dairy and the Chinese Garden'; from Red Book for Woburn Abbey (1805), pl. XXIX

'Nucleus' of his design (Figure 6). The new conservatory was linked to architecture via Holland's covered walkway. That walkway allowed the conservatory and hot houses of the forcing garden to be accessible in all seasons. The fact that Repton illustrated this



Figure 6. Humphry Repton, 'The Forcing Garden'; from Red Book for Woburn Abbey (1805), pl. XXVI

garden illuminated on a frosty night, with gardeners working and family and guests promenading, is an audacious vision for one outdoor 'apartment':

though it is difficult to ornament the mean slanting roof of a hot-house, yet when all other vegetation is destroyed by cold, we may occasionally enjoy the sight of plants protected by Art, without disgust at the means by which they are protected.²²

It is an illuminating instance of the art of visualization. It marks out Repton as luminary.

Next to the 'Nucleus', the 'Dressed Ground' was referred to as a 'rosary or flower garden'. The planting might seem derivative, with 'shrubbery' and 'grove' thrown in as fashionable accessories (Figure 7). However, it would be wrong to confuse derivation or imitation with plagiarism, since Repton, like any great artist, modified and then borrowed from his own motifs. Repton returned to a style he had used successfully *c.*1799, when he worked at Oakley House, possibly for the future 6th Duke of Bedford. Attached to a rudimentary sketch were instructions:

The flower patches to be dug up – and the earth not taken away – but mixed with more garden mold – so as to raise the beds round in the middle about a foot above the level of the ground for the present year – the beds may be filled with annuals herbaceous plants & such roses or other shrubs in pots as will bear removing – also some pots of Geraniums may be plunged in to make a gay shew this Year –

Next Autumn – plant as follows – in the beds AA – put a hedge of dwarf roses either with or without basketwork – – & fill in with low plants, chiefly flowers & Roses – but all the other beds may have the middle fill'd with taller shrubs – such as honeysuckles Lilacs – Liburnums – Portugal Laurels – – & surround them with dwarf plants Roses etc. – – & leave room for flowers near the margin.²³

When compared with William Tomkins's view of the Elysian Garden at Audley End (Figure 3), Repton's view shows him radically shifting 'fashion' over fifteen years: first, 'theatrical' planting had given way to 'dwarf roses' and other 'low plants'; second,



Figure 7. Humphry Repton, 'The Dressed Garden'; from Red Book for Woburn Abbey (1805), pl. XXVII

basketwork edgings had replaced edging annuals; and third, the water's edge was no longer bare, being dressed instead with marginal plants.

FROM THE NUCLEUS TO THE PERIPHERY OF THE PLEASURE GROUND

The extension of the covered passage, which Repton details in his written account of the 'Dressed Ground', makes it clear that the flower garden was a matter of convenience and comfort as much as the brilliancy of his innovative Art:

The above design is proposed as the boundary between the Rosary and the Arboretum or American garden; it forms the covered passage which connects the Mansion with the Riding house, the Orangerie, the Tennis court, the Chinese dairy, and the Larder, and which is doubtless one of the most pleasing novelties of Woburn.²⁴

Only when passing through this proposed boundary would Nature be revealed, as Repton detailed in his section 'The Arboretum, &c.':

The valley which extends to the East from the Chinese garden is beautiful in itself, but too large for the character of a Flower garden. There are already many trees not natives of England, and as this place is perfectly sheltered perhaps it could not be better occupied than as an Arboretum planting one side with such exotic trees from Southern countries as will bear our climate, and the other with those from America: but leaving the middle of the valley open as an irregular glade. A walk may pass along the high ground on each side the valley; that on the North side may be accompanied by shrubs and beds of flowers; and that on the South side with borders of American shrubs, which would be shaded by the skreen of evergreens at the back of the forcing or Winter garden.²⁵

It is perhaps significant that Repton provided no view of the arboretum and American garden. His art of visualization appears to have faltered within the north-eastern and eastern 'apartments' of the pleasure ground – an inventiveness he only regained in visualizing the

menagerie area on the circuit back to the ‘Dressed Garden’. A large area encompassed by a shrubbery walk along the sunk fence of the eastern boundary was left open with the indeterminate text: ‘Place for Sports Games and Bowling Green } or the whole may be subdivided to form Orchards[,] Espalier fruit Gardens, Botanic, or experimental Gardens, or if necessary – an outer Kitchen Garden orchard or Kangaroo Enclosure’ (Figure 1).²⁶

Kew and kangaroos were on his mind, quite clearly, as he angled for a royal commission in Brighton. He would work on the Red Book for the Royal Pavilion during most of January 1806. Woburn’s small Hindu dome – topping Repton’s proposed boundary between the rosary and arboretum – would find full expression in his ‘General View from the Royal Pavilion’ at Brighton.²⁷ However, on delivering the Red Book for Woburn in January 1805, Repton had left ‘The Place of Sports, Botanic Garden and Orchard’ entirely to his client’s inclinations: either to go towards amplifying the physical pleasures of the palace of Woburn; or to turn to the intellectual and scientific pursuits of botany and husbandry. The latter would win out as the duke collected grasses, heathers and willows.

On plates XXXI and XXXII of the Red Book for Woburn Abbey, Repton made a point of contrasting the neo-classicism of the ‘Dressed Ground’ with the ‘fanciful’ rusticity of the menagerie:

The door in the above design for the termination of the dressed ground may open into a covered seat of a very different Character represented below: This being formed of fir trees and cones of various kinds will make an unexpected contrast between the chaste style of Athenian Doric and the fanciful decorations of the menagerie: and being placed at the back of each other they can never be seen together.²⁸

What was known as the ‘Pine Cone Pavilion’ (after the implementation of 1808–10, when the ‘nets’ for the enclosure were completed) can be seen on the left of Repton’s watercolour (plate XXXIII) (Figure 8). The idea of a covered passageway was sustained



Figure 8. Humphry Repton, ‘The Menagerie’; from Red Book for Woburn Abbey (1805), pl. XXXIII

from this pavilion to the central aviary, and the latter backed on to the winter garden. This interconnectedness supported Repton's idea of a 'Nucleus', around which paths formed various circuits, including the netted path:

Having described on the map the outline of the proposed pleasure ground, the fence may be brought so near the area intended for the Menagerie that a walk richly accompanied with shrubs should pass round it. This walk, in the course of which are some very large Oaks, should sometimes be open to the park and sometimes have a View into the Menagerie. There would also be another walk close to the pens and both would unite near the upper end of the pool from whence it would return thro' the grove.²⁹

THE RED BOOK AND BOOKS OF THE DUKE'S BOTANICAL COLLECTIONS

Davidson and Daniels have both described the hesitant way in which Repton's Red Book proposals headed towards implementation before being largely discarded. Over the months of 1805, Repton failed to keep appointments as Salmon struggled to make things work in the duke's absence in Ireland, and with Adam auditing those struggles. After the Duke of Bedford's return in 1806, Repton resumed regular visits every spring. These led to his work on the thornery with its *cottage orné*; to his presenting a paper on ivy at Woburn in April 1810; to his gratification in having the menagerie completed; and, finally, to his celebrated proposal of 1810 for the 'Cottage at Aspley Wood'. Davidson summarizes: 'In the event, other than the Menagerie, only the basic framework of Repton's proposals for the pleasure grounds was adopted at this time: leveling the central terrace, laying the network of gravel pathways, and erecting the iron perimeter fence.'³⁰

Repton might claim, as he turned the Woburn Red Book into theory and practice in his *Enquiry* of 1806 and his *Fragments* of 1816, that his plans at Woburn 'have no where been so fully realized'. Yet the duke told his son: 'It was I, who carried the approach from the London entrance to the west front assisted by Repton [...] Repton was a coxcomb, but he had infinitely more genius than one half of his critics and detractors.'³¹ What he meant by 'coxcomb' has been fully covered by Daniels in an essay in *Bourgeois and Aristocratic Cultural Encounters in Garden Art* (2002).³² One aspect of Repton's work as a 'Man of Fashion' was cultivating the confidence of aristocratic women, doubtless including Georgiana. The Duchess of Bedford exercised a strong influence on the grounds, and it is she who appears fashionably dressed on the balustrade overlooking one of Repton's improved scenes. However, Repton's direct dealings with the duke and his senior staff, Salmon and Adam, meant the 'coxcomb way' with the duchess was kept to one side. Georgiana began to express her own preferences with flowers in the 1820s. It could be said that Repton's ideas lived on through her well after he had departed the scene.

In *Fragments*, Repton argued that the 'disposition' of the gardens had been largely completed. Yet, by 1816, most of his gardens, including the Nucleus itself and the arboretum and American garden, were still to be completed. Significantly, a new one had been established instead: a botanic garden for grasses (Figure 9, no. 24) under the care of Sinclair, appointed 'botanist gardener'.³³ It is clear that the duke had his own ideas of what kinds of botanical and experimental gardens should be laid out, and of how to build hot house collections as well as genera collections of trees. The fact that the Scottish gardener Sinclair (1786–1834) was already employed by the duke in 1807 points to a speedy engagement in scientific and botanical horticulture only two years after the delivery of Repton's Red Book.

Sinclair's *Hortus Gramineus Woburnensis* was published in 1816 as an expensive folio volume containing dried grasses.³⁴ The second edition of 1825 contained plates. Sinclair's was not the first attempt to catalogue grasses, but it became the most celebrated. William Curtis had published his *Practical Observations on British Grasses*

as early as 1790; and his *Hortus Siccus Gramineus* came out posthumously in 1802. Sinclair dedicated his *Hortus Gramineus* to Thomas William Coke on the basis of prior ‘experiments’ with grasses in agriculture. The preface takes the reader back to the work of John Worlidge (1681), and Sinclair praises the productive works of ‘Linnaeus, Smith, Stillingfleet, Hudson, Curtis, Martyn, and many others’.³⁵ The contents page points to a new scientific knowledge of soils and pastures, for example: ‘Of the grasses, and other plants, which are natural to dry, sandy, and elevated soils.’ Seeds of meadow fescue-grass, *Festuca pratensis*, and soft brome-grass, *Bromus mollis*, are as refined as a full portraiture of sheep’s fescue, *Festuca ovina*, this latter recalling plates in Curtis’s *Flora Londinensis*.³⁶

By 1825, Sinclair had moved on, going into partnership as seedsman with Cormack & Son in London. Thus, it was the 6th Duke of Bedford who wrote an introduction to *Hortus Ericæus Woburnensis* (1825) after recovery from illness in 1822:

Under the superintendence of my late Gardener, Mr. SINCLAIR, F.L.S., F.H.S., the accuracy of whose researches in Botany, and Vegetable Physiology, is too well known to need any encomium from me, I have been enabled to complete a Catalogue of such plants as I have hitherto collected.³⁷

The heath-house plan came from his architect, Jeffry Wyatt (after 1824, Sir Jeffry Wyatville, 1766–1840), while the two views of the heathery were by an Italian artist, a Mr Aglio. The artist George Hayter (1792–1871) provided an appendix on colour in plants. One striking aspect was that the collection of hardy and indigenous heaths went into a ‘Parterre’, as shown in a view and plan of the heathery.

As with grasses, so with heaths, there were prior publications. In 1790, Francis Bauer set up house at Kew, and, until his death in 1840, he produced some of the finest works of botanical art, starting with heaths and concluding with orchids. *His Delineations of Exotick Plants cultivated in the Royal Gardens at Kew* first appeared in 1796 and depicted ten of Francis Masson’s Cape heaths – the group that the duke alluded to in his introduction.³⁸ Ten further illustrations followed in 1797, and ten more in 1803, so the duke would have been aware of these.³⁹ However, they are omitted, and, instead, the work of botanists Carl Thunberg (1743–1828) and Karl Willdenow (1765–1812) are cited, along with volumes available in H. C. Andrews’s *Coloured Engravings of Heaths* (1794–1830) and Sir James Edward Smith’s two volumes of *English Flora* (1824).⁴⁰

In the duke’s publication, George Hayter’s ‘Appendix’ on colour in flowers, which was prompted by Sinclair’s lament at the lack of a work to define the colour of ‘any new or rare blossom’, merits discussion because of Repton’s use of the positive term ‘gaudy’. Advances in colour theory would become central to the ‘artifice’ of planting, notably in ‘bedding-out’, but Hayter was not advancing theory so much as providing a colour chart. By contrast, Erasmus Darwin’s new application of complementary colours in gardening was later interpreted through J. W. Goethe’s *Farbenlehre* of 1810 and Michel-Eugène Chevreul’s influential work of the 1830s.⁴¹ This helped promote the cause of bold contrasts in the mode of ‘bedding-out’ over the easy gradations of the picturesque. Judged by his watercolours, Repton was creating gaudy intermixtures of roses and geraniums rather than the massed blocks of contrasting colours that came with subtropical annuals and the theory of complementary colours.

A catalogue of willows, indigenous and foreign, *Salictum Woburnense* of 1829, followed the model of documenting the native and exotic heaths in the duke’s collection. James Forbes (1773–1861), the 6th Duke of Bedford’s gardener, contributed to the work. However, the impulse had come from Sinclair before his departure. The duke then consulted his friend, Sir James Edward Smith (1759–1828), whose fourth volume of *English Flora* covered British willows. The duke gave special attention in his introduction

to 'Johnson's Willow' (now known as the Bedford willow, *Salix* × *fragilis* var. *russelliana*): first, by explaining that Dr Johnson visited it every time he was in Lichfield, reclining 'under its shade'; and second, by noting that, although it had been 'destroyed by a violent hurricane', the book's frontispiece recorded it just before its demise. Among those flowering in the willow garden, the silky-leaf osier (a cross between *S. cinerea* and *S. viminalis* = *S. × smithiana* Willd.) commemorated Sir James Edward Smith and his work.

THE RED BOOK IN RELATIONSHIP TO *HORTUS WORBURNENSIS*

The visual description of the grounds of Woburn Abbey in James Forbes's *Hortus Woburnensis* (1833) (plate III) (Figure 9, no. 18) shows the duke's willow garden. It was geometric, planted in concentric circles and lying at the heart of what Repton had envisaged as the irregular arboretum and American garden. By this one feature, it is easy to gauge just how far the duke's vision of his pleasure ground had deviated from Repton's original concept. To grasp the full extent of that deviation, it is worth following Forbes's verbal account of plate III. For a visitor arriving in 1833, the circuit would have begun, according to him, by the 'Parterres in front of the Sculpture Gallery' (no. 6), passing the Greenhouse (no. 7) and Camellia House (no. 8):

The main walk, which sweeps round the greater part of the Pleasure Ground, is nearly two miles in length; [...] At the east end of the Greenhouse we ascend by a flight of steps that is necessary for the connection of the walk, and which continues by the Heathery

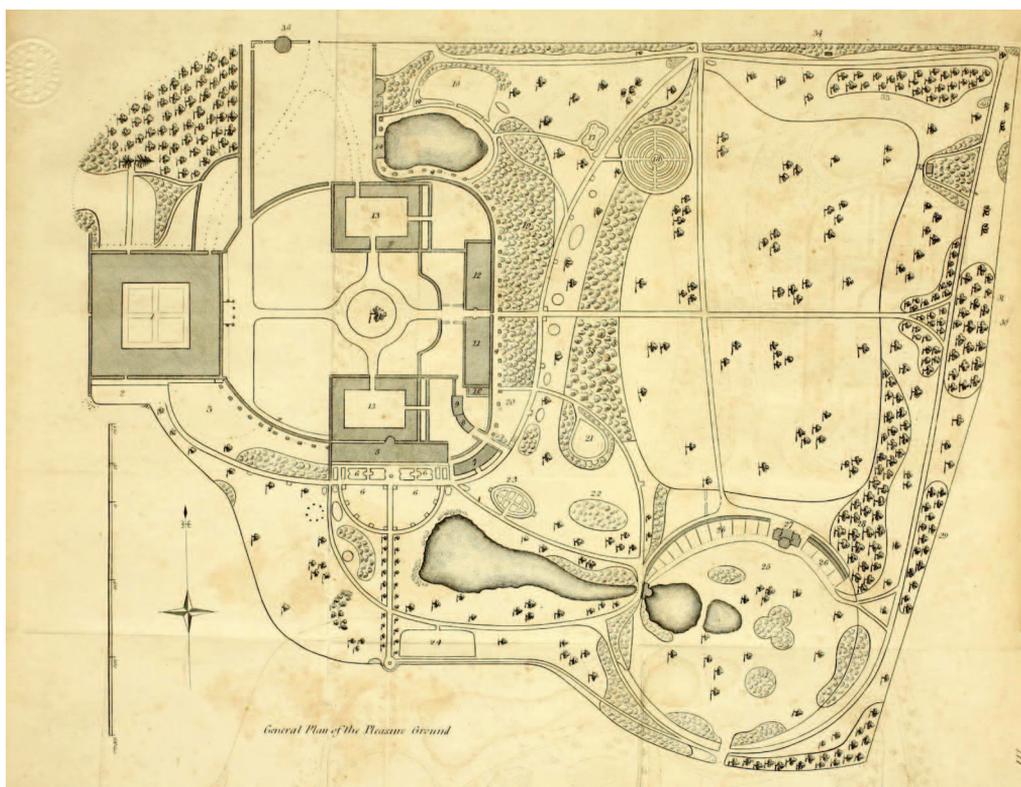


Figure 9. James Forbes, 'General Plan of the Pleasure Grounds'; from *Hortus woburnensis; a descriptive catalogue of upwards of six thousand ornamental plants cultivated at Woburn Abbey* ... (London: J. Ridgway, 1833), pl. III. Biodiversity Heritage Library, item <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/121021>

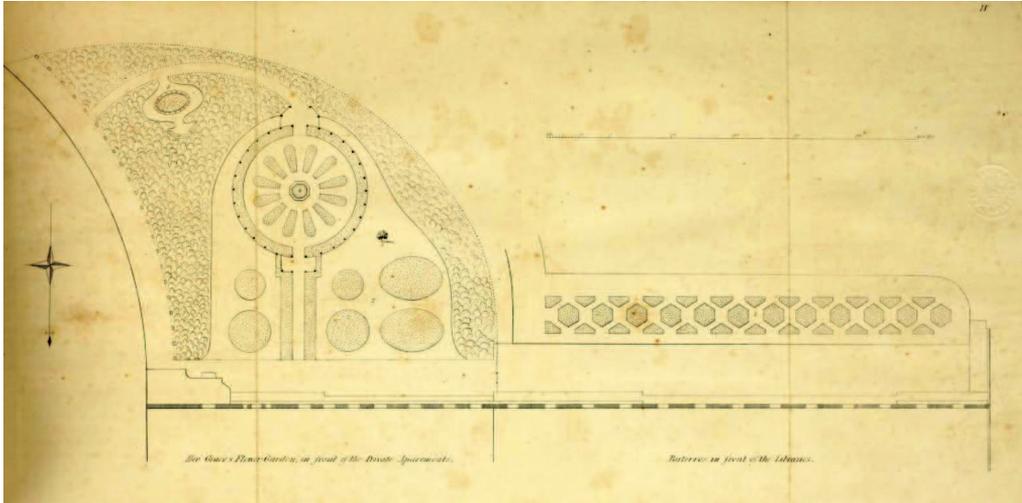


Figure 10. James Forbes, ‘Her Grace’s Flower Garden in front of the Private Apartments’ & ‘Parterres in front of the Libraries’ from *Hortus woburnensis; a descriptive catalogue of upwards of six thousand ornamental plants cultivated at Woburn Abbey ...* (London: J. Ridgway, 1833), pl. IV. Biodiversity Heritage Library, item <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/121021>

and Hardy-heath Garden [no. 20], and from thence sweeps along by the American Bank [no. 19], Willow Garden [no. 18], and Rock-work [no. 17], towards the top of the Pleasure Ground.⁴²

From what had been the southern half of Repton’s proposal, the basic shape of the Dressed Ground’s water and its connection to the duck pond of the menagerie via the Doric door and Pine Cone Pavilion was still discernible. Yet, only a simple orthogonal path network survived from what had been the Nucleus. As a whole, only a bare framework was recognizable, and fragmentation dominated over coherence. Although a formal parterre garden asserted a strong axial layout in place of Repton’s ‘Dressed Ground’, odd elements were juxtaposed to either side of that axis. Indeed, the delightful unity of Repton’s scheme – flower garden, shrubbery and grove – had given way to collections, spatially disconnected even if sensibly located for horticultural and botanical purposes: the ‘Grass Garden’ at no. 24, the elliptical ‘Rosarium Britannicum’ at no. 23 and a ‘Collection of Hollies’ in an ellipse at no. 22.

The duke was clearly looking for an organized display of his collections beyond Repton’s aesthetic, and it was surely left to Wyatville to interpret Repton’s Red Book ideas in ways that partly ‘realized’ the original architectural vision. The duchess was perhaps more in tune with Repton’s ‘dressed’ style: his bold basket-edged beds and water’s-edge plantings. In *Hortus Woburnensis*, Forbes described plate IV in detail (Figure 10), corresponding to nos 2 and 3 on his ‘General Plan’ (Figure 9).⁴³ The hexagon beds were graced with iron basketwork, echoing Repton’s basketry, though the patterns were novel. The circular and elliptical beds were planted up with ‘Geraniums, grouped together’ – a move towards massing and a step further than Repton’s intermixed sensibility. Above all, and importantly, the rosarium was akin to what Repton proposed at Ashridge – that circular model for rosaries that inspired others over centuries. Forbes’s plate V, ‘Parterres in front of the Sculpture Gallery’, represented a design after ‘drawings of Her Grace, the Duchess of Bedford’, c.1829–30.⁴⁴ This revival of French-style parterre appears to have followed on from Loudon’s publishing William Baillie’s flower garden at Dropmore in 1828 and other illustrations in *Gardener’s Magazine*.⁴⁵ Repton did indeed inch towards

the revival of French-style parterres in his 1814 Red Book for Beaudesert, Staffordshire. Yet, Tudor-revival gardening around Aspley Lodge set the tone at Woburn in 1810, recalling family origins at Berwick Manor in the Bride Valley, West Dorset, the birthplace of John Russell, 1st Earl of Bedford (c.1485–1555).

REALIZATION OF THE RED BOOK: A WORLDWIDE FOLLOWING

By 1838, a year before the duke's death, John Caie, gardener at Bedford Lodge, Campden Hill, would publish a plan of the London garden in *Gardener's Magazine*. He had taken the lead in the bedding-out system from early proponents of massing such as Philip Frost at Dropmore. 'The Dowager Duchess of Bedford's garden [...] became a lesson-book of decorative landscape art for all England,' wrote D. T. Fish.⁴⁶ If Caie became the new 'leader' with 'followers' in the Victorian age, how much did he owe to Georgiana whose confidence Repton gained at Woburn Abbey? If Repton was not a designer-cum-contracting 'leader' like Brown, just how great was Repton's leadership as the Regency's leading 'luminary'? The integration of interior and exterior in the Woburn way was inspirational, without question, and the similitude of 'apartments' seems to anticipate the 'garden of rooms' at Hidcote and Dumbarton Oaks. Yet, Repton's notion of 'Nucleus' came with neglecting the extensive pleasure grounds. Aside from the thornery, he gave little thought to far-flung amenities such as Parson's Wood and Somerley Grove on the perimeter of the park. Here was once the haunt of the young brothers Francis and John, and, after addition of the 4th Duke's temple of 1756, what Arthur Young in 1770 enjoyed as the 'Duchess's shrubbery'.⁴⁷ John, as 6th Duke of Bedford, had to keep up stewardship instead, adding to the evergreen plantations of 1746/1790s in 1802–05, and making them the subject of his final publication with James Forbes' *Pinetum Woburnense* (1839). Repton's extensive vision (Figure 2) was wanting in this respect.

Were we to measure Repton's largely unexecuted vision for Woburn against Brown's consequential work at Croome, we would find Lord Coventry's extensive and intensive pleasure grounds the fully 'realized' accomplishment. By contrast, Humphry Repton was supremely in his element as a theorist, with his Red Book for Woburn displaying visionary promotional skills based on theory. Yet, aspects of Repton's history and theories of fashion and imitation seem questionable today, especially his omission of 'French styles' at a time of war and his odd ideas on the genesis of warfare. His 'ignorance in Botany' was a self-confessed weakness when it came to persuading the duke of his theoretical position.⁴⁸ Though his planting was daringly innovative, and his visualizations unmatched, he also used imitation in calculating seductive allure.

Yet, for all his flattering arts, Repton's Red Book art was not the 'tinsel kind of talent' of Loudon's early estimation; nor was he a 'coxcomb' mediocrity.⁴⁹ In the duke's sincere words, 'he had infinitely more genius than one half of his critics and detractors'. For, even though, through the 6th Duke of Bedford's zeal for botany and horticulture, Repton failed to get implemented what he had envisaged before his death in 1818, the greatness of this 'great leader' was to impress generations to come by visions of luxuriant plantings. What had been first realized through Georgiana and Wyatville, following Repton's peerless Red Book for Woburn Abbey, has now been revitalized recently by Louise, present Duchess of Bedford, working on a series of five-year plans with Martin Towsey, Gardens Manager for the abbey. Above all, far and wide within landscape architecture, as the Garden Museum exhibition (2018–19) revealingly documented, Repton's visualizations would be imitated down the decades and up to the present day.⁵⁰

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- ³ *Ibid.*, p. 56.
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